

American Legion Auxiliary

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May 2024 \$3.75



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AUXILIARY

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ON THE COVER: Sarah Tobin, Department of Colorado, discusses The American Legion's legislative priorities during the Washington Conference (photo: Sara Fowler/ALANHQ). **ABOVE:** Women Veterans Day is observed annually on June 12. The American Legion Auxiliary salutes our current and future women veterans. Members of the Greenwood High School Navy JROTC set a table for all Prisoners of War and those Missing in Action during a POW/MIA Recognition Day ceremony at American Legion Post 23 in Bowling Green, Ky., in 2022 (photo: Grace Ramey/Daily News via AP).



NATIONAL PRESIDENT TRAVELS (above): Lisa Williamson with American Legion Riders while visiting American Legion Auxiliary departments; (below): a trip to the 9/11 Memorial during Williamson’s Department of New York visit was a moving experience.

Practicing gratitude and keeping the little things in mind is so important. To that end, let me say thank you! *Thank you* all for all you do to support our veterans, military, their families, and our communities.

So far this administrative year, I have had the opportunity to witness so very much! When The American Legion National Commander Daniel J. Seehafer, Sons of The American Legion National Commander Don “JR” Hall Jr., and I traveled to Hawaii for Pearl Harbor ceremonies, we also toured the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA). The incredible men and women there are able to put the puzzle pieces together to identify our missing servicemembers, allowing family members to say their final goodbyes.

About a month later, I toured Dover Air Force Base, specifically the Mortuary Affairs Operations. They are committed to ensure dignity, respect, and honor to our fallen while providing care, service, and support to their families. This brought the dignified transfer of our POW/MIAs full circle.

I am extremely grateful to know our servicemembers are never forgotten, and, once identified, provided with such honor.

Whatever you do, serve! And serve with gratitude.

Other moments for reverence and gratitude hinge around 9/11. I was able to tour the Pentagon Memorial a couple of days before the 9/11 commemoration. Then I saw the Wind Chime Memorial and the Flight 93 Memorial in Shanksville, Pa. And finally, I toured the 9/11 Memorial and Museum in New York City. In all three places, it felt like it happened just yesterday, not more than 20 years ago. While it is a horrific time in our history to remember, I am grateful I had the chance to visit all three places. It renewed my passion for our mission.

The American Legion Washington Conference provided a way for me to give back, and much of it tied into our Legion Family focus of bringing awareness to the suicide epidemic of our military and veterans, and Be the One.

The conference allowed Legion Family members to visit with their members of Congress in Washington and hear from U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs leadership. Legislation we are advocating for during this session of Congress includes suicide prevention and mental health resources for the military and veteran community, VA health care modernization, implementing the

PACT Act by helping veterans suffering from toxic exposure, and providing affordable child care and safe housing to those currently serving. And let’s not forget that paying our Coast Guard during any potential government shutdown is also high on the list.

How can you give back? How can you express your gratitude?

It could be as simple as wearing a poppy to honor the fallen and support the living servicemembers and veterans on May 24 for National Poppy Day®.

Perhaps it’s as simple as asking a veteran in your life how they are doing and listening when they need to talk. Let them know it’s OK to say they’re not OK!

Maybe it’s heading up a committee to put together S.A.V.E. Suicide Prevention Training within your local community or a Legion Family event.

Maybe it’s scheduling a meeting with elected officials in your area (district) too. Many grassroots advocacy leaders say having these meetings in your district is more impactful than meeting in Washington, D.C. If your elected official is unavailable, meet with their staff! They can never hear from us too much.



It’s a small way to give back to those who provide us with our freedoms. Whatever you do, serve! And serve with gratitude.

I am reminded of the saying that helping one person might not change the whole world, but it could change the world for one person. #BeTheOne

Lisa Williamson
National President

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THE POWER OF A FLOWER: Pinning a red poppy on yourself is a great feeling.

The month of May is unique when it comes to the American Legion Auxiliary and the general public. You see, when someone mentions Memorial Day, Americans typically picture military personnel in uniform, a veteran like Grandpa, or even a tombstone decorated with special flowers. Aside from vacation days and cookouts, the holiday tends to evoke thoughts of military and honor in most of us.

And speaking of our heroes, there are more military-related observances in May than in any other month. You could say it's a busy time for Auxiliary members! We have a lot going on at the unit, department/state, and national levels because of these times of special recognition: National Military Appreciation Month, Military Spouse Appreciation Day, Armed Forces Day, National Poppy Day®, Memorial Day, and more.

The American Legion Auxiliary was founded in 1919 to support our military servicemembers — past, present, and future — and their families. We haven't let go of that important mission. In fact, even after adding other programs and activities

to our mission service roster, our strongest connection remains tied to the military. May is a time for the American Legion Auxiliary to show nonmembers what we're made of. Everything presented, hosted, or done during this month 100 percent demonstrates the forefront of who we are, what we do, and why we matter as an organization.

On National Poppy Day (May 24 this year), for example, our members will be out in full force at local American Legion posts, storefronts, shopping malls, and other high foot traffic areas to ask the public for a nominal donation in exchange for a poppy. When you feel that red crepe paper flower on your fingertips, you and the Auxiliary member who gave it to you are likely thinking the same thing: *This poppy symbolizes the sacrifices made by our veterans, servicemembers, and their families. We thank them for our freedom.*



AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY

A Community of Volunteers
Serving Veterans, Military, and their Families
May 2024

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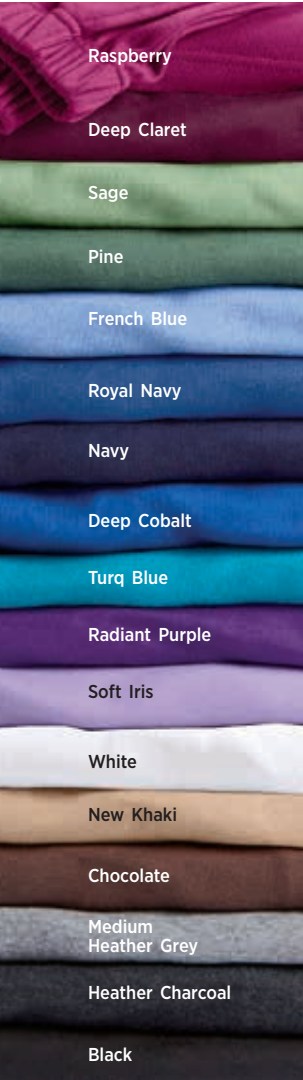
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Excited about February cover photo

Thank you so much. That was a HUGE surprise and honor to be on the cover! And such a fantastic article. Great job to all!

—Jennifer Murray, Massachusetts

Editor's response: We wanted to save it for a surprise! We are so glad you liked it.

Thankful for information in quarterly magazine

I love to receive your magazine. I read it cover to cover. Please do not discontinue printing the magazine. It is so enjoyable to read all of your updates, so thank you.

—Judy Juza, Wisconsin

Thankful for chaplain's Reflections in magazine

I am a 40-year PUFL member of Leon R. Roberts 161, Fifth District, Oneida County, Department of New York. I have served as our county chaplain many times and again this year. It has to be one of the most rewarding of any committee that I have ever served on. I am writing to tell you how much I enjoy your writings in the national magazine. They really do send a message and I do use parts of them in my prayers before and after our meeting.

—Jeannine Damon, New York



Poppy art shows meaning behind red flower

I wanted to share this beautiful poppy art made by Meg Libby from Harry N. Cutting Unit 59. I thought this was so amazing. I wanted to share it with you all at National!

— Francisca Massey, Vermont



WTHI-TV Channel 10's Patrece Dayton, and ALA members Leona Thacker, Rose Hart, Joanne Fritch, Norma Bean, and Beverly Sheley.

Illinois unit honored with Make a Difference Award

American Legion Auxiliary Lawrence Unit 28, Department of Illinois, has visited our nursing home veterans for the past 19 years every month with sweet treats and gifts. Our veterans were not forgotten during the pandemic as treats and gifts were left with the activity department to deliver to our veterans when we were unable to visit.

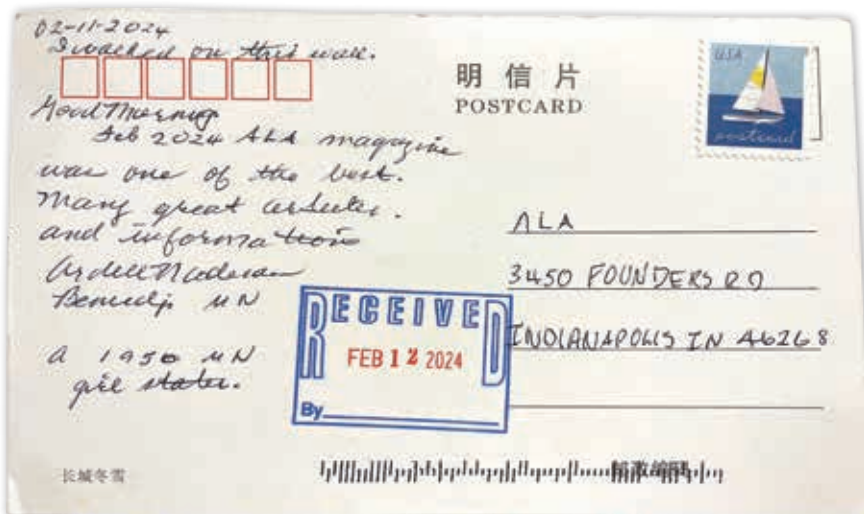
American Legion Auxiliary Lawrence Unit 28, Department of Illinois, was surprised during our Veterans Day visit to our nursing home veterans when Patrece Dayton, WTHI-TV Channel 10, Terre Haute, Ind., presented Lawrence Unit 28 with the Make a Difference Award. Lawrence Unit 28 President Beverly Sheley, Chaplain Rose Hart, and nursing home veterans Tony Wells and Roger Outler were interviewed. This interview was televised three times on WTHI-TV Channel 10.

—Beverly Sheley, Illinois

'One of the best' magazines

February 2024 ALA magazine was one of the best. Many great articles and information.

—Ardell Nadesan, Minnesota, a 1950 Minnesota ALA Girls Stater



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

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JUNIOR ROCK PROJECT SPREADS ALA MESSAGE IN FUN WAY



Each year, Junior members who attend the national Junior meetings held

in conjunction with ALA Mission Training work on a service project to benefit our veterans, military, their families, and communities.

A project this administrative year was similar to the Kindness Rocks initiative — take one when you need one, share one with a friend who needs some inspiration, or leave one for another. The idea is that one message at just the right moment can change your whole day and/or outlook on life. Participants place the kindness rocks around their communities for others to find. Sometimes, the rocks are picked up within hours.

Many rocks the Juniors painted this year added an ALA, patriotic twist like veteran-related messaging and red, white, and blue color choices or red poppies.

Want to do this project at the unit or department level? Here's what you need to know!



SUPPLIES:

- 2" to 3" large painting rocks, flat and smooth natural river stones.
- Paint markers in various colors and tip sizes.
- Spray gloss finish: three to four coats needed; do this in a well-ventilated area.

STEPS:

- Paint the rocks. Allow 30 minutes to dry. Consider drawing pictures or adding

encouraging quotes onto the rocks.

- Spray them with gloss a few times.
- Set out around your community (e.g., your local library, city park, or other public locations) where the rocks will be visible to people walking by.

This is a fun, easy project for Junior members of all ages to do and is a great way to spread the American Legion Auxiliary message and mission.



EARNING PATCHES: Hazel from Indiana is the first Junior member to earn a Purple Level patch. And she earned all three!

NEW PATCH LEVEL NOW AVAILABLE

There are now four patch levels to the American Legion Auxiliary Junior Patch Program.

The newly created Purple Level is for preschoolers, ages 3 through kindergarten.

Children of this age can earn the Americanism, Membership, and Poppy patches:

- Americanism: Educate yourself about the rights and responsibilities of an American citizen.
- Membership: Your eligibility for membership is a gift from a veteran.

SOCKS OF LOVE GIVES BACK TO VETERANS

Conducting charitable acts for veterans is at the heart of what we do. Because of that, the American Legion Auxiliary instills this mindset among our Junior members at early ages.

During the national Junior meetings held in various cities across the country, our youngest members participated in the Socks of Love service project, geared toward veterans who are either homeless or seeking treatment in a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs medical center.

The items for this project can vary, but the provided list gives an idea of what can best help veterans who may be struggling.

Everything goes into one sock, along with the second sock. The socks are tied off with a ribbon and tag from the ALA Juniors so veterans would know who the donated items came from.

At the national Junior meetings, ALA senior members turned the project into a relay race for the Juniors to add even more excitement. The Juniors and supplies were divided into two teams. Juniors went by pairs to the table of supplies to fill a sock, then tagged off the next two Juniors until all their socks were filled. The winners got to pick first



The project involves stuffing personal items into a pair of socks:

- Deodorant
- Disposable toothbrush and toothpaste
- Lip balm, with customized ALA Junior labels
- Disposable washcloths
- Soap or hand sanitizer
- Lotion

from a candy bag.

Juniors enjoyed the project and learned to understand that these basic, small items can make a big difference for our veterans on the streets.

A project like this can be replicated at the unit, district, or department levels as well. It's fun, easy, and fast, and can benefit

many veterans who are in need in local communities. The project can be completed before, during, or after a Junior meeting. Supplies needed could be donated from ALA members or from outside organizations that want to help veterans and teach young members about the importance of giving back and helping others.

• Poppy: The symbol of sacrifices our veterans have made.

For each of the three patches, four of the seven possible choices must be completed to earn the patch. For example, to earn the Americanism patch, a member could recite the Pledge of Allegiance with an adult, color some pages in the ALA's *America the Beautiful* coloring books, draw a picture about what is important to you living in the United States, and have an adult identify the proper number of stars and stripes on the American flag.

In recent years, ALA National Headquarters has fielded inquiries from mothers and Junior Activities chairs asking if anything could be sent for their young Juniors who were working alongside older siblings. National Junior Activities Committee Chair Barb Washburn initiated a process of adding a new level for the younger Juniors, which created the Purple Level.

Any Junior member of the ALA and school-aged Sons of The American Legion can be part of the Junior Patch Program. You

don't have to have an active group to participate. This is a great way to be involved in learning about the ALA, American Legion Family, volunteering in the community, and serving our country's veterans.

The other three levels of the Junior Patch Program include Red Level — first to fourth grade; Gold Level — fifth to eighth grade; and Blue Level — ninth to 12th grade.

For questions related to the Junior Patch Program, email JuniorActivities@ALAforVeterans.org or call ALA National Headquarters at (317) 569-4500.

“Just keep going forward. Don’t look back.”

ILO LOUCK



MOMENTS THAT WILL LAST A LIFETIME (above): With laughter and love filling the room, Ilo Louck celebrates her 109th birthday with her son, Gerry Louck, as they reminisce on Ilo’s long-lived life, and all the memories made with her beloved son and other loved ones.



Born in Collins, Ohio, Ilo Mae Louck recently celebrated her 109th birthday, making her possibly the oldest American Legion Auxiliary member in the country. Her bright blue eyes and sharp mind immediately

engage you in conversation. Still able to walk, she comes to the monthly BIG Pancake Breakfast at Allingham-Golding Post 18 in Silver City, N.M., regularly. There, she is surrounded by her friends and admirers for at least an hour. Legionnaire Bill Harrison, a 101-year-old World War II veteran, happily is not the oldest person in the room for a change.

Louck lives in a log cabin with family, two sheep, two goats, a dog, and a number of wild animals that wander through the property. She inspires all those around her.

Who made your ALA membership eligibility possible?

My husband, Robert G. Louck, served in the Pacific in World War II, and was my sponsor when joining the ALA. Bob was an Army Air Corps archivist; his role was to identify and catalogue the deceased, then ship the bodies back home for burial.

Why did you decide to join the American Legion Auxiliary?

I wanted to support all the people who were doing so much for our country. They give up three or four years of their life for us. One of my childhood memories is of a local man who was gassed in World War I; he gave so much for us. They need more from us to get back their lives.

A lot of your family served in the military. How has that shaped your life?

My father served in the National Guard, and four of my brothers served in World War II — two in the Army, and two in the Navy. Of course, I wanted to help out too. I worked at a munitions plant in the nurse’s office during the war. For most of my life, I have been taking care of people. I’ve worked as a nurse’s aide in people’s homes, and for many years I worked in a nursing home. Somewhere in there, I spent a few years as the school lunch lady. My son Gerry calls me “a selfless person who loves this country.”

As one of our oldest ALA members and still active in your post home, why do you feel it is

important to stay connected to the Auxiliary and our mission of serving veterans, military, and their families?

The need to serve others never changes. And when you are helping others, you are helping yourself. My husband’s career meant we had to move frequently. I’ve lived in Wyoming, New Jersey, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Florida, among others. Each time I moved, I would connect with the local American Legion Auxiliary. It was an extension of the family.

What would you say the secret is to longevity and good health?

My daily exercise routine. Keeping strong muscles is vital. Don’t forget: The heart is a muscle! I just don’t sit still. In addition, my family lived on a farm and we never had chemicals. Essentially, I was eating organic food long before it became popular. I still eat a well-rounded diet of simple, whole foods.

What are some of your favorite activities or hobbies?

I like to paint. My room is decorated with my paintings of flowers. My favorite painting is one of the white house that my nine siblings and I grew up in. I also enjoy crafting holiday decorations for the table.

What is the best piece of advice you’ve ever received?

When I was 4 years old, my mom wrapped me in a blanket and ran out of the house with me in the middle of the night. The house was on fire! It burned to the ground. My family and I were forced to live in the shed outside for a time. My mother said, “Just keep going forward. Don’t look back” in response to our predicament. That advice has carried me through many of life’s toughest times.

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“Those who are the happiest are those who do the most for others.”

— Booker T. Washington, American educator and author



If you held a red poppy in front of a stranger and asked, “Know what this is?” chances are, the flower will conjure up memories. How many of us remember as children getting an ALA poppy after Grandma put money in a unit’s change bucket? Or what about the familiar sight of a poppy hanging from the sun visor in Dad’s truck? Is it all coming back to you now?

American Legion Auxiliary youth play a large role in our communities. They participate in our programs alongside senior members. Above, Rylee Little, Department of Ohio, proudly holds patches she received from the ALA Junior Patch Program.

Do you want to be national?



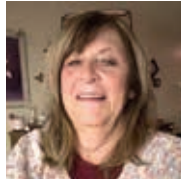
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What does the poppy mean to you?



"The poppy reminds me of heartbreak and hope at the same time. I remember all the souls lost so that we may have our freedom. I also know the donations specifically help veterans and active-duty military to have their needs met."

— Maribeth Hannon, Ohio



"The poppy reminds me that freedom comes at a price. Many have sacrificed for our freedoms and others continue to do the same. Lest we forget."

— Dorothy Hazen, New Mexico



"Remembrance, reverence, respect, and gratitude."

— Karen Cook, Arkansas



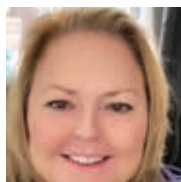
"The poppy represents and reminds me every day of the reason why I joined the American Legion Auxiliary — the fearless, loyal, strong, selfless, valorous, tough, admirable, brave, gallant, patriotic, commendable, courageous, and resilient men and women who were and are willing to sacrifice their lives for our country."

— Debra Rumery, Maine



"Freedom and sacrifice."

— Dixie Thornton, Mississippi



"It reminds me of all the sacrifices that have been made and are made for us. Lest we forget."

— Holly Heatly, Texas



"We remember the sacrifices made by so many brave men and women."

— Janice MacLeod, North Carolina

Follow us on Facebook and Instagram at @ALAforVeterans. You could be featured in an upcoming issue of *Auxiliary*.



HELPING VETERANS (back row): Brian Hambek, Black Hills Chapter of the American Legion Riders director, and members of the Post/Unit/Squadron 164 worked together to collect items for home starter kits for veterans.

SOUTH DAKOTA AMERICAN LEGION FAMILY PROVIDES HOME STARTER KITS FOR VETERANS

The American Legion Family in Spearfish, S.D., recently joined forces to collect donations and prepare home starter kits that include kitchen, bathroom, and bedding items to take to the Support Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) of the Cornerstone Mission in Rapid City.

The Cornerstone Rescue Mission administers the SSVF program through a supportive services grant from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) across South Dakota. The SSVF program focuses on intensive case management to help very low-income veteran

families increase their ability to sustain permanent housing and reach their greatest potential.

On a recent visit with the SSVF director, Micheline Nelson, Spearfish American Legion Auxiliary Unit 164 president, learned the program was out of home starter kits for families and was in urgent need of the items.

Nelson prepared a list of the items needed to assemble starter kits and shared the project at the Legion Family post, squadron, unit, and chapter monthly meetings. In addition, Nelson shared the project on social media and The American

ALA GOOD DEED AWARD RECIPIENTS HELP MILITARY KIDS ADJUST TO NEW SCHOOL

For about five years, ALA Department of California member Christine Evans and ALA Unit 180 has had a great connection with Fort Irwin and the elementary school there. Evans' passion is the Auxiliary's Children & Youth program and wanting to get more involved in that area at the unit level, so she reached out to her contact at the school to see if there might be any children the unit

could nominate for the Good Deed Award. That's when Evans found out about the school tours.

Lewis Elementary School is on the military base at Fort Irwin in California. The kids are involved in a program at their school, Anchored4Life, where they participate in monthly meetings, help with planning and implementing school service projects, and give tours to students who are brand new to their school.

When a student arrives at the base, this group of seven children makes sure the military kids have

Legion Family reached out to other veterans service organizations for assistance as well.

Sons of The American Legion Adjutant Doug Henwood secured donations from the Saint Vincent de Paul store for kitchen kits, and Derek Besler of The American Legion post secured 15 bags of bedding, hotel towels, and washcloths from hotels in the Deadwood area. In addition to donations from individual members and monetary commitments from the Legion Family, they were able to compile seven starter kits to take to Cornerstone Mission. The Queen City Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 5860 also partnered with the Spearfish American Legion Family and gave three more sets.

Nelson said it took a caravan of two pickups and two cars to load all of the baskets and bags.

"The saying 'It takes a village to raise a child' applies to this project," she said. "It took the whole American Legion Family to give hope and healing to veterans in need."

In addition to this project, Nelson said Auxiliary Unit 164 delivers gift bags on Christmas, Valentine's Day, Veterans Day, and Independence Day. The Spearfish American Legion Family will continue to help with starter kits for the project, and other Auxiliary units in the area have signed on to provide donations.



GETTING ACCLIMATED: Principal Taryn Lamoreaux with students Henry, Emma, Addison, Emma, Kylie, and Ace. Not pictured: Bella, also an award recipient.

NEW YORK HISPANIC AMERICAN UNIT STRIVES TO IMPROVE LIVES IN ITS COMMUNITY

After working with veterans and volunteering in the community, spouses and family members of the Gabriel A. Rodríguez Legion Post 1928 in western New York decided to create an Auxiliary unit to further enhance the lives of veterans, military, and their families. Auxiliary Unit 1928 in Buffalo was established Sept. 7, 2023, and the unit has already accomplished so much since then.

“Posts are usually more successful when there is a unit behind them to support them, so we decided to become a unit,” said Unit 1928 President Wilda Ramos-Morales. “I can see what a good impact the Legion is making for veterans I know, and I wanted to be part of it.”

The Gabriel A. Rodríguez Legion Post 1928 and unit is uniquely made up of mainly Hispanic Americans. The Post 1928 Family fully embraces different heritages and cultures and encourages people from all backgrounds to be a part of their Legion Family. Numerous members of Unit 1928 do not speak English fluently, so the unit meetings are done bilingually by integrating both Spanish and English.

“Our unit has a diverse population — the majority of our

a friend they can count on. They also play with the new students and introduce them to other children at the school.

“I thought it was so interesting that these kids do this,” Evans said. “When a child arrives brand new to the school, these kids take them under their wings and show them around to their classes.”

Evans and ALA Unit 180 nominated seven kids for a Good Deed award.

Evans said she was happy and excited to nominate the children for the award and appreciated her unit’s support.



NEW TO THE ALA: The first members of American Legion Auxiliary Gabriel A. Rodríguez Unit 1928 after being initiated and becoming official members of the Auxiliary.

unit is Hispanic Americans, and a majority of those people happen to be Puerto Ricans, but we do have members who are African American, and we have some Caucasian members,” said Ramos-Morales. “We would like for our unit to be a representation of different cultures.”

Unit 1928 enjoys working with other units on projects and fundraisers to help advance the ALA’s mission of serving veterans, military, and their families. Since Unit 1928 is a fairly new unit, they greatly appreciate the advice and knowledge other units have shown them so far.

“We want to work with different units and be integrated because the more we know about each other, the more acceptance we have for one another — culturally accepting other people from other

“The kids were so excited to get the awards,” she said.

For other units that may live near military bases, Evans offers simple advice on how to get connected for Good Deed Award nominations and more.

“Get out and talk to people,” she said. “I’m really involved and get to know a lot of people. Ask at church, schools, community centers if there are any kids who deserve a Good Deed Award. There are a lot of bases people can contact. I was blessed enough to call Fort Irwin and they picked up the phone.”

backgrounds is so important to us,” said Ramos-Morales.

In addition to the many veteran-focused projects and community outreach initiatives, the Gabriel A. Rodríguez Post 1928 Legion Family helps maintain the Western New York Hispanic American Veterans Monument in Naval Park. The historic war memorial honors all Hispanic American veterans who served in the United States Armed Forces, and it is one of the few memorials in the United States solely dedicated to Hispanic American veterans. Also, the Hispanic American Veterans Monument is one of the only war monuments in the country that includes a female servicemember.

“The minority veterans have felt invisible, and we need to change that,” said Ramos-Morales. “The memorial means sacrifice, it means pride, it means recognition, and it means we matter.”

Legionnaires and Auxiliary members help clean the monument as a Family twice a year — before ceremonies on Veterans Day and Memorial Day. During the rest of the year, members of the Monument Committee and the Gabriel A. Rodríguez post/unit check in on the memorial to always make sure it’s clean and tidy.

“Helping the community is a fulfilling feeling — it’s a feeling of accomplishing something that is bigger than us,” said Ramos-Morales. “It’s important for people/members to feel they belong to something bigger than themselves.”



WEBSITE, BLOG SERIES BRING ALA'S NATIONAL HISTORY TO YOUR FINGERTIPS

It is said that a historian is someone who gets excited about things others don't care about. In reality, it is someone who gets excited about things others *think* they don't care about. If history is presented in an interesting way or a personal connection can be made between that "thing" and the "others," they will want to know more. They will begin to care.

The American Legion Auxiliary national organization has a long, exciting, and interesting history — one that is worth knowing. We've been serving this nation's veterans, military, their families, and our communities for more than 100 years.

ALA National Headquarters is home to the Auxiliary's museum — *Cavalcade of Memories* — which was approved at the 1972 National Convention. Displayed in the museum and throughout the building are a number of artifacts we have collected thus far. Each item contributes to the telling of the Auxiliary's story and its many accomplishments.

Unlike community museums, many of our members are unable to visit Indianapolis and see this collection. As the saying goes, "If the mountain will not come to

Mohammed, Mohammed will go to the mountain." Because of advancements in technology and being the recipient of two grants (one from the Indiana Historical Society with funding from Lilly Endowment, and the other from The National Bank of Indianapolis), that collection is now brought to *you*.

Welcome to the American Legion Auxiliary digital archive! This online collection is a searchable catalog of various materials for the Auxiliary's permanent national collection. It includes artifacts, photos, and the *Auxiliary* magazine. At this time, the database includes only a small portion of our collection, but new records are continually being added. So, we invite you to visit often, as there will be more to explore.

The fun of learning the Auxiliary's history doesn't stop at the digital archive. Now you are able to learn the more detailed story of the ALA by visiting the *American Legion Auxiliary's History's Mysteries* blog series! We're bringing back to life those stories that have either been forgotten, little known, or simply not passed down through the years. You will learn about individual members

who have made a big impact inside and outside the Auxiliary, the projects our members have tackled, new additions to our collection, behind-the-scenes anecdotes, and much more.

In other words, these two places offer you the opportunity to learn about our early members — those whose shoulders we stand on — so that the next generation of members can stand on ours. Hopefully, you will learn more about this organization than you ever thought possible. If you already know a great deal about the Auxiliary at the national level, hopefully you will stumble upon some tidbit of information you didn't know or previously overlooked. And in case you're wondering, both websites are mobile friendly, meaning you can view them on your tablet or smartphone.

But National Headquarters isn't steering this history ship by ourselves. Both the digital archive and the history blog series invite you to ask questions, tell us what you want to know, and provide feedback. We desire an interactive dialogue because we don't know everything about this great organization of ours.

We are also on the lookout for items not in our current national collection. So, if you have ownership of an artifact you think might fit in the scope of our collection, please contact National Headquarters at history@ALAforVeterans.org or (317) 569-4500.

And there is one more thing you can do: Share this information with others, including non-members. These are additional tools that can assist with branding and membership recruitment.

If, after reading this, you are still wondering whether knowing the ALA's national history is important, we leave you with one thought: Through the study of history, we know the past — where we came from — thus knowing how we reached where we are for better engagement in the present, which takes us to eliciting a bigger and better impact on the future.

Visit the digital archive at ALAforVeterans.pastperfectonline.com and the history blog at www.ALAforVeterans.org/history-blog.

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TIPS ON PREPARING FOR YOUR DEPARTMENT CONVENTION

Spring and summer signal convention season for the American Legion Auxiliary. For some departments, convention might be wrapping up, but for many of you, convention preparations are still underway. Governing documents play a lead role at convention, so we've come up with a quick checklist to help you prepare, conduct, and close the governance business of your 2024 convention.

Prior to department convention:

- Review your governing documents and identify any areas that need to be updated. Be sure to check the Constitution & Bylaws section at www.ALAforVeterans.org for a list of changes to the national Constitution & Bylaws and Standing Rules since November 2023.
- Draft your proposed changes on a three-column amendment form (found on the C&B page of the national website), including detailed rationale (reasons) for the proposed change.
- Distribute proposed amendments to membership in preparation of the department convention vote.
- Host a virtual Q&A for members to ask clarifying questions prior to the vote at department convention. This is a perfect time to get familiar with free options like Zoom.

During department convention:

- Have copies of proposed amendments on hand for members to review.



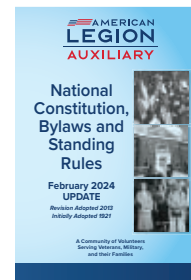
- Consider options for “live editing” on your convention screens. This allows members to see any changes made to the proposed amendments in real time.
- The chair should announce the outcome of each vote in true numbers, not percentages. For example, the chair would announce that the vote was “60 in favor” and “40 opposed.”
- Be sure to include the voting totals in the department convention meeting minutes.

After convention:

- Make all necessary updates to the governing documents following the convention votes.
- Announce any governing document amendments to all members.
- If your unit/department has a website, consider posting a list of all amendments to the governing documents and an updated version of the full document to the unit/department website so members can download the most up-to-date version.

- Have a Minutes Review Committee edit and approve the convention minutes. Make the finalized convention minutes available to members via the website or other reliable communication methods.

C&B BOOKLET AVAILABLE ONLINE



Get the latest version of the ALA National Constitution, Bylaws, and Standing Rules online at www.ALAforVeterans.org. You can

download the file from the national website for free, or purchase printed copies through American Legion Flag & Emblem Sales at Emblem.Legion.org.

DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE CONSTITUTION & BYLAWS?

Email ConstitutionBylaws@ALAforVeterans.org for answers!



Will we see you in New Orleans?

The 104th American Legion Auxiliary National Convention will be in New Orleans Aug. 23-29, 2024. Final preparations are underway, and you can learn more at www.ALAforVeterans.org/meetings/national-convention. Follow us on Facebook and Instagram @ALAforVeterans for updates.

VA S.A.V.E. TRAINING CLASS TEACHES AMERICAN LEGION FAMILY MEMBERS HOW TO HELP VETERANS IN CRISIS

American Legion Resolution No. 9 encourages the hosting of U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) S.A.V.E. training classes in support of Be the One — the Legion's suicide prevention mission to save the lives of veterans and destigmatize asking for mental health support. The VA S.A.V.E. training is a free online or in-person course taught by a VA suicide prevention coordinator who gives you the tools to help a veteran in crisis or having thoughts of suicide.

The American Legion has reported that members in New York, North Dakota, and Kentucky have already facilitated training events with their local VA centers.

In an interview with The American Legion, Glenn Wahus, a past national vice commander and member of North Dakota Post 29, shared that the training gives each participant the tools to talk to a veteran or anybody in the community.

"We needed our veterans to know that there's training available out there through the VA to assist us in being the one," reported Wahus. "We have it right with Be the One to ask, to reach out, to listen. That's pretty much S.A.V.E. training."

After the training in New York, Dean Erck, Post 904 adjutant and service officer, said he was struck by how hard it was to look someone in the eye and ask, 'Are you thinking about hurting yourself?' "Even when you're role playing, it's hard to actually get that out," Erck said. "So, this definitely gives you an opportunity to practice something that you hope you don't have to use. But if you ever do, you want to feel confident that you're able to do it."

In Kentucky, the training was provided by National Guard veteran Kelly Marcum, a mental health social worker who serves

as community engagement and partnerships coordinator at the VA medical center in Louisville.

Marcum said teaming with organizations like The American Legion is valuable as the VA continues to work to reduce veteran suicides — especially among those not in the health care system.

"Anecdotally and statistically, it's of the utmost importance now for [VA] to involve the community in suicide prevention," Marcum told The American Legion. "Being able to train community members, have relationships with people like The American Legion — who can now interact with those veterans in a way that we talked about in the training — is going to prevent suicide for those folks who are maybe coming to a Legion [post] where they feel comfortable ... or any other community where they feel comfortable going in and asking for help."

How can members bring the VA S.A.V.E. training to their unit or post homes?

Those interested in hosting a VA S.A.V.E. training class can facilitate it through their local VA medical center's suicide prevention team. An ALA unit can locate contact information for their local suicide prevention team through the Veterans Crisis Line resource website at www.veteranscrisisline.net/find-resources/local-resources. Once on the website, enter a ZIP code and press search. Then select

the box next to suicide prevention coordinators and press search again. Once completed, you will be provided with the closest suicide prevention coordinator and their contact information.

What is taught during the training?

- The scope of veteran suicide in the United States
- Signs and symptoms of suicidal thinking
- How to identify a veteran who may be at risk for suicide
- How to ask questions about suicide in an objective and non-threatening way
- What to do when you identify a veteran who may be at risk for suicide

The in-person training also may include role-playing exercises where participants ask another participant suicide prevention questions.

Who should participate in this training?

Those hosting VA S.A.V.E. training classes are encouraged to invite the entire Legion Family and members of the community to attend. Attendees do not have to be enrolled in the VA health care system to take the training. The more individuals trained in VA S.A.V.E., the more veterans in crisis who can be helped.

How can members take the VA S.A.V.E. training online?

Visit learn.psycharmor.org/courses/va-save to take the free course online.

The S.A.V.E. acronym helps you remember these steps for suicide prevention when helping a veteran:



- S:** signs that indicate a veteran might be thinking about suicide
- A:** ask the most important question of all: "Are you thinking of killing yourself?"
- V:** validate the veteran's experience
- E:** encourage treatment and expedite getting help



 **AMERICAN
LEGION**
**AUXILIARY
FOUNDATION**

Subgrants from Corporations and Foundations Available

The ALA Foundation can serve as a recipient of grant funding for ALA departments, districts/counties, and units from a foundation, corporation, or entity that requires the recipient to be a 501(c)(3). The ALA Foundation then, in turn, will subgrant to the ALA entity according to the terms and conditions of the grantor.

THE ALA FOUNDATION AWARDED 22 SUBGRANTS IN 2023 TOTALING \$58,683:

- \$360 to ALA Unit 2 in Oregon for rock painting for veterans
- Several grants to ALA Girls State programs, including \$530 to the Department of Washington for ALA Evergreen Girls State, \$862 to ALA Heyward Fields Unit 239 in Georgia for ALA Georgia Girls State, and \$620 to ALA Orange Unit 132 in California for ALA California Girls State
- \$1,500 to ALA Unit 1941 in Illinois for the Mary Patterson/Helen Olsen Educational Scholarship
- \$2,747 to ALA James R. Hickey Jr. Unit 120 in New York for veteran and military family support programs
- \$17,125 to the Department of Minnesota for various programs

**To learn more about subgranting opportunities and to apply,
visit www.ALAFoundation.org/grants.**

EXPLAINED IN SIMPLE TERMS A CLOSER LOOK AT THE AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY'S MEMBERSHIP ELIGIBILITY

Every single member of the American Legion Auxiliary makes a difference in the lives of our country's veterans, military, and their families simply by holding membership in this organization.

When the ALA was founded in 1919, it wasn't uncommon to have a connection to the military through multiple family members. At that time, there were over 3 million members of the Armed Forces. Today, there are approximately 1.2 million.

Less members of the military unfortunately equals less connections people have that could make them eligible for ALA membership.

In 2018, The American Legion opened its eligibility. Since the Legion's founding in 1919, membership had been open only to veterans of World War I, WWII, Korean War, Vietnam War, Lebanon/Grenada, Panama, and Gulf War/War on Terrorism.

The Legion's National Executive Committee in 2018 passed a resolution to call on Congress to declare that the United States has been continuously engaged in a state of war from Dec. 7, 1941, to the present.

The bill passed and expanded eligibility for membership in The American Legion to veterans and servicemembers who served any time after that date, including those currently serving. Because of that change, more family members became eligible for the American Legion Auxiliary.

How the ALA is classified by the IRS

The ALA was an all-women organization until 2019 when the Legion changed the language

“wife” to “spouse” to allow male spouses.

The IRS makes the determination regarding degrees from the veteran allowed to be a member of a VSO auxiliary.

The American Legion Auxiliary's membership eligibility is determined by The American Legion; however, The American Legion's determination of the ALA's membership eligibility must also fit within the confines of the IRS definition of a 501(c)(19) veterans service organization auxiliary.

The American Legion Auxiliary is classified by the IRS as a 501(c)(19) Veterans' Organization.

To be exempt under Internal Revenue Code section 501(c)(19), an organization must be either:

- a post or organization of past or present members of the United States Armed Forces

- an auxiliary unit or society of such post or organization
- or a trust or foundation for such post or organization

The IRS defines eligibility within two degrees of consanguinity (blood relation).

Back in 2019, The American Legion reviewed the eligibility of the American Legion Auxiliary and determined that allowing direct descendants (more than two degrees) was not in compliance with the IRS definition. Therefore, the eligibility requirements were changed to allow only granddaughters as the furthest allowable relationship.

Official Terms: Requirements for ALA Membership

Membership in the American Legion Auxiliary is limited to:

(1) grandmothers, mothers, sisters, spouses, and direct and adopted female descendants of members of The American Legion; and

(2) grandmothers, mothers, sisters, spouses, and direct and adopted female descendants of all men and women who served in either of the following periods: April 6, 1917, to Nov. 11, 1918 and any time after Dec. 7, 1941 who, being a citizen of the United States at the time of their entry therein served on active duty in the Armed Forces of any of the governments associated with the United States during either eligibility periods and died in the line of duty or after honorable discharge;

(3) grandmothers, mothers, sisters, spouses, and direct and adopted female descendants of all

men and women who were in the Armed Forces of the United States during either of the following periods: April 6, 1917, to Nov. 11, 1918; and any time after Dec. 7, 1941 who served on active duty in the Armed Forces of the United States during either eligibility periods and died in the line of duty or after honorable discharge; and (4) to those women who of their own right are eligible for membership in The American Legion.*

*A woman who is eligible for American Legion membership is eligible to join the American Legion Auxiliary regardless of whether or not she is a member of The American Legion. However, eligibility of her female relatives (sister, mother, direct descendants) and/or spouse depends upon her membership in The American Legion.



AWARDING GRANTS: American Legion Department of New York Commander Timothy Collmer at a news interview after approving \$100,000 for the ALA Foundation at New York's Mid-Winter Conference.

A GENEROUS GESTURE FROM NEW YORK AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY FOUNDATION RECEIVES \$100,000 DONATION FOR VETERANS CREATIVE ARTS THERAPY

In a heartwarming display of support for those who served our country, The American Legion Department of New York donated \$100,000 to the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation, dedicated to enhancing veterans' therapy programs. The generous contribution promises to make a significant impact on the lives of those who sacrificed so much for the well-being of our nation.

New York Department Adjutant Jim Casey said the department received a sizeable gift dedicated to disabled veterans and their families in 2006. Because of that gift, The American Legion Department of New York was able to establish a grant program to support organizations directly helping veterans at risk for suicide or homelessness. Casey said the department set aside \$1 million for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) therapies and \$500,000 to support homeless veterans.

Since the granting program began, the department has funded several projects for PTSD and TBI therapies in New York and

initiatives by other Legion Family organizations. Casey recalled a particularly emotional encounter at an equine therapy center in New York where he and several others from the Department of New York were receiving a tour. When the guide announced the end of the tour, American Legion

"...this donation will make a significant impact on suicide prevention among those suffering with PTSD."

then-National Commander Jim Triola said, "Ma'am, it's not the end of the tour — the Department of New York would like to give you \$100,000." The four women working at the equine therapy center began to cry. "It makes all of the tough days in the job worth it when we know we've helped someone," Casey said.

The substantial donation to the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation comes at a critical time when the need for mental health

services for veterans is more pressing than ever. The philanthropic gesture demonstrates a deep commitment to the wellbeing of those who have bravely defended our country. The funds are earmarked specifically for veterans' therapy programs, ensuring that individuals struggling with the invisible wounds of war receive the care and support they deserve. The ALA Foundation will allocate the funds to the Veterans Creative Arts Festival (VCAF) fund, which impacts creative art therapy programs.

Annually nationwide, veterans enrolled at U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs health care facilities compete in a local creative arts competition, which includes categories in the visual arts division that range from painting to leatherwork to sculpture. In addition, there are categories in writing, as well as the performing arts of dance, drama, and music. The ALA Foundation supports local creative arts festivals by awarding grants to ALA entities to fund veterans' creative arts programs in their community.

After hearing about the equine therapy donation, ALA Foundation Board of Directors President Cathe MacInnes reached out to The American Legion Department of New York to inquire about applying for a grant to allow the ALA Foundation to increase its support for the American Legion Auxiliary's co-presentership of NVCAF and local VCAF granting program. Notification of the award was announced at the Department of New York's 105th Mid-Winter Conference in Albany.

"It's gratifying to know that the Department of New York American Legion is so supportive of this effort," MacInnes said. "With 131 of the VA medical centers nationwide participating in the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, this donation will make a significant



NEW YORK DONATIONS HELPING OTHERS: Donations were given to organizations that help homeless veterans and research and treatment for PTSD. The ALA Foundation received \$100,000 earlier this year for its support of veterans creative arts therapy (photo on left by Frank Carletta; photo on right by Robert Stronach).

impact on suicide prevention among those suffering with PTSD. I cannot thank them enough.”

In announcing the grant award to the media following New York’s Mid-Winter Conference, Department Commander Timothy Collmer began a briefing by noting that the focus of The American Legion is prevention of veteran suicide.

“We have people who are willing to listen to veterans who are struggling and get them the help they need,” Collmer said

about The American Legion’s Be the One mission. He added that the Department of New York also works with partners to provide direct support and assistance to veterans suffering from PTSD.

The \$100,000 donation enables the integration of innovative therapeutic approaches that have shown promise in addressing the unique challenges faced by veterans. This may include programs incorporating art and music therapy practices, offering alternative avenues for healing beyond traditional counseling

methods. The goal is to tailor therapy options to the diverse needs and preferences of veterans, fostering a holistic approach to mental health care.

The donation dedicated to veterans’ therapy programs represents more than a monetary contribution — it symbolizes a profound commitment the Legion Family has to the well-being of those who have selflessly served our nation.

“Be the One, and Be the One as big as you can,” Casey said.



The ALA Foundation has awarded 37 local VCAF grants, listed below, totaling \$76,448. Local creative arts competition top winning entries advance to a national judging process, and first, second, and third place entries are determined at the national level. First place winning veterans are invited to attend the

National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NVCAF) hosted by a different VA facility each year.

Department of Iowa	.....\$750
Department of Vermont	..... \$1,500
Department of Maryland	.....\$500
Department of New York	.....\$750
Department of Illinois	..... \$2,500
Department of New Jersey	.....\$1,700
Department of New York	..... \$850
Department of Vermont	..... \$2,000
Department of Vermont	..... \$2,500
Department of Iowa	..... \$2,500
District of Columbia Unit 1	..... \$2,500
Department of Vermont	..... \$2,500

Illinois Unit 281	..... \$2,500
New York Unit 1524	..... \$1,500
Arizona Unit 62	..... \$2,500
Department of Wisconsin	..... \$2,500
Texas Unit 320	..... \$2,300
Department of Vermont	..... \$2,500
Department of Missouri	..... \$2,500
District of Columbia Unit 1	..... \$2,500
Kansas District 5	..... \$2,190
Department of Vermont	..... \$2,500
New York Unit 1524	..... \$1,600
Department of Nebraska	..... \$1,630
Arizona Unit 62	..... \$2,500
Department of Colorado	..... \$2,500
Texas Unit 521	..... \$2,500
New York Unit 721	..... \$2,450
New York Unit 120	..... \$1,828
Colorado Unit 1	..... \$2,500
New York Unit 927	..... \$2,500
New York Unit 1524	..... \$1,650
Indiana Unit 230	..... \$2,500
Colorado Unit 2	..... \$2,500
New York Unit 120	..... \$2,500
Department of New York	..... \$750
Tennessee Unit 47	..... \$2,500



JOIN, TRANSFORM, BELONG, AND SAVE BIG

Membership organizations like the American Legion Auxiliary provide their members with exclusive access to a variety of resources, including retail, health care, and lifestyle discounts. As an ALA member, you have access to special discounts, early access to sales, and members-only promotions. These perks provide tangible savings for you, making your ALA membership a wise investment.

The ALA has leveraged our membership data to personalize shopping experiences for members, including an ALA-specific Lands' End Business storefront, insurance offerings that cater to our membership demographic, and discounts to companies like R. Riveter that share our values and mission. By understanding our members' preferences, we can curate tailored recommendations, ensuring you discover products and deals that align with your interests.

The ALA prioritizes our members, and our member benefit providers do the same, offering enhanced customer service and support. ALA members have access to dedicated customer

support lines, ensuring quicker resolutions to issues or inquiries. This heightened level of service contributes to a positive customer experience, reinforcing the value of membership.

The ALA has been working diligently to enhance our offerings and bring more value to members of the Auxiliary. Without further ado, here is a look at three of our newest member benefits:

BenefitHub

Enjoy discounts, rewards, and perks on thousands of brands, including Hertz, Sam's Club, Walt Disney World, Toyota, Skechers, and more! BenefitHub is your

single-source site where you can find extensive savings through an easy-to-use, discount marketplace. Enter the exclusive ALA member referral code — HZE7XG — when creating your account.

Armed Forces Vacation Club

Armed Forces Vacation Club (AFVC) is built around the idea that the military deserves the best, and that's why they offer weeklong resort stays from just \$409. That price might sound unbelievable, but search the "R&R" page at www.afvclub.com/search-resorts/results/price-types/space-a for resorts and see for yourself! AFVC offers over 200,000 resort accommodations in over 100 countries in a wide range of sizes, from studio to two or even three-bedroom units.

Liberty Mutual

Liberty Mutual has partnered with American Legion Auxiliary to offer members special savings on quality auto and home insurance. Liberty Mutual offers customized auto insurance so you only pay for what you need.

We believe partnerships like these will elevate your ALA membership, and we're committed to continually improving and providing you with a membership experience that exceeds your expectations.

Take advantage of your membership benefits today and visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/member-benefits.

Must-Have Gear for Travel

We all know to pack clothes, toiletries, medication, and walking shoes. How about adding any of this must-have gear to your suitcase?



- Travel umbrella
- Reusable water bottle
- Portable water purifier
- Travel towel
- Travel clothesline
- Money belt
- Travel-safe wallet
- Extra credit card
- Small flashlight
- Lightweight combination lock
- Sunglasses (polarized are best)
- Sun hat and sunscreen
- Dry bag
- Waterproof socks and shoes
- Laundry bag and soap
- Dry shampoo
- Dramamine
- Insect repellent lotion



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New ALA history-focused blog series debuts

Get acquainted with our latest blog series — *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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Supporting the Same Mission

American Legion Family members work together to explain legislative priorities

By Sara Fowler

American Legion Auxiliary members had the opportunity to learn, discuss, and network among each other as well as other American Legion Family members at The American Legion's annual Washington Conference.

American Legion commission meetings and visits with lawmakers on the Hill gave ALA members insight into what needs to be done to take care of our nation's veterans, military, and their families.

Prior to the first Legion Family meetings, the ALA had one of its own to hear about the Be the One mission as well as learn more information from chairs of the ALA National Security, Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, and Legislative programs.

The Be the One team discussed how that mission is going to accelerate the relevance of The American Legion Family and the Legion's goal to train as many people it can in preventing veteran suicide. There were two in-person suicide prevention training sessions that weekend, developed and led by experts at Columbia University.

This year, ALA National President Lisa Williamson invited department National Security chairs to attend the Washington Conference.

"I have never been to the Washington Conference, and was so excited when I got the invitation to go," said Terri Ouellette, Department of New Hampshire National Security chair. "Our VA&R chair went last year and spoke so highly of her experience."

Other ALA members, like Laurie Kuntz, Department of Colorado, have been to this event a few times.

"This is one of my favorite conferences to attend," Kuntz said when she found out she would be going to represent Colorado. "I feel I learn more about the organization and direction when attending."

ALA members were assigned to attend one of four American Legion commission meetings: National Security, VA&R, Veterans Employment & Education, and Legislative.

"I attended the National Security Commission, and what an eye-opener that was," Ouellette said. "There was so much discussion regarding the drug problem and security at the border. There was a lot of discussion about the military quality of life and the fact that there are veterans serving in over 170 countries."

Kuntz attended the VE&E Commission meeting and gained insights into the gap between military service skills and what civilian life requirements are, as well as more on women veterans.

"During the mental health and wellness session, the statistics — especially concerning women veterans — were eye-opening," she said. "With more women in the military, we need to be advocating for support service during their tenure and when they transition out of the military."

After the Legion commission meetings, the Commander's Call was an opportunity to hear from Legion Family leadership and U.S. Secretary of Veterans

Affairs Denis McDonough, among others.

"We all work for you," McDonough reminded veterans and their families in the audience.

The Commander's Rally was the next morning, which focused on the Legion's legislative priorities prior to meeting with members of Congress and their staff.

"This gave a deeper dive into the 13 priorities and some of the background behind them," Kuntz said. "It also equipped us with additional information to use as we made our visits."

Going to the Hill is often a favorite of members during this event. The opportunity to sit face to face with legislators and/or their staff gives The American Legion Family the chance to explain what's important that benefits veterans, military, and their families.

"It was such a thrill to be included with meeting our representatives and their staff, and being on the Hill was such an honor to be with members of our state delegation to be able to discuss the priorities of our American Legion Family," Ouellette said of her congressional meetings.

Kuntz and the Colorado delegation met mostly with staffers, but that didn't stop them from sharing vital information on upcoming bills.

"Their knowledge of The American Legion's priorities was refreshing," Kuntz said. "Some may have been unaware of some individual ones but were very receptive to researching and working to be part of the solution."

In addition to the commission meetings and Hill visits, the Washington Conference gives ALA members the chance to network with fellow members and share ideas to support the mission.

"It was great seeing other members of our American Legion Auxiliary — many I have met at previous conventions," Ouellette said.

Kuntz agrees. The benefits of this event go beyond the required sessions and meetings on the Hill.

"I always value when I am around other ALA and Legion Family," she said. "It is important to learn from them, build camaraderie, and develop relationships. We are all supporting the same mission in D.C. and at home. Being able to get different perspectives and ideas is always valuable."

Looking ahead, it continues to remain vital for American Legion Auxiliary members to be part of this event to advocate for our veterans, military, and their families on Capitol Hill.

"I think it's very important for ALA members to be included in this event where we can approach our representatives with a united front as the voices of our veterans," Ouellette said.

Kuntz agreed the Washington Conference promotes The American Legion Family working together.

"When the ALA shows up to support the mission of The American Legion, we are strengthening our voice,"

she said. "We are still one family, one voice."

The Washington event left ALA members with a greater understanding of the Legion's legislative priorities, new ideas, and a renewed sense of service to the Auxiliary's mission.

"The experience is one I will never forget," Ouellette said. "The camaraderie and unity of our wonderful organization is amazing."



WASHINGTON CONFERENCE (opposite page): The American Legion Family of Alaska met with Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) to discuss the Legion's legislative priorities on Hill Day. This page: American Legion Auxiliary members representing their departments from across the nation participate in the Pledge of Allegiance, ready themselves in their seats, and take notes during the various Legion commission meetings they were invited to attend.

A Closer Look at The American Legion's Legislative Priorities

The American Legion is the voice of U.S. military veterans and servicemembers. A resolution-based organization, The American Legion's positions represent the views of its nearly 1.6 million members and shape the organization's legislative priorities for the 118th Congress:

Suicide prevention and mental health

Suicide remains a top issue in the veteran community. The suicide rate among veterans is nearly double that of civilian counterparts. It is imperative that we simultaneously destigmatize mental health assistance, while increasing access. The American Legion encourages Congress to robustly fund VA's suicide prevention outreach budget and peer support programs. We encourage all Americans to Be the One who is willing, ready, and able to have difficult conversations about suicide and other mental health issues.

Alternative treatments

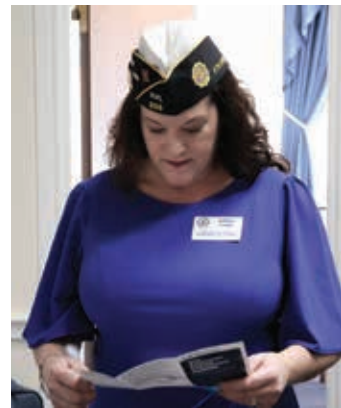
Data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) shows that in 2021, approximately 2.8 million veterans experienced an illicit drug or alcohol use disorder, with 92.4 percent not receiving treatment. More must be done to ensure veterans have access to the effective treatments they desire. This includes expanding research and access into alternative treatments and emerging therapies.

VA health care modernization

The biggest issue in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care modernization is the implementation of the new electronic health record modernization program (EHRM). VA has experienced difficulties as the EHRM rollout has progressed. Some issues identified were the differences in the training software compared to end-user software, along with inexperienced instructors providing the training to VA staff. VA made improvements on these identified issues. As the EHRM rollout is set to resume in 2024, The American Legion continues to call on Congress to provide oversight and to hold VA and other relevant parties accountable for the implementation and functioning of the EHRM system.

PACT Act: Implementation and oversight

Since the implementation of Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act, VA has screened more than 5 million veterans for toxic exposure. The average time to complete a PACT Act-related claim is 157 days. It is imperative that VA fully leverage the resources made available in the PACT Act to assist in the continued modernization of Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) information technology systems as well as the hiring of additional employees to ensure claims are adjudicated in a timely manner. The American Legion urges Congress to provide the necessary oversight and funding to ensure VA has the resources to properly implement this legislation.



TAKING IT ALL IN: ALA National President Lisa Williamson speaks during the Washington Conference; ALA members listen during the National Security Commission meeting; Laurie Kuntz takes notes while fellow American Legion Family members look on; Terri Ouellette, Department of New Hampshire, listens while Sen. Jeanne Shaheen's (D-N.H.) staff member asks questions; Sarah Tobin, Department of Colorado, looks over the legislative priorities; Auxiliary members ready for their meeting.

Safeguard veteran benefits

Veterans are facing a growing threat from exploitative entities aiming to capitalize on the benefits rightfully earned through military service. These predatory actors range from claims companies charging exorbitant fees to lawyers seeking sizable portions of VA disability benefit payments. The American Legion urges Congress to pass legislation to: restore criminal penalties for persons or companies that represent or charge veterans fees to file, prepare or prosecute initial VA claims without VA accreditation; and to oppose any legislation that would allow unaccredited parties to become legal representatives without completing the accreditation process. The American Legion's advocacy role remains focused on safeguarding the well-deserved benefits of those who have served.

Concurrent receipt

There are currently 42,000 military retirees with combat-related injuries who are eligible for retirement pay from the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) and compensation for service-connected disabilities from the VA. However, retired veterans with a disability rating below 50 percent have their VA compensation deducted from their DOD retirement pay. The American Legion strongly supports ending this inequitable policy, where many military retirees must forfeit their retired pay to receive equal amounts of disability compensation.

Guard and Reserve GI Bill parity

National Guard and Reserve servicemembers are being deprived of education benefits that active-duty servicemembers enjoy, despite completing the same duties. According to current law, National Guard and Reserve servicemembers only accrue GI Bill entitlement when called to active duty under federal orders. When Guard and Reserve servicemembers are activated under state orders, they do not accrue eligibility for Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits like their active-duty counterparts do. The American Legion believes that every day in uniform counts and urges Congress to recognize the service of Guard and Reserve servicemembers as eligible for the GI Bill.

GI Bill for honorable service

To receive most VA benefits, a veteran's character of discharge or service must be "under honorable conditions." However, GI Bill education assistance benefits have a requirement that servicemembers receive an "honorable discharge." If the character of service is "general under honorable conditions," this benefit remains out of reach for these veterans. The American Legion urges Congress to correct this statutory incongruity by amending U.S. Code to allow access to VA educational assistance to veterans with general under honorable conditions discharges.

Military quality of life

The U.S. military's greatest resources are servicemembers and their families. Without highly

qualified and committed men and women, even the most sophisticated weaponry will not provide the deterrence necessary to defend our nation. Factors contributing to quality of life include proper compensation, appropriate housing, quality health care, reasonably priced commissaries, and access to child care services. The American Legion urges Congress to pass legislation to expand access to affordable child care, increase appropriations for military construction projects (including barracks and family housing), and ensuring timely access to mental health care.

Pay the Coast Guard

U.S. Coast Guard personnel carry out vital national security missions. Still, because the Coast Guard is under the Department of Homeland Security instead of DOD, its members are more likely to experience pay interruptions during prolonged government shutdowns. The American Legion urges Congress to pass legislation that would guarantee that Coast Guard personnel are paid in case of a shutdown.

Access to health care for overseas military and families

Military personnel stationed overseas in support of U.S. interests and our alliances provide a key role in deterring adversaries from a myriad of actions. However, even after the realignment of medical services in overseas and remote locations under the Defense Health Agency (DHA), major issues involving access to various types of health care continue. Additionally, the lack of access to certain types of care limits overseas assignments and contributes to military families being separated for extended periods of time.

Improving the military TAP

The American Legion urges Congress to direct the modernization of Transition Assistance Program (TAP) delivery using technology and performance data to ensure the DOD delivers a successful program. The creation of a mobile application, providing servicemembers with an extensive toolkit of on-demand transition-related content would improve participation and increase the benefit of transition resources available. Delivering effective transition assistance will ensure a veteran's proper reintegration from active duty to civilian life and reduce negative experiences. Improved TAP instruction will support our servicemembers in finding education, employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities and send successful citizens back to our communities.

Protect the American flag

The American Legion urges Congress to approve an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would allow Congress to prohibit the physical desecration of the U.S. flag. Additionally, The American Legion urges Congress to pass the Flag Code Modernization Act of 2021 to amend the U.S. Flag Code to codify common patriotic customs and practices as described in The American Legion Resolution No. 19: Flag Code Amendment. ★



Service to Country, Service to the ALA

Our women
veterans share their
unique stories, perspectives

By Jennifer Donovan

Women are the fastest growing group in the veteran population, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. There are currently more than 2 million female veterans in the United States and the American Legion Auxiliary will honor them June 12 on Women Veterans Day. The day is significant in military history — President Harry S. Truman signed the Women Armed Services Integration Act on June 12, 1948, allowing women to serve as regular members of the military.

The American Legion Auxiliary counts more than 5,000 female veterans among its membership. Women veterans are eligible for the ALA through their own military service, regardless if they're a member of The American Legion. They can be dual members (belonging to the ALA and American Legion), or they can be solely a member of the ALA or Legion. Having female veterans as members can help units identify needs that may differ from male veterans in their communities.

Several veteran ALA members shared their experiences with *Auxiliary* magazine. Here are a few of those stories.

LaSharon Perez

Unit 574, Department of California
Dual member and U.S. Navy veteran

LaSharon Perez is dedicated to assisting fellow veterans and others in her community. She serves in leadership roles in both the ALA and The American Legion.

Perez joined the American Legion Auxiliary in order to connect with like-minded individuals who shared her devotion to serving veterans and their communities.

“It provides a platform for me to collaborate on projects and initiatives I’m passionate about,” said Perez. “It provides me additional opportunities to make a meaningful difference in the lives of veterans and their families while also fostering personal growth, community engagement, and camaraderie.”

Perez brings a unique perspective to the ALA with firsthand knowledge of military service and the challenges veterans, especially female veterans, face. This knowledge

helps her unit with programs and initiatives.

“I am able to advocate effectively for the needs of veterans and their families,” said Perez. “With my credibility and firsthand understanding of veterans’ issues, I am able to amplify the ALA’s advocacy efforts at local and state levels.”

Perez uses her connections within the military and veteran community to expand her unit’s reach and impact. She understands the importance of checking in on veterans. In fact, she initiated Buddy Checks for her post home.

“As a veteran, I carry unseen burdens and struggles that others may not fully understand. However, through my involvement with the ALA, I’ve found a space where I can channel negative energy into positive action by assisting fellow veterans. The camaraderie and understanding within the ALA community have allowed me to connect with others who share similar experiences, providing a sense of solidarity and validation,” said Perez. “Moreover, being part of the ALA has deepened my empathy and compassion toward my fellow veterans.



A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE: LaSharon Perez, a U.S. Navy veteran, serves in leadership roles in her unit and post. Perez with Maj. Gen. Richard D. Roth, USAF (Ret.) at Moreno Valley Veterans Day Ceremony.

By actively engaging in initiatives and programs aimed at supporting veterans, I've gained insight into their diverse challenges and issues. This understanding enables me to offer genuine empathy, support, and guidance to my peers, who may be facing similar struggles."

Perez is also passionate about education. As Education chair for her unit, she initiated the Give 10 program for ALA Unit 574 and created a scholarship program with hopes of at least three local high school students receiving a scholarship in 2024.

Tricia Thurston

**Unit 24, Department of Maine
Dual member and U.S. Navy veteran**

Tricia Thurston enlisted in the U.S. Navy at the age of 17.

"I remember my mother having to sign for me due to being underage. I turned 18 years old in boot camp," said Thurston. "I went into the Navy without a guaranteed A school [training program]. It's crazy to realize how brave I was to do this."

Her first duty station was in Scotland, where she met her future husband, Kirk. Following marriage, the couple moved to California, where she served in the Navy Reserve, until their move to Japan.

Thurston first learned of The American Legion Family when her husband joined The American Legion through the mail, before ever visiting a post. Soon after he joined, they attended a local event and discovered his post was being revitalized and seeking new officers. To their surprise, he was nominated for 2nd vice commander of the post. Shortly after he took office, he encouraged Thurston to check out the Legion and join.

"He said, 'You know you can join as well.' I answered, 'I don't think so, I am not a veteran. I didn't go to war or retire after 20 years.' He shared, 'Yes, you are. You served,'" said Thurston. "For some reason, I never thought of myself as a veteran. I was never told I was a veteran or was looked at as a veteran."

This moment changed her thoughts on what a veteran is.

"It was then and the fact that I joined The American Legion in 2006 that I could stand taller as a woman veteran and also fight for others who also do not realize they are a veteran or considered a veteran by others," she said.

Thurston also joined the ALA at the same time she became a Legionnaire.

"With my husband becoming involved with the Legion,



VETERAN & MILITARY SPOUSE: (Top) Tricia Thurston met her husband, Kirk, while serving in Scotland; Thurston with her family; serving in the U.S. Navy; Thurston pictured with her husband and their friend, Walter Fightmaster.

I decided to join both the Legion and the Auxiliary," said Thurston. "He served for 20 years. I was a Navy spouse longer than I served our great country. My comfort level at this time was with other spouses and those who were eligible through their family's service."

"I feel that I bring experiences of being both a veteran and a spouse of a veteran. As a veteran, I bring education that women are veterans too," said Thurston.

She urges members to not make assumptions that someone is or is not a veteran based on their sex. Women veterans have unique experiences and it's important for them to share ideas and information with fellow members to provide support in their communities.

Thurston's post home offers unique activities for women veterans. One of those is the Annual Women Veterans Luncheon, which they have hosted for 10 years.

"We provide service officers, VA representatives, etc.," said Thurston. "We have provided a safe place year after year for women veterans to come to and know they can come back and experience the camaraderie we are all used to." She said they have women veterans who return each year and those who attend for the first time.

"There are no strangers among us. From beginning to end, we laugh, cry, applaud each other, show respect to our flag and country, remember our comrades who have gone before us, support each other, watch some outstanding performances, eat amazing food, and have

Women have served in the military throughout U.S. history

- Civil War: 400 women
 - World War I: 35,000 women
 - World War II: 350,000 women
 - Korean War: 120,000 women
 - Vietnam War: 265,000 women
- June 12, 1948 – President Harry S. Truman signs the Women Armed Services

Integration Act, allowing women to serve as regular members of the military.

Women Veterans Day is not officially observed in every state. It is currently a state-recognized commemoration in 14 states.

*Source U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs



a fabulous day,” said Thurston. “And we cannot do this without the support that our amazing unit members give. These members give 100% support to these luncheons, along with our Sons of The American Legion and Legionnaires. It is truly a Legion Family event.”

I am very proud of my service, said Thurston.

“I credit the Legion and the Auxiliary for this,” she said. “Before the experiences with this organization, I did not really think about that fact that I was a veteran. I learned how to be on my own and gain the confidence to do so.”

Davielle Hawks

Unit 202, Department of Maine

Dual member and U.S. Air Force Reserve veteran

Davielle Hawks enlisted after a recruiter reached out to her after learning about her story and seeing her photography in a local café. At the time, she was a single mother working three jobs.

Hawks’ journey in The American Legion Family began with a post on Facebook. The local Legion was looking for volunteer bartenders.

“When I began bartending at the post, I made amazing connections which allowed me to continue to support veteran nonprofits while also learning about the benefits of being a Legion member,” said Hawks. “I received the mental health support I needed while also supporting programs.”

Hawks has a heart for volunteering and knew she had more to give and could make an impact with her perspective as a veteran.

“I joined the ALA because I saw an opportunity for the ALA to make a difference for spouses, their children, and veterans,” said Hawks. “I think it has brought a new understanding on what veterans go through on a regular basis and how those problems and concerns affect the whole family. I think about if this were me, how would I want the situation or support handled? I think that has brought in different ideas and has brought the ALA closer in working with our Legion Family.”

“My unit has created a space for family members to seek advice or help. While not every veteran is the same nor are their experiences, it has allowed members to ask questions or resources to help their family,” she said.

Due to her military experience, she also recognizes some of the warning signs that others may not.

“We had an ALA member who was struggling to get their loved one help with mental health,” Hawks said. “They approached me and asked for resources. The family member was struggling to have a conversation, and I provided them with a VA contact who could provide more support. I was then able to connect with the post commander who reached out to the Legion member doing Buddy Checks, and because of that, we were able to get the veteran help.”



HEART FOR VOLUNTEERING (top): In Iraq, Davielle Hawks helped get animals to the U.S. for adoption; she organized a Suicide Prevention Walk-A-Thon; Hawks helped get women veterans honored; she was awarded ALA Department of Maine’s Courage Award.

Hawks can also provide her fellow ALA members advice on serving women veterans.

“I think it helps many members of the ALA with what it means to be a woman in the military. While not every veteran’s experience is the same, it is different for women. I can only relate this back to my own experience, but leaving my child for extended periods of time crushed me. I had an amazing support system back home, but not many women did or do. It takes a different mental strength to serve as a female,” said Hawks. “I was told countless times, I would never amount to anything, I wasn’t good enough, that a female like me will never make a difference. As women in the workforce, many of us have heard these words. Being able to make those connections and relate to each other as women is so important.”

“I think we need to continue to encourage veterans to be a part of different areas in our Legion Family. I think the diversity of thought and perspective is needed to make real and meaningful change,” said Hawks. “I think change is possible, and I encourage any veteran to be a part of The American Legion Family.”

Growing amount of women veterans

As the number of females entering the military grows, so will the number of women veterans in your community. Honor and recognize these veterans on June 12 and continue to find ways to support them and include them in the ALA throughout the year. If you have a story about your unit and women veterans, we’d love to hear about it. You can email us at ALAMagazine@ALAforVeterans.org. ★

How you can observe Women Veterans Day

- **Host an event for women veterans.**
- **Highlight female veterans on social media.**
- **Send cards of gratitude to women veterans.**



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Live recordings added in 2024:

ALA National Scholarships:

This webinar will give you a basic understanding of ALA national scholarships, explain the eligibility and rules for the scholarships, and teach you how to guide students in applying.

Be the One: How Auxiliary

Members

Can Help: You will have the opportunity to hear from members of The American Legion Family and 2023-2024 ALA National President Lisa Williamson as they discuss crucial topics of today's veterans, their mental health, the suicide epidemic, and how The American

Legion Family is incorporating this into our collective missions.

Understanding the Differences between National Security and Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation:

Wondering if an activity falls under ALA National Security or VA&R? This 30-minute informative webinar

explains the differences and similarities between our National Security and VA&R programs.

Celebrating Women of Service:

This course provides an overview of the different types of grants the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation offers and explains the

ALA Foundation's Celebrating Women of Service initiatives.

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www.ALAforVeterans.org

ALA GIRLS NATION: EMPOWERING FUTURE GENERATIONS

 www.Facebook.com/ALAGirlsNation



ALA Girls State and ALA Girls Nation are premier programs of the American Legion Auxiliary.

They teach participants about citizenship, politics, patriotism, and ALA programs. ALA Girls State and ALA Girls Nation teach rising high school juniors about the political process. The citizens debate their platforms and learn that they don't always see things the same way but can learn to see the other side's viewpoint.

ALA Girls State teaches participants the workings of city government all the way up to state government. Citizens are encouraged to step out of their comfort zones and grow as individuals.

ALA Girls Nation has two citizens from each state as senators. They spend a week in Washington, D.C. debating their bills, running for office, continuing to learn about citizenship, and seeing our nation's capital.

This year at ALA Girls Nation, we will share more time with American Legion Boys Nation. We will join Boys Nation at Arlington National Cemetery to lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. This will be the first time we will have an ALA Girls Nation senator, a Legion Boys Nation senator, ALA National President Lisa Williamson, and Legion National Commander Daniel J. Seehafer lay the wreath together. Both programs have worked together as a Family to make this happen.

We will also see Legion Boys

Nation at Twilight Tattoo, an action-packed live military event held at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, Va. The ALA Girls Nation senators and Boys Nation senators for each state will meet with their own state senators on Capitol Hill. They get the chance to ask them questions and discuss what is important to them. It is an amazing day for all participants.

These premier programs change their lives and many times, their future endeavors. We should all be proud of these programs and what they represent. With these young adults as our future leaders, the United States will continue to prosper.



Kelly Elliott is a 23-year Auxiliary member of Ray & Virginia Boyer Unit 166 in Shellsburg, Iowa.

CONSTITUTION & BYLAWS: THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR GOVERNING DOCUMENTS



The American Legion Auxiliary's governing documents clarify our purpose and the reason we

exist. They also describe the rights and responsibilities of our members. That is why it is so important to keep your governing documents up to date. In the American Legion Auxiliary, we define our governing documents to include Articles of Incorporation (if incorporated), Constitution, Bylaws, Standing Rules, and policies.

What are these documents and what purpose do they serve?

Articles of Incorporation include the name of your unit, physical and mailing addresses, and explanation of the purpose of our organization.

This is a legal document that is filed with your state.

The Constitution & Bylaws, commonly referred to today as Bylaws, should include the name of the organization, its purpose, membership eligibility, officers, duties of the officers, committees, parliamentary authority, and the amending process of these Bylaws. The Constitution & Bylaws should be reviewed often but seldom changed.

Standing Rules are specific to your unit and contain information such as the meetings (time, date, place), dues, elections, awards, and finances. Including your policies in your governing documents makes it clear to members what is expected of them. Some policies included might be a code of ethical conduct, conflict of interest, confidentiality, and social

media agreement.

Your governing documents should be clear and concise without any question of understanding by members.

Whether you are a new unit establishing your Constitution, Bylaws, and Standing Rules, or an existing unit updating your governing documents, the words you use not only will determine how your unit will function, but also the rights of its members. Keeping your governing documents up to date and making them available to all members is the first step to your unit's success.



Michele DeGennaro is a 22-year proud member of Hudson Unit 335 in Florida.

JUNIOR ACTIVITIES: GROWING OUR FUTURE LEADERS

 www.instagram.com/ALAJuniors

The Junior Activities program offers resources to help members up to age 18 navigate their leadership journey. A great starting point is the “Get Involved” tab on the Junior Activities webpage at www.ALAforVeterans.org, which is the gateway to resources for mentoring.

A longstanding tool is the ALA Junior Patch Program, an easy-to-use resource for Junior members to learn the ALA programs. The Purple Patch level for youth, ages 3 through kindergarten, was introduced this year to engage our youngest members, and it has been a hit.

A “Lunch and Learn” Patch Program webinar was held in February to familiarize attendees



with the ALA Junior Patch Program. The webinar is available in ALA Academy. Every Junior mentor needs a copy of the Junior Activities Handbook, which contains valuable information for leading Junior members. The handbook is available for download (member log-in required) at www.ALAforVeterans.org/Member/Committees/Junior-Member-Activities.

The Junior Member of the Year Award presents four division winners with \$1,000 scholarships each, and a \$5,000 scholarship to the

National Junior Member of the Year with a trip to the Auxiliary’s National Convention. Information is available on the Junior Activities webpage at www.ALAforVeterans.org.

National Junior meetings offer a unique opportunity for future leaders to network and learn more about ALA programs ... while having fun! We celebrated nearly 130 Junior members attending the five national Junior meetings during the 2023-2024 administrative year. A special thank-you to the senior members who brought their Juniors to these meetings.

It is up to all of us to mentor our Junior members and teach them our American Legion Family programs. Together, we can make it happen, one Junior member at a time.



Barb Washburn is a 47-year member of the Auxiliary. She belongs to Bickel-Nelson Unit 360 in Cook, Neb.

RISK & COMPLIANCE: MAINTAINING FINANCIAL CREDIBILITY CRUCIAL FOR ALA'S SUCCESS



The Risk & Compliance Committee continues to work on behalf of the National Executive

Committee as one set of eyes and ears to ensure the American Legion Auxiliary and the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation, as a subsidiary, remain diligent in its oversight for compliance with the tax-exempt purpose granted to each of the entities. As important as it is for the national organization, the role of this committee, in its purpose, remains applicable at the department level as a cornerstone of good business practices.

The roles and responsibilities

of the committee focus on the collaborative efforts with management to limit the exposure of internal and external threats to the overall health of the organization. It is recommended that every department should have a Finance Committee and Risk & Compliance Committee to help the departments have a good handle on how things are being run.

The Risk & Compliance Committee is not alone in its efforts, as we share the responsibility of the oversight of the national organization with the Finance Committee and the Executive Committee to the NEC. All three committees are responsible and accountable to the NEC, creating an

equitable balance.

The Risk & Compliance Committee is behind the scenes, ensuring the American Legion Auxiliary and the ALA Foundation maintain the integrity, financial credibility, and long-term visibility so that our members can continue the mission in service to our veterans, military, and their families.

We would like to thank you, our ALA leadership, and National Headquarters staff for all of their hard work on the financial audit and helping us stay in compliance.



Carol Westergren is a 12-year Auxiliary member of Unit 91 in Beebe, Ark.



Candidate: National President
Trish Ward
 Department of Kansas:
John P. Hand Unit 250
Eligibility: Through

father, John M. Brusati, who served in the U.S. Army during World War II. Also adds military service of her grandfather, Edmund S. Lindberg, who served in the U.S. Navy during WWII.

Offices Held: Served several unit-, district-, and department-level offices and chairmanships. National: served as chair of the Auxiliary Emergency Fund, Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, Children & Youth, Constitution & Bylaws, Leadership, ALA Girls Nation, Public Relations, and Membership committees. She also served as the Central Division national vice president; The American Legion Flag Alliance consultant; National Executive Committee member; American Legion Auxiliary Foundation Board of Directors member; ALA Centennial Strategic Plan Team; and American Legion Auxiliary national vice president.



Candidate: National Vice President
Pam Ray
 Department of Illinois:
Urbana Unit 71
Eligibility: Through late

father, Clay Lofton, who served during the Korean War and WWII.

Offices Held: Served numerous unit-, district-, and department-level offices and chairmanships. National: Chair of ALA Girls Nation, Junior Activities, National Security, Membership, Constitution & Bylaws, Children & Youth, and Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation committees. Served on the National Executive Committee and ALA Strategic Planning Committee; served as staff assistant, nurse, and committee member for ALA Girls Nation; she also served as vice chair for the Public Relations and Junior Activities committees.

American Legion Auxiliary members elect five national division vice presidents, one from each ALA division.



Candidate: Central Division National Vice President
Rosemarie W. Hauck
 Department of Missouri:
Florissant Valley

Memorial Unit 444

Eligibility: Through husband, Joel M. Hauck, who served in the U.S. Air Force during the Korean War.



Candidate: Eastern Division National Vice President
Lauren Lloyd
 Department of District of Columbia:
George

Washington Unit 1

Eligibility: Through father, Vietnam War veteran Thomas "Toby" Markham, U.S. Army; and her husband, Eugene "Gene" Lloyd, U.S. Air Force.



Candidate: Northwestern Division National Vice President
Debra Albers
 Department of Nebraska:
Davenport Unit 335

Eligibility: Through father, Paul Straube Sr., who served during WWII.



Candidate: Southern Division National Vice President
Cheryl Shine
 Department of Virginia:
Colonial Heights Unit 284

Eligibility: Through husband, Joseph Shine, who served in the U.S. Navy during the Vietnam War. Also adds military service of her father, U.S. Army veteran Thomas Algerio, who served during WWII; her mother, Claire Algerio, who served in the U.S. Navy during the Korean War; and her grandfather, U.S. Navy veteran Richard Meyer, who served during WWII.



Candidate: Western Division National Vice President
Beverly Eads
 Department of Alaska:
Robert G. Blair Unit 17

Eligibility: Through husband, Vietnam War veteran Ronald Eads.

The national historian completes a historical record of the administrative year in which they serve, maintain, and update the historical records of the ALA.



Candidate: National Historian
DaraAnne Oliver
 Department of Florida:
Unit 219

Eligibility: Through father, David E. Bulterman Sr., who served in the U.S. Navy during the Vietnam War.



Candidate: National Historian
Yvonne Brunner
 Department of New York:
Lynbrook Unit 335

Eligibility: Through husband, Joseph A. Brunner Jr., U.S. Navy.



Candidate: National Historian
Melanie Taylor
 Department of California:
William Russell Ledford Unit 293

Eligibility: Through husband, Vietnam War veteran Bob Taylor, U.S. Navy. Also adds military service of grandfather, father, brothers, son, daughter, and granddaughter.

American Legion Auxiliary chaplains express our founding principle of service to God and country and celebrate diversity among people and faiths. They also provide spiritual and emotional guidance, sending dignity and respect to the occasion.



Candidate: National Chaplain
Monique Batiste
 Department of Louisiana:
Unit 505

Eligibility: Through grandfather, WWII veteran Clinton Richard Johnson.



Candidate: National Chaplain
Judy Sadler
 Department of Colorado:
Leyden Chiles Wickersham Unit 1

Eligibility: Through father, Sgt. Maj. Wesley Freeman, who served in the U.S. Army during WWII. Also adds military service of son, Duane Topping, U.S. Army veteran who served in the Iraq War.

WHEN ARE ALA NATIONAL OFFICERS ELECTED?

These national officer positions serve one-year terms and are elected at National Convention, serving until adjournment of the following National Convention. In addition to these candidates, any member in good standing may be nominated for any of these national offices from the floor at National Convention. ALA national division vice presidents are nominated in their respective division caucuses and are elected by convention delegates. Visit www.ALAforVeterans.org to read more about the candidates for 2024-2025 office. Information presented on this page was provided by the candidates.

UTILIZE POPPY FUNDS TO SUPPORT ALA PARTNERSHIP WITH HONOR FLIGHT



In 2021, the American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters entered a formal partnership with Honor Flight Inc. to support their mission of celebrating America's veterans by inviting them to share in a special day of honor at our nation's memorials that were built to commemorate their service and sacrifice. The ALA's Memorandum of Understanding with Honor Flight allows ALA units and departments to directly donate funds generated from the distribution of our poppy.

Honor Flight's vision is to form a nation where all of America's veterans experience the honor,

gratitude, and community of support they deserve. Their mission is to celebrate U.S. veterans by inviting them to share in a day of honor at Washington, D.C.'s war memorials. Honor Flight Network is a national nonprofit organization made up of independent hubs working together to accomplish the Honor Flight mission. Veterans who participate in an Honor Flight trip get the opportunity to gather with other comrades for the special occasion, remember the sacrifice of those lost, and share their stories and experiences with other veterans.

There are three ways poppy funds may be used to support our veterans participating in an Honor Flight:

1. Money may be donated directly to Honor Flight hubs in your area or to Honor Flight Lone Eagle program. To locate a hub, visit www.honorflight.org/find-a-hub. For more information on the Lone Eagle program, go to loneeagle.honorflight.org.

2. Poppy funds may be used for the items listed at right by donating directly to Honor Flight Inc. by

visiting www.honorflight.org/donations. Once on that page, click on "Poppy Funds from The American Legion Family," located on the bottom right.

3. Another way to utilize poppy funds to support Honor Flight Inc. is by purchasing items from the list below directly. You will first need to coordinate that effort with your local hub or with the Lone Eagle program.

Your poppy funds may be used for any of the following items:

For the veterans:

- Food and nutrition
- Oxygen
- Wheelchairs
- Medical teams on each flight
- Wheelchair-accessible buses

For the guardian (companion/caregiver who attends with the veteran):

- Airfare to accompany veteran on the trip
- Food and nutrition
- Hotel accommodations to remain with veteran during the trip
- Guardian training and associated needs to execute necessary tasks — food, room rental, medical training, and identifying articles of clothing.

MID-YEAR NEC MEETING UPDATE

The American Legion Auxiliary's National Executive Committee conducted its mid-year board meeting virtually in February to discuss the business of the organization. The board consists of NEC members (52), national officers (11), and Past National Presidents who have a voice but no vote. Like all regularly scheduled ALA national board meetings, it was an open forum meeting. The meeting took place via Zoom and had about 125 participants present.

During the meeting, voting members of the board ratified any national committee appointment changes and charter cancellations since the 2023

National Convention, as well as heard reports from national officers and staff members. The national Finance Committee and ALA National Headquarters Finance Division prepared a "Year to Date" presentation for the board, highlighting any areas of concern in the fiscal year 2024 budget. The national Risk & Compliance Committee — alongside National's auditing firm — presented the external audit for acceptance and filing.

Updates/changes from the mid-year NEC meeting:

- The NEC member from Nevada made a motion to remove the national president and national vice

president IT equipment policy from the consent agenda and referred it back to the Finance Committee to review language so that it did not assume the national vice president automatically ascended to the position of national president. The motion passed.

- Department of North Dakota removed Unit 188 and Unit 299 from the list of charters to be cancelled.
- The national secretary reported the Articles of Incorporation that were updated during the 2022 National Convention were filed and accepted by the Indiana Secretary of State.
- The 2023 combined audited financial statements were accepted as presented (adopted by the board as final).

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

MAY

May We Remember

As we extend a warm welcome to the enchanting month of May, please allow me to transport you to the heart of Hawaii, where a unique and vibrant celebration graces the islands.

May 1 is May Day in Hawaii, affectionately known as Lei Day. It is a cherished tradition steeped in the spirit of aloha, unity, and community. It is common practice to “make a lei, gift a lei, and get a lei.” Lei Day epitomizes the interconnectedness of nature, people, and community, serving as a poignant reminder of the profound beauty that blossoms when we open our hearts to both give and receive.

In the embrace of May’s enchantment, there is much to honor.

As a nation, we stand united, recognizing that liberties we enjoy today are built upon the sacrifices of the brave.

May our hearts be filled with gratitude for those who stood on the front lines, most likely steeped in fear yet displaying extraordinary courage and valor. Their sacrifice echoes through the annals of history, a testament to the price of freedom and resilience of the human spirit and the enduring strength of Americans.

Divine Presence, in this sacred month of May, bless the American Legion Auxiliary with unity and purpose. May our efforts to honor veterans and serve communities be guided by compassion. Illuminate our path with understanding, empathy, and a shared commitment to making a positive impact. Amen.

JUNE

Jubilation in Unity

In the tranquil embrace of June, amid starlit evenings and watermelon joy, may we uncover fresh avenues to embrace, cherish, and welcome one another. For this is the path to ensuring our commitment to inclusion resonates and creates an environment where all feel valued and heard.

Amidst efforts to unwind, perhaps even during vacation, let us be reminded that our collective strength blossoms through embracing diversity.

June pays homage to Alzheimer’s, Pride, World Ocean, and Juneteenth, urging us to celebrate the richness of our community and honor each individual contribution.

It’s evident: Our mission flourishes when we cultivate an environment of inclusion.

Let us pause in reflection, offering gratitude for the freedoms we cherish, and the sacrifices made by those we honor.

May our actions be guided by compassion,

understanding, and respect for one another, embodying the true spirit of unity.

May we strengthen our bonds, upholding the American Legion Auxiliary as a welcoming space for all who share our mission.

Divine Presence, we come to you to ask for help to open our hearts and guide us to stand united, welcoming in spirit and forgiveness, echoing the wisdom of our friends who share Philippians 2:2: “Be of the same mind, maintaining the same love.” May our hearts be beacons of acceptance, weaving compassion into our mission. Amen.

JULY

Freedom through Faith

As we stand on the threshold of July, a month that resonates deeply with the ideals of freedom and independence, let us gather to reflect on the profound significance of our shared faith and commitment to service within the American Legion Auxiliary.

July, a month that marks the birth of our nation, calls us to celebrate the ideals that unite us — freedom, service, and resilience.

Wrap us with all our varied paths of our faith journeys, and let us stand together, honoring the sacrifices made for the liberties we hold dear.

As we celebrate the blessings of freedom, let us also honor the sacrifices of those who have defended our liberties with unwavering courage and devotion.

May our faith guide us to embrace the inherent dignity of every individual and to champion the cause of justice and equality for all.

As fireworks light up the sky, let them remind us of the spark within each of us, urging us to shine brightly in the face of adversity.

May our shared commitment to service be a beacon, illuminating the path toward a better, more compassionate world.

With gratitude for the freedoms we share and the bonds that tie us, let us march forward into July with renewed dedication to our mission.

Gracious Creator, as July unfolds, unite us in purpose and spirit. Bless our endeavors with courage and compassion. Guide us to honor the sacrifices of our veterans and serve our communities with unwavering dedication. May our actions reflect the values of love, unity, and peace. Amen.



Brister Thomas is a military spouse, daughter, and PUFL member from eUnit 56 in Hawai'i.

STAY FOCUSED

WAYS OUR MEMBERS CAN MAINTAIN COMMITMENT TO ALA, MISSION

Servicemembers and their families know what it means to keep a devoted, steadfast eye on the mission. After all, a well-known credo in the military is that of “mission first, people always.”

This mantra, which touts the dual value of focused mission advancement and constructive personal interaction, is no less applicable to the members of the American Legion Auxiliary.

Like the veterans we support, ALA members are most effective when they work collaboratively to advance causes that fulfill the organization’s mission. That means setting aside concerns that are not mission-aligned and overcoming personal differences to work together in the spirit of *Service Not Self*.

All organizations — from Fortune 500 companies to branches of the military — face distractions. When differences of approaches and opinions interfere with the “mission first, people always” spirit of teamwork, they can make an organization’s efforts less effective.

The notion of collaborating in support of our mission seems straightforward. But it requires us to regularly remind ourselves of the mission that initially drew us to join — even when our association has more than a century of history and a

commitment to the noble cause of supporting veterans.

The American Legion Auxiliary stands for a variety of ideals, but supports the same overarching goal: improving the lives of veterans and enhancing our military communities, states, and nation they serve. When we evaluate the why and the work the ALA does to support the mission and the reasons it attracted us to join, we are better equipped to focus on those efforts when distractions threaten to steal our attention.

How can ALA members maintain their commitment to collaboratively supporting the mission? Here are two very important ways:

1. Stay positive.

Belonging to the ALA means just that: belonging. It provides countless opportunities to be part of a group doing meaningful work. But group interactions can get complicated, whether it’s through negative talk about others or the formation of cliques that leave some feeling excluded.

In these cases, the first step toward staying mission-focused is to

look for occasions to work with others in positive ways. Whether through social gatherings or service activities, members can find opportunities to get together and serve that rise above individual differences and emphasize positive connections and veteran support.

2. Get educated.

The ALA provides a host of resources that are valuable not only for those learning about the organization for the first time, but also for those seeking a refresher. Among the information and training tools available:

- ALA website. The *About Us* page at www.ALAforVeterans.org/about provides an overview of what the organization is and how it operates. The page offers links to a comprehensive set of topics and materials with details about the ALA’s mission and vision, as well as facts and figures showing its impact.

- ALA Academy. Members have the option of taking free courses through this online training platform. Some ALA Academy courses are self-paced, and others are live webinars.

The courses cover a broad range of subjects that can deepen members’ understanding of the organization and offer insights for working with other members in support of veterans.

One of those courses, *ALA 101*, provides the perfect foundation for revisiting the benefits of supporting our mission. The course presents the story of the Auxiliary’s founding and explores the many ways members have worked to improve the lives of veterans and their communities since 1919.

By committing to regularly revisiting the mission of the American Legion Auxiliary and the reasons it attracted us to join, it goes back to the intended audience and ideological issues that can deter the important efforts of the ALA. Members can rise above the fray to put “mission first, people always.”



Get an ALA refresher on the basics:
Visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/about.

RESPONDING TO INQUIRIES FROM POTENTIAL MEMBERS

TIPS FOR GETTING BACK TO MEMBERS IN A TIMELY, PERSONALIZED, AND ONGOING WAY

A 2023 report from the University of Maryland's Do Good Institute shows that nearly half — or 47% — of U.S. nonprofit leaders describe recruitment as a significant problem.

Through activities like posting an organization's logo or participating in community events, marketing can help nonprofit organizations like the American Legion Auxiliary attract members and change that recruitment narrative.

But to be successful, this

marketing needs the support of the group's current members. ALA units should be prepared to respond appropriately to any inquiries they receive from people introduced to the organization through marketing efforts.

"Many people want to help in some capacity," said Jennifer Mullen, senior instructor of marketing for Indiana State University's Scott College of Business, "or they want to see if the organizational mission

aligns with their personal values."

To capitalize on this interest, members should respond in a way that's timely, personalized, and ongoing, said Mullen, who regularly consults with nonprofit organizations and incorporates nonprofit fundraising into her marketing courses.

Mullen recommends the following six tips for responding to inquiries from potential Auxiliary members.



1. PROVIDE A PROMPT AND PERSONALIZED RESPONSE.

By answering

any questions about the ALA quickly, members show respect for the person who's inquiring and a genuine interest in what they have to say. Responses should avoid canned replies, providing customized answers to the specific questions raised. The organization should take note of the best ways to reach the person who has expressed interest — capturing their email address, for example — and store that contact information for future outreach.



2. HIGHLIGHT THE ALA'S VALUE AND RELEVANCE.

In responses to queries, current

members should include a focus on the unique value that the ALA can offer the individual. The information that members provide should emphasize the ways that the ALA's work in support of veterans, military, and their families aligns with the values and goals of the individual who's asking about the organization. One of the best ways to illustrate the Auxiliary's value is by asking current members to share their own stories about the impact that the group has had on them and on their community.



3. ENGAGE PROSPECTIVE MEMBERS IN DIALOGUE.

"Marketing

used to be a one-way form of communication. Those days are long gone, and consumers want to feel heard," Mullen said. With this point in mind, it's important for current members to ask questions of those who are inquiring about the ALA, to better understand their interests and motivations. By taking the time to learn about the person who's asking questions, the group can provide answers that address an individual's concerns and build connections.



4. INVITE THEM TO UNIT ACTIVITIES.

Does your unit have a meeting or

social activity coming up? Does the group have service activities planned? Inviting someone who has expressed interest in the ALA to take part in a group event — especially if it's one that aligns with their own interests — can help them to feel involved and foster a sense of purpose. Additionally, participation in these activities provides a firsthand look at how the ALA advances its mission.



5. CONTINUE WITH OUTREACH EFFORTS.

Contact with those who ask

about the ALA shouldn't end after the first interaction, which is why making note of people's contact information is critical. Current members should stay in touch with prospective members, and the unit should offer updates through channels like emails, texts, or social media posts. These continued outreach efforts keep the Auxiliary top of mind and reinforce the organization's value for those who have asked about it.



6. BALANCE ENTHUSIASM WITH RESPECT.

While it's good to show enthusiasm for

the ALA and new members, there's a fine line between showing passion and overstepping boundaries. In communicating with those who have questions about the organization, members should avoid using language that seems overly salesy or puts pressure on someone to join. A consistent message about the ALA's values and impact — and the personal fulfillment that they can bring — is more effective in building interest and attracting members.

important hopeful friendships influential
 patriotic outstanding fun motivational
 memories inspirational epic womanhood uplifting
amazing life-changing extraordinary dynamic
 support influential incredible monumental passionate
 discovery impactful significant unity
inspiring iconic phenomenal
 spectacular transformative spectacular
 perfect special unforgettable dedication opportunity
 community **empowering** beautiful
 encouraging genuine
 remarkable extraordinary energizing remarkable magic family

Describing ALA Girls State and Nation in one word — not an easy task. So many words came to mind, as we discovered, when we asked the question on the ALA Girls Nation Instagram account @ALAGirlsNation. Here's a look at the responses, with the largest words representing the most answered.

GIRLS STATE DOCUMENTARY AVAILABLE FOR STREAMING

The much anticipated documentary filmed during a session of ALA Missouri Girls State premiered on the big screen and is now available on AppleTV+.

American Legion Auxiliary members and ALA Girls State alumnae know how transformative, educational, and inspirational the ALA Girls State program is. Now, everyone will have the opportunity to get a glimpse inside one to witness it for themselves.

Following in the footsteps of the 2020 documentary *Boys State*, the documentary *Girls State* premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in January. *Boys State* directors Jesse Moss and Amanda McBaine also are behind *Girls State*. Moss and McBaine describe the film as a sibling, not a sequel.

In an interview with Drew Taylor from *The Wrap*, McBaine said they always wanted to make *Girls State*, but the question was when and where. They first considered Texas again but chose Missouri as the filming location, partly because

the state is politically complicated, said McBaine. In the documentary, participants featured held views across different areas of the political spectrum, allowing voices from multiple sides to be heard.

The film was shot in 2022, which was also the first year ALA Missouri Girls State and The American Legion Missouri Boys State were hosted on the same campus at the same time, but as separate programs. This naturally led to comparisons between programs in the documentary.

Hot-button issues of the day are often top of mind during sessions of ALA Girls State and ALA Girls Nation. During the 2022 ALA Missouri Girls State, a big political

topic was making headlines as participants arrived on campus: News of the SCOTUS decision overturning *Roe v. Wade* was being reported, giving audiences a real look at viewpoints on the issue from today's youth.

There have been great reviews



from film critics so far. The film has received a 95% rating on film rating site Rotten Tomatoes. *Girls State* is available for streaming on Apple TV+. If you missed *Boys State*, it is still available on Apple TV+.



ALA Girls State and American Legion Boys State participants may qualify for a Samsung American Legion Scholarship, available for high school juniors who participate in the current session of ALA Girls State or American Legion Boys State and are a direct descendant (or legally adopted child) of a

U.S. military veteran who served honorably on active duty during a period of war. Applications must be submitted prior to day one of their state's program. For more information, visit www.Legion.org/Scholarships/Samsung.



ALA Girls Nation senators will be busy debating bills and visiting our nation's

capital in July. You can follow along with the 77th annual ALA Girls Nation on both Facebook and Instagram @ALAGirlsNation.



We want to hear from alumnae of all ages! How has ALA Girls State or ALA Girls Nation impacted your life? Tell us your story. Email us at ALAMagazine@ALAforVeterans.org.

ALA MEMBER THANKFUL FOR SECOND CHANCE AT COLLEGE



Valerie Wagner

The Non-Traditional Student Scholarship helps those who are part of The American Legion Family, a veteran, or spouse of an active-duty

servicemember or veteran pursue a college degree later in life or allow them to pick up where they left off when their studies were interrupted.

Valerie Wagner, Department of Minnesota, is a 2023 Non-Traditional Student Scholarship recipient.

Did you attend college directly after graduating high school?

After high school, I went to South Dakota State University to obtain my bachelor’s degree in nursing. My desire to care for individuals, families, and communities drove my passion for a career in nursing. I was determined to finish my degree in four years and sacrificed much by taking summer classes. Technology was in its infancy, and there were no online courses. Yet, I committed so much time commuting three hours daily and studying to stay close to my family.

Why did you go back to school for an advanced degree?

I have always desired to enhance my education and obtain a master’s degree in nursing. Twenty-one years ago, I was about to enroll in classes for a nurse practitioner master’s degree in nursing; however, I still needed to continue to work full time for financial reasons. Once I learned of my fourth pregnancy, I knew I had to postpone my education for the family’s needs. Now, we are empty nesters, and I felt that the time was right for me to further my education.

Your college major is nursing education. What inspired that career choice?

My professor from SDSU during my bachelor’s degree was Becky Maurer. Professor Maurer was thoughtful, supportive, and caring. During my senior year, she guided me always to seek more education, and that education is something nobody can take away. We kept in touch after college, and she consistently praises my efforts to improve my clients’ lives.

How did you find out about the ALA’s Non-Traditional Student Scholarship?

I knew about it when my daughter, Sierra, was starting college. She received this award in 2015 because of the delay in starting college after her high school graduation because of her basic training and Advanced Individual Training (AIT) in the Army. As I started my return to college, I knew applying for this scholarship was the perfect fit.

What does it mean to you that you both received this scholarship?

It’s extraordinary that both my daughter and I received the ALA Non-Traditional Student Scholarship. It means we prioritize our education

with hard work and determination. I have always emphasized education by telling her nobody can take it away. I am so proud of my daughter. She is a fantastic person with grit and integrity.

With so many scholarships focused on high school-aged students, how does this one stand out?

I love that ALA invests in its members and provides opportunities for self-improvement through education. It means so much that all members of all ages and backgrounds can work toward bettering themselves, which improves the communities they live in and serve.

Do you have any advice for other non-traditional students when it comes to applying for this scholarship?

We are our source of self-doubt. The six inches between your ears can decide if you take the steps toward your education or goals. Shut off the doubt and the negative thoughts. Ask the questions, do the research, and take the steps necessary to succeed in starting your future through education. Apply for all eligible scholarships, and do not compare yourself to others.

5 strategies to be successful in college as an adult



Currently, 1 in 10 college students is age 40 or older. By 2027, 3.3 million students will fall within this age group. Here are five strategies that can help you thrive as a non-traditional college student:

- STRATEGY 1:** Apply where your experience and education are considered for admission.
- STRATEGY 2:** Reduce financial stress.
- STRATEGY 3:** Manage your time and workload.
- STRATEGY 4:** Find support and resources.
- STRATEGY 5:** Don’t forget to enjoy life.

Make a list of your most important personal and professional responsibilities and plan your schoolwork accordingly.

Source: Franklin University, franklin.edu



Learn more about available American Legion Auxiliary scholarships at www.ALAforVeterans.org/scholarships.



AMERICAN LEGION POSTS BRING AWARENESS TO BE THE ONE WITH WATCH PARTIES

The American Legion’s sponsorship of Chip Ganassi Racing’s American Legion Honda is increasing exposure to the Be the One mission. In support, posts across the country are hosting watch parties as part of the 2024 NTT INDYCAR SERIES.

This season, INDYCAR rookie Linus Lundqvist is behind the wheel of the No. 8 Honda — which prominently features The American Legion and Be the One branding on its livery — for most of the 2024 season. And defending INDYCAR SERIES champion Alex Palou also will carry American Legion branding on his No. 10 DHL Honda.

This provides an opportunity for posts to invite fellow American Legion Family members and other racing enthusiasts to the post and cheer on The American Legion drivers. Once there, guests can relax and enjoy watching the race while also learning more about Be the One. It’s an opportunity in a relaxed social setting to share information about the Legion’s veteran suicide prevention mission.

The American Legion has tips for hosting watch parties on their website at Legion.org.



(Photo: Hilary Ott/The American Legion)

BE THE ONE RESOURCES AND TRAINING

The American Legion’s Be the One mission encourages American Legion Family members, veterans, servicemembers, and others to act when they believe a veteran is at risk of suicide. It’s a mission to help destigmatize the need to ask for help and save the lives of veterans. To help members deliver this mission at the local level, there are several resources and trainings available.

As part of the Be the One mission, The American Legion is partnering with Columbia University to conduct training for those who want to learn more about interacting with and responding to veterans who may be in crisis. After the training, participants will be able to:

- Use the Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale to determine at-risk individuals.
- Identify risk factors and warning signs.
- Outline the types of suicidal

ideation and four behaviors that indicate imminent risk.

- Communicate effectively with an individual who may be at risk of hurting themselves.

Members of The American Legion Family are encouraged to take part in this training and share it with their communities. For updates on when training will be held both in person and virtually, visit BetheOne.org/training.

American Legion National Headquarters is updating its resources for posts, districts, and departments to use. Among the new items:

- How-to videos, including a series — narrated by an American Legion post commander — about how to conduct a successful event.
- Sample social media posts to promote events.
- Revised sample press releases.
- And more!

Visit Legion.org/BetheOne/ resources.



LISTEN IN!

Check out the weekly podcast *Tango Alpha Lima*, which discusses issues important to veterans, servicemembers, and those who support them. All episodes are available in both audio and video formats. You can find episodes on Legion.org, the Legion’s YouTube channel, and wherever you get your podcasts.

CAMP LEJEUNE TOXIC WATER CLAIMS WINDOW CLOSES IN AUGUST 2024

Although the window of opportunity to file a CLJA claim closes Aug. 10, litigation is finally moving forward. Attorneys say the first trial could be as early as May for individuals who allege they contracted bladder cancer, kidney cancer, leukemia, Parkinson's disease, or non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Currently, more than 164,000 administrative claims have been filed with the U.S. Navy and approximately 1,500 lawsuits have been filed in federal court.

On Feb. 6, the court surprisingly sided with the U.S. Department of Justice and said victims could not have their cases heard by a jury but would have to be heard by a federal judge. Attorneys are advocating for bundled trials for individuals with similar diseases because this would be more efficient in hearing the cases in court.

The CLJA does not list specific covered diseases, and anyone could sue if they resided or worked aboard Camp Lejeune for 30 days or more between 1953 and 1987, as long as they can show they suffered harm as a result of their exposure. However, many law firms are drawing a line on what claims they will file.

In addition to the lawsuit, the Veterans Administration is now reopening and reviewing claims that were previously denied due to the CLJA considerations. One of the most common questions asked by veterans is whether filing a claim under the CLJA will put their current or prospective VA benefits at risk. The VA has stated in official guidance that "if you are awarded a relief from a CLJA lawsuit, your VA benefits will not be reduced, and your eligibility for other VA benefits will not be affected." If a veteran is already receiving benefits or other compensation for injuries caused by the water at Camp Lejeune, the act still gives them the right to sue — and the benefits will not be lost even if an action is brought under the act.

With the Aug. 10 deadline approaching, Legionnaires and family

www.ALforVeterans.org



CHAMPS: Newport Harbor Post 291 Color Guard of Newport Beach, Calif., poses for a picture after the National Color Guard Contest at The American Legion's 104th National Convention in Charlotte, N.C. (photo: Hilary Ott/The American Legion).

COLOR GUARDS WANTED FOR NATIONAL CONVENTION

The American Legion Family's National Convention is Aug. 23-29 in New Orleans. An annual tradition is the Color Guard Contest. Now is the time to submit applications.

In order to participate in the National Color Guard contest, you must be any of the following:

- Member of The American Legion Family.
- Member of a JROTC program.
- A mixture of the above Legion "Family" can participate in all classes in the Color Guard Contest, except for the Military Class, which must consist of American Legion members exclusively.

members are urged to reach out in advance of the deadline in order to have their case reviewed with plenty of time. With the plethora of law firms vying for veterans and family members to represent, many are charging exorbitant rates that include costs up to 20 percent in addition to attorney fees.

Bergmann & Moore has been selected by The American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary to assist their members in filing CLJA claims. They have agreed to handle the CLJA claims for 33.3

There are four classes of competition:

- Advancing/Retiring Colors
- Military
- Military-Open
- Open

To be considered for the National Commander's Color Guard, units must compete in either Military or Military-Open and Advancing/Retiring Colors. Units can represent any part of the Legion Family or have a combination of members in the unit.

For contest applications and rules, go to Legion.org/convention/contests.

percent to include all fees and costs. Claimants who believe they were exposed to toxic water at Camp Lejeune may speak to an intake specialist by calling (800) 898-9450. Callers are encouraged to mention the Legion when they call. If you have questions prior to filing a claim, call retired U.S. Marine Annita Best, Bergmann & Moore's CLJA spokesperson, at (301) 290-3148. The firm Beasley Allen, Bergmann & Moore's co-counsel, serves on the plaintiff's executive committee for the CLJA litigation.

AMERICAN LEGION FAMILY HISTORY



Did you know?

- American Legion Baseball was created in 1925

and about 50 percent of Major League Baseball players are graduates of the program.

- The American Legion celebrated its 105th birthday on March 15. The Auxiliary will turn 105 on Nov. 10.
- In 1932, The Sons of The American Legion were officially recognized.



American Legion Auxiliary Department of Michigan member Laura Keil and her husband, Dan, a Legionnaire, created a YouTube series called Veterans Post Tour. Dan is a combat veteran and has a degree in film he received through the GI Bill of Rights. They visit different American Legion posts, Veterans of Foreign Wars posts, and other veterans service organizations across the country — so far, they've filmed over a handful of posts and have visited over 50 in the last year and a half. They film the post, highlighting what makes each one unique and what it does for the community, and they interview the officers and members. Their hope is that by filming this series, they can encourage younger members to join.

Can you share how you two got the idea to create the YouTube series Veterans Post Tour?

Laura: I actually was a professional musician for 15 years and I got invited to play at one of The American Legion posts recently. I like to have a second guitar player. Dan played, they found out he was a combat veteran, and said, "You have to join the Legion." He joined and [afterward], we went to all the Legions in our area. During one of those nights hanging out, we talked about starting a YouTube series and going to different posts around the country, showing what they do around the community.

Dan: I didn't know about The American Legion before this. It was important to get the name out there of the organization for veterans like me who have been out for 15 years who might not know about [the Legion]. I think that's important for veterans to find some commonality with other veterans.

What is your goal during each visit to a post home?

Dan: For each post that we film, if we can get them at least one new member, I say we have accomplished our mission. I want every veteran who is eligible to join these organizations. Without them,

we as veterans don't have the voices we deserve to have in Washington. They have seats in Washington — they can fight for funds veterans need for whatever they have going on.

involved in the community they are in. The American Legion does so much for the community, and we want to highlight that with each episode.

What do you hope people take away when they watch your videos?

Dan: I hope if they are a veteran and they are not a member of The American Legion or VFW, it gives them something to think about. For the veterans who are members, I hope it motivates them to participate a little bit more, to reach out to the younger ones to come in — that they see our episodes and are going to go talk to that younger veteran. Commanders and members who have more leadership positions can get ideas on how they can make their post better. There are so many ways this can benefit other people.

Is there anything else you want to add about Veterans Post Tour?

Dan: I think it's important to say there is a stigma of the Legion, the VFW — dark, dingy watering holes. We've been to plenty of posts that are bright and warm and friendly and welcoming, and I can bring my kids in here to watch the game, bring board games,

kids can play pinball. We need to get away from the stigma of a bunch of old veterans drinking and telling war stories. Many just want to hang out with other veterans where they are understood.



Laura: A lot of younger veterans don't realize they are eligible for benefits and disability. These organizations are a channel for them to be able to get benefits and be



Watch previous and upcoming episodes of Veterans Post Tour by visiting www.YouTube.com/@veteransposttour. Want Laura and Dan to come to your post home? Have questions for them? Email veteransposttour@gmail.com.

HOW TO HELP GET YOUR LEGION POST HOME ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Many buildings that American Legion Auxiliary units and American Legion posts call home have architectural or historical significance. And that could make them perfect candidates for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.

Taking the steps to include these properties on the registry can be beneficial — not only for the Auxiliary members who gather there now, but also for The American Legion Family and the surrounding community in the years to come.

“People embrace their history if they know their history,” said Jim Gabbert, a National Park Service historian, in a 2015 video from the National Trust for Historic Preservation. “I like to encourage people to list properties on the National Register. It’s an acknowledgement that this place is important, and it serves as a keystone for future planning and for fundraising.”

So, where should ALA units turn if they want to seek the inclusion of the buildings where they meet on the National Register of Historic Places? Here are answers to five key questions about the process:

1. What is the National Register of Historic Places?

The National Park Service manages the National Register of Historic Places program. Authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the program maintains the register as a list of historic buildings, sites, objects, and districts. Being on this list indicates that a place is worthy of preservation.

2. What are the criteria for places to be on the National Register?

When evaluating whether a property qualifies for this list of historic places, the National Park Service considers its:

- Age and integrity: Is the property old enough to be historic, generally at least 50 years? Is its appearance relatively unchanged from the past?

- Significance: Is it associated with happenings, people, or achievements that were impactful in the past? Could investigating the location uncover information about history?

3. What are the benefits of including a property on the National Register?

When a site is on the National Register, it can foster a sense of pride among its owners and those who use it. It can serve as a source of historical knowledge for students and others in the community. Inclusion on the list can also offer some tangible benefits:

- Eligibility for grants and tax credits: The National Park Service offers federal grant and tax credit programs for National Register of Historic Places owners who qualify.

- Protection against removal: In the event of a federal project — highway construction, for example — that would otherwise require its removal, a National Register designation can protect a place from destruction.

4. What is the process for pursuing National Register designation?

Unless the property is on federal or tribal land, the process for obtaining National Register status begins with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). The National Register of Historic Places provides a webpage with links to each state’s SHPO: www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/state-historic-preservation-offices.htm.

After an individual or group



reaches out to the SHPO, that office contacts any property owners who the designation could affect, notifies local officials, and solicits public comment. State reviewers consider suggested nominations, a process that typically takes at least 90 days.

Then, once the National Park Service receives a nomination from the state, it decides on the proposed listing within 45 days.

5. What are other resources that provide information and assist with the application process?

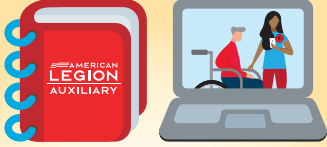
A variety of webpages can be helpful for exploring the ins and outs of nominating a property for the National Register of Historic Places. Two of those sites, from the National Park Service:

- How to List a Property (www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/how-to-list-a-property.htm) — Describes the nominating process for National Register listings. It also provides details about regulations that govern federally designated historic places, locations for ordering a plaque for the honor, and the process for nominating properties on federal or tribal land.

- FAQs (www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/faqs.htm) answers questions on topics ranging from how to determine whether a property is already on the National Register to what steps to take to apply for tax credits.



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



A GREAT RESOURCE FOR ALA MEMBERS

ALA members can find useful resources in the MyAuxiliary member portal at www.ALAforVeterans.org:

- ALA Academy — online courses and recorded webinars
- Online dues payment
- Guides and forms
- ALA Red Book
- Program information for ALA national committees
- Member benefits



COMING UP

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

- National Veterans Creative Arts Festival: May 11-18
- National Poppy Day®: Friday before Memorial Day (May 24 this year)
- Memorial Day: May 27
- Flag Day: June 14
- Independence Day: July 4
- ALA Girls Nation: July 20-27
- ALA National Convention in New Orleans: Aug. 23-29

READ PAST ISSUES



Take a look at the past archived issues of *Auxiliary* magazine, available online at www.ALAforVeterans.org/magazine.

SPOT SCAMMERS BEFORE THEY STRIKE

Scammers are getting more sophisticated on the emails they send as bait. Even ALA National Headquarters has seen emails that look convincing. These phishing emails will contain known ALA-related names and look like they come from an ALA member at first glance. But our organization is not alone in this problem — other groups and businesses have seen an increase in these types of scams.

How do you protect yourself from phishing emails?

- Look at the email address. It may come from a familiar name, but if you look closer at the sender's address, you can verify if it is real or not. For example, any emails from ALA National Headquarters will end with @ALAforVeterans or @Legion-Aux. If you are in doubt, search for the sender's legitimate email domain to see if it matches. A common trick scammers often

use is adding extra letters or slightly changing them (e.g., "cell" vs. "call," or "celll").

- Never email personal or financial information to an unsolicited email.
- Never send money or gift cards.
- Never reply with personal information.
- Don't click on attachments or links until you confirm they are legit.
- Still unsure? Is this person in your contacts? Do you have their phone number? Reach out and ask if they sent the email.

Scammers are also active on social media. If someone you don't know responds to a comment you make on social media and asks to be your friend, it may be a scammer. Usually, these comments start with a compliment about how beautiful or handsome you are, and they tell you how much they want to connect with you as a friend. Don't fall for it. They are just trying to gather personal information about you.

Now Available: ALA *America The Beautiful*, *Poppy*, and *Halloween* Coloring Books

Purchase online at emblem.legion.org
or download free at www.ALAforVeterans.org/coloring-books

“There is peace even in the storm.”

— Vincent Van Gogh, painter



It can be hard to find beauty or a positive light when you're in a challenging situation. How do we get past it? Express your feelings, practice gratitude, focus on personal growth, and remember that you're not alone.

Above: A Gold Star Family member releases a painted lady butterfly during a commemoration ceremony held at Fort Lee's Memorial Garden in May 2022. The ceremony honored fallen loved ones who sacrificed their lives while serving in the U.S. military (photo: Chad Menegay, U.S. Army).

*A Community of Volunteers
Serving Veterans, Military,
and their Families*

Learn about the Poppy Program

- Can ALA members make poppies?
- Who is considered part of “a veteran’s family”?
- How poppy funds cannot be used
- Purchasing poppy kits and labels
- How to make the ALA red crepe paper poppy
- How to be an ALA poppy production manager
- Working directly with veterans at a state veterans home
- Working with poppy makers indirectly
- National Poppy Day®
- Effective marketing practices

Download our *Poppy Program Guide* at www.ALAforVeterans.org to learn more about poppy distribution and the five criteria for use of poppy funds. Or to purchase printed copies, go to American Legion Flag & Emblem Sales at Emblem.Legion.org.

 AMERICAN
LEGION
AUXILIARY

Poppy Program Guide

Expanded ways
to use the poppy
to raise funds
and awareness

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

