



American Legion Auxiliary

In the Spirit of Service Not Self for Veterans, God and Country

Kris Nelson's 2011-2012 National President Installation Address National Convention 2011 – Minneapolis, MN

Good morning everyone; thank you all for being here. It is a great honor to serve as your national president, and I truly appreciate your friendship and confidence. First, I would like to extend my thanks to my family, who you will meet following my installation address. Terry is my best friend and confidant and has been my cheerleader for the 27 years that I have been involved with the Auxiliary. My children — Troy and his wife, Angie; Sarah and her husband, Kent — and grandchildren, Myah, Ty, Sydney and Kruze, have had the Auxiliary as a part of their entire lives and I appreciate their support and will miss them dearly while I travel this year. Thank you! I love you all.

I would be remiss if I didn't also thank a few of my mentors. To the Past National Presidents for your advice and support, thank you. To Carol Van Kirk for giving me my first national chairmanship, Jan Pulvermacher-Ryan for recommending me to Carol, Desi Stoy for giving me the Children & Youth appointment, Rita Navarreté and Carlene Ashworth for your mentorship and friendship. And to Peggy Thomas, Dubbie Buckler, Nancy Brown-Park, and Janet Jefford for the hours spent planning for this year, for your support and friendship: thank you.

And to the great American Legion Family of Minnesota — please stand and be recognized. I can't thank you enough for your support of time, talent and treasure as I sought this office. Thank you all. I pledge to all of you that I will serve to the best of my ability this year as I serve with members across the nation "supporting our veterans, military and their families." Thank you; you are the best!



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I look forward to working closely this year with American Legion Commander Fang Wong and SAL Commander Jim Roberts, serving our veterans and in turn increasing our membership and awareness.

When planning for this year, two things became crystal clear to me: Our membership is decreasing annually, and the American Legion Auxiliary is not recognized throughout the country by the vast population of Americans.

The American Legion Auxiliary members have been serving our communities across this nation for 91 years. We do the work, but what we don't do well enough is share our story. For that reason, the pin I chose this year is the Auxiliary emblem with the words surrounding it, "In the spirit of God and country, we serve veterans, military and their families." Wear your pin when you serve veterans, military and their families in your communities. When asked, "What is the American Legion Auxiliary?" repeat the words, "In the spirit of God and country, we serve veterans, military and their families."

I am very proud to belong to an organization that serves first under God, serving American heroes — our veterans, whose sacrifices allow us to live in a free country.

My background is in human resources, and one of the great trainers that we used is Stephen Covey. So of course when I needed to create goals for this year, I researched Covey's 4 Disciplines of Execution. Covey states that organizations who have only one or two goals, which he calls WIGS — wildly important goals — will succeed. The more goals, the lower the success rate.



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We will work this year with two goals, one external and one internal.

Our external goal is; “***Through mission delivery, the American Legion Auxiliary will become so appealing to people who care about veterans that our membership will increase.***” We can only increase our membership and volunteer capacity if community members know who we are and what we do. Asking community members to join you in service projects will give them hands-on experience, will let them see and feel how our service projects make life a little easier for our veterans, military and their families. If we are positive and make it a fun experience — community members will ask how they can join us — we will become appealing, and our membership will increase.

We need to refocus how we do things and create opportunities for the younger generation that are meaningful and that they are able to work into their schedules. Statistics show that with the fast pace of today’s life and the numerous things that demand our attention, many women do not have the time or the interest to attend meetings. The younger generation wants to have hands-on, one-day projects that can leave them with a feeling of accomplishment. If we want to grow our membership, it is up to us to look at the way we are doing things and become diverse and inclusive. We must encourage and support new ideas for mission delivery projects and opportunities that women of all ages can participate in.

On the other hand, units have told us that we have too many programs and they do not have the members or resources to support all of them. We are trying something new this year; we have grouped like programs together in what we are calling “pods.” The Plan of Action includes how-to sheets that will help members



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to meet the program objectives either by individual program or by pod. Additionally, the national chairmen will be mentoring units in each division to assist them with each of the five pod projects that are suggested in the Plan of Action. The chairmen will then create monthly bulletins sharing with all of you what is working and what needs to be tweaked. The national chairmen were diligent in the expectation that they create tools that will assist units in meeting all of the objectives in each program. These how-to sheets were written with a small unit in mind and can be followed easily. They encourage collaboration with other nonprofits throughout communities and engaging community members who share our passion of serving veterans and their families. If we are passionate about what we do, inclusive about who we invite to share our activities, and successful in setting goals that are mission-related, we can't help but grow our membership and become an organization that is easily recognized. My challenge to each of you is to communicate with your members and get this information to them.

Our membership theme for the year is "Honor Their Service." We are members of the American Legion Auxiliary because of a veteran in our life. Everything we do is in honor of their service. Our country is at war; the need to support our veterans, military and their families is great. We do great things; our membership should be increasing annually, and that is not happening. If we honor the service of our veterans and share our stories, we will increase our membership. There is a great membership video available on the Auxiliary website to use in your communities when sharing what the Auxiliary is and what we do. Throughout the year we will continue to explore public relations opportunities to help you spread the word about the Auxiliary and "make the ask" for community members to join you in support.



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We are all eligible for membership because of a veteran in our life. We would like you to email a jpeg picture of your veteran, in uniform, to the Auxiliary Communications staff. We would also like you throughout the year to email us pictures of your members working on mission-related activities. These pictures will be used throughout the year to promote the Auxiliary.

Our members have been asking us for training. This year, there will be five national training weekends. The trainings will be based on our programs and how grassroots members can accomplish our objectives. They will be interactive, and those attending will leave with a wealth of information. Please encourage both your members and prospective members to attend one of these trainings.

Historically, each national president selects a presidential project. This year, my project is The American Legion Auxiliary Foundation. Donations to the foundation are permanently endowed gifts. If each of our members donated only \$15, our foundation would be able to fund our programs in perpetuity. When creating your annual budgets, please consider a donation to the foundation, and please encourage your members to consider the foundation for donations, memorials or estate planning.

Our internal goal (WIG) is “***The American Legion Auxiliary will become an Employer of Choice.***” This goal can be easily accomplished — it is an internal goal — and I challenge each of you to assist us in reaching this goal. Yes, those we employ work for us, are paid to provide customer-service and the operations necessary to assist us in the implementation of our programs. But, few people realize the number of inquiries that both our national and department staff



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members receive daily. The workload on both the department and national level increases annually as we change and implement our programs. Statistics show that money and benefits are not a motivator to the majority of employees; rather, motivation comes from pride in work, the feeling of being appreciated, pride in knowing that the work being done makes a difference to our members and our recipients — veterans, military and their families. The American Legion Auxiliary is a volunteer organization where volunteers govern the organization and staff members manage the organization. It takes volunteers and staff working together to successfully accomplish our goals.

So, how can you help the American Legion Auxiliary become an Employer of Choice? Simply by taking the time to say “thank you.” By remembering that our staff at all levels of the organization are vital members of our team. By taking the time to listen to their ideas and concerns. Our staff members are also volunteers. They believe in our mission and are passionate about veterans. The national staff is all field-service certified, and all of them want to work as part of our team. They would like to have their voices heard, share their vision and be a part of our organization, which has a rich heritage of “service, not self.” Working together as a team, we can accomplish great things; treating each other with civility and with respect can only result in positive growth.

In conclusion, we have two wildly important goals this year;

“Through mission delivery, the American Legion Auxiliary will become so appealing to people who care about veterans that our membership will increase.”

And; ***“The American Legion Auxiliary will become an Employer of Choice”***



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As we work together to accomplish these two goals, we will honor the service of the veteran who gave us our eligibility. As we volunteer throughout communities across America and share our concerns for veterans, military and their families, we cannot help but succeed in both membership growth and making the American Legion Auxiliary the easily recognized go-to organization for veterans.

Thank you all for your faith in me, I pledge to you that I will do my very best to meet the obligation you have charged me with, to serve side-by-side with our membership as we “Honor their service” and “Through mission delivery become so appealing to people who care about veterans that our membership will increase.”

God Bless each of you, God Bless our veterans, and God Bless America.