

American Legion Auxiliary

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November 2023 \$3.75



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ON THE COVER: ALA Department of Utah President Mike Rasmuson interacts with members at a district meeting. He is the first male ALA member to be a state president. Read more about him on page 10 (photo: Michael Brandy).

ABOVE: Sentinels at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery carry the ALA wreath while ALA Girls Nation senators look on. The poppies in the wreath are placed by each senator. Read more about ALA Girls Nation on page 24 (photo: Alexa Freeman/ALA National Headquarters).



SERVING OUR VETERANS: National President Lisa Williamson and her husband, Darrel, served as guardians for veterans Sue and Larry Priest for a Lone Eagle Honor Flight. They flew to Washington, D.C. to visit the memorials and monuments dedicated to their service.

It's hard to believe the time is already here! I'm honored to be your 2023-2024 American Legion Auxiliary national president. I'm ready to roll up my sleeves and dive into department visits, service projects, and American Legion Family events.

Speaking of Family, we are one big team working our collective mission to support our nation's veterans, military, and their families. I really want us to focus on the Legion Family this year because together, we can achieve more.

For the 2023-2024 ALA administrative year, we are going to focus on a serious topic and very important one to our Family and our nation — veteran suicide. The Auxiliary is teaming up with both The American Legion National Commander Daniel J. Seehafer and Sons of The American Legion National Commander Donald "JR" Hall Jr. to focus on Be the One — be the one to save one veteran. It's vital to know how to help a veteran in crisis. As a Legion Family, we are working to eliminate the stigma related to mental health treatment and lower the number of veterans who die by suicide every day, which

is estimated between 17 and 22.

On average, each death by suicide affects an estimated 135 individuals — family, friends, co-workers, etc. For comparison, that's more than our ALA membership size in Hawaii!

I encourage you to Be the One by asking veterans in your life how they are doing, listen when a veteran needs to talk, and reach out when you think a veteran might be struggling. Let them know: "It's OK to not be OK!"

... we are going to focus on a serious topic and very important one to our Family and our nation — veteran suicide.

If you or someone you know needs help, dial the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988, then press 1. Counselors are available 24/7. You can also text 838255 or visit the VA crisis line website at veteranscrisisline.net. You don't have to be enrolled in VA benefits for health care to connect. I am hopeful that by placing an extra emphasis on this issue, we can collectively save more veterans' lives.

I'm looking forward to

department visits this year and learning how our members are helping our veterans, military, and their families work through and overcome veteran suicide, as well as learning more about the mission-focused activities our grassroots members are working on.

This administrative year took off — literally — after participating in an Honor Flight. What an experience to see and hear the excitement of our veterans! I love that through this organization, these heroes have the opportunity to visit the war memorials in Washington, D.C. built in honor of them.

ALA National Headquarters has a Memorandum of Understanding with Honor Flight. As a reminder, poppy funds may be used for direct support related to a veteran's attendance on an Honor Flight, as well as for the veteran's guardian (companion/caregiver) who attends with the veteran.

Our Legion Family was instrumental in making this Lone Eagle Honor Flight a complete success! At the last minute, the Legion Family in Halethorpe, Md., came through to host the final dinner, complete with snacks for the plane ride home. And the Legion Family members in Tennessee were able to quickly gather members at the Nashville airport to welcome "my" veterans home. Isn't that what we are about — helping each other help our veterans? I am thankful to all of you, and grateful to our members!

Thank you so much for entrusting me to lead this organization for the 2023-2024 ALA administrative year. I look forward to working alongside you and serving our veterans, military, and their families.

Lisa Williamson
National President



Visit page 38 to learn more about 2023-2024 ALA National President Lisa Williamson and the Auxiliary's national focus for this administrative year.

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LEARNING: Members take part in a team-building activity at an ALA Mission Training session earlier this year.

What is the process when your American Legion Auxiliary unit is planning an event or outreach activity? After your logistics are plotted and in the works, you then likely chart all of the places where you can get the word out. This is external marketing.

At ALA National Headquarters, we have a general go-to list for most of our promotions, but one source remains our most important: peer-to-peer (internal) marketing.

This is where you, our members, come in.

At ALA Mission Training, members of all ages, all levels of the Auxiliary, and all walks of life receive invaluable information on several topics relevant to our service: veterans, youth programs, membership, and more. Attendees also interact with members outside of their states and learn that what works for one unit, could be a different approach for another ... aka idea sharing to the fullest degree.

Sure, National can hit some

computer buttons and blast all kinds of messaging to our various ALA media channels to promote ALA Mission Training, but it's *you* we need in order to really get the word out. When you attend one of these enriching events, you become immersed in our programs for a day, learning from ALA leadership on how you can most effectively serve our veterans, military, and their

families. We have fun while learning too!

Please sign up for these ALA events and tell your friends and fellow members afterward. It would mean the world to us here at National Headquarters. You see, we're not standing around with tablets and racking up registration numbers; it's way bigger than that. When more people attend Mission Training and take what they learn back to their units to implement ideas into action, it means



the people we serve will be 100 percent heard and taken care of — in a way, life lessons for your unit.

See you soon: Cincinnati; Providence, R.I.; Lincoln, Neb.; Nashville, Tenn.; and Las Vegas! Learn more about Mission Training at www.ALAforVeterans.org/Meetings/Mission-Training.

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY

A Community of Volunteers Serving Veterans, Military, and their Families
November 2023

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Enjoy reading inspiring magazine articles

I have been a member of the Hazelton, N.D., Unit 126 since 1989 because of my grandfather's World War II service. The articles in this month's magazine [August 2023] were so good and inspiring. I enjoy reading them throughout the year. Volunteering is such an important part of our lives. Please continue with the inspirational stories.

— Robyn (Schnabel) Olson, North Dakota



There's so much to read in quarterly magazine

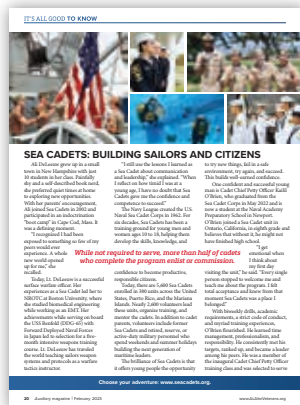
I like that you send my magazine early before August so I can get a head start to reading the magazine. There is so much to read in all of them besides doing other things. I'm glad to see an article about POW/

MIAs, and I would like to see more articles in the magazines about our POW/MIAs. Thank you for such a wonderful magazine I enjoy so much.

— Sharon Converse, Illinois

Appreciated article about Sea Cadets

Just wanted to comment on the article *Sea Cadets: Building Sailors and Citizens* in the February 2023 issue. The article stated that the Navy League created the U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps in 1962. I served in the U.S. Naval Sea Cadet



Corps in Tacoma, Wash., from 1957 to 1962 prior to graduating from high school in 1962. I joined the Naval Reserve upon turning 17 and enlisted in the U.S. Navy upon graduation from high school. I served for six years and was honorably discharged in 1968. Thanks for running the article! Sea Cadets was a great experience for me!

— Norm Hulscher, Adjutant, West Des Moines American Legion Post 620, West Des Moines, Iowa

Thank you for copies of Auxiliary magazine sent to VA

On behalf of the Montana VA Health Care System (436) patients and staff, we would like to extend

our appreciation to you for your donation of magazines. It is through efforts of community partners like you that allow us to continue the quality care and services that we seek to provide for our deserving veterans. We look forward to the opportunity to work with you again for future events. Thank you for your continued support.

— Christopher Frappier, Acting Chief CDCD

Loved making craft from May magazine issue

I made your patriotic Mason jar, and everyone loved it. I passed on the recipe to a few friends. Thank you.

— Catherine Savoie, New Hampshire

Change of meeting location fun for everyone

This past Monday night was a regularly scheduled meeting, and our president discovered that there was a free outdoor concert in our local area at the same time. She consulted with her officers and everyone agreed to have the meeting OUTDOORS before the concert in the park! As this was unprecedented, we were prepared



for anything! We also invited veterans from our post, family members, and friends! There were about 40 of us! We had our meeting and then enjoyed the concert — a Fleetwood Mac Tribute Band.

— Debra Jackson, New Jersey

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM you

Email: ALAMagazine@ALAforVeterans.org or send letters to: **ALA National Headquarters 3450 Founders Road, Indianapolis, IN 46268**

Story and Photo Submissions: **Visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/Magazine for more details.**



PROMOTING THE POPPY: ALA Junior Member of the Year Abigail Johnson of Iowa distributes poppies for donations.

JUNIOR MEMBER OF THE YEAR GIVES BACK TO VETERANS THROUGH TECH SUPPORT

“Being recognized for the hundreds of hours I have put in working to create something that will help not only the members of my post and unit, but all veterans now and in the future, means the world to me,” said 2022-2023 ALA Junior Member of the Year Abigail Johnson of Iowa.

Johnson, 16, was one of several Juniors nominated for the award.

“We had 17 nominees this year, and it was a very tough decision for the Junior Activities chair, vice chair, and two committee members to make,” said Kristin Hinshaw, senior program coordinator at ALA

National Headquarters.

Johnson created Veterans Tech Support, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that provides computers and technical help to veterans.

“I didn’t create Veterans Tech Support to win any awards or help me personally in any way, but knowing that the people I did create it for see value in the work I am doing is incredibly meaningful,” Johnson said. “I know that even without any accolades, I would still be teaching technology classes to

veterans and looking for funding for more Veterans Tech Support locations.”

In addition to helping veterans with technology, Johnson also enjoys participating in poppy days.

Johnson offers advice for other Junior members who want to strive to help others and be in leadership positions within the ALA.

“I would say to listen to what is going on around you, and if you see a need, fill that need,” she said. “Think outside of the box and don’t be afraid to create new ways to help”

As a Junior member, Johnson knows how important youth are to the organization.

“The youth are the future of the American Legion Auxiliary and The American Legion,” she said. “Listen to their ideas, support ones that are feasible, be open to change, and recognize those who are working hard to make things better.”

Johnson has been an ALA member since 2019 and is eligible for membership through her grandfather, Michael Lake, a U.S. Army veteran.



Changes to ALA Scholarships

Next year, there will be five division Junior Member of the Year winners (one from each division), and the national JMOY will be chosen from those five. The national winner will receive a \$5,000 scholarship and be authorized to bring greetings to the ALA National Convention. The remaining four will each receive a \$1,000 scholarship.

We want to reward Juniors who are out there working the ALA’s mission and encourage more participation by offering scholarships.



TEXAS JUNIORS RAISE FUNDS FOR CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL THROUGH LEMONADE STAND

Junior members of ALA Unit 597 in Carrollton, Texas, used sweet drinks to help raise funds to help children in need.

"This was our first time to do a lemonade stand, and

I thought it would be a great way to help the kids learn to support other kids their age and to give back to the community," said Nikki Ellis, Unit 597 member. Her daughters,

Charlotte, 5, and Emma, 6, participated, along with a friend, Gwen, 6.

Between the lemonade stand and a bake sale, over \$1,200 was raised in one day for St. Jude cancer research. The girls were pleased with the customer turnout.

"Since it was a Junior event, I felt St. Jude's was very appropriate," Ellis said. "They were so proud to be able to raise awareness and funds for children in need who may be their same age."

While getting their lemonade poured, the girls informed customers they are part of the ALA Junior Activities program.

"I think it's important to show the Juniors that they can make a difference even at 5 and 6 years old and to always remember *Service Not Self*," Ellis said.

SUPPORTING OTHER KIDS: Gwen, Emma, and Charlotte raised \$1,200 in one day for St. Jude cancer research from their lemonade stand and a bake sale, while also telling customers about the ALA Junior Activities program.

REGISTRATION OPEN FOR 2023-2024 NATIONAL JUNIOR MEETINGS

These annual meetings give younger ALA members the opportunity to make new friends, complete service projects, and learn more about the Auxiliary. Junior members age 8 or older who are interested in meeting other Junior members who share the same passion for helping veterans and servicemembers are encouraged to register for national Junior meetings. Visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/Meetings/National-Junior-Meetings for more details.

Central Division: Nov. 4
Cincinnati, Ohio

Eastern Division: Nov. 4
Providence, R.I.

Western Division: Jan. 27, 2024
Las Vegas, Nev.

Northwestern Division: Feb. 3
Lincoln, Neb.

Southern Division: Feb. 3
Nashville, Tenn.

Honorary National Junior Division Vice Presidents Elected

Congratulations to the 2023-2024 ALA honorary national Junior division vice presidents! These Junior members will be installed at the national meetings in their division, where they will help lead the meeting.

Central Division:

Evelyn Hinshaw, Indiana

Eastern Division:

Emily Savage, Pennsylvania

Northwestern Division:

Anastasia Donnelly,
Minnesota

Southern Division:

No candidates

Western Division:

Leah Rosales, Arizona

WISCONSIN MEMBER WINS NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS' T-SHIRT DESIGN CONTEST

ALA Junior members ages 8 to 17 years had an opportunity to participate in a National Headquarters-hosted contest to design the next T-shirt to be worn at ALA national Junior meetings. Participants had to create a digital design of their shirt and submit their original art. Members voted

via social media on one of three designs.

Seventeen entries were submitted, with 585 votes online.

The winner was Rylee Turowski, 13, from the Department of Wisconsin. We can't wait to see her wearing her design!



“One phone call made all the difference to me in learning and participating.”

MIKE RASMUSON



A LEADERSHIP FIRST: ALA Department of Utah President Mike Rasmuson and his wife, Ninzel, American Legion Department of Utah commander. Both are serving their leadership terms for the 2023-2024 administrative year. Ninzel is an Air National Guard veteran.

History was made in 2019 when The American Legion voted to extend membership in the American Legion Auxiliary to male spouses of U.S. veterans and servicemembers. Legion delegates voted to replace the word “wife” with “spouse” in their constitution and bylaws, opening up membership in the American Legion Auxiliary.

A few years later, history was made once again when the ALA Department of Utah elected its first male ALA member as 2023-2024 department president. Mike Rasmuson is the first male ALA member in the nation to hold the office of president at the state level.

How did you feel when you found out you were eligible to become a member of the Auxiliary through your wife’s service?

I went to a couple meetings, and it felt really kind of good because it was something I could share with my wife. After those meetings, I joined but didn’t do much with it

until I got a phone call.

How did you get involved with the ALA as more than a card-carrying member?

In 2020, my wife was going to be out of town a lot. We had a mutual friend who was department president at the time. She called me, asking what I was going to do while my wife was away and if I had considered being in leadership in the ALA. I said I would be willing to learn. One phone call made all the difference to me in learning and participating. At that point, I learned from the top down what the ALA is. It wasn’t my wife who tried to drag me in — someone else explained to me there is a need for leadership and that I could make a difference in serving. I’ve had some good mentors.

Do you feel welcome among fellow Auxiliary members in your unit and department?

It’s been overwhelmingly positive. I do take the position and what I do very seriously.

I went to National Convention in Phoenix two years ago and some of these chairs said, “OK, ladies” and I said, “And men.” I’m assertive but friendly.

I am very humble to represent the Department of Utah. I’ve gotten an overwhelming response of volunteers who have stepped forward in our state because I asked. I go back to that one phone call — whatever time you have is enough.

What are some of the goals you’d like the department to achieve this year?

The Auxiliary Emergency Fund is my president’s project this year. I’d like all members in our department to do a little more in our communities with the understanding that whatever you do is enough. We celebrate what we do.

Any advice for other male ALA members who may not be in leadership positions yet?

Get involved in your communities and understand that we can’t limit ourselves in what we do. We have to go out and be uncomfortable. Being a male ALA member of a predominantly all-women organization is more than just being a box to check — it’s getting your hands dirty. You need to go and do some of the things and understand what the ALA is trying to do and put service before self. Bring energy and ideas. Be humble. Be able to take direction and admit mistakes. And be able to understand the motto, *Service Not Self*.

Is there anything else you want to add?

The Department of Utah is all about everyone having opportunities. I appreciate the women I work with and respect them. I hope I represent Utah well.



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“A hero is somebody who voluntarily walks into the unknown.”

— Tom Hanks, actor



When does an Auxiliary member stop saying thank-you to those in uniform? Never! The gratitude is ingrained in us. If there's a room full of servicemembers, you can guarantee we're going to issue nonstop “Thank you for your service” wishes. We congratulate our 2023 ALA Salute to Servicemembers Award recipients.

Pictured with 2022-2023 ALA National President Vickie Koutz (from left) are Gunnery Sgt. Joshua Layton, Chief Boatswain's Mate Stefano Joseph Torre, Staff Sgt. Dessence Waddell, Cpl. Sabrina Townes, Petty Officer 3rd Class Kolten Flook, and Lt. Col. Maria Shelton. Read more about the recipients at www.ALAforVeterans.org/blog.

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What's your favorite way to stay connected with the ALA?



"Social media! The information is instant, you save money on postage, and the interaction and sharing of ideas with others is great because the pool of people is broader."

— Julie Maldonado, Pennsylvania



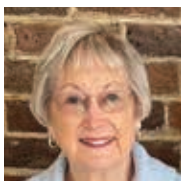
"*Auxiliary* magazine is an amazing resource! The articles are thorough, well-balanced, and incredibly professional. I always look forward to it arriving in the mail and use it as a resource to get the bigger picture of how we are living out our mission."

— Jackie Regester Brauser, Wisconsin



"Social media! I love all of the different Facebook groups for ALA programs and how they allow us to connect with units and members throughout the organization. It is a great opportunity to connect and collaborate!"

— Jammie Phillips, Arkansas



"I primarily only access information through *Auxiliary* magazine. I live in a town without an ALA unit and belong to the Auxiliary in a neighboring town. I don't get over there for meetings."

— Betty Higdon Brown, Tennessee



"I like social media! It gives you a greater reach than just your unit meetings. You're able to see what others are doing from a unit level to the national level if you want to. I also like attending district meetings. Both are a great way to collect information to take back and share with your own unit."

— Lisa Garrett, Indiana



"Social media is a great way to reach both members and non-members. I also love the *Auxiliary* magazine!"

— Hilda Marie Kruml, Texas



"I like all [social media, newsletters, unit meetings]. I get different things from each. Our meetings are great for knowing about our unit, post, and district. Newsletters give a bigger picture. Social media is great for events and hearing about the goings-on of the larger organization."

— Jennifer Shepherd, Ohio

Follow us on Facebook and Instagram at [@ALAforVeterans](https://www.facebook.com/ALAforVeterans).
You could be featured in an upcoming issue of *Auxiliary*.



Auxiliary has members from all walks of life who come together to support veterans, military, and their families. Military service is a sacrifice for the whole family — that's why ALA members are there to ease the burden. Renewing member dues each year helps support our mission while also building friendships, gaining leadership skills, promoting patriotism, and advocating for those who have fought for our country.

Consider purchasing a PUFL membership. If you do want to continue paying a family member's dues but don't want to worry about being unable to pay in the future, consider purchasing a Paid Up For Life membership. A PUFL membership makes a great gift any time of year. Families can get involved by purchasing memberships for multiple generations — think birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, or just because!

In addition to showing your financial commitment, there are numerous other benefits to being a PUFL member. By paying once, you don't have to be concerned about remembering to renew your dues each year — one less payment to worry about! A rate change in dues will not affect you either, as the PUFL rate is calculated based on current dues rate — you are never charged additionally! You can feel a sense of pride by committing your dues to the ALA for a lifetime, and you'll enjoy a lifetime subscription to *Auxiliary* magazine.

PAYING IT FORWARD

SHARE VALUE OF ALA MEMBERSHIP IF NO LONGER ABLE TO COVER COST FOR FAMILY MEMBERS

A common practice in the American Legion Auxiliary is when a parent or grandparent pays the membership dues of a daughter or granddaughter. For example, a mother might sign a newborn daughter up for a Junior membership, or a grandmother might pay for her granddaughter(s) to belong to the ALA and continues to pay each membership year.

If you are someone who does this from year to year for a family member, it can be a nice tradition and even a nice gift, but do you ever share with them WHY you do it — and the importance of continuing their membership if you are no longer able to pay? Maybe they are an active participant in ALA programs and realize the value of their membership, but if not, it's up to you to tell the stories and impact of membership in the ALA.

Here are some tips to help make sure your family members continue their Auxiliary membership if you are unable to or no longer want to cover the cost:

Share your why. Whether you joined to honor a family member's military service or that of your own, it is important to share the story of how and why you became involved in the ALA. If you can speak from the heart about why you belong, it

can possibly relay the importance to them and make them want to share that experience as well.

Encourage them to get involved. If they are not currently active in the ALA, encourage them to get involved in their community. If they feel valued and involved in the ALA, they will more likely want to continue to be a member.

Share the impact of collective membership. From our thousands of ALA members, dues add up to make a large impact on the Auxiliary's mission outreach and advocacy efforts to serve our nation's 16.5 million veterans. Whether or not one is able to actively participate in ALA service projects or attend meetings, our dues make our mission outreach possible and help ensure the future growth and prosperity of the ALA and its programs.

Share the benefits of membership. The American Legion



“When I decided to make the commitment to join the ALA, it was for life. Veterans gave their lives for this great country and our freedom, and the least I could do was commit to serve them for the remainder of mine.”

— Kat Kessler of Illinois

To download a PUFL application, visit:
www.ALAforVeterans.org/Joining.



PRODUCE FOR A PURPOSE: American Legion Family members of Arizona Post, Unit, and Squadron 62 gather in front of their post home before passing out produce.

ARIZONA AMERICAN LEGION FAMILY PROVIDES PRODUCE TO COMMUNITY

Making our communities better places to live is a core value put into action by American Legion Auxiliary members every day. Committed to making a difference in their city, The American Legion Family of John J. Morris Post, Unit, and Squadron 62 in Peoria, Ariz., partnered with a nonprofit organization called Borderlands' Produce Rescue to provide their community with easy access to fresh and affordable fruits and vegetables.

The organization has a community outreach initiative program — Borderlands' Produce On Wheels With-Out Waste (P.O.W.W.O.W.) — that rescues, recycles, and redistributes millions of pounds of produce every season. They save fruits and vegetables that grocery stores have leftover that would typically go to landfills, then redistribute the produce to communities throughout Arizona. For a \$15 donation, event supporters can take home up to 70 pounds of produce.

"Grocery prices have gone up so tremendously — it's an affordability

issue for some people," said Arizona Auxiliary Unit 62 President Kathy Amery. "And where can you go and get 70 pounds of produce for a \$15 donation?"

The American Legion Family worked with Borderlands' Produce Rescue to organize and host multiple produce drive-thru events at their post home in Peoria.

"It is a joint effort of Auxiliary members, Legionnaires, Sons, Riders, and community members, and I'm just proud that they all come out together to support this."

Open to the public, these events operated as a convenient drive-thru experience — attendees never had to get out of their cars to receive the produce. Community members simply just had to wait in a car line for their turn, hand their monetary contribution to Amery, pop their trunk open, a team of volunteers would load their car with rescued

fruits and vegetables, and off they'd go.

"It's an amazing process," said Amery. "It's definitely a Legion Family project — we thought this was a way we could really help our community."

Due to the high heat temperatures in southern Arizona, Legion Family members gathered at 3:30 a.m. to set up for the drive-thru events. A Borderlands' truck would drop off loads of pallets filled with fruits and vegetables to the post

home. After unloading the pallets, Post 62 members sorted the produce into boxes and placed them on tables near the drive-thru lineup to easily distribute into vehicles. With all hands on deck, the post passed out produce from 6 a.m. until around 9 a.m.

"This is something we are all very, very passionate about and I'm just so proud of our post Family," said Amery. "It is a joint effort of Auxiliary members, Legionnaires, Sons, Riders, and community members, and I'm just proud that they all come out together to support this."

The American Legion Family of Post/Unit 62 have completed three drive-thru events so far, with plans to continue doing the project in the future. Between the three events, the Legion Family had help from over 100 volunteers contributing their time and effort. They gave out 975 boxes of fruits and vegetables, which totaled 117,500 pounds of produce redistributed back into the community.

"Everybody is just so willing to help and then at the end of it, we sit down, and we are tired, but we feel so good that we've done something that truly supports our community," said Amery.

ALA MEMBER HELPS FIT PATIENTS WITH PROSTHETICS IN VIETNAM

ALA Department of Georgia Unit 143 member Anna Fe Miller, a pre-med biomedical engineering student at Mercer University, recently participated in a monthlong service-learning program in Vietnam. The program, known as Mercer on Mission Vietnam, gives students the opportunity to serve along with university faculty to fit patients with prosthetic legs and hands, as well as host an orthopedic and physical therapy clinic.

According to Mercer University, an estimated 100,000 amputees are currently living in Vietnam, with an additional 2,000 men, women, and children losing limbs each year due to the 2.2 million unexploded ordnance and landmines left over from the Vietnam War. Since 2009, the Mercer On Mission Vietnam program has fit more than 10,000 amputees.

Miller said she initially became interested in the program as it closely aligned with her academic interests as a pre-med biomedical engineering student. In addition, a few friends had participated in previous years and after seeing a professor's video clips from the 2022 trip, she knew it was a program she needed to be a part of and applied the same afternoon.

"The experience was both mentally and physically challenging; however, it was the most meaningful, fulfilling program I have been a part of," shared Miller.



HELPING OTHERS: Georgia Unit 143 member Anna Fe Miller has a patient test their new prosthesis and observes for gait complications; testing socket for proper fit for bilateral hand amputee.

"I had the opportunity to change someone's life each day by giving them back an ability they had lost, and in some cases, never had. In return, those people changed my life."

Miller's group served in Bến Tre, Kiên Giang, and Hậu Giang, spending around a week in each location. Each day, they worked with different partners to grow skill sets and abilities. As part of her day-to-day activities, Miller worked with the group to fit prostheses, and also rotated working in the orthopedic clinic and performing physical therapy. In addition to working at the clinic, Miller said the group had the opportunity to visit temples, fruit farms, and places of historical and cultural significance.

While also gaining more knowledge about the biomechanics of the body and the prosthetic fitting process, Miller said she also learned a lot about herself and her

passions. The experience taught her how to be more grateful, to serve with joy even when tired, and that a language barrier does not prevent you from making meaningful connections.

Before leaving for Vietnam, Miller said her ALA unit strived to make sure she had both the physical items and emotional support necessary for the trip. The members encouraged her, prayed for her, and sent her a card during her time in service. Her unit continued to pray for her peers in the program and continually checked in on her status with her mom, Rose, who was the Legion service vice commander at the time.

Miller said she's incredibly grateful to everyone who played a role in her involvement with the project, as well as the people of Vietnam who were extremely welcoming and hospitable. She hopes to continue this type of service in the future and encourages others to become involved in mission projects.

"If you are able, I wholeheartedly recommend being involved with a mission project no matter the size," Miller said. "Although mission is often viewed as an opportunity to change someone else's life, the experience may change you in ways you would never expect."

Mercer on Mission Vietnam

Providing affordable and sustainable care to these underserved populations has been its goal for over 10 years, and with the success of the program thus far, the Mercer on Mission program hopes to broaden its outreach by opening up orthopedic and medical clinics, as well as dental clinics in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.

Source: merceronmissionvn.org



WHY AN AUDIT OF YOUR PUBLICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA IS A GREAT IDEA

Have you ever gathered, organized, and labeled miscellaneous items for a garage sale? Or for a fundraiser? At first, the work can be daunting. But once you've completed all of your tasks, you likely are less stressed — and satisfied with what you accomplished.

You can gain that same peace of mind by auditing your American Legion Auxiliary unit publications, social media, and other communications. Why? A regular audit can reveal areas where you can become more efficient and effective in reaching your audiences. For example, you may find that you'd be better off sending a newsletter every other month instead of every month. Or you may need to post updates on your social media accounts more frequently.

Conducting a communications audit can be the key to better managing your Auxiliary time. Here are some steps:

Inventory all of your communications. How often are you sending emails? Posting on Facebook or Instagram? How many

likes and shares are you getting with each social media post or video? How many subscribers are opening your emails? You can keep track of the answers to those questions on a sheet of paper. You also can place Post-it notes on a wall, pin notes on a cork board, or type a list on your computer. Choose the method that works best for you. But just make sure you capture everything you are producing.

Identify what's working and what's not. Take the time to review which emails, social media posts, newsletters, and website content pieces receive the most attention. This part of an audit can provide insights on the type of content your members are most interested in. Perhaps how-to articles resonate with your audience the most. Or maybe they really enjoy photos and short stories about the veterans you serve in your community. Use that information to guide the type of content you write about in the future.

Learn about your audience. If you haven't done so already, learn more about the members

you're reaching. Conduct a short survey to find out more about their demographics, interests, and types of information they like to receive. With this information, you can tailor your content to better resonate with your audience.

Assess any content gaps.

How often are you posting photos? Videos? Encouraging quotes? Stories? Maybe it's time to mix up your content. For example, people love to see photos of themselves, friends, and loved ones. Consider assigning one or two members to take photos during your ALA events so you can later post on social media.

Check your branding. Does your content follow ALA brand guidelines? Use a communications audit to assess whether your content aligns with the organization's brand and mission. If in doubt, ask for input on whether your unit is consistent with the ALA brand.

Review your budget allocation.

Consider ways you're using your content to reach people who may not be familiar with the American Legion Auxiliary. Do you invest funds into boosting your social media content beyond your followers? For just a few dollars, you can promote the work performed by the American Legion Auxiliary to people in your community. On Facebook, for example, you can spend \$5 or \$10 to boost a post to hundreds and even thousands of people.

By regularly auditing your email and social media campaigns, you can strengthen the impact you're having among members — helping them to remain engaged in serving the veterans in our communities. You also can use an audit to explore ways you can tell others in your community about the great work performed by the American Legion Auxiliary.



ALA National Headquarters conducts communications audits too!

Just like units, ALANHQ periodically audits our social media, print, and web publications to evaluate information such as content, number of social media posts, and overall audience engagement. Auditing helps us provide the best experience for our members!

IDEAS TO HELP VETERANS DURING THE HOLIDAYS

The holiday season is right around the corner, and it's important to show veterans extra love and appreciation during these cold winter months. This time of year can be especially hard on veterans who may not have family close by, or it's difficult for family and friends to visit due to veterans being in an assisted living facility or hospital. It's our duty as American Legion Auxiliary members to answer the call of *Service Not Self*, and help our isolated veterans feel loved and valued this holiday season.

There are so many ways to engage with veterans who may be alone during the holidays. Gather members of your ALA unit and help the veterans in your community feel appreciated.

For homebound veterans

- Bring them homemade goodies and snacks.
- Make a casserole each week, and drop it off at their home.
- Bring over crafts, crossword puzzles, Sudoku worksheets, magazines, books, etc., to keep them busy during the long winter.
- Write them thoughtful cards explaining how grateful you are for them, and thank them for their service.
- Gift them a stocking stuffer for Christmas filled with things they

enjoy or need.

- Bring them hats, gloves, scarves, warm socks, throw blankets, etc.
- Give them streamers for New Year's and a new calendar.
- Organize a meal train.
- Pick up their groceries or send groceries through Instacart.
- Help with any errands they may have.
- Focus on conversation and companionship.
- Lend a helping hand in any way you can.

For veterans in assisted living facilities

- Contact a local facility to see what items are allowed inside — it won't be the case for every location — but at least asking will give an idea of what's allowed and what kind of things would really benefit veterans during those harder months.
- Send a care package that includes the items that are allowed. A few popular examples are playing cards, puzzle books, journals, pens, lip balm, fuzzy socks, a knitted scarf, specialty teas, a handmade drawing, a handmade card, an appreciative letter, etc.
- Try visiting a veteran once a week.
- Play cards with them.



- Do something creative together like painting or drawing.
- Be a listening ear with a thankful heart.

For VA residential home or hospitalized veterans

- Work with your local U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs residential home or VA medical center to see how you can help veterans staying there. Ask the VA what you can bring to benefit veterans living there.
- Depending on their protocols, try visiting once a week.
- Ask ALA Junior members to draw pictures and bring the artwork to veterans at the VA.
- Give them a thank-you card, and Christmas and New Year's Day cards.
- Bring them magazines from The American Legion and American Legion Auxiliary.
- Gift them puzzles and books for entertainment. Keep them company.
- Show them kindness and compassion. You may be the only person visiting them during the holidays, so make a positive impact.



AUXILIARY SUDOKU

Insert the missing numbers one to nine exactly once in every row, column, and 3x3 square. The three Sudoku games below are in order of easy, newspaper style, and hard. Answers are found on page 50.

8	2	3	4				7	
	6		7	9		5		
7						4	1	
2	4		5		7		9	1
5					9			2
		6	3		8			
6	9				4	8	3	5
4		2					6	7
	7	5	8	1		2	4	

			6	3				
5	6		8					
3	7	4		9	2			
			4					2
	2				3	9	6	8
	3			5	9	1		
2	9	6			4	5	3	
						7		4
8		7	3	1				

3	4		2					1
	5	8						
6				3				7
					8			
2					6			9
	9			5	3			7
							5	8
							7	
1	7	6		5			3	2



BUILDINGS NEED FOUNDATIONS — DOES THE AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY?

The short answer is, yes. The most important element of every home or building is the foundation. Without a proper, strong foundation, we would live in insecure homes or work in unstable buildings.

The same can be said about the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation. It provides support to the ALA by granting funds for national programs, including the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, ALA Girls Nation, and providing grants to ALA units, districts, and departments.

With any foundation — structurally or organizationally — a financial investment is required to ensure stability. One of the ways the ALA ensures financial stability of the ALA Foundation is through annual fundraising efforts at National Convention, including the Wall of Heroes initiative.

The Wall of Heroes — previously known as the #GivingTuesday booth — gives National Convention attendees the chance to honor a hero in their life by donating to the ALA Foundation in his or her honor. Donors write the names of their honoree on a paper star and adhere it to the Wall of Heroes

installation, sponsored by AmWins Group Benefits LLC.

“Donors were proud to explain their relationship to the person they were honoring — a parent or grandparent, a spouse or sibling, a child, or special friend,” said ALA Foundation Board of Directors Vice President Diane Duscheck. “Each star was special, and amassed, told the stories of why each member belongs to the American Legion Auxiliary.”

“It’s amazing to hear the stories our members share about their personal heroes — reminding us all why we join, why we renew, and why what we do matters.”

This year, 244 donors contributed to the Wall of Heroes and each had a unique story to tell.

“Meeting ALA Foundation donors at the Wall of Heroes is a unique experience,” said ALA Foundation Board of Directors President Cathe MacInnes. “It’s amazing to hear the stories our members share about their personal heroes — reminding us all why we

join, why we renew, and why what we do matters. I hope the photos of the donors with their stars on the wall are among their favorite memories of National Convention.”

In addition to the Wall of Heroes initiative, there were three other fundraising opportunities at National Convention — the States Dinner silent auction, a wine pull, and a chance to win a Paid Up For Life membership. All of these fundraising opportunities resulted in \$27,462 in donations for the ALA’s Mission Endowment Fund, the ALA Foundation’s greatest need and fundraising priority.

Some donors may ask: Why is the Mission Endowment Fund the greatest need of the ALA Foundation? In an endowment fund, donations are pooled together and invested. At the end of the year, a portion of the pooled money goes to the organization, while the remaining assets are retained in the fund so it can continue to grow. Endowments are different than reserve funds in that they are designed to keep the principal untouched. However, the ALA Foundation can use the investment income as needed for programs, operations, or purposes specified by the donors.

The Mission Endowment Fund is not only great security for the ALA, but it ensures donors that the ALA will be there for the long haul. Endowed funds can be income streams for the life of an organization, sustaining them with invaluable financial support through unstable times, like a pandemic for example.

Donating to the Mission Endowment Fund, in a way, is the ultimate gift to the ALA. The moral of the story is, you need to build a good foundation, or your building won’t last long.



To learn more about the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation’s impact and to make your tax-deductible gift, visit www.ALAFoundation.org or call (317) 569-4500 to discuss a special gift to the Mission Endowment Fund.

Auction Winners Share Their Story



Wisconsin Unit 494

had five active members as the norm who do everything. You can count on them for baked goods, raffles, and poppies, but our unit needed to grow in the community if we wanted to attract new members.

The first idea that brought our unit to a whole new level in the community was jukebox bingo. This involved inviting all local businesses to donate a basket for raffles and selling the music papers to stamp. The event was

such a success! We are heading into our third year. We also ran out of room at our post and had to find another larger location to graciously let us borrow their space each year.

This unit's strength is acceptance and belief in its own members, as well as our close partnership with our post and Sons. We support each other in every event. With the new ideas, we were able to reach more people and show them just how amazing our organization is, and

we have been drawing in new volunteers and members over the last two years with great excitement of how they can help. If you learn one new thing from this unit, it is to **EMBRACE** each and every member for their strengths — regardless of age — as well as stay close and work together with your post and Sons ... because together, we are stronger. You can learn more about our unit by searching American Legion Family Harvey Funk Post 494 Caledonia, WI.



IS IT A GOOD OR BAD IDEA TO POST RECORDINGS OF MEETINGS ON SOCIAL MEDIA?

From FaceTime to Zoom, the virtual meeting possibilities seem to be endless these days. But you know what they say — with possibilities come responsibilities, and this holds true for hosting board meetings in the digital age. In some respects, virtual meetings have made taking meeting minutes much easier: Simply hit that record button and download the audio file at the end of the meeting.

It's so easy that corporations might be tempted to simply post the recordings of their meetings on social media so that all of their members can listen. While corporate transparency is commendable, posting recordings of board meetings to social media might not be the best idea, so consider the following before you

hit that share button.

1. First, define “meetings.”

Meetings in executive session are only for those included in the executive session, so in this instance, posting the minutes or recordings in a public space like social media would be beyond inappropriate.

2. Recording laws differ from state to state (one-party versus two-party consent). So, you need to research your state legislation regarding recording of meetings and sharing those recordings. Remember: If one or more people participating in the call are from different states, you'll want to get everyone's consent to record the meeting to be safe.

3. Research your state statutes regarding recording

meetings and publicizing meeting recordings. At the national level, we do not and would never post our board meetings on social media. We utilize social media platforms to share content carefully crafted by our professional team at ALA National Headquarters. We do this because we are all aware of the fact that social media is still, in many ways, like the Wild West — people shoot (metaphorically speaking) first and ask questions later. Things are easily taken out of context, and there are always people “trolling” to find things to spin in a bad way. So, National Headquarters would see posting board minutes to social media as an unnecessary way to open the organization up to all kinds of liabilities.

4. Finally, what is the objective of posting recordings on social media? If it is for transparency, that can easily be achieved by posting the minutes on the unit/department website with “members only” access, similar to what is done at the national level with the MyAuxiliary member portal at www.ALAforVeterans.org.

Do you have a copy of the National Constitution, Bylaws, and Standings Rules book? If not, it is available for download at www.ALAforVeterans.org or you can order it from American Legion Flag & Emblem Sales.

Do you want to learn more about Constitution & Bylaws, or have a question? Log in to the MyAuxiliary portion of www.ALAforVeterans.org.



Amendments passed at the 2023 National Convention

Convention delegates debated and voted on two amendments at this year's convention. The first amendment was a change to the national Standing Rules to increase convention delegates/change delegate formula. It increased the delegates for each department from five to seven for each 1,200 members or major fraction thereof. The second amendment was a change to the national Bylaws and provided clarification that a new unit or a rechartered unit requires 10 senior members to charter. A unit cannot be cancelled solely because of unit membership dropping below 10 senior members.

MILITARY SPOUSES FINDING MORE REMOTE WORK OPPORTUNITIES



When Lydiah Owiti married a U.S. servicemember in 2012, she had practiced law in her native Kenya for seven years.

Shortly after the couple married and moved to Delaware, Owiti's husband, Geoffrey Otienoh, was deployed with the U.S. Army to Kuwait. She was left behind with no job and a law degree that her new country did not recognize.

Owiti realized that even if she sought training to practice law in the United States, each time she and her husband moved, she likely would have to pass the bar in her new state to continue her career there.

"My sense of identity was crushed," she said.

Now, after years of struggling to find work in the United States that would fit with her experience while accommodating the nomadic lifestyle of a military spouse, Owiti has found her professional calling with a role that allows her to help military spouses experiencing many of the job-seeking challenges she has encountered.

Best of all, it's a remote position — if Owiti and her family move, her job comes with her. Owiti is manager of Military Spouse Professional Networks for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Hiring Our Heroes program.

She joined the American Legion Auxiliary while living in Union City, Calif., and now lives in Southbury, Conn. Her employer, which works to connect people from the military community with American businesses, is based in Washington, D.C.

Owiti said she's seeing more and more military spouses who, like her, are securing jobs they can perform anywhere.

WFH Research, a team studying trends in at-home employment, reports that working from home saw a five-fold increase between 2019 and

2023, with 40% of U.S. employees now doing so at least once a week. In 2021, freelancing platform Upwork projected that — thanks to practices that began during the COVID-19 pandemic — by 2026, about 28% of U.S. employees would be completely remote.

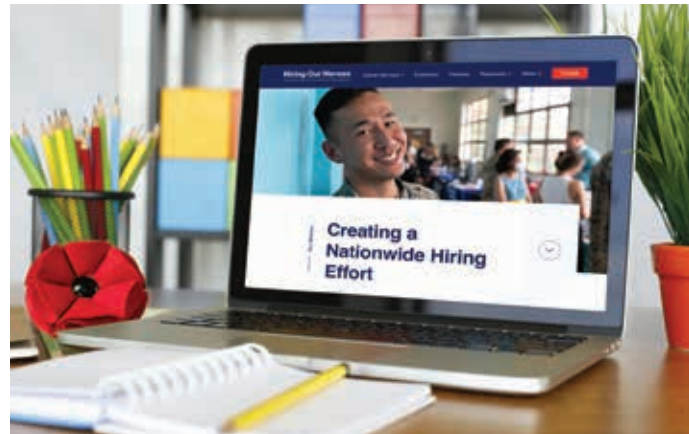
In her position with Hiring Our Heroes, Owiti works to ensure that servicemembers' spouses have greater access to jobs that fit with their interests, aptitudes, and availability. That often means remote work.

How has remote work affected your life?

It was a game changer. It was probably the only consideration that would make or break [my career decision]. I went into project management because of the portability and flexibility. And having three kids in different age groups requires a lot of balancing. I targeted work that was remote.

What are the benefits of remote work?

I think companies understand that the environment you create for your employees will either make them efficient and effective or not, whether they're in a physical space or a virtual space. If you invest in training, systems, and processes that enable your employees to perform, they will. On the other hand, employees who have the flexibility of working from home can remove the barriers that stress them out emotionally and financially.



If I can maintain my productivity without having to be in a physical space, then it's good for the employer and for me.

Do you expect employers to continue hiring more remote workers?

I do expect it to continue. Companies realize the benefit for them, which is usually what it takes for them to say, "OK, this is working." When companies offer opportunities only for people within a locality, there may be many other people who are qualified for the same thing who can do the job virtually. So [remote work] has exploded, and many military spouses are getting jobs, courtesy of virtual programs.

What remote work resources does Hiring Our Heroes offer?

We have trainings for how to prepare yourself for virtual work. We help with résumés, networking, and many other things. We refer military spouses to websites like FlexJobs and Instant Teams. We also have many organizations working with companies that are military-friendly. So, we have a whole host of companies that know the lifestyle of a military spouse and are willing to work with them regarding their mobility issues.



Links to some helpful resources for military spouses seeking remote work:

- **Hiring Our Heroes:** www.hiringourheroes.org
- **Instant Teams:** instantteams.com
- **FlexJobs:** www.flexjobs.com
- **Spouse Education & Career Opportunities:** myseco.militaryonesource.mil



Turning Today's Youth Into Tomorrow's Leaders

By Jennifer Donovan

Teens in ALA Girls Nation polos and Boys Nation polos converged on Capitol Hill one day this past July to meet with U.S. senators from their state. As they made their way around the Hill, many who spotted the polo shirts knew exactly why they were there and who they were. Not only because it's an annual tradition to see the shirts on the Hill, but many of those working in Washington, D.C. are alumnae of the state and national programs. When visiting senate offices, many are met with the comment, "I attended ALA Girls State/Boys State!" or "I attended ALA Girls Nation/Boys Nation!" That's for a great reason — these programs give students the tools and leadership skills to be successful in politics and in all of their future career endeavors — a true testament to this decades-long program that shapes our nation's youth and is well respected.

Spending a day on Capitol Hill is just one of many highlights during the week in our nation's capital. The 76th session of ALA Girls Nation had the traditional senate sessions, touring D.C. monuments, and going to Twilight Tattoo, but it also had things that made it stand apart from other years. The session welcomed two senators from an inaugural ALA Girls State program and a special performance from veterans involved in the

Veterans Creative Arts Festival through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs in the D.C. area.

The American Legion Family, veterans, and creative arts

Each year, senators not only learn about the federal government, but they also learn about The American Legion

Family, who we serve, and about the sacrifices of veterans and their families. These lessons come from activities such as a visit to Arlington National Cemetery, a poppy ceremony, visits from American Legion Family leadership, and much more.

"It gave me an entirely new perspective on military and the role it plays in our lives and in the government. I'm especially thankful for the ALA as the granddaughter of two Vietnam War veterans. It gave me a new identity and a new thankfulness getting to attend Twilight Tattoo, which was a live military event, and getting to hear from The American Legion national

commander and the Auxiliary national president," said 2023 ALA Girls Nation President Ysabella Olsen. "These experiences really educated me about The American Legion Family and also made me invested to want to experience more, volunteer, and honor my grandfathers."

Another activity that brought awareness to veterans and how the ALA serves was a special event tied to the ALA's

Senators on the Hill

"I really enjoyed getting to sit in the Senate gallery. It was a huge highlight for me," said Ysabella Olsen, 2023 ALA Girls Nation president.

As senators visited Capitol Hill to meet with real-life senators from their states, some got an extra bonus: Many were able to make it to the Senate Gallery where there happened to be a vote on the floor (and where many high-profile senators were on the Senate floor).

2022-2023 national focus — the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. Veterans involved in the VA's creative arts program in the D.C. area came to campus and performed for the ALA senators.

During the performances, senators felt a wide range of emotions. Navy veteran Matthew Gill kicked off the program and had the senators out of their chairs dancing. Army veteran April Goodwin had everyone laughing with her comedy routine, and, once again, out of their chairs dancing along with her. Many of the participants were then moved to tears at the powerful writing of Army veteran Mike Howard. Rounding out the performances was Army veteran Andre Jones who got the senators up dancing again as he performed his original songs. Following the performances, the senators were able to meet the performers and ask questions.

New beginnings in Washington, D.C.

You may think of Washington, D.C. as just national government, but the city has a local government too. And that is what the inaugural combined D.C. Boys and ALA Girls State taught students from the area. The program was small this year — with a combined group of eight — but volunteers have plans to increase participation.

Sara Fenimore is from Virginia and attends school in Washington, D.C. She says the small size of the state program didn't put her at a disadvantage when attending ALA Girls Nation. "It was a very big jump from a small group to a group close to 100, but I really enjoyed that jump. At D.C. Boys and ALA Girls State, I was able to really get in the nitty gritty of D.C. politics, so I got the best of both worlds," said Fenimore. "I also really like the bigger aspect of ALA Girls Nation because you can meet people from all over the country, which is something I'm personally not used to."

Despite ALA Girls Nation being in the same area she lives in and attends school, Fenimore said she enjoyed the D.C. sites. "I think my favorite thing was being able to go see the monuments," said Fenimore. "It was really important to see the reactions of some people who were so amazed and so happy, and it's nice to see that excitement like when I first saw them. Now I drive past them every day to school. Seeing people have this excitement for D.C. and government is amazing."

Legion Family connections

For some attendees, ALA Girls State and Nation are their first exposures to The American Legion Family. For others, the connection runs deeper.

Emma Johnson of Wyoming is no stranger to The American Legion Family. Johnson has been involved in The American Legion's Oratorical Contest — placing third at the national competition in 2023 — a contest that helped her with her speaking skills at ALA Girls Nation. Johnson was reminded of this competition while attending Twilight Tattoo. She was able to catch up with fellow oratorical competitor and national second place finisher Ian Chung of New York, who was attending Boys Nation.

Johnson is also a military child and recently became an ALA Junior member. She waited to join the Auxiliary until after she finished competing in the Oratorical Contest so there would be no hint of bias and she was also able to devote more time to being a Junior member.

Johnson was encouraged to attend ALA Girls State and Nation while competing at the national Oratorical Contest. "I ran into a lot of alumnae there who attended," said Johnson. "I think that exposure definitely solidified my ambitions of wanting to attend ALA Girls Nation." Johnson was also encouraged to attend by her parents,



A BUSY WEEK ON AND OFF CAMPUS (opposite page): Waving flags to music at Twilight Tattoo; (above, from left): ALA Girls Nation President Ysabella Olsen taking the oath; posing with performers at Twilight Tattoo; voting cards are ready; dressed and ready for banquet; a gathering of Supreme Court justices; touring the D.C. monuments.

who happen to be alumni of ALA Badger Girls State and Badger Boys State.

Johnson is grateful for the support she received from The American Legion Family. “I know there are countless hours and countless amounts of money that have been poured into these programs,” she said. “So, to sit where I am, I’m just a sole person, but there are hundreds of people behind me who have gotten me to where I am today.”

Becoming president, supporting others, and discovering a passion

Results of any election are an exciting time for one candidate and a disappointment for another. However, what’s great about an ALA Girls Nation election is the immediate show of support. On the day of the election, both presidential candidates sat with nervous anticipation alongside their running mates, wondering if they would have a new title to add to their name.

The tightly closed eyes and nervously shaking legs were visible as the winner was about to be named. Then Nationalist candidate and Missouri senator Ysabella Olsen was named president. An immediate jump and cheer of excitement and then Olsen turned and went directly to her fellow presidential candidate to give her a hug and show support.

Olsen was grateful for the opportunity to attend ALA Girls Nation and being elected president.

“I knew I wanted to try for ALA Girls Nation because of the opportunity to be in the same place as two young women from every single state [program] is really just a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,” she said. “I wanted to have a chance to be able to represent Missouri and interact and have conversations with these incredible young women.”

The week also allowed Olsen to discover something about herself.

“Attending ALA Girls Nation made me realize how much of a passion I have for speaking and getting to share my message,” she said.

Olsen had the opportunity to speak to an even bigger audience than ALA Girls Nation — an honor bestowed upon the ALA Girls Nation president is an invitation to speak at the ALA National Convention.

“It makes me emotional and forever grateful that the American Legion Auxiliary recognizes that young women need to be taught about government and empowered to know that a career in politics is possible,” she told delegates and guests at the ALA’s 102nd National Convention in Charlotte, N.C.

Olsen said the lessons learned at ALA Girls Nation are steppingstones to successful careers in government and in life. One life lesson she will take with her is having conversations with others.

“I’ve learned how to use my voice from these



programs. I’ve learned how to have difficult conversations with others — skills I’ll take with me throughout college and my career.”

Olsen said her views on what it means to be an American citizen and what it means to be an active participant in government will be beneficial in her future career and help her become a great citizen, and a great person to others for the rest of her life.

Empowering each other

“Barbie is all these women. And all these women are Barbie,” said the narrator in the *Barbie* movie. The summer hit movie with a theme of female empowerment was also a symbol of empowerment for ALA Girls Nation senators. Ironically, both the Federalists and Nationalists chose Barbie as their party rally theme. But that wasn’t the only sign of empowerment throughout the week.

“I think being involved in this week has shown me just how positive and uplifting people can be even if you don’t know each other well,” Johnson said. “You know each other enough that you want to build them up and you want to support them in every facet possible. The senators are respectful of opinions as they learn about students from different backgrounds from all across the U.S.”

Olsen sent a message of empowerment to fellow senators to not let anyone dull their light and pointed out they are paving the way for their future and for those who come after them. She hopes to see her fellow senators involved in politics in the future, without hesitation.

“I want women to only have to be asked once to run for office,” said Olsen. “We definitely need more women involved in government. We need more women serving in public office and getting involved.”

Fenimore also had advice for future senators.

“Put yourself out there and be confident,” she said. “Being able to put yourself out there is going to help you later in life.” ★

Stay in the know about ALA Girls Nation! Get ready for the 2024 session by following @ALAGirlsNation on Instagram and Facebook.



TOURING AND LEARNING (left to right): The ALA Girls Nation senators and staff gathering on the steps of the U.S. Capitol; touring the World War II and Korean War Veterans Memorial; mingling with Boys Nation at Twilight Tattoo; senators working together; senators enjoying the National Mall; paying respects at Arlington National Cemetery; veterans Matthew Gill and April Goodwin performing as part of the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival presentation; touring the WWII Memorial; all smiles in senate session; showing spirit at the party rallies.



Mission Driven Focus Celebrates Year's Successes at National Convention

By Sara Fowler

The sound of race car engines filled the air with flashing red, yellow, and green lights as the American Legion Auxiliary zoomed into the 102nd National Convention after getting the green flag from 2022-2023 National President Vickie Koutz.

Celebrate Good Times

The theme for this year's celebration was Mission Driven, combining Koutz's love for both racing and veterans.

The opening entertainment was provided by Air Force veteran James Curry, who performed three upbeat songs. Members were dancing in the convention hall aisles to the beat, smiling, laughing, and waving their red, white, and blue bandanas as patriotic fervor filled the air. The positive energy was a great way to start the event, bringing members together.

"My love for our veterans and military and my deep connection to our mission put me in the driver's seat this past year, and I never let off the gas," said Koutz. "It was a thrilling, eye-opening and sometimes exhausting experience. I am so grateful for the opportunity to travel across the nation and witness our amazing members in action."

Many generous members gave to others this year through the national focus on companions of National Veterans Creative Arts Festival veterans.

"As national president, the focus you choose is so important because it is an opportunity to leave the organization a little better than you found it," Koutz said.

As of press time, \$86,952.72 was donated to support the companion experience at the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival.

Membership was another exciting component to celebrate at convention.

"Membership is on the upswing, so that's a positive for the organization as a whole to be able to celebrate," said Linda Tome, 2022-2023 national Membership Committee chair.

Tome was also happy to share 100% reporting for membership. The ALA's five divisions were in a battle to be No. 1 up to the end this year. Southern and Western divisions were neck and neck, with Western pulling out the win with 102.35 percent membership. Western Division members in the audience erupted with excitement when they realized they had won.

Membership goal departments for 2022-2023 (as of National Convention) included District of Columbia, New Mexico, Florida, Alaska, Arizona, Michigan, New Hampshire, Delaware, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Texas, California, Colorado, Alabama, North Carolina, Hawaii, and Vermont.

Throughout convention, all of the national program committees shared reports, detailing what units are doing across the country to continue to move the ALA's mission forward of serving veterans, military, and their families.

In the Americanism Committee report, members received great advice: A unit doesn't have to be big to make a big impact. The words were wise, especially for smaller units.

Getting Down to Business

This year, National Convention delegates voted on one amendment to the national Bylaws and one amendment to the national Standing Rules.

The first amendment was to the delegate strength, proposed by the Department of Minnesota, stating that each department shall be entitled to seven delegates and one additional delegate for each 1,200 members or major



Missed the 2023 ALA National Convention?

Catch up by watching archived videos of the general session livestream, plus national officer elections and installation — or view convention photos — by visiting www.ALAforVeterans.org/convention. Want to attend the ALA's largest national event? The next National Convention will be our 103rd, held in New Orleans in late August 2024. Follow our social media @ALAforVeterans for future convention information.

fraction thereof.

The second amendment was proposed by the national Constitution & Bylaws Committee, stating the minimum number of members to charter a new unit shall be 10 senior members, with the exception of a department headquarters unit that shall have no minimum membership requirement.

Several Auxiliary members voiced their concerns and support during the discussion section of the amendment related to delegate strength. After much discussion and clarifications, the convention body voted to pass both amendments.

ALA National Officers Elected

Wednesday morning of convention week always brings extra excitement when the next administrative year's national officers are elected.

It's always a bittersweet time as leaders are seen "passing the torch," aka a red and blue sash, to the next leader in line, ending their administrative year and another one beginning. Hugs and well wishes are given, knowing the next year is in capable hands.

During the election of national officers, technology came to the rescue so National President Candidate Lisa Williamson's daughter, Danielle Tarjoman, could talk to the convention body through Zoom and nominate her mom for office. Tarjoman was stuck in Florida because of Hurricane Idalia and wasn't able to nominate Williamson in person, as it's traditionally done from the convention floor.

"My mother's commitment to serving others is unparalleled," Tarjoman said virtually to the audience. "I have witnessed the countless hours my mother has worked to help our veterans."

Williamson of the Department of Alaska was elected the ALA's 2023-2024 national president. The national ALA focus this year is to increase awareness about the veteran and military suicide epidemic by embracing The American Legion's Be the One mission — be the one to save one.

Read more about Williamson on page 38 in this issue of *Auxiliary*.

Other national officers elected to serve during the 2023-2024 administrative year: Trish Ward, national vice president; Carol T. Robinson, Central Division national vice president; Debra Tiernan, Eastern Division national vice president; Karen Susag, Northwestern Division national vice president; Christine Trahan, Southern Division national vice president; Jeanette (Jan) Cushing, Western Division national vice president; Kathy Daudistel, national secretary; Marybeth Revoir, national treasurer; Brister Thomas, national chaplain; and Donna Thurman, national historian. Learn more about the national officers at www.ALAforVeterans.org/about/national-leadership.

Eyes on the Future

The end of National Convention is sometimes sad after closing one administrative year and changing leaders and focuses, but it's important to always



CELEBRATING ALA YEAR (left to right): 2022-2023 National President Vickie Koutz waves a checkered flag as part of the convention racing theme; Justin "JD" LeHew accepts the ALA Public Spirit Award on behalf of Team Long Road; ALA members dance during opening session; Air Force veteran James Curry thanks the crowd after singing; Ohio ALA members; ALA Junior Member of the Year Abigail Johnson; recognizing units/departments for their work.



remember all that was accomplished during that time and to use the momentum to drive forward into the next year to continue a *Service Not Self* mindset for our veterans, military, and their families.

Closing out the Mission Driven theme, Koutz waved a black and white checkered flag, signaling one ending and a new beginning for the 2023-2024 ALA administrative year.

National ALA Awards Presented

Several national ALA awards were part of this year's convention highlights, including the Public Spirit Award, Unit Member of the Year, and Salute to Servicemembers.

Public Spirit Award

The American Legion Auxiliary's prestigious Public Spirit Award recognizes outstanding individuals and organizations for contributions that positively impact communities through service to our military, veterans, and their families.

Every year, we celebrate those who make a difference through a creative body of work or even a single generous act. Previous recipients have included U.S. presidents and government officials, as well as regular citizens who saw a need and acted.

Vickie Koutz, 2022-2023 ALA national president, chose Team Long Road to be the recipient of this year's Public Spirit Award.

To accept on behalf of Team Long Road was Justin "JD" LeHew. Other members of the group include fellow U.S. Marine Corps veterans Coleman "Rocky" Kinzer and Ray Shinohara.

"Thank you so much for being with us today and for accepting the 2023 Public Spirit Award on behalf of Team Long Road," Koutz said to LeHew. "We are all inspired by the passion you have for our POWs/MIAs. We are so grateful for your work."

LeHew had the opportunity to address members and guests attending the ALA's 102nd National Convention general session.

"Being in front of the American Legion Auxiliary is

one of the greatest honors of my life," he said.

On June 6, 2022, the anniversary of D-Day, the three highly decorated retired Marines started out on a hike on U.S. Highway 20. This was no ordinary hike. The voyage would take these men from Boston — through 12 states and 3,365 miles — to the final stop on our nation's west coast: Newport, Ore.

The "why" is even more impressive — to bring awareness to Prisoners of War and Missing in Action, and to emphasize the importance of continuing search efforts. These men served our country, and now that they're retired from service, they continue to serve by working to make sure all who served are returned home.

"We wanted pain, we wanted sacrifice," LeHew said from the convention stage about the many miles they walked and the heavy backpacks they carried.

After speaking to the general session audience, LeHew hosted a Q&A session in the afternoon for those who wanted to ask questions and dive deeper into Team Long Road.

Learn more about Team Long Road and their new mission — History Hike — at teamlongroad.com. To see a list of previous Public Spirit Award recipients, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/Public-Spirit-Award.

Unit Member of the Year

The ALA Unit Member of the Year Award recognizes those serving at the unit level who exemplify the values and ideals of the Auxiliary and whose accomplishments significantly impact the program work in their units.

This year, Unit Member of the Year recipients were honored at the American Legion Auxiliary Luncheon for their work at the unit level.

"These individuals have consistently demonstrated their dedication to our mission," said Vickie Koutz, 2022-2023 ALA national president, at the luncheon. "Through their selfless actions, they invest their time, resources, and unwavering effort to benefit others."

ALA departments are proud to honor this year's 2023 ALA Unit Member of the Year recipients for going above and beyond when it comes to serving our nation's

Want to learn about the ALA Foundation's fundraising efforts at National Convention? Read about the PUFL raffle, silent auction, and Wall of Heroes on page 20 of this issue of *Auxiliary*.

veterans, military, and their families:

Alaska: Donna L. Brockschmidt; Arizona: Alice Gilles; Arkansas: Johnna McClain; California: Diana Reymundo; Colorado: Jill Caldwell; Connecticut: Tracy Garrigus; Delaware: Robin Airey; Florida: Linda Bowers; Georgia: Lindsey Coats; Hawaii: Toni Difante; Idaho: Kathy Barrow; Illinois: Mary Ann Mountain; Indiana: Candice Carter; Iowa: Patricia Flynn; Kansas: Gleneva Winn; Kentucky: Richard Gano; Louisiana: Colinda Renee Hantz; Maine: Lauren Curtis; Maryland: Steffanie Taylor; Massachusetts: Marguerite Duncan; Michigan: Myrna Puse; Minnesota: Bonnie Luedloff; Mississippi: Ashley Curtis; Missouri: Debbie Alderson; Montana: Jane Jackson; Nebraska: Cindy Moore; New Hampshire: Angela Boyle; New Jersey: Mary Ann Woollen; New Mexico: Diana Raines; New York: Valerie Mecabe; North Carolina: Patricia Sloan; North Dakota: Ruth A. Quam; Ohio: Sammie Cordial; Oklahoma: Beth Myers; Oregon: Lilly Lawson; Pennsylvania: Lisa Sebolka; Rhode Island: Amy Gill; South Carolina: Edith Blas; South Dakota: Joann Muller; Tennessee: Nicole Hartsfield; Texas: Kay DeFoor; Vermont: Darlene Graves-Cumm; Virginia: Jayne Ramirez; Washington: Bev Beierman; Wisconsin: Cathy Wilbur; Wyoming: Kathleen G. Ebert. (Note: Not all American Legion Auxiliary states submitted names for this award.)

“Grassroots members are the cornerstone of our organization,” Koutz said at the luncheon. “As we look to the next century of service, my hope is that it will be filled with contributions from members just like today’s honorees.”

Salute to Servicemembers

Presented annually at the American Legion Auxiliary National Convention, the Salute to Servicemembers Award honors all military personnel who are currently serving our country in the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard, Space Force, and the National Guard/Reserve.

This year, all six recipients were able to attend National Convention to accept their awards:

- U.S. Air Force: Staff Sgt. Dessence Waddell (nominated by the Department of Texas)
- U.S. Army: Lt. Col. Maria Shelton (nominated by the Department of Texas)
- U.S. Navy: Petty Officer 3rd Class Kolten Flook (nominated by the Department of Iowa)
- U.S. Coast Guard: Chief Boatswain’s Mate Stefano Joseph Torre (nominated by the Department of Alaska)
- U.S. Marines: Cpl. Sabrina Townes (nominated by the Department of Michigan)
- U.S. Reserves: Gunnery Sgt. Joshua Layton (nominated by the Department of Illinois)

*There was no nomination for U.S. Space Force.

To learn more about this year’s winners, check out the ALA blog at www.ALAforVeterans.org/blog. ★



TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS (opposite page): Unit Member of the Year recipients were honored at the ALA Luncheon. This page: Arkansas members; Little Miss Poppy Ruth Hermiller; Ann Fournier speaks on an amendment; D.C. members dance during the opening session; Nebraska members have spirit; ALA Girls Nation President Ysabella Olsen speaks; Rose Ficklin discusses an amendment; members are all smiles during convention.



ALA PROGRAM ENGAGEMENT PLANS HELP EDUCATE MEMBERS

American Legion Auxiliary members are continuously at work in their communities, demonstrating the compassion and heart we have for our veterans, military, and their families. Auxiliary members are always busy serving our mission. We know unit activities take time to plan, execute, and process. Because of that, we understand the need for better information and materials to be easily accessible.

The ALA Program Engagement Plans give our members instructions and guides by incorporating local and national Auxiliary priorities. Program Engagement Plans are for unit members and departments (states) to implement the Auxiliary’s mission in their communities, and further their knowledge of each program.

We recognize there needs to be a multifaceted approach to educating ALA members about mission delivery, as members don’t always receive the information the same way. One large document is no longer the answer. We use Facebook groups, Mission Training events, ALA Academy, quarterly virtual meetings, the national website, and now, the Program Engagement Plans to educate Auxiliary members in all things focused on mission delivery.

The plans are aimed at individual members but can be used to fit unit and department activities very easily. We know that not every unit or department delivers the mission the same way, but this form of information is available for all members at all levels of the organization.

What are ALA Program Engagement Plans?

Located at www.ALAforVeterans.org, these plans drill down how to implement the key purpose statements and other ideas on how members can take their ALA mission outreach activities to the next level. They provide resources already available, real-life how-tos, links to useful information, links to our national committee Facebook groups, deadlines and important dates, sidebars for easy access to important topics about the programs, and in-depth knowledge of each program.

Will the program plans change from year to year?

The committee purpose statements will not change as those are now part of the Auxiliary’s national Constitution & Bylaws. While some activities may change from year to year, we know that it still takes two to three years for widespread awareness at the community level of new programs. These plans should be simple and easy to apply for that purpose.

Where can I find the Program Engagement Plans?

All plans are located on the member side of the national website. Sign in to the MyAuxiliary member portal at www.ALAforVeterans.org via the Member Log In link, click on “Committees” and you will see several options — at the end of the options, you will see a “How to Get Involved” box. From there, click on “Program Engagement Plans.” You may also go here to easily locate the plans: www.ALAforVeterans.org/member/program-engagement-plans.



To learn more about the ALA national program committees, request to join one of the many Facebook groups at www.Facebook.com/alaforveterans/groups.

PUBLIC RELATIONS: KEY TO ALA SUCCESS

 www.Facebook.com/groups/ALApublicrelations



The ALA Public Relations Program promotes our mission to enhance the

lives of veterans, military, and their families. This program makes sure we are sharing information about who we are, what we do, and why we matter.

As you make your public relations plan, you need to develop a strategy to bring awareness to membership, programs, volunteers, and donations. This strategy should highlight the ALA in your community.

The Public Relations program has three key program statements:

1. Spread the word about the

American Legion Auxiliary: A community of volunteers serving veterans, military, and their families.

2. Encourage ALA members to be visible in their communities through valuable, distinct branding.

3. Share the latest news from ALA volunteer national leadership and ALA National Headquarters.

To help you follow the key program statements and put them into practice, log in to the MyAuxiliary portion of www.ALAForVeterans.org and go to the Public Relations Committee. There you will find a “Get Involved” button that will give you helpful information. In addition, you can also find links to a public relations toolkit, the PR program Facebook group, and ALA Academy courses.

The PR Facebook group is a place

for you to ask questions and share ideas on how you are working the program in your community. We love to see posts about news coverage and members being branded at community events.

If you have questions about anything ALA public relations, email us at PublicRelations@ALAForVeterans.org.

“Everything you do or say is public relations.” — Author unknown

Let your passion and enthusiasm for our organization show in all that we do or say. Have fun and be creative.



Pam Bates joined the ALA in 1976. She is a member of Unit 214 in Willoughby, Ohio.

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY FOUNDATION



The American Legion Auxiliary Foundation funded a Veteran Projects Fund grant for Unit 86 in Maine for all-terrain beach wheelchairs for Maine Veterans’ Home.

Nancy True, of ALA Unit 86, said, “The American Legion Auxiliary Foundation is a fantastic organization. I would encourage those who are able, to make donations to the fund. I would also encourage other Auxiliary units in our great state of Maine and throughout the country to apply for a grant to benefit veterans in their area. The process is simple, and the national staff is so willing to answer questions and help with the process.”

Veteran Projects Fund grants are awarded to ALA units, districts, and departments, up to \$10,000. To learn more or to apply, visit www.ALAFoundation.org/grants.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS & REHABILITATION: BE THE ONE

 www.Facebook.com/groups/ALAVAR

“Be the One” — National President Lisa Williamson’s pin (pictured at right) states the Auxiliary’s 2023-2024 focus and provides the 988 Suicide and Crisis line number. Our VA&R Program can do so much to support this focus area. Providing service to our veterans is the core of this program.

Auxiliary members volunteer at VA medical centers, community-based outpatient clinics, and provide service to veterans in our families and communities every day. A simple “How are you feeling today?” can open the door to a conversation that could be just what that veteran needed that day. Be a good listener. Assist them in getting help to overcome any feelings they may have.

Remember: We are not professionals, but we can get them connected to the help they need. Be sure you check back in with that veteran. Don’t help once and

disappear. Just being there and knowing someone cares may make all the difference.

The ALA has a memorandum of understanding with Honor Flight. As ALA members, there is much we can do to serve our veterans and their families through this program. Have you considered volunteering to be a guardian on a flight? Perhaps you or your unit would like to write letters thanking a veteran for their service. Do you live close to a local hub of Honor Flight? If so, the welcome home for these veterans is a wonderful way to thank them for their service.

Flags waving and people clapping and shaking hands is so emotional, not only for those welcoming the veterans, but for the veterans as



well. Did you know that poppy funds may be used to support this program? For more information, visit the MyAuxiliary member portal of our national website at www.ALAforVeterans.org/poppy-funds. I have volunteered for this program for many years now. It is one of the most rewarding things I have done.

Please go to www.ALAforVeterans.org and review the Program Engagement Plan for VA&R. There are websites you can visit and ideas for your units to work the program. There are so many ways you can Be the One.



Pam Ray is a 66-year member of the Auxiliary. She belongs to Urbana Unit 71 in Illinois.

EDUCATION: PROMOTE OUR SCHOLARSHIPS TO BENEFIT YOUTH

 www.Facebook.com/groups/ALAEducation



One of the key program statements of the ALA Education Program is to provide scholarships

to those who desire a college education. In the words of Nelson Mandela, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” One of the American Legion Auxiliary’s focus points is to bring awareness to children — especially our military children and adults — of the scholarships available.

We can do that by promoting

in our units, departments, and our communities. Team up with your American Legion Family and host an event and provide the information needed on the scholarships available from the unit, department, and national levels. The American Legion Auxiliary Children of Warriors National Presidents’ Scholarship, Spirit of Youth Scholarship for our Junior members, Junior Member Loyalty Scholarship, and the Non-Traditional Student Scholarship information is available at www.ALAforVeterans.org/scholarships. There you will also find other scholarships available within The

American Legion Family.

Familiarize yourself with each scholarship requirement so you can share your knowledge with others. Share information in your local libraries, schools, newspapers, and your public service stations. You can increase awareness by reaching out and sharing the ALA Education Program and the countless positive ways you can make a difference. Let’s continue to work together for a brighter tomorrow by reaching out today.



Starr Purnell is a 28-year Auxiliary member of Howard J. Purnell Memorial Unit 145 in Salisbury, Md.

COMMUNITY SERVICE: PLAN AHEAD FOR AMERICAN LEGION FAMILY DAY

 www.Facebook.com/groups/ALACommunityService

The National Executive Committee of The American Legion passed Resolution No. 7 in 2022, establishing American Legion Family Day to be observed annually on the last Saturday of April. Posts are encouraged to open their doors to their community for the day to recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of The American Legion Family.

An all-day event of this kind takes a great deal of advanced planning and commitment from many members to ensure its success. It is the perfect opportunity for members of the Legion, Auxiliary, Sons of The American Legion, and American Legion Riders to really work together!

To get things started, committees consisting of members from all four groups need to be established. The

post building needs to be reserved for that day and probably the day before to allow adequate time for setup. Then the real work begins! Planning this event will also allow your Legion Family to explore new and creative ways to promote our programs.

Well-planned visual displays that appeal to guests of all ages will highlight our long-standing commitment to caring for our veterans, military, their families, and our communities. American Legion Family Day is an excellent opportunity to promote our outreach programs by highlighting our commitment to such things as blood drives, CPR training, and emergency preparedness in our National Security Program, child safety programs of the Children & Youth Program, and respect for

our flag through our Americanism Program, just to name a few.

To assist you in planning your amazing event, the Community Service page at www.ALAforVeterans.org offers a special page entitled: “How to Plan a Successful American Legion Family Day”. This how-to sheet offers tips for planning your program, inviting guest speakers, working with the media, and much more. This info can be accessed by logging in to the MyAuxiliary member portal on the national website.

Are you ready for American Legion Family Day 2024? Let’s hope your answer is a resounding “YES!”



Diana Sirovina is a 36-year member of the Auxiliary. She belongs to Bixby-Hansen Unit 171 in Union Grove, Wis.



New ALA history-focused blog online now!

Get acquainted with our latest blog — the *American Legion Auxiliary History’s Mysteries!* Every month, we will explore the accomplishments, ALA members, the Auxiliary’s Cavalcade of Memories Museum, recent acquisitions, projects in the archives, and so much more.

Visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/history-blog.

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THE AMERICAN LEGION CWF GRANT SUPPORTS STAR SPANGLED KIDS PROJECT

Educating our children about American history is essential to our country's civic health. Star Spangled Kids is the American Legion Auxiliary initiative to inform our youth about United States history, Americanism, and the U.S. Constitution.

"The Star Spangled Kids project promotes Americanism and patriotism while allowing students to learn more about the U.S. Constitution," said National Americanism Committee Chair Sallie Rossman. "The knowledge students gain through this project will enable them to become insightful citizens and future leaders."

To show their support and appreciation, The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation (CWF) Inc., awarded the American Legion Auxiliary's Star Spangled Kids project with a generous grant to help further educate and enlighten the youth of America. The ALA used the awarded funds to distribute Star Spangled Kids kits to every ALA department headquarters so members can use them as valuable, topical educational tools to teach children the importance of American history.

"The Child Welfare Foundation grant will allow the Star Spangled

Kids project to be a prominent component of the Auxiliary's Americanism program," said Rossman. "The grant funds identical kits to departments providing unified information, creating innovative ideas to energize the Star Spangled Kids project and the students the project reaches."

Our goals for the Star Spangled Kids kits are to further the civic education of our youth in local communities across the country, to promote the values and mission of The American Legion Family nationwide, and to instill a sense of patriotism in our nation's youth.

"It's important for us to educate our youth to be good citizens, teach them about our country's history, and help them to promote patriotism throughout all our communities," said National Constitution & Bylaws Committee Chair Michele DeGennaro.

The Star Spangled Kids kits give our members more tools to make a difference in children's lives within local communities. The educational kits are to be used as launching pads to promote patriotism and educate our youth about the U.S. Constitution, Declaration of Independence, and the freedoms unique to our country.

"The CWF grant for the Star Spangled Kids project allows the Auxiliary to showcase the Americanism tools

available from American Legion Flag & Emblem Sales and outside vendors to departments," said Rossman. "The project will provide avenues for departments to explore the various uses of the items — from handouts at events to demonstrating to members the usage of items to promote patriotism and flag etiquette — while increasing student knowledge of the U.S. Constitution," said Rossman.

Thanks to the CWF grant, the Star Spangled Kids kits include various exciting items that make teaching our youth about the history and heritage of our country fun. Enclosed in the kits are two colorful comic books from Emblem Sales. *I Pledge Allegiance* comic book includes fun activities and stories that teach how and why we pledge allegiance to our flag. The *Our Country's Flag* 20-page educational comic book explains the history, significance, and proper treatment of the U.S. flag in a fun and exciting way.

"We hope these kits will reinvigorate and support these efforts in our units and departments throughout our organization," said ALA National Headquarters Americanism Committee Liaison Chrystal Daulton. "We are thankful the CWF chose to support our project."

Learn more about the American Legion Auxiliary Star Spangled Kids initiative by visiting www.ALAforVeterans.org/Star-Spangled-Kids.

Star Spangled Kids kits include:

- 25 – *I Pledge Allegiance* comic books
- 25 – *Our Country's Flag* comic books
- 1 – *Let's Be Right on Flag Etiquette*
- 50 – 4X6 stick American flags
- 50 – Declaration of Independence/Constitution of the United States
- 50 – USA flag keychains
- 50 – flag pins
- 50 – patriotic stickers
- Star Spangled Kids how-to sheets

Provided by Brister Thomas, National Chaplain 2023-2024 | www.Facebook.com/groups/ALAchaplains

Aloha, American Legion Auxiliary members!

There is a special phrase that lives in my heart every day and I thought it might touch yours. It is especially relevant, as my family is from Hawai'i. Like a lei, we are all connected. A lei is often made up of all different types of glorious flowers. Once intertwined, they find strength and beauty in their common goal.

This is what we are hoping for this year as your chaplains — to become united as one from all faiths (and even those who are searching). Please reach out and connect with me (alahq@ALAforVeterans.org), with your division, department, and/or unit chaplain, and let us know what we can do for you.

Here are some monthly devotions that hopefully will lift your spirit, empower your heart, and grow your faith.

And remember: Like a lei, we are all connected.

NOVEMBER

Strength and sacrifice: A November devotional for National Veterans and Military Families Month

As November unfolds, we turn our hearts and minds to honor the brave men and women who have devoted their lives to protect our nation. National Veterans and Military Families Month is a time to reflect on the sacrifices made by our military personnel and their families, as well as the strength and resilience they embody. This month, let us find inspiration and faith in their unwavering commitment to service. Let us remember that faith, courage, unity, and sacrifice are the cornerstones of our military community. May we offer thanks for their service and pray for a future of peace and security for all nations. Amen.

Week 1: As people of faith, we often speak of finding courage in our writings. As a Christian, that translates to recognizing we are never alone. Let's reflect on the bravery of our military members as they face adversity with courage. Pray for their safety and for the families who support them.

Week 2: Unity in diversity. Consider the unity that transcends boundaries within the military. Let's pray for harmony among nations and the wellbeing of our global military community.

Week 3: Sacrifice and service. Reflect on the ultimate sacrifice made by some military members. Let's lift our voices in love for those who have given their lives and for comfort for their families.

Week 4: Hope for the future. Let's consider the future of our world, where peace may prevail, and military service may no longer be necessary. May we express gratitude for the hope they bring.

DECEMBER

Embracing light and hope

As December ushers in the holiday season, military families often find themselves navigating a unique

journey. Separated by duty, they hold on to the light of hope, cherishing moments of togetherness, even if through distance.

In this season of joy and reflection, let us remember the resilience of military families of all generations. Just as the North Star guides travelers through the darkest nights, faith guides us through challenges. It reminds us that love transcends miles, uniting hearts in a tapestry of devotion.

During this holiday season, let us also celebrate the unwavering commitment of our servicemembers. Their sacrifices, like the selfless gift of the Magi, inspire us to give of ourselves. Acts of kindness, no matter how small, can illuminate the lives of those serving far from home.

In the candle's warm glow, we find comfort in traditions that connect us across the globe. Together, we pray for peace, unity, and the safe return of our loved ones. And, as we gather with friends and family, let us keep an empty seat at our table, symbolizing our unwavering love and longing for those who serve.

Together, we light the way through the darkest of nights, celebrating the love that binds us, and cherishing the moments we share. In unity, we find our greatest strength, and in hope, our brightest light.

May this December be a time of shared hope, love, and light for all — a testament to the enduring spirit that unites us all.

JANUARY

Renewing hope in the new year

As we step into the fresh canvas of January, let us reflect on the power of renewal and hope. Just as the winter frost blankets the earth in the colder regions of our country, covering it in a shroud of stillness, January offers us an opportunity to start anew. In this moment, we, the American Legion Auxiliary, can draw inspiration from the resilience that defines our nation's veterans.

Our veterans have faced the harshest of winters on foreign shores, battling not only the cold but also the challenges of duty, sacrifice, and separation from loved ones. Yet, their unwavering spirit and commitment to a brighter future have carried them through.

In this new year, let us take a page from their playbook. Let us resolve to renew our dedication to service, our commitment to our community, and our support for our veterans. Just as the sun rises after the longest night, so too can we rise to meet the challenges ahead. Together, we can be the beacon of hope for those who have served our nation and the driving force of positive change in our communities.



Brister Thomas is a military spouse and daughter from eUnit 56 in Hawaii.



American Legion Family focused

**Meet 2023-2024
ALA National President
Lisa Williamson**

Enthusiasm radiates from ALA National President Lisa Williamson, whether she's talking to 100 people or just one. It's contagious, making the people who are listening or talking to her want to get to that same level of excitement about serving our veterans, military, and their families.

"I'm passionate about our mission and I'm passionate about our American Legion Family," she said. "I raised my children in this organization."

Williamson is ready to make a difference this administrative year as Alaska's first ALA national president, continuing the Auxiliary's longstanding tradition of *Service Not Self*.

Family life

Williamson was born in southern California and moved to Fairbanks, Alaska, when she was 7 years old. Fairbanks is the second largest city in the state.

"Instead of an Army brat, I was a university brat," she recalled. "My mom and dad both worked for the University of Alaska Fairbanks — my dad in the graphic artist position and my mom was a secretary for various deans. At one time, my folks were resident advisers at one of the biggest dorms there, so I had 800 brothers and sisters during the school year living under the same roof."

Williamson was an intern reporter when she was a junior and senior in high school and continued through college when she attended for a few years and majored in journalism.

Years later, she moved to Anchorage and was looking

for a new line of work when she opened the newspaper and saw an ad for administrative assistant for The American Legion Department of Alaska. She worked there for eight years.

"I really learned the Legion side of the house and the Sons — we didn't have the Riders quite yet," she recalled. "I saw that it was a family and saw how the family worked together."

Williamson birthed her son, Kyle, while working for the Legion.

"Kyle was literally raised in this organization," she said. "He's gone to convention and workshops and conferences. He's held offices in the Sons of The American Legion. My daughter, Danielle, was an ALA Junior member and went to national Junior meetings and ran for and was elected

to office at the department and national levels."

After high school, Kyle asked Williamson to go to Eielson Air Force Base with him so he could take his oath of enlistment. She had no idea he was intending to join the military.

"As he was growing up, he had the opportunity to talk to all of these different Legionnaires about the different branches of service," she recalled. "I didn't realize he was doing it to figure out which way he wanted to go. As a mom, you are scared, but you are so happy and thrilled knowing you did a good job."

The family enjoys going to their recreation cabin located about half an hour from home to drive four-wheelers and get off the grid.

"You are right on the verge of cell service up there," she said. "In an emergency, you could make a call and get things through, but emails, not so much. Sometimes when we want to disconnect, that's where we like to go."

Fun facts about 2023-2024 National President Lisa Williamson

- ★ I go to Mexico every year with my husband, Darrel. That's where we got married.
- ★ I'm an American Legion Rider. That is one of the times I do my best thinking.
- ★ I am studying Spanish and try to daily.
- ★ I'm not a big meat-eater. I'll eat a burger every once in a while, with a lot of stuff on it. Steak or prime rib is not my jam.
- ★ I like seafood.

After working at the Alaska department headquarters, Williamson held a couple of other miscellaneous jobs before becoming a licensed realtor. She has been in that career for over 20 years now.

Getting involved in the Auxiliary

Williamson has served several unit-level positions and multiple department-level offices and chairmanships. At the national level, she has served as chair of the Auxiliary Emergency Fund, Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, Children & Youth, Education, Legislative, Constitution & Bylaws, Public Relations, and Junior Activities committees, and as 100th Anniversary Committee member, National Executive Committee member, ALA Centennial Strategic Plan strategy co-captain, and American Legion Auxiliary national vice president.

Williamson has enjoyed her various roles but said she really loved when she was the national Legislative Committee chair.

“That was where you could see all of the committees are interwoven,” she said. “Legislative touches on so many different aspects — it kind of focuses on our children and youth and how we can help our military families, it touches on national security when we help our military, it touches on VA&R when we help our veterans, it touches on Americanism, and if you promote it right, it’s also touching on public relations, and if you are doing a really good job and someone sees you are doing a really good job and they go, ‘How can I be part of that?’ then you have a new member. It encompasses everything.”

One ALA committee Williamson said people sometimes shy away from is Constitution & Bylaws.

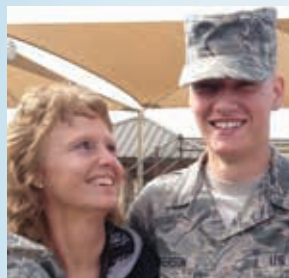
“I can tell you if anybody ever has any aspirations — to not necessarily be national president — but to be their department president or their district president, I truly believe you have to have C&B,” she said. “You need to know that’s your standard operating procedure. Those are your rules and your guidelines on how you can operate. I know there have been members who served in president capacities at all levels and are kicking themselves in the rear that they have never served in that capacity prior to being president. It’s an important one. Is it a fun one? Not necessarily, but it matters.”

Williamson said she likes many ALA activities, including going to National Convention.

“The American Legion Family service project to me is the bee’s knees,” she said. “I can remember when we painted a wheelchair ramp — the best thing about that house was that wheelchair ramp.”

She said she has gone to as many of the service projects as she possibly can at National Convention and enjoys starting off the weeklong event by lending a helping hand. The annual service project is designed to help veterans or assist the host convention city with a needed project such as cleaning up a park or memorial.

“It puts the whole convention on a great note for me right from the get-go,” she said.



FAMILY FIRST: 2023-2024 ALA National President Lisa Williamson is all about family — her personal family as well as The American Legion Family. Williamson takes a break from her motorcycle with husband, Darrel, in the background; participating in an American Legion Family service project at a previous National Convention; Williamson with her kids, Kyle and Danielle; Kyle’s U.S. Air Force photo; Williamson and Kyle; Williamson and Darrel at an Honor Flight homecoming; Williamson with her grandsons; Darrel and Williamson; Kyle and Darrel escorting Williamson to be installed as national president; Williamson accepting the nomination for ALA national president.

ALA's national focus for 2023-2024

A few experiences from people close to Williamson have led to an ALA national focus on preventing veteran/military suicide. Williamson said her focus for the administrative year is surprising to many who know her bubbly personality.

"I know it's not a subject anybody ever thought I would take on because I like to have fun and roll up my sleeves and go do a service project or have fun and go to a ballgame," she said. "But the mission has always been there in my mind, and so I think that maybe because it is so unlike what people think of me, it will make even more of a strong impact because this is not something they see me doing. I could have done something less serious."

Living in Alaska with the shortest day of the year only about seven hours of daylight and being away from family, Williamson said she can see how military members could get depressed in that environment.

"You've got that single soldier who is in the barracks, away from family, in the dark, who has no resources when it comes to mental health — I can see why we have an epidemic for veteran/military suicide," she said.

Additionally, she has a really good friend she met one year when she and her husband, Darrel, went to Mexico. Four years ago, that friend's son died by suicide. There was no indication. The day it happened, he was upbeat and everything seemed well. He died by suicide using a firearm.

"When I'm in Mexico, I go walk every morning and I was walking and thinking about her, and it just came to me: that focusing on veteran/military suicide is what I have to do," she said.

Another story — this one from Williamson's son — solidified her decision.

"My son is in the Guard and his deskmate on one beautiful summer day went to a lovely lake and died by suicide with a firearm," she said. "My son worked

across from him and had no indication the kid was struggling."

The No. 1 thing is to destigmatize getting help, she said.

"Especially in the military, you're made to be tough and strong and so you have to suck it up," Williamson said. "It's something that's engrained in them from the very get-go. They think that getting help is making them weak or less of a person or less of a man."

She said The American Legion's Be the One mission is not just the Legion's, but The American Legion Family's with all three leaders — Legion, Sons, and the ALA — focusing on this important issue for this administrative year.

"Just be the one to save one," Williamson said. "All those ones add up. Between three organizations, we are 2.5 million strong. If each one of us helps one, there are 2.5 million we save."

Looking forward

While serving as ALA national president, Williamson said she is excited to be part of the Wreaths Across America caravan from Maine to Arlington National Cemetery, as well as other mission-related events. Additionally, she is very much looking forward to department visits and seeing what they do to help veterans who are struggling with PTSD or mental health. Williamson said she looks forward to meeting members throughout the ALA's administrative year.

As a seasoned member, she offers advice for any new ALA members who may join this year.

"Find someone you can shadow," she said. "Find a friend and get as involved as you want to. Don't get burned out. Don't agree to become president or chair of something right away. Make sure you are pairing yourself up with someone you admire and trust and not someone who is going to take advantage of you. Give it your all, but don't get overwhelmed." ★

By Sara Fowler, Staff Writer

BE =THE= ONE

WORKING TOGETHER TO BE THE ONE

Let's change the narrative. Let's talk about how we can Be the One to save one — rather than the number of those who were successful. The rate of suicide for veterans is more than 50% higher than that of non-veteran adults.

WHAT CAN VETERANS DO?

- Dial 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.
- Talk with others about how you are feeling.

- Ask for help when you know you need it.
- Know there are millions of people ready to help you.
- Remember that your family and friends care.

WHAT CAN FAMILY AND FRIENDS DO?

- Ask veterans in your life how they are doing.
- Listen when a veteran needs to talk.
- Reach out when a veteran is struggling.

Source: Legion.org



Supporting Our Scholarships

2023-2024 ALA National President Lisa Williamson will be going above and beyond in her role as national president, by not only helping to raise awareness about the Be the One mission, but also to raise funds for the American Legion Auxiliary's greatest need — Spirit of Youth (SOY) Scholarships.

Beginning in fiscal year 2024, the ALA will increase the number of SOY scholarships by 49, bringing the total number of scholarships awarded to 67. This will bring the total amount awarded to \$100,000, the most the Auxiliary has ever awarded for SOY scholarships.

With your help, the ALA will help more students fulfill their educational pursuits in preparation to lead in the future.



To donate, text "Lisa" to 1-844-940-3450.

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Get involved with Wreaths Across America Day

The American Legion Auxiliary and Wreaths Across America have partnered for joint community service activities that bring awareness to both groups' missions. Each December on National Wreaths Across America Day, over 2 million wreaths are placed on headstones of our nation's servicemembers.

For more information, including how you can be part of National Wreaths Across America Day, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/WAA.

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IDEAS TO ENCOURAGE VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION — ESPECIALLY WITH YOUNGER ALA MEMBERS

Americans are spending less time volunteering — and younger people’s dwindling interest in community service has left organizations searching for ways to reach generations that represent the future of their causes.

A 2019 study from the University of Maryland’s Do Good Institute notes that volunteering among adults age 22 to 35 decreased to about 22% in 2015, compared with nearly 26% just 12 years prior. That decrease left U.S. causes and organizations with 2.4 million fewer young volunteers.

Between 2019 and 2021, rates of volunteer activity continued their decline among all demographic groups, according to a 2023 analysis from the U.S. Census Bureau and AmeriCorps.

“People are so, so busy these days that it is hard to get their attention and get them to take action,” Amanda Lea Kaiser, author of the book, *Elevating Engagement: Uncommon Strategies for Creating a Thriving Member Community*, shared in an email. “Younger people have significant constraints on their time while building careers, starting families, and making big financial decisions like buying a house.”

The American Legion Auxiliary is not immune from the national trend of decreasing volunteerism among younger people, said Karen Toll, the organization’s 2023-2024 national Membership Committee chair.

“If we make younger members

feel welcome, they will participate,” Toll said.

But when an organization is battling a host of other commitments for interest and engagement — particularly among its younger generations of members — how can it attract attention and strengthen participation in volunteer activities?

Auxiliary magazine asked Toll, Kaiser, and ALA member Ann Rehbein — whose unit has a history of active volunteer participation

If we make younger members feel welcome, they will participate.

among its younger members — to offer their tips on encouraging volunteer participation, especially among younger ALA members:

Go where they are. Toll, a member of ALA Unit 203 in Latonia, Ky., recommends promotional efforts that specifically target younger people where they gather. From sponsoring school sports teams to hosting social events for teens and young adults, a host of opportunities exist that can put the ALA and its activities in front of a younger audience.

Rehbein, of ALA Unit 37 in Ames, Iowa, says providing high school academic awards — with an event that honors award recipients — is another way to meet young people where they are.

“If the event is friendly and welcoming, they will want to come back,” she said.

Start with “hello.” Rehbein’s unit provides mentoring to help new members navigate ALA membership, and it starts with a simple, friendly greeting. “You can’t ignore them,” she said. “They are giving up valuable time to attend a meeting or activity, so say ‘hello’ to them and encourage them to take part in activities.”

Kaiser’s research supports this emphasis on welcoming newcomers. “First impressions are critical for first-time volunteers, and during those crucial first impressions, first-time volunteers decide to become repeat volunteers,” she said.

Focus on the experience.

Consider how you want your members to feel, Kaiser says, from excitement about the work to a belief that they are part of something bigger than themselves. Then tailor your volunteer experiences to elicit those emotions.

“Neuroscience shows that emotions drive decisions to engage,” said Kaiser. “Many organizations use a super professional tone. While it conveys meaning, it doesn’t convey a lot of feeling. Warm up your tone and trigger emotions by imagining you are writing or talking to your new best friend.”

Encourage enthusiasm. An organization’s younger members often are excited about the opportunity to help, and they bring good ideas to the table, Rehbein said. Although her unit’s mentors are available to explain the history of an activity or event, they don’t discourage suggestions for changing plans and procedures.

“Don’t tamp down that enthusiasm,” she said. “Be encouraging and flexible, and try new things.”

Show gratitude. When people volunteer, they’re offering their time, ideas and, often, their money. Taking these contributions for granted can have lasting consequences. Kaiser recalled a volunteer who told her he raised more money for an event than anyone else but didn’t get a thank-you for his efforts.

“Plan how to thank every volunteer,” Kaiser said, “with public or personal thank-yous to enthusiastic volunteers who go above and beyond.”



FACEBOOK OVERKILL WHEN TOO MANY ALA FACEBOOK GROUPS DILUTE OUR BRAND, IT OVERWHELMS MEMBERS

Back in the old days of Facebook — let's say 2008 — the “thing to do” with an organization's Facebook page was to increase your follower count or to get more “likes.” And while it's still important to attract and retain followers, the buzz these days is all about creating VIP-type online communities such as Facebook groups.

In a Facebook group, users opt-in to online communities where people with similar interests around one or multiple topics can come together to share ideas and connect with one another. For example, you may belong to a group for hidden gem restaurants in your local community or in the case of the ALA, you might belong to a group for the national Children & Youth Committee or a Poppy Committee with your local unit.

In terms of reaching and communicating with ALA members, Facebook groups have been great and continue to grow in popularity both at the national, department, and local levels. ALA members can find at least 16 Facebook groups through the main National Headquarters Facebook account focused on a particular program or role. In addition, a search on Facebook can lead to

many groups related to local units and departments, but when does having too many groups tied to the same topic become overwhelming to users and potentially dilute the ALA's brand and message?

To be clear, we aren't saying there can't be a national Facebook group, department group, and unit group ... it's when a group is created for anything and everything (e.g., an ALA unit creating individual Facebook groups for Poppy Day, poppy making, poppy cookie

...when does having too many groups tied to the same topic become overwhelming to users and potentially dilute the ALA's brand and message?

making, poppy fundraising — you get the idea).

The risks of overexposure.

In a www.steemit.com article, journalist John Boitnott warns that too much of your brand can harm it. He suggests that over time, overexposure can lead to your brand becoming diluted, with consumers' eyes glazing over as they see yet another message or post from the same organization.

Having no clear focus. Often the biggest issue with having too many accounts, Boitnott says, is that organizations never quite focus on one thing. Instead of honing in on one or two accounts and making it the best online presence it can be, an organization may spend its time shifting between four

or five different accounts, never quite excelling at any of them and spreading themselves too thin.

If we, as an organization, are creating multiple social media accounts, pages, and groups for all of the activities we do, it's likely we are also overwhelming members by asking them to join everything.

Less is more. Before starting a group, check to see if one already exists at the ALA national level that could achieve the same goal. Each national Facebook group provides an arena for organic discussion about your local programs or services and presents the opportunity to cultivate brand awareness. If you do still feel you need a local group, create only one, and don't branch off by creating subgroup after subgroup related to the same topic.

Start slowly. Whether you are creating a new group or joining groups, determine how your time can best be spent. Start with one group and participate fully in that one before considering others. If you determine a group, as a user, doesn't feel right or you become overextended by the number of groups you've joined, it's OK to pull back and watch from the sidelines.

Be consistent in messaging.

If you are managing a group where there could be a national, department, and even district group, ensure the messaging stays consistent. Be sure to check the latest messaging from National and your department so your content is aligned.



HONORING HER SERVICE: Jane Thurston stands at the podium with the 2023 ALA Girls Nation senators following the passing of a special resolution in her honor.

PUTTING DOWN THE GAVEL AFTER THREE DECADES OF SERVICE

ALA Girls Nation Government Director Jane Thurston of Indiana has made an impact on hundreds of teens (close to 1,500 to be exact!) who have participated in ALA Girls Nation over the years. Add to that the thousands she impacted at ALA Hoosier Girls State. That effect could be seen at ALA Girls Nation 2023 when the senators honored Thurston with a memorial resolution on the final day of senate session. The resolution honored Thurston for her 15 years of volunteering with ALA Girls Nation and 30 years of service with ALA Hoosier Girls State.

Thurston's journey began in 1992 when her former high school teacher, Ilene Bailey, got her involved in ALA Hoosier Girls State as a city government counselor. An interesting note about that year: It was also when another counselor — Past National President Vickie Koutz — began her service with the program.

Fast forward 15 years and as fate would have it, Thurston joined the government staff at ALA Girls Nation.

"Again, Ilene Bailey recruited me. She had been on the government

staff at ALA Girls Nation for several years. Someone backed out at the last minute, and she suggested me. It was the right place, right time," said Thurston.

ALA Girls Nation focuses on the federal government. To make sure the participants were getting an authentic experience, Thurston did her homework.

"When I joined the government staff at ALA Girls Nation, I read everything I could get my hands on," said Thurston. "I watched Senate sessions on C-SPAN. I ordered books from the Senate gift shop. I studied the Standing Rules and Bylaws of the United States Senate."

Prior to serving at ALA Girls Nation, Thurston was prepped for the job by serving at ALA Hoosier Girls State as a city government counselor, county government counselor, Federalist party adviser,

and Senate adviser. An Indiana politician also helped her sharpen her skills.

"Former Indiana Lieutenant Governor Becky Skillman was an ALA Hoosier Girls State alumna and worked with us," she said. "She taught me a lot."

Participating in ALA Girls Nation opens doors for many senators, and they grow as a person — a transition Thurston saw every year.

"For some, it's the first time they have met girls as driven as they are. For others, it is the realization that there is a big, wonderful world outside of their small community," said Thurston. "For those who tend to be shy, they realize they have just as much to offer as the more outgoing girls. For a lot of them, it is the first time other women have been so supportive and encouraging."

Thurston also said senators learn that politics play a part in their life, and they can actually do something about it.

"Learning the process of how to affect change in politics is a skill that translates to all areas of life," she added.

That's not the only thing that changes by the end of ALA Girls Nation.

"The level of confidence is the biggest change I see. Some girls become more confident in taking a risk. Some become confident enough to express their opinion. They become confident enough to listen to other points of view and change

their minds," said Thurston. "I see it in the tone and volume of their voice, I see it in the way they walk and carry themselves, I see it in their smiles, and I hear it in their laughter."

Thurston said it's been wonderful to meet ALA members from all over the country, with many of them becoming friends.



Jane Thurston

NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP WORKS WITH ARMY VETERAN'S FUTURE



Latisha Wagner, Afghanistan, 2004

Getting a job or staying competitive in today's workplace involves showing employers you have the skills and experience to get the job done. In many cases, returning

to college is a must. The American Legion Auxiliary's goal is to do all we can to make that happen, and that's what the Non-Traditional Student Scholarship is all about. This scholarship helps people pursue a college degree later in life or allows them to pick up where they left off when their studies were interrupted.

Latisha Wagner learned about the scholarship through a good friend who is also a fellow American Legion Auxiliary member.

We understand this is your first time receiving a scholarship. Congratulations!

I was thrilled to find out that I was nominated for this esteemed award. I want to express gratitude toward my friends and the members of Auxiliary Unit 641 for their help. They assisted me in finding resources and proofreading my thank-you letter for the scholarship award.

What college are you attending, and what are you studying?

Currently, I am studying at Grand Canyon University, a Christian-based institution in Phoenix. My doctor of philosophy program in general psychology with a focus on cognition and instruction has a GPA of 3.7.

Where did your interest in this career come from?

I was a nurse for many years, and the Army offered me opportunities to specialize in different medical realms. I took advantage of the EMT, critical care, and combat medic programs. I was deployed to Afghanistan in 2004 and used those skills. Thank goodness because they all helped me survive. Due to the combat environment, my idea to pursue a career in psychology seemed appropriate, as I needed to understand why some people act and react in certain situations. During my time in Afghanistan, I witnessed the immense psychological toll that war takes on individuals.

We are excited for this scholarship to help you! What are your post-education plans?

My plan, once I complete my education, is to take an idea Dr. John Hopfield built upon, where he decided to recreate the neural networks in a human brain and put it in a computer to make it think like a human. This concept, known as the Hopfield network, has revolutionized artificial intelligence by mimicking the complex cognitive processes of the human brain. By implementing this idea, I aim to contribute to the development of advanced AI systems that can reason, learn, and solve problems in

a more human-like manner.

My idea is to reverse that, so to speak. By integrating 3D-printed neural networks into the human brain, we could potentially restore lost cognitive functions and enhance overall brain performance. This groundbreaking approach holds immense promise for revolutionizing the field of neuroscience and improving the quality of life for individuals affected by neurological conditions.

Any advice to other students who may want to apply for this scholarship?

It is essential to effectively showcase your deep passion, unwavering dedication, and steadfast commitment to your chosen area of study. To differentiate yourself from other candidates, provide concrete examples of how you have demonstrated these qualities in both your academic and personal endeavors.

What would you say to donors who support ALA scholarship funds to help support students like you financially?

I want to express my heartfelt appreciation to the kind and generous individuals who contribute to the scholarship funds of the ALA. Their support provides financial assistance and opens doors of opportunities for students like me.

CH-CH-CHANGES TO ALA SCHOLARSHIPS



- **Spirit of Youth Scholarship:** Winners added at the department level; 47 department winners will receive \$1,000. The five division winners will still receive \$5,000.
 - **Non-Traditional Student Scholarship:** Open to military spouses, veterans, and veterans' spouses. Recipient no longer has to be a member of The American Legion Family to apply.
- Learn more: www.ALAforVeterans.org/scholarships.**



NEW VOLUNTEER LEADERSHIP: The American Legion Family leaders for 2023-2024 are (from left) Sons of The American Legion National Commander Donald “JR” Hall Jr., ALA National President Lisa Williamson, and American Legion National Commander Daniel Seehafer (photo: Travis Perkins/ALA National Headquarters).

WELCOME TO OUR 2023-2024 AMERICAN LEGION FAMILY LEADERS

Elected during the August 2023 National Conventions of each organization in Charlotte, N.C., were American Legion National Commander Daniel Seehafer of Wisconsin, American Legion Auxiliary National President Lisa Williamson of Alaska, and Sons of The American Legion National Commander Donald “JR” Hall Jr. of Maryland.

Seehafer is a member of American Legion Post 157 in Horicon, Wis. He served in the U.S. Navy and Navy Reserve as a military chaplain. Seehafer has served a number of American Legion offices, including national chaplain and commander of the Department of Wisconsin.

He is also an ordained minister and received his bachelor’s degree in pastoral ministry from Concordia University and a Master of Divinity at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Ind. He currently serves as administrative pastor at

St. Stephen Lutheran Church in Horicon.

Seehafer and his wife, Stacey — a member of American Legion Auxiliary Unit 157 — have two children, Jacob and Emma.

Williamson is a member of C. Russell Huber ALA Unit 57 in Fairbanks. She is eligible for ALA membership through her father, Ray Allington, her adoptive father, Keith LaChance, and through the military service of her son, Kyle, who serves in the Alaska Air Guard. Williamson is also an American Legion Rider. Read more about Williamson on pages 38-40 in this issue of *Auxiliary*.

Hall is a member of Squadron 40 in Glen Burnie, Md., where he has held most offices and volunteers regularly. He worked his way through the Southern Maryland District as vice commander and commander in 2011. On the detachment level, he has served as sergeant-at-arms, vice commander,



and as the detachment commander in 2014-2015. On the national level, Hall has served on the SAL Internal Affairs Commission and the Americanism Commission, where he was the chairman for three years.

Hall, and his wife, Margie, have three children and seven grandchildren. His eligibility is through his grandfather, World War II veteran Edward Hall.

All three leaders are focusing on Be the One, an initiative to increase awareness about the veteran and military suicide epidemic.

2023 marked The American Legion’s 104th, the ALA’s 102nd, and the Sons’ 51st national conventions. In keeping with tradition, all three conventions were held in the same week in the same city.



(Photo: Hilary Ott/The American Legion)

WHAT RESOLUTIONS WERE PASSED AT THE LEGION’S NATIONAL CONVENTION?

Twelve resolutions were passed by delegates to the 104th American Legion National Convention. Those resolutions are now available to view in the Legion’s Digital Archive, which houses all currently active American Legion resolutions from 1919 to present. It also houses magazine and newspaper articles, historic collections of National Convention programs and Emblem Sales catalogs, meeting digests, and much more. Learn more at www.Legion.org.

NEW PODCAST SERIES ANNOUNCED

As part of its initiative to reduce veteran suicide, The American Legion *Tango Alpha Lima* podcast has a new monthly episode devoted to Be the One. The series debuted in September — Suicide Prevention and Awareness Month. Through this series, The American Legion aims to further elevate the discussion, raise awareness, and

ultimately prevent veterans and servicemembers from being lost to suicide.

The episodes are hosted by Amy Forsythe, a Marine combat veteran, current Navy reservist, and award-winning multimedia journalist. The series will focus on topics related to veteran suicide, breakthrough therapies, and more.

You can listen and watch future and past episodes of *Tango Alpha*

Lima on www.Legion.org, the Legion's YouTube channel, and other major podcast-hosting sites.



UNDERSTANDING THE FACTS ABOUT CAMP LEJEUNE'S TOXIC WATER LITIGATION ENSURING OUR LOVED ONES GET WHAT THEY DESERVE ... BEFORE THE WINDOW CLOSES

It has been over a year since Congress passed the PACT Act (Aug. 10, 2022), which among many other things, introduced a separate remedy for veterans and families exposed to toxic water at Camp Lejeune — the Camp Lejeune Justice Act (CLJA). A lot of misinformation continues to circulate, leaving many veterans and their spouses unsure of what to do. Thankfully, the predatory attorney advertisements appear to have subsided — for now — but confusion persists.

What we are left with is uncertainty (and even distrust) by many veterans and spouses, and even veteran service officers on whether to file a CLJA claim. Here are the facts that may help clear the air. For veterans and their families exposed to toxic water at Camp Lejeune between 1953 and 1987, there are two separate avenues/remedies they may pursue — a VA claim route **and** a federal tort route. It is very important to note that the law expressly recognizes two separate/distinct avenues that veterans and family members may pursue. It is also important to note

that neither is exclusive — veterans may seek both.

Many people are concerned that a CLJA claim related to toxic water exposure will affect their VA disability benefits. This is not true. VA and the Department of Justice and Navy have publicly confirmed that an award under the CLJA **will not affect VA benefits or care.** Period. This is commonly referred to as an offset. However (and to confirm), there is no offset against VA disability benefits. Under VA law, family members (this includes spouses and children) only have a medical care (not a compensation) remedy for toxic water exposure. However, under the CLJA family members may receive a one-time monetary/compensation remedy — this would be separate from any VA care. This applies/includes claims by a veteran or a spouse on behalf of a spouse or child who died as a result of toxic water exposure. (We will discuss settlements and benefit compensation in the next issue of *Auxiliary*.)

As of today, many firms are pursuing remedies for upwards of 50 diagnoses/illnesses related to toxic water exposure, even though the Department of Navy is currently only seriously looking at the following nine diagnoses/conditions: cancers of the bladder, liver, kidney; leukemia; multiple myeloma; Parkinson's disease; scleroderma; Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma; and kidney disease/end-stage renal disease. The recognized

conditions will change over the next several months.

Regardless, those sitting on the sidelines need to be warned that Aug. 10, 2024, is the deadline to file a CLJA claim. Once this window closes, the only remedy available for toxic water exposure will be via the VA.

Bergmann & Moore LLC is a national law firm managed by former VA attorneys. They have successfully represented over 12,000 veterans and their family members in federal court related to VA disability compensation. Bergmann & Moore has been selected by The American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary to help assist their members in determining whether to file a CLJA claim. Claimants who believe they were exposed to toxic water at Camp Lejeune may speak to someone personally by calling (800) 898-9450, or by filling out the form online at www.camplejeunelitigationteam.com/al. If you have any questions before filing a claim, please call Elizabeth Hartman, B&M's CLJA liaison with The American Legion, at (252) 497-7255.



Elizabeth Hartman

The Legion encourages veterans/claimants to reach out to a CLJA attorney for any condition they think may be related to toxic water exposure while at Camp Lejeune.



For decades, Michelle Santiago has been immersed in a life of volunteerism. As the American Legion Auxiliary chair of the Poppy and Community Service committees for Leonard H. Hawkins Post 156 in Bronx, N.Y., Santiago’s dedication to supporting veterans dates back to her teen years. It’s now become part of her day-to-day life. In addition to volunteering alongside her parents, brother, daughter, and niece — all members of The American Legion Family — she often seeks opportunities to support her community through other outreach opportunities. Here, Santiago shares her ALA story.

Who makes your American Legion Auxiliary membership possible?

My father, Richard F. Calbo, served in the Navy from 1964 to 1978, as a petty officer second class. We all became members under my father, who is currently serving as master-at-arms for The American Legion Department of New York. He’s been a member of The American Legion for more than 40 years, and my mom, MaryAnn Calbo, has been a member of the American Legion Auxiliary for more than 30 years. My brother, James Calbo, was recently elected commander of Squadron 1009 for the Sons of The American Legion in Yorktown Heights, N.Y. My daughter, Amanda Santiago, also is an ALA member.

When did you join the American Legion Auxiliary?

I’ve been a member for a very long time ... since I was 15 years old.

What were some of your earliest memories of being active in The American Legion Family?

We used to always volunteer when we were young, helping my dad with his service with The American Legion in the Bronx. I remember marching in The American Legion parade, volunteering at the Bronx VA hospital, and wrapping gifts for veterans during Christmas.

How did those early experiences influence you?

I used to love seeing the smiles on veterans’ faces when we would sit down with them and just be there for them. Today, that’s still very important in my life because I love taking care of people in need. A lot of our veterans just need someone to talk to them sometimes. And I still love putting a smile on their faces. People ask

me all the time, ‘Why do you do all that if you don’t get paid for it?’ I don’t need to get paid. It just warms my heart that I did something good out there to help people in need, especially our veterans.

What would you say to convince someone to start volunteering?

It’s really important for everyone to try to volunteer, even if it’s an hour of your time. Any community service is helpful. Our service means a lot to veterans, many of whom are experiencing homelessness and dealing with a lot of medical issues. Nobody’s here to help them except organizations like The American Legion Family. Our government needs to do more to help them because they fought for this country to keep us safe. We also need to share more about The American Legion and American Legion Auxiliary because a lot of people don’t know about them. We need to spread the word because veterans really need our help.

What do you enjoy most as an ALA member?

My favorite experiences are related to people getting together and being there for each other, whether it’s walking during parades or volunteering at local VA hospitals. It’s all inspiring. Our members are very dedicated to what they do. I love being part of this community.



Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service connects ALA to veterans

The VAVS program supports recruitment and retention of a knowledgeable, diverse, and encouraged supplemental workforce of volunteers to assist in the delivery of VA health care.

WHY VOLUNTEER?

- Gain work experience
- Learn new skills
- Meet new people
- Give something back
- Serve others
- Social interaction

WHAT DO VOLUNTEERS DO?

- Escort
- Drivers
- Clerical/computer
- Information desk
- Red Coat Ambassador Program
- Education
- Outpatient assistance
- Patient feeding
- Guest relations
- Chaplain service

NEW YORK LEGION FAMILY HONORS SERVICEMEMBERS DURING UNIQUE HOLIDAY EVENT

A ceremonial tree lighting is one way to honor our past and present servicemembers.

The idea started last year when James R. Hickey American Legion Post 120 in Palmyra, N.Y., celebrated its first “Honoring Our Hometown Heroes” ceremonial tree lighting.

For the project, the post invited members of the community to honor past and present military servicemembers by submitting a photo and details of military service that were used to make personalized ornaments and placed on a Christmas tree at the post home during the event.

The inspiration and idea came from Unit 120 American Legion Auxiliary member Haley Ford, who had participated in a similar event for several years in Rochester called “Lights of Honor,” led by Blue Star Mothers.

“I have been a member of our American Legion Auxiliary for the past several years, and it has become a home to me with people there who have become my family,” shared Ford. “I loved the experience I had when I went to the Lights of Honor ceremony, and I wanted to be able to share that with my community.”

Ford’s Legion Family created a form so people could submit information for each ornament, and a flyer was created to promote the event. Copies of both the flyer and the form were sent to an email list for members at the



HONORING SERVICEMEMBERS: Ken Diesenroth hangs an ornament during the “Honoring Our Hometown Heroes” ceremonial tree lighting; Haley and Luke Ford attend the event. Haley Ford brought the idea to the Family after seeing a similar event (photos: Robert Rivera).

post home, and Ford reached out to local papers, media outlets, and local Facebook pages to announce the event.

For each ornament, people had the ability to designate their veteran’s name, branch, service era, and any military honors awarded. In each ornament, 3-inch clear bulbs included an internal dual image with one side showing the veteran’s picture and the other side listed service information and awards. Color-coded writing on the service information area was indicative of the veteran’s status: blue for any veteran/military member, black for POW/MIA, silver for wounded in action, and gold for killed in action.

Ford said the initial ornament was paid for by Unit 120, and those ornaments stay on the tree each year for the family. If people want to have a duplicate ornament made for themselves, they could designate on the form and purchase duplicates for \$15 each.

In total, 43 personalized

ornaments were placed on the tree, and 34 ornaments were created for people to take home.

Ford noted their 2022 event was supported by the entire American Legion Family in Palmyra and could not have been accomplished without the support of the post/unit leadership and members of The American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, Sons of The American Legion, and several other community members who all helped with the logistics and coordination of the event.

The celebration will become an annual event for American Legion Family Post 120. Ford hopes it will become an inspiration for other surrounding areas to celebrate veterans and current servicemembers.

“I grew up in a very small town similar to Palmyra,” Ford said. “Being able to bring everyone together to celebrate our community around the holidays — especially our veteran community — brings a certain joy and pride into the hearts of many that is like no other experience I can describe.”



Tips for planning a community event hosted by your American Legion Family:

- Choose a fun theme that will appeal to a broad audience.
- Secure a date and location.
- Create a timeline, including when you’ll send save-the-date notices.
- Recruit volunteers and assign roles.
- Secure any permits, keynote speakers, and vendors.
- Promote the event.
- Follow up with everyone involved post-event and send thank-yous.
- Evaluate what went well and what didn’t for future event planning.

    Visit our social media at www.ALAforVeterans.org/social-media

@ Threads

A NEW SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM

Threads is an Instagram app that was released by Meta in July. It's designed for short pieces of texts, photos, videos, and links that encourage conversations and real-time updates. Does that remind you of another social media channel? In fact, Threads is considered a competitor of X, formerly known as Twitter. Here are a few questions and answers about Threads.

Q: Do you have to be an Instagram user to use Threads?

A: Yes. Before you join Threads, you need to have an Instagram account.

Q: If I get Threads and then decide to delete it, will my Instagram account go away?

A: Yes. Right now, Threads cannot be deleted without also deleting your Instagram account.

Q: How will American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters use Threads?

A: We have a Threads account! However, you will not see the same amount of content on Threads that we post on Instagram and Facebook. The content posted on our Threads will be shorter. Instagram and Facebook will remain ALA National Headquarters' primary social media channels.



WHAT'S THE ALA NATIONAL PRESIDENT UP TO?

You can follow the travels of ALA National President Lisa Williamson on Facebook. Go to www.Facebook.com/alanationalpresident.

FALL IS HERE!



Polar Fleece
red or navy
(307.515x)



Cardigan
red, white or navy
(307.520x)



Hoodie
red or navy
(307.518x)

* Proceeds support American Legion Family programs

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AUX MG 1123



COMING UP

In between issues of *Auxiliary* magazine, you can follow the ALA blog, social media, ALA eNews, and our website. Here's what's happening soon:

- Veterans Day is Nov. 11. We'll remember the brave men and women who served to protect our freedoms.
- Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day is Dec. 7. We'll remember the more than 2,400 lives lost that day.
- 2023-2024 ALA Mission Trainings and National Junior Meetings: Follow our social media to get the latest information and registration links.
- And, as always: stories about ALA members and units serving our veterans, military, and their families.



WHERE DID TWITTER GO?

Even though the iconic blue bird is missing, Twitter still exists. The social media site has undergone a rebranding. In place of the bird is now an "X" and is no longer called Twitter, but simply X. However, you will still find references to Twitter on the app.

Auxiliary Sudoku answers from page 19:

8	2	3	4	5	1	9	7	6
1	6	4	7	9	3	5	2	8
7	5	9	6	8	2	4	1	3
2	4	8	5	6	7	3	9	1
5	3	7	1	4	9	6	8	2
9	1	6	3	2	8	7	5	4
6	9	1	2	7	4	8	3	5
4	8	2	9	3	5	1	6	7
3	7	5	8	1	6	2	4	9

9	8	2	6	3	1	4	7	5
5	6	1	8	4	7	2	9	3
3	7	4	5	9	2	8	1	6
7	1	9	4	6	8	3	5	2
4	2	5	1	7	3	9	6	8
6	3	8	2	5	9	1	4	7
2	9	6	7	8	4	5	3	1
1	5	3	9	2	6	7	8	4
8	4	7	3	1	5	6	2	9

3	4	9	2	8	7	6	5	1
7	5	8	1	6	4	2	9	3
6	1	2	5	3	9	4	7	8
4	7	1	9	2	8	3	6	5
2	3	5	7	1	6	8	4	9
8	9	6	4	5	3	1	2	7
9	2	4	3	7	1	5	8	6
5	6	3	8	9	2	7	1	4
1	8	7	6	4	5	9	3	2

**“Valor is stability, not of legs and arms,
but of courage and the soul.”**

— Michel de Montaigne, essayist



The 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month. Veterans Day may happen annually on the calendar, but for American Legion Auxiliary members, it's every day. We take care of those who wore the uniform and took care of us. And on Nov. 11, we'll salute and honor every single one of our heroes.

