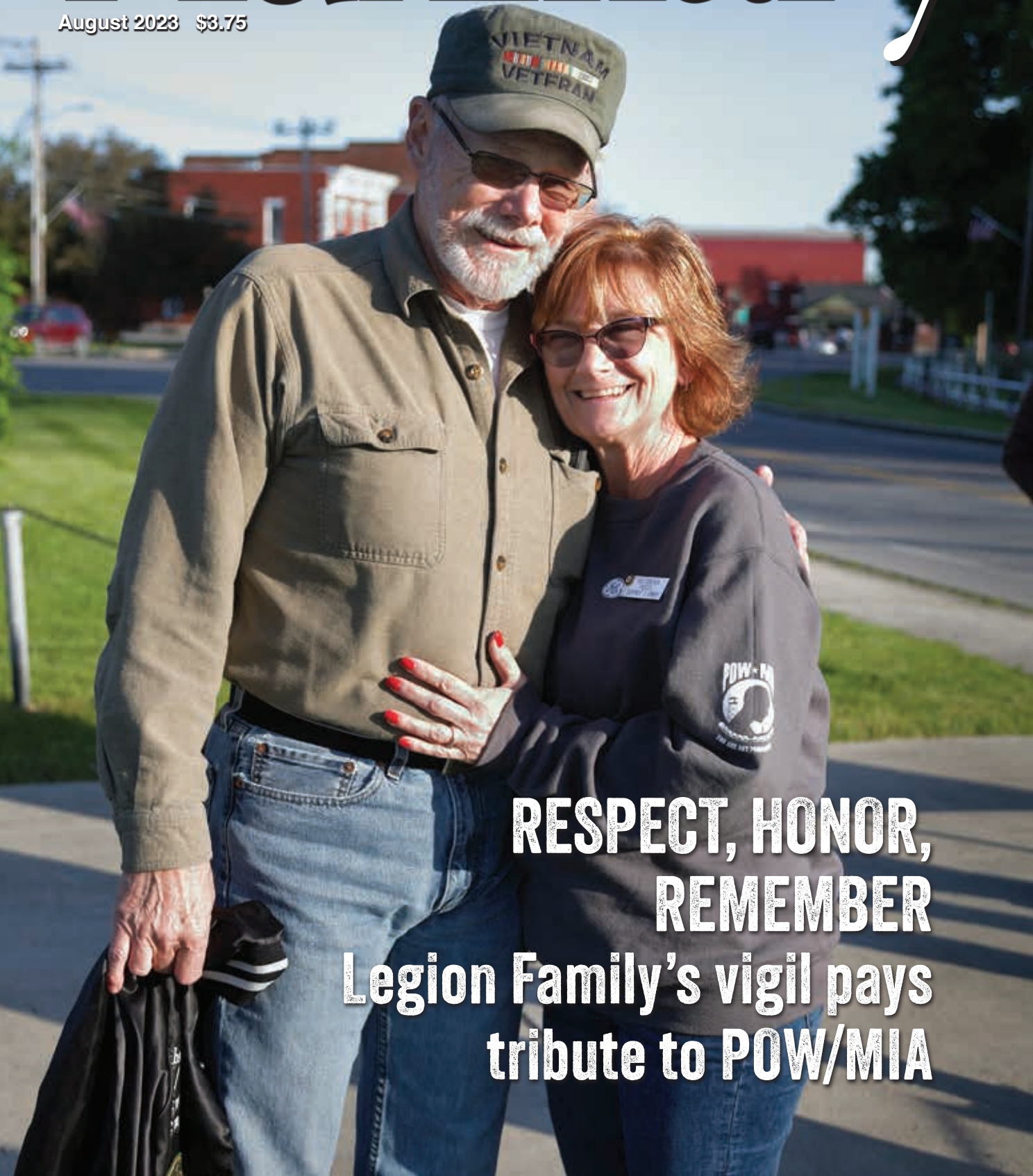


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Auxiliary

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ON THE COVER: ALA member Kelly Donaldson of Vermont Unit 49, and her father, Vietnam veteran Joseph Donaldson, at the weekly Prisoner of War/Missing in Action vigil the post/unit hosts in Fair Haven, Vt., in remembrance of those who have still not come home (photo: vibeporraitart.com). Read more on page 30. **ABOVE:** Artwork from National Veterans Creative Arts Festival gold medal winner Steve Kost. The metalwork is titled *Achilles Heel*. Read more on page 24.



PROUD WINNER: National President Vickie Koutz gives veteran performer Kevin Dougherty his gold medal at the 2023 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival.

It's the final countdown! The 2022-2023 American Legion Auxiliary administrative year is coming to an end. I've enjoyed these last few months of visiting units and departments and meeting grassroots members working the ALA mission.

In **Washington state**, I had the chance to tour the Orting Veterans Village, a community of several tiny houses. It was amazing, and I even got to meet several people from the company that built them. All residents in the tiny homes are veterans. It was a great first-time experience!

Although Christmas is still months away, Santa's Castle in Washington is stocked and ready to go. I love Christmas, and getting to visit Santa's Castle on the grounds of Joint Base Lewis-McChord was humbling. Servicemembers can shop for their children the first two weeks after Thanksgiving. They have approximately 115 volunteer elves who help each year. If I lived close to Santa's Castle, I would definitely

volunteer there.

At American Legion Post 2 in **Oregon**, the Auxiliary participates in rock painting, and they share that passion with the community. What a fun idea!

I appreciate everyone who understood the importance of helping our NVCAF companions.

Attending the 2023 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NVCAF) was incredible. I met the gold medal winning veterans — some of them old friends and many new ones. The veterans and companions were so appreciative of what we do, but we all know as members of the American Legion Auxiliary that we are the lucky ones to be in the presence of our heroes and the people who care for them.

I appreciate everyone who understood the importance of helping our NVCAF companions. It was incredibly rewarding to see

companions eating with their veterans at this year's Festival (something previously many never could afford to do) because of this initiative. At National Convention in late August, I can't wait to announce the grand total of money raised.

Going to the state capital grounds in **Louisiana**, I had the honor of laying a wreath at the Gold Star Families Memorial, and also placed a wreath at the Southwest Louisiana Veterans Cemetery.

Celebrating the inaugural American Legion Family Day in **Alaska** was a great experience. It was wonderful to see Family members in action together and opening their doors to the community.

In **Minnesota**, I toured the Armed Forces Service Center, which is located at the airport. The Department of Minnesota Auxiliary presented them a check for over \$20,000. What an awesome place for active-duty military to grab a snack or rest while traveling.

Throughout my travels, I also visited several **Fisher House** locations. The Fisher House Foundation builds comfort homes where military and veteran families can stay for free while a loved one is in the hospital. These homes are located at military and VA medical centers around the world.

As our national administrative year closes, it's a bittersweet feeling to know I'll soon be back home again in Indiana. I've cherished everyone I've met, the memories made, and the ALA mission moments I've experienced.

Vickie Koutz
National President

WATCH THE VIDEO REPORT HIGHLIGHTING 2022-2023 DEPARTMENT VISITS

National President Vickie Koutz visited more than 40 ALA departments and met hundreds of unit members throughout the ALA administrative year. Koutz will discuss some of these stories during the national president video report at the 2023 ALA National Convention in Charlotte in late August. To view the livestreamed video, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org. An on-demand recording also will be available.



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MOVING MESSAGE: The American Legion's Be the One truck stopped by ALA National Headquarters after the Indianapolis 500 race.

What does it take to put together the national *Auxiliary* magazine? The short answer: a lot.

Several weeks before each issue hits your mailbox, our communications staff are interviewing members, writing lots of copy, editing drafts, and designing layouts.

We try to imagine what it was like at National Headquarters back in the late 1920s when the national magazine first published. Were staff using candlestick telephones to talk to members? Someone probably transcribed all handwritten letter correspondence into a typewritten version while a printing service pasted up the copy into layout form.

Today, we're doing interviews through virtual meetings, emails, and yes — via good old-fashioned phone calls (though, these days they're of the smartphone variety and not handhelds).

It's important for us to always be connected to our members. We gather story ideas throughout

the year on a constant basis, and we put them into action through an editorial budget weeks before each magazine issue reaches your mailbox. That's not even including our other ALA

media, which we're always keeping up to date with original content. If you have something we need to know, we urge you to contact us at ALAMagazine@ALAforVeterans.org. We always love hearing from you.

MAGAZINE PUBLISHES

QUARTERLY: We've received a few inquiries lately from members asking why their copy of *Auxiliary* didn't reach their mailbox. Most

of the time, it's a misunderstanding. Our magazine comes out four times a year — February, May, August, and November. If you've missed an issue, please head over to www.ALAforVeterans.org/magazine to see the archives, or give us a call at (317) 569-4500, and we'll gladly mail you a hard copy.

In between issues, please be sure to follow our socials @ALAforVeterans so you're always in the know on all things American Legion Auxiliary.



AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY

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

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Question about one ingredient

Your patriotic Mason jars are a great idea. I have one question: What is the rubbing alcohol for? Great idea for a craft fair fundraiser.
— Sue Romero, Utah



Editors' Response: Thank you for checking out our Mason jar craft! Our instructions didn't really explain the purpose of this ingredient, so you asked an excellent question. From our research, rubbing alcohol will help the food dye colors spread evenly in your bags of rice. It'll also help absorb into the rice and dries very quickly. If you forget the rubbing alcohol in the dyeing process, your colors may appear splotchy. Don't have rubbing alcohol on hand? Try using vinegar as an alternative.

ALA Arkansas: Thank you for your service

In 1964, as a teenager, I lived in Little Rock. I was happy to see John L. McClellan at a parade in Little Rock. I was glad to read about the

Arkansas Auxiliary and the Legion department's VAVS who serve coffee to visitors at the John L. McClellan Memorial Veterans Hospital. I appreciate the members who serve coffee and make the visitors feel welcome!

— Cynthia Lee Manasco Ratliff, Alabama

Illinois unit donates patriotic books to local library

Keeping patriotism alive and well, beginning with children is an issue of great importance to both me and the other members of Unit 581.

Recently, when a member of our Auxiliary passed away, our unit received some monetary donations in her name. This member was very dedicated to veterans and had lost a brother during the Vietnam War. The idea arose that perhaps we could continue with our cause of patriotism in children in her honor. Her daughter is a librarian at the Columbia Public Library, so I contacted her and shared the idea of patriotic books for children being purchased with the donation funds and then donated to the library. Needless to say, she was delighted.

Unit 581 purchased 25 books for children of various age groups and placed dedication stickers in each book, showing whose memory we wanted to keep alive with this project. A group of us had the privilege of presenting the book collection to the library and seeing firsthand how important our project was.

A few additional books were purchased and distributed to the schools participating in the Poppy Poster Contest to assist teachers in explaining the history of the poppy. Plans for the future include making regular donations so that

the "patriotic section" can grow and meet the needs of the youngsters who are the future.

— Janet Janson, Illinois

Connecticut Purple Team purples up for military kids

April is Purple Up! For Military Kids. Elaine Kotler of West Hartford, Conn., is a member of the American Legion Auxiliary Hayes-Velhage Unit 96 and science teacher at Henry James Memorial School in Simsbury on the Purple Team. She got her students to show support by dressing in purple. Held April 15 each year, Purple Up! For Military Kids is a day for Department of Defense Education Activity communities to wear purple to show support and thank military children for their strength and sacrifices. There are several students on the Purple Team who are military kids. Miss Kotler held her Purple Up! Day before spring break since April 15 fell on a Sunday.



Miss Kotler wore purple every day to show her support, including an event at the William O'Neill Armory in Hartford. Miss Kotler and members from other ALA units in Connecticut volunteered at the CT National Guard Children & Youth Program's Meet the Easter Bunny. She and her co-volunteers met Gov. Ned Lamont, who stopped by on his way to the UConn Husky Parade.

— Elaine Kotler, Connecticut

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM you

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

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



FUTURE LEADERS: Junior members attended the 2022-2023 national Junior meetings held in various locations across the five ALA divisions. Juniors participated in crafts, completed a service project, learned how to fold the flag, were educated on ALA customs, and more during these one-day events. Help more Juniors attend these meetings by fundraising for our future.

FUNDRAISE TO SEND YOUR UNIT'S JUNIOR MEMBERS TO ALA NATIONAL JUNIOR MEETINGS

American Legion Auxiliary national Junior meetings give younger ALA members the opportunity to make new friends, complete service projects, and learn more about the ALA. These events are for ALA Junior members 8 years

old or older who are interested in meeting other Junior members who share the same passion for helping veterans and servicemembers.

A great way to help ensure your unit's Juniors can attend these informative and fun events is to hold fundraisers. As the future of this organization, encouraging Juniors to participate in national Junior meetings at an early age will only benefit the ALA as a whole. Units can help ease the financial

costs of attending by conducting a variety of fundraisers — bake sales, book sales, American Legion Family dinners, silent auctions, and more. Dedicate time to fundraising for these young members and see the positive impact these events make as the Juniors advance to becoming adult members in the ALA.

For more information on national Junior meetings, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/Meetings/National-Junior-Meetings.



HELPING THE HOMELESS: Junior members of Illinois Unit 577 helped put together laundry packets for homeless veterans in their state for one of their service projects.

SIMPLE PROJECT MAKES A DIFFERENCE FOR HOMELESS VETERANS

Sometimes, less is more.

In Illinois, Junior members of Unit 577 participated in a new project after receiving notice that laundry packets were needed for homeless veterans in the state.

"We bought a big container of Tide PODS and snack-size baggies and included a fabric sheet, Tide POD, and note from the Juniors thanking veterans for their service in each one," said Julia Moore, Unit 577 Junior Activities chair.

About 120 packets were

distributed to help homeless veterans in another part of the state.

"We do a service project and a fun project every month," she said. "The younger girls can't do some of the other stuff, but they can do this."

It's important for Juniors to participate in these kinds of projects so they learn we are a service organization, Moore said.

"I have a terrific bunch of young girls, and they do their service project before they do their fun project," Moore said. "They are always excited about what they are going to do. We explained to them it's people who don't have a home to live in and so they can have clean clothes and feel

CALIFORNIA JUNIOR FOCUSES ON OTHERS, EARNS NATIONAL ALA AWARD

When Junior member Kristina Seward learned she was an ALA Good Deed Award recipient, she was surprised and happy.

“It was a very special moment for me, for my unit, and for my family,” she said. “Honestly, I did not believe this wonderful award was being bestowed onto me.”

The Auxiliary’s Good Deed Award is given to any youth who donates time and/or money for a worthy cause.

“The Good Deed Award has helped me recognize things about myself and my community and inspires me to continue and do more,” she said.

Seward has been involved in quite a few projects that also happen to meet the criteria for the award — restoring feminine hygiene products in high school restrooms, Operation Gratitude Program, and Operation Gratitude Jot-A-Note.

Her high school had no feminine hygiene products available in the restrooms. With help from a few friends, she created a petition to raise

awareness and ask for support. Now, these products are available in all women’s restrooms. Because of this, Seward also started the first Women’s Empowerment Club at her school to give young women the courage and confidence to talk about and raise awareness of the difficulties young women have overcome and still face today.

Another project was Operation Gratitude Beanie Baby. In four months, Seward collected over 2,000 Beanie Babies to put into care packages for those deployed overseas.

“I spoke first [to the Auxiliary] about the purpose of the Beanie Baby Project as an opportunity to show gratitude to deployed, local military, and veterans with a plush toy and how much it meant to have one included in their care packages,” Seward said.

For her Operation Gratitude Jot-A-Note project, she has collected over 500 notes from all seven units within District 20 in California.

“It was challenging for everyone,” Seward said. “But what made our goal of 500-plus Jot-A-Notes was the attention and support of the six other units in our district. I made a box for each unit with all the supplies needed and a poster for each unit.”

Being involved in quite a few



projects and activities, Seward offers advice for other teens who want to get involved in their communities.

“Do it without thinking or looking for recognition or an award,” she said.

“The opportunity to lead a project you like and know that your project helps your community, a person, or another group gives you good feelings and meaning. Make it fun and make it enjoyable for yourself and others. Ask for help or get involved with others who share the same objectives about your project.”

Seward has been an ALA Junior member for three years and is part of ALA California Unit 377. She is eligible for membership through her grandfather, U.S. Air Force veteran John Seward.

good about themselves.”

Moore offers advice for other units looking to add a similar project.

“Just plan something the girls can get into, something they can do,” she said. “Make sure you tell them what it’s all about and why it’s needed. Our community is very supportive — even if the Juniors didn’t have the funds to do it, somebody would donate the Tide PODS. Don’t be afraid to ask people for help. I tell our Juniors if they have a brother in the Sons, bring them along too. You don’t have to be eligible or be a member to participate.”



MINNESOTA JUNIOR MEMBER HOLDS DUAL ROLES IN AMERICAN LEGION

American Legion Auxiliary Junior member Taylor McElroy is also a member of The American Legion after completing her basic training for the Army Reserves while a junior in high school. An Auxiliary member since 2007, McElroy belongs to Unit 161 in Minnesota. She is also the Honorary Department Junior President for 2023-2024 and attended ALA Minnesota Girls State this summer.

“There are so many different ways people can help. Our deficits don’t make us weak. They make us strong. Don’t push your disabled members aside. It’s not that we cannot do anything. It’s just that we may have to do some things differently.”

CANDACE WICKS



For 30 years, Candace Wicks kept up with a demanding routine as an early childhood teacher in Dallas. “At 6

o’clock in the morning, I would jump up, and say, ‘Let’s go!’” recalled Wicks with a laugh.

It wasn’t just her job for Dallas Independent School District that kept Wicks busy. She also was committed to advocacy throughout the Dallas community. In addition to supporting veterans as a member of American Legion Auxiliary Unit 453, Wicks served in various roles for many organizations, including the American Federation of Teachers, the Martin Luther King Community Center, and New Hope Baptist Church.

Wicks said she modeled herself after her adoptive parents, Samuel and Lela Wicks, who taught her the importance of community service through their own involvement.

And when both of her parents’ health deteriorated because of dementia, Wicks stepped into the role of caretaker for years until they passed in 2012 and 2013.

Wicks showed no signs of slowing down with her community activities until 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. That’s when Wicks suffered excruciating abdominal pain and was rushed to the hospital. After undergoing eight surgeries within one month for a cyst, Wicks suffered from life-threatening sepsis complications that required emergency measures. She also was diagnosed with pneumonia and was placed on dialysis. While Wicks survived, she underwent several amputations due to the side effects of her treatment.

Wicks talked to *Auxiliary* magazine about that life-changing experience and why it didn’t stop her from continuing her lifelong dedication of service.

How did you cope after your devastating medical emergency?

It is like experiencing a death to see your feet one moment, only to wake up and see you have no feet after surgery. You have to fight depression and anxiety. Being raised in a Christian household was my saving grace. My prayer life kept me going. I drew all of my strength from everything my parents taught me. I also received a lot of encouragement and prayers from the hospital chaplains, my family, and my friends.

Most people would understand if you decided to pare down volunteering. Why did you continue?

I was in the hospital for two months, completely bedridden. I couldn’t feed or dress myself. I could barely speak because I had a tube down my throat for so long. I had a discussion with God and He said, ‘If I let you get up off this bed, you have to do what you were doing prior to getting in this condition.’ I made a promise that I would. That was part of my recovery process. The prognosis was that I may be in long-term care. But that wasn’t the case. I had been doing volunteer work since I was 5 years old. It’s kind of ingrained in me.

How do you spend your time now?

I regularly advocate for the needs of the homeless, disabled people, and people who are just down on their luck, which, in most cases, includes veterans. I’m also an avid believer in sending letters and making phone calls to the powers that be — from the local level all the way up to the

president. I called the White House recently expressing my concern about the military not being paid if the debt ceiling is not increased.

Why did you join ALA?

My father was a veteran and, upon his death, I wanted to find a way to honor him. He was a private first class in the U.S. Army during the Korean War. I have served as a parliamentarian and chaplain for a previous unit. When I transferred to Unit 453, my responsibilities included Division 1 parliamentarian. I currently serve as the Division 1 historian, and I’m also on the Department of Texas Education Committee.

What would you say to people who are on the fence about volunteering?

There is a blessing in giving and sharing. Everybody’s level of volunteerism may not be the same. Your gifts and talents may be different from your neighbor, but everybody has something they can give. My post has been very accommodating to me. I’m not able to fold 100 boxes of whatever, but I can show my support by buying decorations or donating food. Support comes in different ways, and everybody needs to find out what their niche is and serve that way.

What other message would you like to share?

I’m disabled, but I have a roof over my head. I have clothes on my back. I have food in my pantry. What can I do? I can donate. I can bring awareness to different causes. I can be an encouragement to someone. There are so many different ways people can help. Our deficits don’t make us weak. They make us strong. Don’t push your disabled members aside. It’s not that we cannot do anything. It’s just that we may have to do some things differently. We have to learn how to work together.

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY

Are You Using Old Branding?

Make sure your website, socials, stationery, etc., are up to date with the new logo. Remember: The blue star emblem has not gone away. See details in the revised *ALA Branding Guide* at www.ALAforVeterans.org/Member/Guides/Branding-Guide.



“This nation will remain the land of the free only so long as it is the home of the brave.”

— Elmer Davis, American journalist



Including members of our communities in ALA events and activities is what we do. Receiving a pin from 2022-2023 National President Vickie Koutz is Chrissy, a resident of the Fair Haven, Vt., area. Nearly every week, Chrissy comes with her mother to support The American Legion Family POW/MIA vigil. See page 30 in this issue of *Auxiliary* to read more about the community rallying around the vigil (photo: vibeportraitart.com).

What did you learn after bouncing back from a challenge or struggle?



"I learned that I am enough. I had to tell myself that no matter what struggles I go through, I can always come out the other side of it stronger. I just leave the past behind me and step into the future. It allows me to continue learning in this organization and to mentor those who come after me."

— Francisca Massey, Vermont



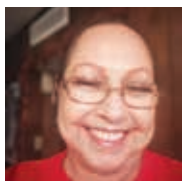
"I've learned with my struggle through my depression, my American Legion Family is so supportive and cheers me on! They give me words of inspiration and strength. They have shown me so much love, even more than my family at times. I wouldn't trade them for anything!"

— Rosemary Lancaster, Iowa



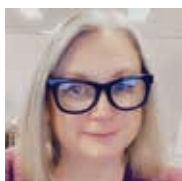
"Always try to stay positive. Forget the negative words and actions of others. I say to myself, 'It's going to get better and go forward.' I am thankful for those special people who showed me the right way. We all need those folks who are there for us through the good and bad times in life."

— Patricia Anne Delgado, Florida



"Not to have another person bring negative energy to me. Looking in the mirror and saying, 'Enough is enough.'"

— Irene Miramontez, Texas



"I learned not to let the challenge define me. Everyone hits bumps along life. It took me a long time to learn to reflect on what happened — how could I have handled it differently, or is there a need to apologize to anyone? I reflect on how I can grow, make myself stronger, and look for the lesson I can learn to move forward."

— Robin Dorf, Minnesota



"I'm stronger than I thought, and I have more love surrounding me than I thought possible."

— Judie Senkow-Richards, Pennsylvania



Do you have a question you would ask fellow members? Let us know what it would be. Email us at ALAMagazine@ALAforVeterans.org.

Mission Outreach Happenings



Is your local VAMC opening back up for ALA volunteers? Tell us about it! Email ALAMagazine@ALAforVeterans.org.

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



LEADING THE WAY FOR MALE ALA MEMBERS (from left): ALA member John Tester speaks at the podium during an ALA meeting; ALA member Jim Vass stands with fellow Auxiliary members at a Legion Family event.

MEN SERVE IN AUXILIARY LEADERSHIP ROLES TOO

Four years ago, a big change happened in American Legion Auxiliary membership: For the first time, male spouses of veterans could join the Auxiliary. At the 2019 American Legion National Convention, the Legion voted to replace the word “wife” with “spouse” in their Constitution & Bylaws section to the ALA’s membership eligibility criteria. The change in eligibility was then voted on and approved by ALA delegates. As a result, the ALA’s membership change extended to male spouses of living or deceased veterans, as long as their military service meets a Legionnaire’s eligibility requirements.

The Auxiliary now has more than 1,000 men among its membership and growing! Some of them are taking their membership beyond just a card — they are finding ways to give back by serving in leadership roles at the unit, department, district, and even at the national level.

Joining and getting involved

John Tester of Unit 36 in Ludlow, Vt., is also a member of the Sons of The American Legion. His ALA eligibility is through his wife Cathy, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran.

“I was so impressed with what she was doing at the Legion and what the Legion was doing for her, I wanted to be a part of that,” said Tester. “When

the Auxiliary opened to male spouses, I was asked to join and jumped at the opportunity.”

Tester didn’t take on leadership roles right away but now has an impressive ALA résumé.

“My first couple of years, I stayed in the background to learn how things operate and learn how I could best make a difference,” he said. “In 2021, I was asked by my unit president if I would like to be sergeant-at-arms, and I happily agreed.”

That was only the start for Tester. He has since taken on many roles at all levels, including unit president, department chairman for the Children & Youth Committee, and is a member of the 2022-2023 national Children & Youth committee.

Jim Vass of Unit 574 in Moreno Valley, Calif., assisted his unit with fundraising activities before the eligibility change. Vass, a retired master sergeant of the U.S. Air Force, is also a member of the Legion and Sons. His ALA eligibility is through his wife, Master Sgt. Pamela Vass, USAF (Ret.).

“My membership gave me yet another outlet to give back to those who have served our country,” said Vass. “Getting involved in leadership at my unit was a great way to make a meaningful impact on the organization and its members. Becoming part of the leadership team

in my unit not only made me a better unit member but enabled me to assist the president with building an effective team committed to the mission and values of the organization.”

In addition to serving as secretary and parliamentarian at the unit level, Vass also serves as the District 21 secretary/treasurer in the Department of California.

Advice to other men looking to take on ALA leadership roles

Tester encourages other men to join the ALA.

“The most important piece of advice I can give male ALA members is don’t hide in the background,” he said. “Auxiliary units love to work the mission — step up and be part of that work. Offer to help at events and during programs. It can be a little intimidating being the only male in a room of female Auxiliary members, but what those members want more than anything is someone to help and be useful.”

Tester also said men should look at themselves as an ALA member, not as the first or only male.

“Your value as an Auxiliary member is determined by what you DO, not who you are,” he said. “Regardless of your affiliation with any other Legion Family group, embrace the Auxiliary and its mission. We need good leaders who are passionate and active.”

Vass also encourages others to get involved.

“Membership is very rewarding, but the reward is directly linked to the prospective members’ effort to membership and volunteerism,” said Vass. “If a prospective male ALA member is interested in taking on a leadership role in the Auxiliary, my advice would be to start by getting involved at the local level and showing a commitment to the organization and its mission. Attend meetings, volunteer for events and activities, and build relationships with other members.”



Learn more about American Legion Auxiliary eligibility requirements at www.ALAforVeterans.org/eligibility.



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FAMILY IN FORCE (from left): District 2 Sons Commander Matthew Krupco, District 2 Legion Commander Jeff Winters, and District 2 ALA President Kristen Hensley present an Action Trackchair to a local veteran.

KANSAS LEGION FAMILY JOINS FORCES TO FUNDRAISE FOR ALL-TERRAIN WHEELCHAIR PRESENTED TO VETERAN

Kansas District 2 Auxiliary President Kristen Hensley never liked the idea of a president's project because she felt it gave credit to only one person when so many work so hard to achieve a goal. So when her term began, she approached the district American Legion and Sons of The American Legion commanders with the idea of a Legion Family district project instead of a president's project. Everyone could all take ownership and raise funds for a project that was mission focused for the entire Legion Family.

"I am a firm believer that we celebrate the differences between the groups and leverage those differences in order to achieve amazing results working on the common missions we all have," Hensley said. "The focus on the whole Family did amazing things!"

Hensley's idea was to raise funds to purchase a custom fit all-terrain wheelchair for a local veteran and

would not only allow them mobility across different terrains, but to potentially benefit their mental health as well. Hensley shared that while the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs provides wheelchairs and walkers, nothing can get them out in the outdoors (beyond the pavement).

To find a veteran in need of the all-terrain chair, district members approached Friends in Service of Heroes (FISH), a local organization focused on improving the quality of life for troops, veterans, and their families in the Greater Kansas City area. FISH helped the members find and select a Vietnam veteran who lived in the district in need of a chair, and helped them get in touch with the owners of the all-terrain wheelchair company Action Trackchair. Hensley said the selected veteran lived on a farm with 33 acres and enjoyed morel mushroom hunting but hadn't been able to explore beyond paved surfaces for the last couple of years.

The cost of the all-terrain wheelchair was \$23,000, so Hensley knew it was going to be a huge lift for a district-level project.

"In previous years, we were lucky to raise \$2,000 in a year for a district president's project," she said. "It was

amazing to see the Legion, Sons, Auxiliary, and Riders join together with creative events to fundraise."

Hensley said the entire district Family got involved to raise funds and get the word out about the project. In addition to collecting contributions from local businesses, Legion Family members hosted game nights, fundraising dinners and scavenger hunts, held raffles, and found other creative ways to raise the needed funds. Their combined efforts resulted in the district raising \$26,000 in just seven months, which exceeded their fundraising goal by \$3,000. In addition to uniting around a common fundraising goal, Hensley said the project also helped build bridges between members in the district.

Earlier this year, Hensley, along with District 2 Commander Jeff Winters and District 2 Sons Commander Matthew Krupco, were able to present the chair to the local veteran. The veteran was beyond appreciative and shared that no one had ever done anything like that for him. A video about the project and presentation was shown at the local Armed Forces Day at the Wyandotte County Fairgrounds during an event hosted by FISH.



VEHICLE FOR VETERANS (from left): Rod Courtney (director of HERO), Jacki Bolen, Debbie Courtney, Kelly Bryan, and Shay Moore stand proudly with the side-by-side vehicle for the HERO group.

IOWA DISTRICT EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS TO HELP HEROES HEAL

With *Service Not Self* in mind, American Legion Auxiliary district presidents choose a special project to accomplish during their leadership term. Iowa's Fifth District Auxiliary President Jacki Bolen from Deep River Unit 296 wanted to do a unique project that would truly make a difference in the lives of veterans in her community. A nonprofit veterans organization called HERO — Healing at the English River Outfitters — really spoke to her.

"I wanted to give to a different type of organization, so I reached out to HERO," said Bolen. "I love their mission — everything they do is through outdoor therapy, and I honestly thought

NEW YORK LEGION FAMILY WELCOMES VETERANS HOME

After their local U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs Medical Center's volunteer food pantry closed due to COVID-19 restrictions, The American Legion Family of Post 1038 in Valhalla, N.Y., opened an off-site food pantry at their post home for veterans in need — but they did not stop there.

To expand their efforts, Post 1038 Legion Family members began providing welcome home bags to a local veteran-support organization called My Brother Vinny. My Brother Vinny is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit volunteer organization that helps veterans transition from a Veteran Affairs medical center or from a homeless shelter into permanent housing by the VA or other veteran service agency. They provide furniture and housewares to formerly homeless veterans throughout the Hudson Valley region, New York City, and northern New Jersey area. The founder of My Brother Vinny, Paula Miritello, said that she wished for food to be delivered along with the furnishings — and that's when Post 1038 members started the welcome home program.

that was amazing.”

Like many of us, HERO believes there can be healing in nature. They encourage veterans to participate in a special outdoor experience where they can fish, hunt, and hike. Their purpose is to offer a variety of therapeutic, group-based activities designed to foster confidence, hope, and health.

“As civilians, we have no idea what these veterans have gone through,” said Unit 296 member Ellen Zimmerman. “It's amazing to have a place in our state that people can go to get help, and not have to go into a medical facility.”

Bolen reached out to the HERO group to discuss their needs, and it was clear that they desperately needed a side-by-side vehicle to transport disabled veterans and conduct

“To know that there is a veteran who doesn't have food is just unacceptable,” said Auxiliary Unit 1038 President Emmy Creskey. “So, if we, in some little way, can help, we will.”

The entire American Legion Family of Adolph Pfister Unit 1038 participates in the welcome home program to show veterans in the community their appreciation and support while letting them know they are not alone.

“The team that works on this — we are filled with heart and soul — and I think together, it makes a really strong impact,” said Emma Creskey.

A variety of resources are used to purchase and fill the bags. Funding from Unit 1038 budget along with donations from members is a big portion of the donated goods. The community of Valhalla and town of Mt. Pleasant donate items for the welcome home bags, and the VA Montrose Food Pantry also contribute resources. Unit 1038 asks for non-perishable food items like rice, pasta, instant mashed potatoes, beans, vegetables,

maintenance on the grounds. After looking into it, the vehicle would cost \$14,000. Bolen knew this would be a big project to raise funds for, but she was determined to make it happen.

“To prove it can be done, you must believe in yourself and the people helping you,” said Bolen. “You also have to realize that ordinary people can do extraordinary things, especially if the project is worth it.”

Bolen knew she would be able to get a lot more volunteer help and donors by doing an event-type of fundraiser.

The HERO night event took place on St. Patrick's Day at the Deep River Community Center. Members from the entire American Legion Family came to help. They provided guests with a themed meal of corned beef



SERVING OUR NATION'S HEROES: Post 1038 American Legion Family packs welcome home bags for veterans in their community.

applesauce, cereal, oatmeal, peanut butter, jelly, tuna, soup, juice, tomato sauce, etc. The welcome home bags are durable grocery totes that can be used for shopping and on public transportation.

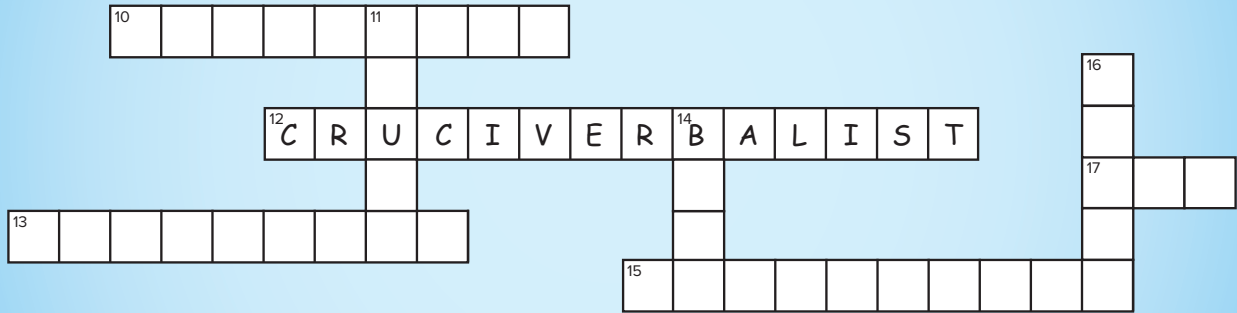
“We have donated about 900 bags currently,” said Post 1038 Legion Commander John Creskey. “That's 900 veterans that were placed from programs from the VA that needed assistance, and it just shows the amount of need that's out there and the resources that are necessary to support veterans in need.”

and cabbage. Throughout the night, people were able to make donations and participate in raffle items. The district secured two bands to perform as an extra entertainment element. Then the live auction started, which is what really brought in the donations.

The HERO event fundraiser exceeded all expectations. They surpassed their goal of \$14,000 and raised closer to \$30,000. Bolen and district five purchased the side-by-side vehicle for the HERO group and spent the extra money on accessories for it like a backseat that fits inside the dump trailer, along with gun racks and fishing pole racks.

“It was just amazing the way people came together to help make this happen,” said Bolen.

12. A person skilled in creating or solving crossword puzzles



LEGIONNAIRE'S TALENT GIVES YOUR MIND A WORKOUT

Have you ever heard of a cruciverbalist (kroo-suh-vur-buh-list)? Chances are, you have seen their work or maybe you are one yourself? A cruciverbalist is a designer or aficionado of crossword puzzles. American Legion Family member and U.S. Army veteran Gail Marie Beckman is both a designer and aficionado of crossword puzzles. She is the owner of Custom CrossWords & More and Happenings Media.

Beckman is a Legionnaire at Post 27 in Sandy Valley, Nev. She discovered during basic training that she tested high on the garbled language portion of her pre-entry exam. But her interest in words began long before that.

"When I was a kid, words in general were intriguing to me, not knowing what my future would hold," Beckman said. "In third grade, I thought it was fun to do the third and fourth grade spelling tests, and I began reading *Webster's Dictionary* and would make flash cards for myself if I got anything wrong in the *Reader's Digest Word Power*. I thought every family did puzzles daily, until I shared a word game at show-and-tell for the whole class to enjoy. Only the teacher was

impressed; the kids — not so much. I suppose I was an original word nerd before the term ever existed."

Beckman wrote her first crossword puzzle in 1990 as way to help her fellow cable TV employees improve their spelling. The puzzle was a hit and was sent to 13 other affiliated cable companies. Then requests started coming in.

"Before I knew it, I was asked to write a crossword puzzle all about someone's dad, then for a local restaurant guide, a coupon booklet, and an automotive newspaper, and Custom CrossWords was born," she said.



Personalized puzzles are Beckman's favorite to create. The themes can be about an individual, a couple, family occasions, milestone birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, reunions, and more.

"My all-time favorite is celebrity puzzles," Beckman said. "I saw an interview with Betty White, and she mentioned her name was once in a *People Magazine* crossword, so I got in touch with her agent to ask if he'd assist in delivering an entire

puzzle all about her life in time for her 99th birthday, which he did. I'm happy to be able to provide a unique gift for someone who may have everything. My latest celebrity puzzle was a custom word search which was half The Rolling Stones and half *I Love Lucy*."

Beckman also receives some unusual or interesting theme requests.

"The most unusual puzzle was a crossword on gastrointestinal diseases," she said. "The most interesting was for a gentleman who hired me to write a crossword puzzle all about his girlfriend and her life, and the bottom line was four words — WILL EWE MARY MI — with oddball clues to throw her off. He had her read it aloud, and she said yes."

Creating puzzles can come with some challenges.

"Occasionally, the words don't easily fall together and I have to walk away for a while, kind of a writer's block," Beckman said. "It will be 32 years in September since I obtained customcrosswords.

com when others were saying, 'This worldwide web thing is never going to fly.' To this day, I write both word search and crossword puzzles by hand with graph paper and pencil, set them up in a program, and lay them out using color photos and graphics. Writing my puzzles by hand is my secret way of keeping my mind sharp."

You can commission Beckman to create a puzzle for you by contacting her company at happeningsmedia@gmail.com or (702) 869-6416.

eUNITS' FLEXIBILITY HELPS MOVE MISSION FORWARD IN UNIQUE WAY

ALA members of Hawaii eUnit 56 meet for their monthly meeting via Zoom, discussing the logistics of their next service project.

"We started an eUnit so we can meet from all different sides of the island when it's convenient," said Brister Thomas, department president. "People moving away are also able to stay linked with us through online meetings."

An eUnit, or electronic unit, allows members to conduct meetings via teleconferencing or online platforms, according to the *ALA Unit Guide Book*. There is no difference in how an eUnit is chartered or operated except for how they choose to meet.

Being an eUnit does not necessarily mean everything is done online — Unit 56 members still meet in person for service projects.

Many of the approximately 30 unit members are spouses of active-duty or retired servicemembers. There are also members from four different countries and several different states. Members of eUnits can reside in any city, state, or country, as long as they meet the Auxiliary's membership eligibility requirements and follow the rules and regulations.

Because the military doesn't always stay in the same place, an eUnit is a great way to stay connected with friends.

There are great benefits to being part of an eUnit, Thomas said.

"It provides maximum opportunities for planning purposes to allow our in-person time to serve our community purposefully," she said.

Thomas has heard a common misnomer about eUnits — that members would lose the socialization, human touch aspect — but she said that's simply not the case.

"When we get together in person, it is for a specific reason — so it brings more purpose to us," she said.

eUnits can be very flexible when it comes to ALA program activities and projects. Mission-oriented projects of the unit can be fulfilled individually or as a group. Although members may be separated geographically, there are many ways to complete a project as a unit: virtually, in person, or a combination of both.

eUnit 56 still has regular monthly meetings all year virtually, but instead of the drive time to and from meetings and a meal that might go along with it, that time is now used for their in-person service projects, such as planting a garden at a VA home, volunteering at a facility for resident overnight care, or helping the Hawai'i ALA Girls State program. Since 2016, the unit has raised about \$20,000 annually so no girl must pay for their ALA Girls State experience.



ACTIVE MEMBERS: Hawaii eUnit 56 members meet virtually for their monthly ALA meetings but in person for service projects, such as their annual Salute to Women in Service event, as well as making poppies to distribute.

For departments that may be struggling with membership, eUnits are a great recruitment tool.

"If you are a department in need of growth, this is the way of the future," she said. "You can get the college kids when they are young, engage with young families — adapt to today's world. This is one easy way to meet."

For those who may be slightly unsure about virtual meetings, Thomas said if you have an email, you can do this.

"During COVID, I set everyone up with cameras and wrote out a list to know what to do," she said. "It's an easy, simple process if you've done it once."

The unit started off using Skype and has since migrated to Zoom.

Thomas said she doesn't feel like there are any drawbacks for members who join an eUnit.

"If you are thinking of doing an eUnit, try it," she said. "It's not going to hurt you, but it can certainly help you."



How to start an eUnit in your area

When a new unit is being chartered, the following documents should be submitted to your American Legion Auxiliary department headquarters office:

- Unit officer list and other forms required by the department
- Charter application
- Membership dues
- Charter fee
- Membership applications
- Unit data form

For more information, visit www.ALForVeterans.org/about/units.



ALA FOUNDATION SAYS FAREWELL TO MISSION IN ACTION GRANTS

When the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation granted the first Mission in Action grant, the year was 2018: Meghan Markle married Prince Harry, Sears filed for bankruptcy, and the world saw a rare “super blue blood moon” for the first time since 1866. Did the super blue blood moon appear in celebration of this new American Legion Auxiliary Foundation granting initiative? The jury is still out.

The American Legion Auxiliary Foundation had been operating for 11 years at that point and was financially secure enough to add a third granting opportunity for ALA units, districts, and departments. Mission in Action grants were awarded to address a specific ALA branding need that would help members with mission delivery and be recognizable in their communities. An example of this grant comes from ALA Foundation Secretary Anne Parker, whose Department of South Carolina received branded storage tubs and a pull-up banner that included bullet points highlighting the ALA mission. The department continues to use the branded materials when their members travel to department conventions and conferences.

Additionally, the Mission in Action grants have been utilized by several ALA Girls State programs.

“A number of department ALA Girls State programs have taken advantage of the Mission in Action grants,” said ALA Foundation Vice President Diane Duscheck.

“The question that plagues many ALA Girls State delegates and their parents is ‘Who is the sponsor of Girls State?’ With the help of Mission in Action grants, departments have branded their ALA Girls State registration areas and sessions with pop-up tents, table covers, and banners proclaiming that Girls State is a program of the department American Legion Auxiliary, providing recognition for the organization.”

Since 2018, the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation has awarded 57 Mission in Action grants totaling \$98,678.86. All of the grant recipients to date:

- Alaska Unit 1
- California Unit 348
- California Unit 46
- California Unit 507
- Connecticut Unit 104
- Department of Colorado
- Department of Connecticut
- Department of Illinois
- Department of Kansas
- Department of Massachusetts

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY FOUNDATION

Mission in Action Impact



57 grants given to support ALA units, districts, departments



\$98,678.86 awarded for branding and mission delivery initiatives



32 states impacted by Mission in Action grants

Learn more at www.ALAFoundation.org.

- Department of Missouri
- Department of Nebraska
- Department of New York
- Department of North Dakota
- Department of Pennsylvania
- Department of South Carolina
- Department of Utah
- Department of Vermont
- Department of Virginia
- Department of Wisconsin
- Department of Wyoming
- District of Columbia Unit 8
- Florida Unit 259
- Georgia Unit 14
- Georgia Unit 239
- Illinois Unit 2
- Illinois Unit 96
- Indiana Unit 148
- Indiana Unit 18
- Indiana Unit 200
- Indiana Unit 331
- Kansas District 5
- Kansas Unit 136
- Maine Unit 81
- Minnesota Unit 260
- Mississippi Unit 6
- Mississippi Unit 79
- Missouri Unit 77
- Nevada Unit 60
- New Hampshire Unit 16
- New York Unit 1038
- New York Unit 137
- New York Unit 1720
- New York Unit 294
- New York Unit 535
- North Carolina Unit 532
- Ohio Unit 214
- Oklahoma Unit 58
- South Carolina Unit 166
- South Carolina Unit 193
- Tennessee Unit 281
- Texas Unit 437
- Virginia Unit 77

The American Legion Auxiliary Foundation Board of Directors thanks all units, districts, and departments that applied for a Mission in Action grant. Thank you for making branding and more prominent mission delivery a priority for your ALA entity.

“The American Legion Auxiliary Foundation is changing to better serve the units and departments of the American Legion Auxiliary,” said ALA Foundation President



GRANTS AWARDED (opposite page): ALA North Carolina Unit 532. This page (clockwise): Department of Colorado; ALA New York Unit 137; ALA New York Unit 535; and ALA Ohio Unit 214 all received Mission in Action grants from the ALA Foundation for various branded items from tablecloths to pop-up tents.

Cathe MacInnes. “Mission in Action grants were established to assist units and departments with increasing brand awareness — one of the five goals in the American Legion Auxiliary’s 5-Year Centennial Strategic Plan. That plan was completed in 2019. With the COVID-19 pandemic causing units and departments to cease meetings, there were few applications for Mission in Action grants. As the pandemic waned, units were eager to reopen, reintroduce themselves to their communities, and restart their programs of hands-on service. Many applied for and received Mission in Action grants, letting their communities know the American Legion Auxiliary is continuing to serve America’s veterans.

“The current American Legion Auxiliary strategic plan emphasizes mission engagement and delivery,”

MacInnes continued. “In keeping with its mission of raising funds for, assisting in conduct of, and providing support to the American Legion Auxiliary programs, the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation is developing a new grant type specifically targeting providing support to ALA programs.”

The American Legion Auxiliary Foundation will continue to offer Veteran Projects Fund grants, Veterans Creative Arts Festival grants, and sub-granting opportunities while a new granting initiative to take the place of Mission in Action grants is developed. To learn more about the granting opportunities available, please visit www.ALAFoundation.org/grants. Thank you for all that you do to ensure the ALA’s mission of service endures for generations to come.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MEETING MINUTES

By the end of August, department conventions will have concluded and new officers will be in place, but before we jump into the next administrative year, let's take a minute to talk about ... well, minutes. Official meeting minutes serve to refresh the memory of those who were present at the meeting, inform those absent from the meeting, and provide a legal record of the meeting.

Here are a few quick tips to ensure your department convention meeting minutes are completed correctly and in a timely manner:

- Minutes are a record of what was done at a meeting, not what was said.

- Minutes do not contain judgement or opinions, and all main motions should be recorded exactly as voted upon.

- Consider forming a Minutes Approval Committee to help you expedite the review, editing, and approval process of your department convention minutes. Robert's Rules of Order



recommends a Minutes Approval Committee for any group whose next regular business session will not be held within a quarterly time interval, or an organization in which there will be a change or replacement of a portion of the membership.

- A draft of the minutes becomes

official only when it is approved by a Minutes Approval Committee or approved at the next meeting.

- Official minutes provide a legal record of the meeting and need to be made available to your membership. Consider posting your official convention/meeting minutes on your department/unit website.

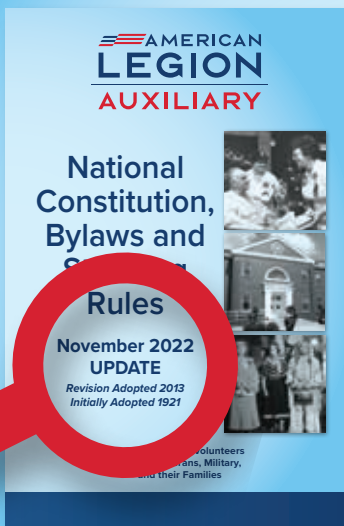
- Even when the convention minutes have been approved and become "the" minutes, corrections can still be made any time an error or material omission is found.

Governing doc bonus: Did your convention delegates pass any changes to your governing documents?

- Make sure governing documents are updated to reflect any amendments/resolutions that passed during your Department Executive Committee meeting and/or your department convention.

- As you update your governing documents, keep in mind that unit/district/department governing documents MUST NOT conflict with state laws or the national organization's Constitution & Bylaws/Standing Rules.

Correction made to C&B book



The National Constitution, Bylaws, and Standing Rules book was updated in November 2022. If you purchased or downloaded the book before May 5, 2023, please be aware of a correction:

On page 17, Article IX Unit Organizations, Section 5, second line, the eighth word should be "membership," not "ALA." The correct sentence should read: "Section 5. Each Unit of the American Legion Auxiliary shall be responsible for verifying eligibility and deciding its membership, subject to the restrictions of the national governing documents."

INCLUDE SONS MEMBERS IN YOUR UNIT, DEPARTMENT JUNIOR EVENTS

Working together as an American Legion Family at all levels is important. For American Legion Auxiliary Juniors and Sons of The American Legion, they can work together to serve the mission from early ages.

“Train them at a young age and you will find they will stick with the program even after graduation and want to be in the senior membership,” said Starr Purnell, Department of Maryland and national Junior Activities Committee chair.

Including your post home's Sons members in unit and department Junior events and activities will make a difference for the Family as a whole.

Purnell has worked together with Juniors and Sons in a few different ways, such as joint meetings, participating in the ALA Americanism Essay Contest, putting together care packages, and making cards for veterans.

“Some things we can do together will benefit them,” she said. “The ALA Patch Program is a prime example. Every patch, Sons can also earn as well.”

The ALA Junior Activities Patch Program is geared toward Junior members and school-aged Sons of The American Legion members. Many families have children involved in both organizations, working alongside each other to earn patches.

“It encourages them to increase their knowledge about what they are learning,” she said.

Henry Solich, a Sons member in Maryland, has earned all of his Level 1 patches. There are 11

patches at that level (kindergarten through third grade): Children of Warriors National Presidents', Americanism, Community & Family Safety, Community Service, Education, Leadership, Membership, Physical Fitness, Poppy, Digital Media, and Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation.

“He was the first Sons in Maryland I know of who put in for patches,” Purnell said. “He earned those patches. Last year, we had a graduation for Juniors who moved to senior membership. We asked Henry's grandmother to bring him too, not knowing we would honor him. We gave him a trophy with an eagle head. It was just so awesome! It encouraged him to strive next year.”

Participating in the Patch Program is a terrific way to be involved in and learn about the Auxiliary and Legion Family, volunteer in the community, and serve our country's veterans.

“I think we need to do more things together,” Purnell said. “We talk about Legion Family, but we don't always do that. I want to see that unity come together. That's



SONS EARN PATCHES TOO: Henry Solich of Maryland receives recognition for earning four Level 1 Patches from 2021-2022 ALA Department of Maryland President Andrea Anderson and 2021-2022 SAL Detachment of Maryland Commander Mark Fayer Sr.

what it's about — to live up to that Auxiliary preamble.”

Purnell offers advice for other units or departments to include Sons in their Junior events and activities.

“Appoint an adviser who is caring and thinks of our children — somebody who has interest in our young people,” she said. “Adjust the program to fit them.”

Overall, Purnell said it's crucial to get our Sons involved with the Juniors.

“They can teach us a lot,” she said. “I've learned a lot from Sons youth as well. They have the will and initiative.”



To learn more about how Sons can be involved in Junior Activities, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org or contact the national Junior Activities Committee at junioractivities@ALAforVeterans.org or (317) 569-4500.



Veterans Value Therapeutic Benefits of Art Festival

By Sara Fowler

U.S. Army veteran Devon Stewart was scrolling through social media at the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival when he read the news that a member of his former platoon had taken his own life. Just a month earlier, the platoon had lost another to suicide. Emotion washed over Stewart, and he retreated from the social event to his room to write a song. The words poured out. At karaoke night, he performed his original song.

“It seemed like it impacted people,” he said. “The song was written from the point of me telling him I wish you would have picked up the phone. But it’s also like I could have picked up the phone. I know we weren’t best buddies, but it wasn’t always on the person who is hurting. I have been there. I’ve been to the point where I would ignore phone calls or texts or if somebody knew I was in a rough place — I didn’t want to talk to anybody.”

Luckily for Stewart, the NVCAF is an event full of understanding veterans and a place of peace from the difficulties of post-military life.

Co-presented by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the American Legion Auxiliary, veteran performers, artists, and writers attended the 2023 Festival in St. Louis, with the event culminating in the art and writing exhibitions, and stage show performance. Throughout the week, veterans rehearsed, participated in art and writing workshops, and built friendships with fellow attendees.

This year, over 2,000 veterans submitted over 4,000 entries into their local creative arts competitions from 129 VA facilities in the divisions of art, creative writing, dance, drama, and music. First-time participants of the national event made up 60 percent of the attendees.

The NVCAF gives our nation’s veterans the chance to express themselves through different art mediums, heal from traumatic experiences, and regain the sense of camaraderie that was part of military life.

The 2023 Festival had two exciting new elements for

veterans — gold-medal winning artwork was on display the entire month of April — not just the duration of the event. Another first: Veterans received the gold medals they earned via ceremonial fashion — ALA National President Vickie Koutz presented the veterans their medals while fellow veterans clapped and cheered.

Auxiliary magazine talked with a few veterans about why this event is so important for their overall well-being.

WRITING SONGS TO TELL THE STORY

Devon Stewart, Performer

U.S. Army

Alaska

First-time attendee

“Sometimes when I write a song, it is my story,” he explained. “Or I hear someone talking, or they open up to me and I can’t help it. That night, I go and write, and it will be about someone else. I don’t want people to think I am embellishing or that I’m blowing it out of proportion. I just want to be honest and true.”

The song that got him to the national Festival is his story.

The stage lights shined down as Stewart strummed his guitar while performing his original song,

Man That I Used To Be:

Those I’ve loved I’ve pushed away.

That’s the price that I now must pay.

Look in the mirror and I don’t see me.

I’m just a man that I used to be.

Thoughts that I’ve tried to hide.

Self-convinced but I’ve just lied.

So scared of the memory of a man that I used to be.

I disappear into a crowd.

I’m honorable but I’m not proud.

My doctor tells me take my pills,

But I know that I don’t feel real.

Sacrifices that we made.

I made it home sometimes I wish I'd stayed.
I don't know my daughters or my son.
But I was damn good with that gun.

"I don't see [my song] the way other people see it," he said. "It's been nice to have people appreciate it. Maybe if someone gets something else out of my song that helps them, then that makes me happy."

Stewart enjoys songwriting and said he would much rather write a song and have somebody else play it.

Out of all the veterans who attended, he traveled the farthest.

"I am very, very proud to represent Wasilla, Alaska," he said.

USING ART AS A FORM OF THERAPY

Alma Kenney, Artist

U.S. Navy

Colorado

First-time participant

"I've been submitting projects for 10 years, and I've always won first place locally," Kenney said. "My sponsor called me and said, 'You're going to national.' It was on my birthday, so I thought he was pranking me. It was real."

Kenney worked as a jet engine mechanic while in the military and said it was a great learning experience.

"There were moments that left marks — PTSD, military sexual trauma — but that doesn't define me," she said.

Her artwork came after her time in the service.

"I just knew I needed to do something to get it



SHARING THEIR STORIES (from top, clockwise): Devon Stewart rehearses his song, *Man That I Used To Be*, for the stage show performance; Alma Kenney next to her gold medal winning art, *Born to be Free*; Kevin Stuart performs his patriotic poem, *A Salute to Our Veterans*; writer Richard Boyce next to an excerpt from his first place creative writing piece in humor, *Name That Pacemaker*.

VETERANS' COMPANIONS THANKFUL FOR ALA'S FINANCIAL HELP TO ATTEND FESTIVAL



For the 2022-2023 American Legion Auxiliary administrative year, National President Vickie Koutz's focus was NVCAF companions —

whether that was money for a meal plan for the Festival, travel, and/or a separate hotel room if needed for non-family member companions. Veterans' companions in St. Louis were very appreciative of the assistance. For some, without help from the Auxiliary, they would not have been able to attend.

"Initially I said he could go by himself," Nonie Barnes said of her veteran husband, Danny. "A week is a long time. I just looked at it as an experience — meet new people and share stories with other companions as well. I knew it was going to be a win-win for both of us."

During the week, companions had the opportunity to get out of the hotel and take a guided trolley ride around St. Louis and learn about the city.

Companions could also participate in some of the art workshops offered to the veterans.

"I appreciated all the things they had available to companions," Barnes said. "It gave us an option to come out and engage with others, or we could take advantage of some of the other things, or if we just wanted quiet time to ourselves."

Some of the National Veterans Creative Arts Competition Gold Medal Art Entries



Mosaic Kit
"Wolf"
Christine Loveless



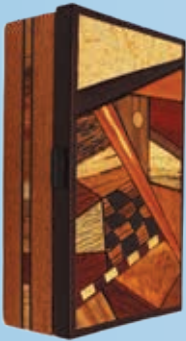
Glazed Ceramics
"Comanche Warrior"
Mel Wyatt



Suncatcher
"Starburst"
Michael Cunningham



Scroll Saw/Fretwork
"The Old Victorian"
Charles Spooneybarger



Woodworking
"Jewelry Box #23"
James Nolen



Leather Carving/Tooling
"Military Collection Hat Bills"
Vernon Love



Pyrography
"Deadwood Line"
Bruce Lindquist



Fabric Art Kit
"3D Folded Block Sampler"
Debra Zelenak



Model Building Kit
"Pre-1920 Ground And Air Transportation"
Richard Schaffer



Watercolor
"Cotton Patch"
Milton Lewis



Special Recognition
"Warrior Queen, Harvest Maiden, Mudhead"
Buddy Chadd



Beadwork
"Cleopatra Necklace"
Elizabeth Ortega



Black and White Photography
"Dapple Grey Day"
Donna Fullerton

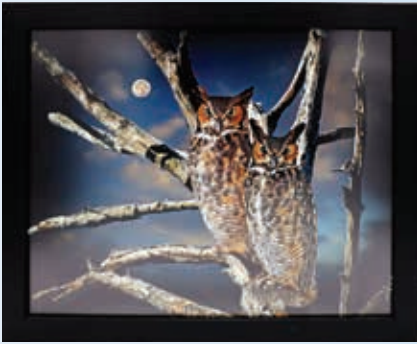


Leather Carving/Tooling
"Butterfly Dreams"
Michael D. Seger

Mixed Media
"Messenger"
Michelle Kaye Robison



Craft Coloring Kit
"Eye On The Future"
Natasha Mathisrud



Color Photography
"Owl Pair At Dusk"
Sandy Scott



Original Design in Needlework
"Summer Visitor"
Debra Zelenak



Crocheting/Knitting
"Sophie's Choice"
Jacquelyn Davis



Collage
"Geisha - Sun Dance"
Sean Connolly



Oil Painting
"Uncle Bill"
Norman Roth



Pastels
"Dreaming Of The Blue Ridge"
Amy B. Cocanour



Carving
"Jessie Chisholm"
Wolf Kiessling



Digital Art
"Collateral Damage"
Joseph Stanfill



Wood Building Kit
"Carousel U.S.A."
Vernon Lawrence



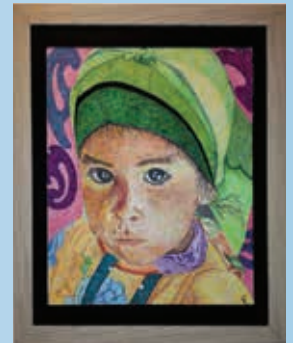
Transfer/Engraving Art Kit
"A Queen"
Gene Hollingsworth II



Figurine Painting Kit
"Forest Druid Bust"
Terry Blair



Stained or Painted Ceramics
"The Battle"
Tonya Wigger



Therapeutic Arts Scholarship
"Innocence"
Cesar Omar Lira



Sculpture
"Lionfish"
Wayne Wolski



Paint by Number Kit
"A Moment's Repose"
Barbara Gilbert



Acrylic Painting
"The Measure Of A Man"
Russell Nelson



Mosaic
"Daisy"
Walter Tomlin



out of my head, and I'm not even sure how I got started," she recalled. "I'm left-handed. Everything I've tried learning had someone teaching right-handed."

Her go-to category has always been cross-stitch. Kenney's preference is the bigger, the more detailed — the better.

The piece for this year's Festival is an eagle, titled *Born to be Free*. It was very difficult to see, she said, noting that it was an 18 or 24 count — meaning that's how many squares there are per inch — very tiny. She used magnifying glasses and a magnified-lit ring, but it was still difficult to see.

"My husband rigged up a TV tray, cut a hole out in the middle, and put a light under it," she said. "So, I had light shining up through so I could see the holes. But I could only work on it for an hour or hour and a half at a time. It just slammed your eyeballs. But I finally got it finished."

Kenney said her art helps her in many ways.

"I can do it by myself and deal with things on my own," she said. "Sometimes it's better for me to work through it by myself than with a group of people."

THE POWER OF THE PEN

Richard Boyce, Writer

U.S. Navy

Florida

First-time participant

Boyce had written poems for years but had never heard of the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival before seeing information online one day.

"I was elated," he recalled about learning that he'd placed first and second for his entries at the national level, with his first-place poem securing an invitation to the Festival.

He described his poetry as "rapid."

"I'll hear something on television and go over and write a poem," he said.

Some are military related, and others have a humor focus, which is the category Boyce won in. Other writing categories veterans can enter include personal essay, short, short story, among other options.

During the Festival, Boyce attended each of the writing workshops offered.

"I have a way of writing and it's successful, but it's been good to see how other people approach these things," he said.

With rhyming poetry, Boyce said 90 percent of the time he writes his last line first.

"I know where I want to go, and I go back and figure out the road to get there," he said.

Although his demeanor was positive and he was often heard joking with fellow veterans and staff, last October, Boyce was diagnosed with leukemia. But despite this news, he has maintained his sense of humor and focus on the bigger picture — life.

"The worse thing I've found about leukemia is nothing rhymes with it," he said. "I haven't written about it yet. I probably will. I won't write about it as a tear-jerker. This is something that will be my last battle, but I'm going to win."

HEALING THROUGH THE STAGE

Kevin Stuart, Performer

U.S. Army

Louisiana

Fourth-time participant

The feeling of working together in the Army came flooding back for Stuart when he attended the 2023 Festival.

"It doesn't matter what service, what branch, what component — Reserve, National Guard, active-duty — it doesn't matter," he said. "You see the same camaraderie."

This is his fourth time invited to the national event.

"For my mental state, it gives me the opportunity to decompress and be part of something bigger than me," he said about being a repeat attendee. "It's a morale booster. It's something that makes me feel good. It's part of my mental treatment. I think that's what this is all about."

For this year's event, Stuart performed his poem called *Salute to Our Veterans*. It reflects on every branch and all of the military being on the same team.

"One of the reasons our country is great like it is, is because of our veterans," he said. "When I wrote this salute, it doesn't matter what you call me — might see me as a

sailor, a soldier, Coast Guard, or Marine — but I'm a veteran. Just proud to be part of this great U.S. team. That's what inspired me to write this poem."

Stuart believes in the healing power of the arts that comes from participating in this event.

"When you go to a doctor or a behavioral health provider, part of your treatment plan is some type of prescription medicine," he said. "This is medicine. Singing is a form of medicine — sculpting, painting, drawing, writing — is medicine."

American Legion Auxiliary makes an impact

As co-presenters of the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, along with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the Auxiliary's support in volunteer hours and monetary donations make a difference in the NVCAF.

ALA members of the national Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Committee helped in a variety of ways — from registration to sewing, ironing, and steaming costumes, to helping with meals — they always put veterans' needs first so they could have an incredible Festival week. With the 2023 event being in St. Louis, the Department of Missouri hosted the always popular hospitality room.

Looking ahead

Through this lifechanging experience, many veterans leave with a newfound sense of purpose, the desire to participate again, a feeling of camaraderie with their fellow veterans, and the shared healing power of the arts.

"I definitely see that people get a lot from this," Stewart said. "It's my first time and I haven't quite grasped the entire thing, but this week seems to impact the other 51 weeks of people's lives and I think that matters quite a bit." ★

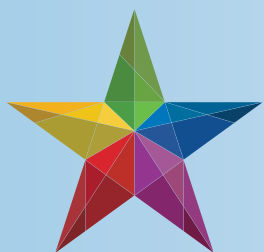


FESTIVAL WEEK (opposite page): Veterans rehearsed throughout the week and performed during the stage show finale; creative writer medal winners pose for a photo before the writing exhibition. This page (clockwise): The National Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Committee and national leadership; companions created mosaic artwork; community members attend the meet and greet for the creative writers; VA&R Committee members help in the costume room.

NATIONAL FESTIVAL DEBUTS NEW LOGO

The 2023 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival featured a new logo. Wondering what it all means? The points of the star represent the five divisions of the competition:

- Green is for the art division and represents growth, new beginnings, health, and wellness.
- Blue is for creative writing. Past Festival participants have said that when they are writing, they feel relaxed and calm. The story or poem they shared makes them feel like they have purpose.
- Purple reflects the dance division. The color inspires passion, creativity, and can kick start your imagination.
- Red has been associated with theater for many years. It also represents courage and a sense of energy, awareness, and reflection.
- Yellow brings it all home with the music division. Yellow brings about feelings of hope, joy, happiness, and positivity — all the feels when you are listening to or singing your favorite song or a tune that makes you smile.



NATIONAL VETERANS
CREATIVE ARTS
FESTIVAL



Next year's Festival will be in Denver! Stay tuned for more updates by following @ALAFforVeterans on social media.



**'THEY NEED TO COME HOME'
VERMONT LEGION FAMILY'S
WEEKLY VIGIL
CREATES POW/MIA AWARENESS**

BY SARA FOWLER

You are not forgotten.

Those strong words are the focus behind the support The American Legion Family gives to Prisoners of War/Missing in Action (POW/MIA). Across the country, a POW/MIA chair is visible in many American Legion post homes.

Annually in September, that focus receives a spotlight via National POW/MIA Recognition Day. Established in 1979 through a proclamation signed by President Jimmy Carter, each president since has issued an annual proclamation declaring the third Friday in September as National POW/MIA Recognition Day.

Ceremonies for this day are held across the country — state capitals, schools, and veterans' facilities — among other locations.

For Vermont American Legion Post and ALA Unit 49, a vigil is held every Thursday for those who are still missing.

Some weeks, it is a silent vigil to really emphasize why the Family does this — such as Memorial Day or Veterans Day — other times, there is sharing and fellowship. At the end, a POW/MIA poem is read, the flag is properly folded, and most leave with a solemn reminder of those who have yet to make it back home after honorably serving their country.

The event is held no matter the weather — winter winds, pelting rain, scorching sun — or any other conditions Mother Nature unleashes.

“You dress accordingly,” said Kelly Donaldson, ALA Department of Vermont president and regular attendee of the vigil. “Are there days when it is sweltering hot and days when it is bitterly cold? Yes. I remember a snowstorm, and it was horrendous. We are responsible for maintaining that memorial, shoveling, and making it safe for whomever comes out. It was a Valentine’s Day storm. It was horrible, but it was our obligation and what we feel is the upmost importance. We stand with umbrellas, hand in hand, and huddle together for warmth. During the summer, we are farther apart. It is a commitment — it doesn’t matter what the weather is.”

A prominent part of the vigil is the POW/MIA flag displayed the entire time — the black and white image of a gaunt silhouette, a strand of barbed wire, and an ominous watchtower. The national American Legion Auxiliary and other organizations, civilians, and businesses

choose to fly this flag every single day. The gesture is done to respect and honor those who were held in captivity and returned, as well as those who have yet to come home.

The POW/MIA flag came from efforts of family members during the Vietnam War who wanted to make the public aware of their loved ones who were being held prisoner or declared missing.

“We stand for one minute every year since the Vietnam War ended, so every year, it goes up another minute,” Donaldson said. “I’m very proud of my family and the community members who do this.”

Vermont’s regularly occurring vigil started in August 1993 and has been held since. It currently lasts 48 minutes.

“There is no sitting unless you are not capable of standing — it is a standing vigil,” Donaldson said. “[Vietnam veterans] did that because they wanted it out there that they didn’t have a choice when they joined the military. A lot of them were drafted. They didn’t have a choice to stand or sit. Forty-eight minutes to stand in bitter cold and rain is nothing compared to what they went through. I know it’s something I committed myself to. We just do it.”

Holding the vigil on a weekly basis helps get the word out to residents and visitors alike, and emphasizes how important this topic still is.



COMMUNITY VIGIL (opposite page): Each Thursday, a POW/MIA vigil is held in Fair Haven, Vt. This page: The plaque marking Veterans Memorial Park and the location of the vigil; Vietnam veteran Joseph Donaldson with a POW/MIA flag jacket (photos: vibeportraitart.com).

“So many people don’t know what [POW/MIA] is,” she said. “It shows we are still fighting for them. We aren’t giving up on them.”

Donaldson found out just last year that only two vigils are held weekly as part of the volunteer organization Northeast POW/MIA Network — one in New Hampshire and this one in Vermont.

The vigil is a place for veterans to gather and be with each other — a safe haven for them — as they support one another in supporting those who are still missing.

“[My father] has said many times: ‘It doesn’t matter who they are. They need to come home — the family needs that closure,’” Donaldson said.

Having a close connection with the military, Donaldson said the vigil is a positive in her father’s life and the lives of the other veterans who attend this event.

“I feel it’s part of my father’s healing,” she said of her Vietnam veteran dad. “I don’t have the words to put what it has done for my dad, but it’s a good thing.”

Vermont’s vigil brings awareness to the community on how POW/MIA is still an ongoing issue. Many people don’t realize or have forgotten that our country still has missing servicemembers from several wars.

“We have people come [to the vigil] on a regular basis, some who are seasonal, and some who stop by periodically,” Donaldson said. “It really is a touching ceremony.”

About 10 people attend the event regularly, including several of Donaldson’s family members. She’s a nurse at a hospital, so she doesn’t get to make it every Thursday, but during the weeks she isn’t working those nights, she is there.

“Nothing comes above it [for me],” she said.

Vermont’s vigil is a Legion Family event with a mixture of members from Post and Unit 49 and surrounding Legion posts. They also have people attend from nearby Whitehall, N.Y. The farthest regular attendee comes from Massachusetts.

The vigil is held in Veterans Memorial Park, which is across from Fair Haven Town Park — some people witness the vigil just by being in the area.

“That’s how we are educating our community on what we are doing,” Donaldson said of the prime location. “We won’t stop until every single remain is home.”

U.S. Department of Defense agency helps to bring servicemembers home

In addition to American Legion Family members and other veteran organizations bringing awareness to those still missing, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) is responsible for determining the fate of our missing, and, where possible, recovering and

identifying those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

DPAA’s mission is to provide the fullest accounting for our nation’s missing personnel to their families and nation.

More than 81,500 Americans currently remain missing from World War II, Korean War, Vietnam War, Cold War, and the Gulf War/other conflicts. According to the DPAA, 75 percent of those losses are in the Indo-Pacific with over 41,000 presumed lost at sea.

On Joint Base Pearl Harbor Hickam in Hawaii, the DPAA has the largest and most diverse skeletal identification laboratory in the world with more than 30 anthropologists, archaeologists, and forensic odontologists on staff.

The hardest part of accounting for missing servicemembers is not having the necessary DNA family reference samples to make an identification. For descendants of missing servicemembers, contact your service casualty officer about a DNA sample by visiting www.DPAA.mil/Families/Contact-Information.

National ALA focuses on POW/MIA

For the 2022-2023 ALA administrative year, National President Vickie Koutz has been working to raise awareness of our country’s POWs and MIAs. Her husband, Jim, returned to Vietnam years after serving overseas to help dig for remains. Listening to Jim talk about his experiences made Koutz realize how important POW/MIA awareness still is today, leading her to place a special emphasis on this topic during her term as ALA’s national president.

Koutz has spoken about POW/MIAs during her ALA visits.

“It’s just touching,” Donaldson said of Koutz’s POW/MIA focus. “It is pride knowing we are part of her awareness. We need to get these men and women home. It’s inspired me to raise more understanding and promote it more.”

Koutz spent time in Oregon with Team Long Road — U.S. Marine Corps veterans Justin “JD” LeHew, Coleman “Rocky” Kinzer, and Ray Shinohara — who hiked through 12 states and 3,365 miles to bring awareness to our POWs/MIAs, and that search efforts need to continue.

Hearing their stories, Koutz learned how The American Legion Family could help. Continuing to address this issue in her visits as national president, and having units like Donaldson’s that regularly focus on POW/MIA, is helping more citizens understand the importance of finding our missing.

“I’m humbled to be part of such a dedicated group of people,” Donaldson said. “I want to be there someday when remains are brought home and see the closure for these families.” ★



REMEMBERING OUR POW/MIA: Community members gather weekly to pay tribute to our POW/MIA. The vigil has drawn several people from the Fair Haven, Vt., area and even others from nearby states to honor our servicemembers (photos: vibeportraitart.com).

History behind POW/MIA

- National POW/MIA Recognition Day was established in 1979 through a proclamation signed by President Jimmy Carter.
- Since Carter, each subsequent president has issued an annual proclamation commemorating the third Friday in September as National POW/MIA Recognition Day.
- In 1997, a law was enacted that further strengthened the importance of the day by officially designating it as one of six days per year that the POW/MIA flag is required to be flown at designated federal government locations.
- The official U.S. POW/MIA flag resulted from the efforts of family members to display a suitable symbol that made the public aware of their loved ones who were held prisoner or declared missing during the Vietnam War.
- The flag was flown over the White House for the first time in September 1982, making it the only flag other than the U.S. flag to be displayed there.
- In 2019, the National POW/MIA Flag Act was signed into law, requiring the flag to be displayed whenever the American flag is displayed on prominent federal properties.

Source: DPAA.mil



See you in Charlotte as we celebrate the end of ALA's 2022-2023 year

Annually, about 9,000 members of The American Legion Family attend National Convention, which includes conventions for The American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, and Sons of The American Legion, as well as The American Legion Riders Legacy Run. The 2023 National Convention is Aug. 25-31 in Charlotte, N.C. This will be the 102nd National Convention for the American Legion Auxiliary and 104th National Convention for The American Legion.

The purpose of our National Convention is to elect officers, receive reports, and conduct the business of the organization as required by the ALA National Constitution, Bylaws, and Standing Rules. Part of that business is conducted by the National Executive Committee, the national board of directors of the ALA with fiduciary, policy, and strategic responsibility for the organization. The 2022-2023 NEC will meet before convention, and the 2023-2024 NEC will be convened by the newly elected national president after convention.

A few highlights of the week will include color guard and band contests, Legion Riders Legacy Run arrival, pre-convention committee meetings, the patriotic memorial service, American Legion Family

Baseball Night at Truist Field, opening convention session, and the installation of the 2023-2024 national officers.

Several major ALA awards are presented at our National Convention to honor outstanding successes in service to veterans, military, and their families, both within the ALA and out in the community:

- **Salute to Servicemembers Award** recognizes military members from each branch of service.
- **Unit Member of the Year** recognizes all department UMOY winners who exemplify the values and ideals of the Auxiliary and whose accomplishments impact the programs in their units.
- **The Public Spirit Award** recognizes outstanding individuals and organizations for contributions that positively impact communities through service to our military, veterans, and their families.

The 2023 Public Spirit Award will be presented to Team Long Road, featuring U.S. Marine Corps veterans Justin "JD" LeHew, Coleman "Rocky" Kinzer, and Ray Shinohara. On Dec. 17, 2022, Team Long Road completed a 3,365 mile hike across America from Boston, Mass., to Newport, Ore. The team covered 20-plus miles per day for over six months, all while carrying 40-pound rucksacks through 12



different states in honor and remembrance of our nation's Prisoners Of War, Missing, and Killed In Action and their Gold Star Families.

Last November, 2022-2023 ALA National President Vickie Koutz spent some time with Team Long Road as they were walking in Oregon. Like the trio, Koutz is raising awareness for POW/MIAs (read more in the February 2023 issue of *Auxiliary* magazine). This year, the Public Spirit Award will be presented on stage during a general session of the American Legion Auxiliary convention.

During the week, convention attendees also have the opportunity to honor a veteran or military personnel by donating to the Wall of Heroes. All funds received will benefit the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation's Mission Endowment Fund to ensure the ALA's mission of service endures for future generations. Those who cannot attend in person can still donate online in honor of their hero by visiting www.ALAFoundation.org.

At the end of the week, the national offices of president, vice president, division vice presidents, chaplain, and historian are elected by National Convention delegates on Wednesday and installed thereafter.

Learn more about the ALA's 102nd National Convention: www.ALAforVeterans.org/convention. Stay connected through social media for the event by using #AuxCon23.

Unable to attend National Convention in person but still want to participate? Here are two easy ways:

Catch the pre-cons virtually

Several pre-convention committee meetings will take place virtually Aug. 9-22: Chaplains, Historians, Americanism, Auxiliary Emergency Fund, Children & Youth, Community Service, Education, Finance, ALA Girls Nation, Junior Activities, Leadership, Legislative, Membership, National Security, Poppy, Public Relations, and Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation. (The Rules, Resolutions, Credentials, and the Constitution & Bylaws pre-convention committee meetings will be held in person Aug. 26 in the Charlotte Convention Center.) Any ALA member can attend the pre-convention committee meetings; however, only official representatives who are convention delegates/alternates (as designated by the departments) are allowed to vote.



See general sessions and installation online

Our livestream is available for each of the general sessions and installation of national officers. Livestreaming will begin on Monday, Aug. 28, and airs live during each general session. Viewers of the livestream can post comments during each session. Archived video recordings will be available following convention so you also can watch at your convenience.

Find info on both of these options at www.ALAforVeterans.org/convention.



**VETERAN-FOCUSED LAW FIRM HELPS EDUCATE ALA MEMBERS ON CAMP LEJEUNE JUSTICE ACT
NEW PARTNERSHIP IS HELPING SURVIVORS AND DEPENDENTS AVOID PREDATORY FIRMS**

In October 2022, The American Legion and law firm Bergmann & Moore (B&M) entered into a memorandum of understanding to help Legionnaires understand the Camp Lejeune Justice Act (CLJA), which allows certain veterans to collect damages from the federal government due to their exposure to contaminated water on the Marine Corps base. B&M is a national law firm founded in 2004 and managed by former VA attorneys providing high-quality representation of veterans before the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (CAVC), and other courts as well as providing effective advocacy training in VA benefits law, including CAVC cases and related matters.

Since its founding in 1919, the American Legion Auxiliary has held a strong relationship with the Legion. Committed to taking care of veterans and military, the Auxiliary puts its trust in the Legion to ensure the utmost attention and consideration is given to those we serve. The ALA signed a memorandum of understanding with B&M in May 2023. As part of this new partnership:

- In collaboration with B&M and The American Legion, the ALA is assisting and creating and implementing a service project initiative of outreach and support for veterans, their survivors, and dependents interested in participating

in the PACT Act/CLJA litigation.

- Assisting with the protection of Legion members and their families through comprehensive education, advocacy, and assistance in determining whether a claim under the CLJA would be beneficial to them when compared with filing for and receiving benefits from programs administered by the VA.

- Through the ALA, encouraging veterans to visit their Legion Department Service Officer about the maximum benefits allowed under the law while protecting against predatory and/or unscrupulous actors; and/or to prevent Legion members and their family members from accepting/receiving a one-time benefit under the CLJA to the detriment of greater, future VA program eligibility and entitlement.

- Assisting with the promotion of resources — education and information to ensure veterans, spouses, and dependents do not become victims of predatory practices.

Bergmann & Moore has provided American Legion service officer training and legal consultation since 2017. Not only have they delivered no-cost representation to Legionnaires, family members, and others, but they also train Legion advocates through a national training program to prepare Legion Department Service Officers to win the most VA benefits for veterans and

families at the local VA regional office.

Although the Camp Lejeune Justice Act potentially offers benefits to veterans and their families, it's important that these benefits are carefully evaluated by a firm that understands VA disability benefits. Bergmann & Moore are Veteran Affairs disability benefits attorneys who have helped veterans and families for almost two decades.

Bergmann & Moore is working with The American Legion and ALA to make sure its members and their families are not taken advantage of by mass tort firms that advertise on television but don't actually understand VA benefits.

Veterans, family members, and others who were affected by contaminated water at Camp Lejeune are encouraged to consult American Legion-accredited service officers about the lawsuit or any other matters related to the PACT Act, which extends VA disability relief for veterans exposed to toxic contamination. Visit Legion.org and click on "Find a Service Officer" to reach an accredited advocate by ZIP code.

American Legion Auxiliary members can continue showing their support in three ways:

- Outreach: notifying membership about the facts.
- Promoting understanding to counter confusion.
- Correcting misrepresentations.

Coordinating an accurate message is key:

- Educating veterans and families of CLJA.
- Informing Legion members, Auxiliary members, and their families through mailings or public service announcements explaining options.
- Protecting Legion members and their families from predatory and dishonest actors.
- Ensuring any process changes or updates are broadcast.

More information will be forthcoming to ALA members. Follow National Headquarters' social media accounts @ALAforVeterans for the most up-to-date notifications.

Bid to Win States Dinner Silent Auction

The States Dinner Silent Auction will take place on Aug. 30 at the ALA National Convention. All proceeds will benefit the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation. Bidding will be online, so even if you can't attend in person, you can still be a winner.

Scan here to bid:



Bid by
Aug. 30, 2023

Place your bids here:
www.charityauctionstoday.com/auctions/ALAF-37091 or scan the QR code.



The American Legion Auxiliary Foundation is a 501(c)(3) public charity that supports the American Legion Auxiliary. All gifts to the Foundation are tax-deductible as allowed by the United States Tax Code and U.S. Internal Revenue Service. © American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters. All rights reserved. 05/2023



AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY

2023-2024 ALA Mission Training dates now available

In these one-day conferences, you'll be inspired while learning more about working the ALA's core programs in an interactive and fun environment. **BONUS:** National Junior meetings are held at the same time and in the same city as Mission Training events.

Learn more: www.ALAforVeterans.org/Meetings/Mission-Training.

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LEADERSHIP: ALA MENTORING IS A NECESSITY

 www.Facebook.com/groups/ALALeadership

Mentoring in the American Legion Auxiliary means taking the time to work with another individual to teach them about the ALA — to explain to members who we are, what we do, and why we matter.

Don't hold back information. Share the knowledge you have, and let those you mentor run with the knowledge to do even better than you did.

One of the best ways to improve is to find someone who will mentor you — someone who will be there to assist you, give you tips along the way, answer your questions, and guide you along the path. If they don't know the answer, a good mentor will find the information for you. However, don't be afraid to talk to more than one person or to have more than one mentor. Remember: No one person knows everything.

The American Legion Auxiliary has many members who have “been

there, done that” no matter what the activity or the office is in the ALA. Sometimes, individuals want to hold on to their knowledge and not share what they know, believing this gives them power over others. The ALA motto is *Service Not Self* and it reflects what members with knowledge need to be thinking as they serve our organization. Share the knowledge you have — teach others so their path, whether it's working on a special project or serving in an office, is easier than what your path was. This is truly *Service Not Self* thinking and action on your part.

I was recently asked to mentor someone. My biggest piece of advice was I would not dictate what they had to do, but I was there to support them along the way. Remember: As a mentor, we don't have to agree with their decisions; the individual you are mentoring needs to be able to figure out what would work best

for them as they make their choices for proceeding.

As a mentor, be proud of who you are and the knowledge you have. Remember that even if someone has not asked you to mentor them, as a leader you may be inspiring someone just by being you. And that, in the end, is the biggest compliment you can receive.

I am a big fan of *The Voice* and as I watched the finale, I was impressed how each artist had improved from the time they auditioned to their final performances. These artists had been mentored along the way by incredible musical artists. This is the same thing we do as ALA mentors. We should see a better final performance than when the ALA member began their leadership journey in the ALA.



Nancy E. Magginnis has been an ALA member since childhood in Kendallville Unit 86 in Kendallville, Ind.

FINANCE: PROTECTING OUR FINANCIAL FUTURE



Your national Finance Committee continues to meet in accordance with our bylaws. Be assured that the Finance Committee has been and will continue to do our due diligence in protecting our finances. Each month, your Finance Committee is given a complete accounting of our finances from the ALA National Headquarters Finance Division director, as well as our national treasurer. Our responsibility is to review them and ask questions if necessary.

The responsibility is to develop the annual budget, which is monitored closely throughout the

fiscal year. We also must ensure the funds are available to carry out the programs and mission set forth by the program chairs and our national president.

Training events and activities such as ALA Mission Training and the national Junior meetings are programs the Finance Committee supports and looks forward to in the future. Training strengthens our future and brings the most up-to-date information to our members. Remember to share with other unit members the information you learn at these trainings. Let's double our attendance to ensure the future of our organization.

Your Finance Committee stands ready to support what is best for

continuing to build leaders and friendships. Whether it is face-to-face training or virtual training, we understand the need for all kinds of opportunities and will be looking to support those now and in the future. Watch ALA social media and your email inbox for learning opportunities that will be available to you.

The Finance Committee stands ready and willing to serve our leadership, as well as our membership.



Sharon Conatser is a 69-year member of the American Legion Auxiliary, Urbana Unit 71 in Illinois, and is a Past National President.

MEMBERSHIP: YOUR MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

 www.Facebook.com/groups/ALAMembership



What an amazing year we have had so far! Our units have gone above and beyond

reaching out to their members to renew, recruit, and rejoin this year — all the way from writing “we miss you” postcards, literally going house to house knocking on doors — and others working as an American Legion Family by taking a membership caravan and traveling over 1,600 miles for membership. Kudos to you all for continuing to work our mission!

We started off the year inviting every department Membership Committee chairman to a quarterly Zoom call. Attendance was fantastic, and participants indicated that they learned so much from other departments when they went

into their division chat rooms. They loved sharing their experiences both good and bad, and picked up a lot of great pointers! Many department Membership Committee chairmen started their own Zoom calls to share ideas and discuss what’s working and what’s not working. Communicate, communicate, communicate — by using Zoom, you are sure that everyone heard the same thing and is on the same page.

From these calls, many learned more about ALAMIS (the member database) and how easy and beneficial it was! This year, we have had a real surge of units using ALAMIS! We now have over 4,000 ALAMIS users! And now, it’s even easier to sign up: Departments submit ALAMIS setup requests to National Headquarters. Once received, the national organization will set up the user

with access and provide an email with login instructions and training information. National has a self-taught course for unit full training, which consists of short videos followed by a quiz the member will need to take. Once they complete the quiz, their score is emailed to national membership, and if they pass, the member’s access is set up and they’re good to go!

What a great job you have all done! Your hard work has not gone unnoticed by this chairman. You still have time to achieve 100 percent, and by the way it looks, we might all be driving down National President Vickie Koutz’s victory lane together!



Linda Tome is a 26-year member of the Auxiliary. She belongs to James R. Hickey Unit 120 in Palmyra, N.Y.



5 Steps to Double Your Donation

Matching Gift Process



Contact your human resources, employee benefits, or community relations office to determine if your company matches employee charitable donations. For more information, visit ALAFoundation.org.

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INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

A major focus of the American Legion Auxiliary is to better enhance the lives of our military children. It is important that we recognize the sacrifices of the children of those who served, because they are the future of this great nation. Providing funds to assist these youth so they can pursue higher education is a concrete way of showing how much we truly care.

The American Legion Auxiliary sponsors the Children of Warriors National Presidents' Scholarship to support the children of our warriors with academic financial assistance. These scholarships are awarded to 15 students annually who excel in academics and volunteer in their communities.

In 2023, The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation (CWF) Inc., awarded the ALA a \$65,000 grant for American Legion

Auxiliary National Youth Program Scholarships, specifically benefiting the Children of Warriors National Presidents' Scholarship. The total funds awarded for this scholarship annually by the Auxiliary are \$75,000 (15 x \$5,000). With the CWF funding of \$65,000, it is over 86% of the total funding needed for this scholarship. Teamwork really does make the dream work!

"An important part of this grant award is that it provides a specific collaboration among The American Legion and American Legion Auxiliary," said Dean Sanders, ALA National Headquarters' development manager.

The Children of Warriors National Presidents' Scholarship funds three \$5,000 scholarships that are awarded annually per geographic division, for a total of 15 scholarships. These scholarships

are for undergraduate study only at a four-year accredited college or university, and may be used for tuition, books, fees, room, and board. For more information regarding rules for the Children of Warriors National Presidents' Scholarship or to submit an application, visit our website at www.ALForVeterans.org/scholarships/children-of-warriors.

The American Legion Auxiliary and The American Legion are dedicated to making a difference in the lives of children throughout the country, and together, we can make a huge impact.

The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation Inc. was organized to contribute to the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual welfare of children and youth. For more information, visit www.cwf-inc.org.



**AMERICAN
LEGION
AUXILIARY**

***Need ideas
on executing
ALA programs?***

**Log in to the MyAuxiliary
member portal to learn how
you can serve our mission!**

www.ALForVeterans.org/committees

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Provided by Karen Peel, National Chaplain 2022-2023 | www.Facebook.com/groups/ALAchaplains

AUGUST

THE POWER OF KINDNESS

Who are the kindest people you know? Isn't being in their presence like sitting in sunshine? Kind people make you glad to be alive; they help you see beyond the fog of worry or discontent. "Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up" (Proverbs 12:25).

What does living a life of kindness mean? It means curbing our impulse to speak sharply. It means praying every day: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer" (Psalm 19:14). If a harsh word escapes us in a moment of stress, kindness motivates us to make a sincere apology.

Sometimes, kindness means shading the stark truth: "You're looking so much better" to a friend going through a hard time and showing it. "I believe in you completely" to someone you care about who is struggling to get his footing in life or on the job. In this way, we help to "bear one another's burdens."

Kindness means refraining from complaining or gossiping, letting the other driver go first, and putting your cart into the cart corral at the grocery store rather than leaving it in the next parking space. It means sending a note or card, making a hospital visit, and bringing a meal to a shut-in.

It means giving to the needy a substantial part of what we are blessed to have. It means being patient with those who try that patience. And it means forgiving, with no strings attached.

True kindness means being gentle in our inner, private thoughts — catching ourselves forming critical, negative judgments and nipping them in the bud. A surefire way to do that is to turn a negative thought into a prayer for that person. Pray for one another.

The best thing about kindness is that it comes with a double blessing. The person who offers kindness gets as much or more out of the deed as the recipient. So, make a conscious effort today to be kind to everyone you meet. It will make them — and you — feel better!

Heavenly Father, help me to tame my tongue. Give me the gift of gracious words. Let kindness flow easily from my lips and let me spread kindness and compassion on a daily basis. I want to bring sweetness to the souls of those you have placed in my life. I am grateful for the blessings that you will pour upon us when we are kind. Amen.

SEPTEMBER

THE RIGHT FOUNDATION

Let your roots grow down into Him, and let your lives be

built on Him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness. Colossians 2:7

His brothers laughed at his heavy laboring, day in and day out, while they lounged around without a care in the world. Their homes had taken no time at all to complete, and they liked them just fine. Until the wolf came, with his gusting huffs and puffs and then... The story is as familiar as its lesson: Take time to do things right so when trouble comes (and it usually does), you will be safe. Build with **worthy** materials, and you'll have something that lasts through the fiercest of storms.

Is your foundation right, and is it strong?

God is the rock on which we can build with confidence. Not only can we have assurance in His firm foundation, but He promises to bless us as we dwell with Him. It may not always be easy, but He promises us that it will always be worth it. Rains, flooding, and gusting wind will come, but He will see us through every storm with truth which will strengthen our faith. We will see Him triumph over sin and darkness, and we will overflow with thankfulness and blessings!

God, help us to rejoice in the midst of the storms. As the winds howl around us, let our faith grow strong. Nothing can come against us that will blow our house down when you are our strong foundation. Amen.

OCTOBER

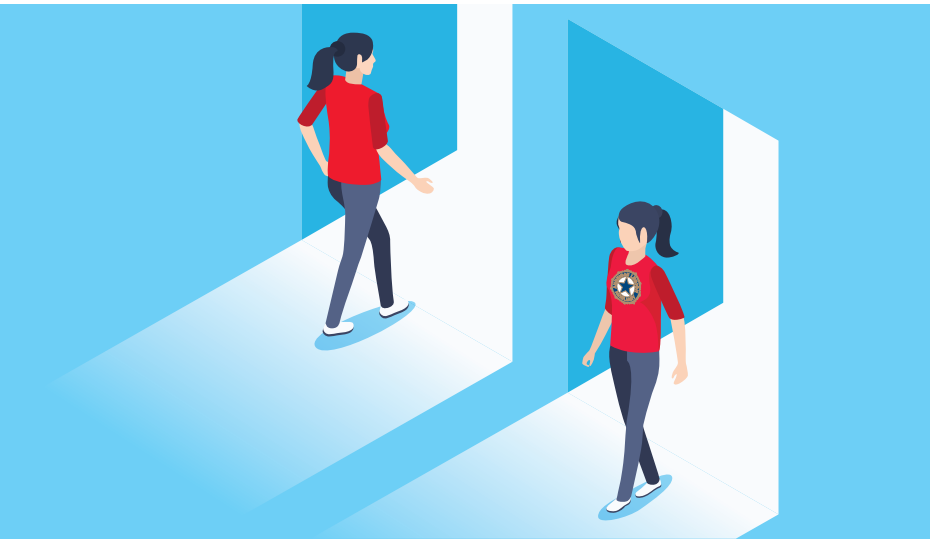
Autumn is a beautiful season of transformation. A *Prayer for Autumn Days* by Joyce Rupp allows us to slow down and appreciate the changes in fall, which is my favorite season — candy corn and pecan and pumpkin pies — what could be better? Usually, we are busy going from one thing to the next, that if we blink, autumn is over ... replaced by lots of snow and puffy winter coats.

Take time to enjoy and reflect on the beauty of autumn and the wonders our Heavenly Father created just for us. I hope you will Google this prayer. It brings to the forefront things we take for granted. Let us remember that God is a God of the seasons, God of autumn, God of fallen leaves, God of misty days and harvest moon nights, God of harvest wagons and fields of ripened grain, God of flowers, and a God of life.

Heavenly Father, help us to take time to enjoy and reflect on the beauty of the autumn season. All the wonders You have created, just for us. You are a God of love and wonder. For all this, we are grateful. Amen.



Karen Peel is a 32-year member of Firestone Memorial Unit 449 in Akron, Ohio.



TAKE A BOW! BOUNDARIES ARE IMPORTANT IN LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS

WHY ‘LEAVING THE STAGE WHILE THE AUDIENCE IS STILL CLAPPING’ IS IMPORTANT

When Joe Plenzler began his work at the Pentagon as a public affairs officer to the commandant of the U.S. Marines, he reached out to a mentor who had served in the same capacity for a Marine Corps general.

That mentor, he says, had been a lieutenant colonel whose abilities put her on track to becoming a colonel and a brigadier general. But she retired before reaching those ranks. Plenzler asked her why.

Her answer offers lessons about the importance of recognizing when it’s time to step aside as a leader and then honoring the transition to new governance. Plenzler says she explained her decision to retire in this way:

“I believe in leaving the stage while the audience is still clapping.”

Plenzler now is a partner at Cassandra-Helenus Partners, a Washington, D.C.-area leadership development and executive coaching firm he co-founded. The Marine veteran recommends that others follow the lead of his mentor whose advice he sought out more than a decade ago. In a text conversation, he noted the wisdom of understanding how far a leader can take a group and when it’s time to move on.

It’s wisdom that applies to leaders

ranging from chief executive officers for large corporations to local officers of charitable organizations like the American Legion Auxiliary: Know when it’s time to go. And when you go, let others steer the ship.

So, what do you do if you’re an ALA unit officer struggling with handing over the reins to new leaders? And if you’re one of those new leaders, how do you ensure that the work transitions to you, giving you and other members the freedom to coordinate plans and activities as you see fit?

Plenzler says it comes down to two issues:

- understanding the reasons that could drive a leader’s reluctance to step aside
- having an organizational system and expectations that guide leadership transitions

Groups that don’t account for these issues risk leadership problems that drive members away. In the case of the ALA, that could lead to an exodus to other units or organizations. It could also lead to members dropping out altogether.

Help your ALA unit avoid these fates by ensuring that your own leaders leave while the audience is still clapping. Follow these tips

to ensure the timely transition of responsibilities:

Examine your mindset. Our national culture, which Plenzler describes as “live-to-work,” often is at the heart of leaders’ reluctance to step down. “I can completely understand the fears associated with letting go — loss of status and relatedness,” he says. But leaders should look beyond that tendency, carefully considering whether they’ve reached their limit in their leadership roles and if a changing of the guard would benefit the group.

Embrace lifelong learning.

Whether you’re a leader who’s moving on or a member who’s stepping into a new role, understand that this new path represents an opportunity to try something new. For former leaders, that might mean assuming the role of a mentor to their successors. For those who replace them, it can mean showing a willingness to expand their responsibilities and make their own mark. In fact, Plenzler says he has a friend who insists that it’s important for people to move to new roles as soon as they’ve mastered the one they have.

Monitor your culture. In a 2019 *Entrepreneur* magazine article, John Rampton, founder of the productivity tool Calendar, says a toxic culture might be an indicator of leadership that’s worn out its welcome. It’s a leader’s responsibility to ensure a positive environment, so it’s important to take note of any spikes in membership losses or behaviors like gossip and bullying — and then take a hard look at whether they are related to concerns about the group’s direction.

Take pre-emptive steps.

Establish an environment that defines leadership as a limited-time position to relinquish when appropriate for the good of the group. For leaders, “it should be the norm that, when their term is up, they should fully support the efforts of the new leadership team and help them in the way they want to be helped,” Plenzler says. “If a former leader can’t do that, it’s best for them to leave the organization.”

AN UPDATED BRANDING GUIDE TO NAVIGATE ALA'S NEW LOOK

You may have noticed new brand marks (logos) for the entire American Legion Family. Some of you love them, and in all honesty, some of you are not a fan. We understand: Making a change is hard after 100 years. But here's the great part — the traditional blue star emblem isn't going away. We are not forgetting about tradition; we're simply enhancing our brand. Think of the new marks as accessories. We know it may take some time to adapt, but give these logos a chance and you might change your mind.

To help you get to know these marks, their purpose, and how to use them, an updated *ALA Branding Guide* is available at www.ALAForVeterans.org. The guide will answer many of your questions.



Before you head over to our website, read on for some of the most important things you need to know about the new logos.

The American Legion Auxiliary emblem — as a member, it's easily recognizable to you. You can spot someone wearing it from across the room. But that's not the case for those outside of The American Legion Family. The words *American Legion Auxiliary* can be hard to read from a distance. Unless someone is familiar with the blue star, they may mistake it with another organization's emblem that has similar traits. That's why the new logos are an important addition to our marketing toolbox.

These logos have a clean, modern look that's easy to read. This is why they are ideal to use for promotional purposes, such as shirts, hats, banners, etc. As members are doing great work in their communities, the brand marks make them identifiable, which in turn can lead to more members, volunteers, and donors.

This concept is not unique to The American Legion Family. Other organizations and companies have taken a similar approach in their marketing efforts. For example, most colleges have an emblem or a seal — would those be recognizable to you if you didn't attend that school? What about their school logo or mascot? Chances are, you would

recognize the logo and mascot over the emblem.

The United States military branches are another example. All have seals, but they also have separate brand marks. The department seal is used for official documents, and the brand mark is used for marketing/communications. This is because it is easier for the public to identify the brand mark versus the seal.

Think of our brand marks as an external way to tell people who we are, and the emblem is the official identifier for internal communications like charters, documents, etc.

Just like the emblem, there are guidelines on how to use the marks. Also just like the emblem, the marks are legally protected property of the American Legion Auxiliary, which means the same rules of permission to use the emblem apply to the brand marks. You can learn more about this in the *ALA Branding Guide*.

So, you may be wondering how this change came about. National Headquarters was notified by The American Legion — which owns the ALA's trademark name and emblem — in summer 2022 that some changes were coming. In September that year, the Legion obtained the final trademark on a new set of Legion Family marks that included the Auxiliary.

This is why they are ideal to use for promotional purposes, such as shirts, hats, banners, etc.

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY

DO:

- Use the new logos for marketing/communications.
- Keep clear space around the logos, free of other design elements.
- Like the traditional emblem, the same rules of permission exist.

DON'T:

- Use the brand mark for official documents (use the emblem).
- Alter the brand mark or place a background shape around it.
- Don't alter the colors.

For a full list of how to use, check out the *ALA Branding Guide* at www.ALAForVeterans.org.



FULL CIRCLE: Shelby and Suzanne Farris at 2022 ALA Delaware Girls State; Suzanne Farris and roommates at ALA Girls Nation 1997; Suzanne Farris at 1998 Maryland ALA Girls State as a counselor; Suzanne Farris meeting President Bill Clinton in 1997.

ALA GIRLS STATE/NATION EXPERIENCE COMES FULL CIRCLE

Suzanne Farris attended ALA Maryland Girls State and ALA Girls Nation in 1997. She credits the programs with shaping her future and having a big influence on her children.

Farris shares her experience in her own words:

I had never been very “politically minded,” and when I was asked to attend ALA Maryland Girls State, I had zero interest. When an alternate spot opened, it was only at the insistence of a family friend that I had decided to go.

By the end of that week, I had found the college I wanted to attend, and I had been elected to attend ALA Girls Nation. The two weeks I spent with the American Legion Auxiliary in the summer of 1997 changed my life.

ALA Girls Nation was inspiring and empowering. My fears and anxieties were quickly gone, and I enjoyed every moment. The photo of President Clinton and me hangs proudly in my den, and my children have heard the stories so many times they can practically recite them by memory.

Because of my time with ALA Girls State/Nation, I applied to college hoping to study education, political science, and law. I was admitted to Washington College in

Chestertown, the same college where our program was held. I obtained a degree in education and did advanced study in special education, leading me to the position I currently hold as the associate director of an organization that advocates for children and families dealing with disabilities and special healthcare needs.

Prior to ALA Girls State, I never realized that fighting for the needs of others was a job. I am the daughter of a disabled veteran. My father and I had a complicated relationship due in part to the PTSD he suffered. Growing up in a household that struggled because of my father’s disability left me with a unique perspective on life and made me acutely aware of the ways that families can suffer when dealing with a disability. My dad struggled tremendously and didn’t always come to school or extracurricular events because navigating the world in a wheelchair bothered him.

When he came to the closing ceremonies at ALA Girls State, I saw him cry tears of pride. As I prepared for ALA Girls Nation, our relationship changed. My dad was



always a very engaged citizen, and he took that responsibility seriously. This was the first thing he and I really had in common. When he died suddenly during my senior year of high school, it was the memories we made because of ALA Girls State and ALA Girls Nation that helped me get through. The following summer, I returned to ALA Girls State as a counselor and found a deep meaning in supporting other young women to grow and learn. Today, I carry those lessons and memories as I work to influence policy and advocate for the needs of those around me.

In 2018, my son attended Delaware Boys State and I was so excited for him. Like me, he hadn’t really been away from home and had never been interested in social justice. He also lives with Autism. His experience helped prepare him to be able to attend a four-year college and live independently.

In 2022, my middle daughter attended ALA Delaware Girls State and I watched her blossom in a way that reminded me so much of my experience exactly 25 years ago. Her excitement and enthusiasm warmed my heart, and when they announced she was selected to attend ALA Girls Nation, I cried in the same way my father did.

Her experience has empowered her and helped her find her voice. In part because of her experience, she competed for and was awarded a scholarship to Washington College. It all came full circle for us. She will attend the same college that ALA Girls State led me to. I can’t help but think, if I hadn’t given in to pressure and grudgingly attended ALA Girls State so long ago, our lives would look very different.

Words cannot express the gratitude my family and I have for the opportunities the ALA Girls State and ALA Girls Nation programs have provided us.

SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT THANKFUL FOR HELP, HOPES TO PAY IT FORWARD SOMEDAY

The American Legion Auxiliary sponsors the Children of Warriors National Presidents' Scholarship to support the children of our warriors. These scholarships are awarded to 15 students annually who excel in academics and volunteer in their communities.

Tycen Mooney was eligible to apply for this scholarship through his father, who served in the Montana National Guard for 34 years.

What does it mean to you to have a connection to the military through your father?

Both my dad and my uncle were full time active-duty soldiers in the Army National Guard. My dad deployed to Iraq when I was only 8 days old — so it's a deployment I do not have memories of — but I know my dad often talked about how much he missed seeing me hit those first-year milestones. He also has been to Kyrgyzstan and Romania. It's such a source of pride for me to talk about my dad and his career.

Can you describe the role military has played in your life?

While [my dad] was full-time military, I didn't have to worry quite as much as other children my age about moving. I always knew we would be based out of Montana, and my roots here are strong. My dad did deploy and had several annual training missions out of the country, but I was always able to depend on my family and friends. The village of family and friends my parents had built for my siblings and me is strong, so I always knew I'd be able to do all my sports and



MILITARY CONNECTION: Tycen Mooney is a 2023 Children of Warriors National Presidents' Scholarship recipient. He was eligible to apply through his father, Michael, who served in the Montana National Guard.

activities, even when my dad was gone.

How did you learn about the ALA's Children of Warriors National Presidents' Scholarship?

I play American Legion baseball and was talking with one of the Legion members who supports our program. He told me to do some research on the various American Legion Family scholarships. I owe him a huge thank-you.

What was your reaction when you found out you were a recipient of this scholarship?

When I read the letter from the American Legion Auxiliary, I was so excited. I had to read the paragraph several times. Reading it to my mom and dad, I felt so much pride. The cost of college is becoming so ridiculous, so having this support makes my first year feel so much more affordable.

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

I will be attending Concordia College in Moorhead, Minn. I will be

playing football for the Cobbers while studying pre-optometry.

Where did your interest in this career come from?

I have been having my eyes checked since I was probably around 3 years old. My optometrist has made my eye appointments so much fun. While I didn't need glasses until this past year, he always showed such compassion. After spending time talking to him at my last appointment on his education and career path, I felt this was the perfect career for me.

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

Start early. Volunteer. Discover your community. Work hard. Fill out your application knowing you deserve the scholarship. Hope for the best!

What would you say to the donors who support ALA scholarship funds?

There are not enough thank-yous in the world to thank all those who support scholarships! My goal is to be able to pay it forward and return the favor to other students someday.



www.ALAforVeterans.org/scholarships/scholarship-recipients

Check out this year's other ALA scholarship winners, including Spirit of Youth, Non-Traditional Student, Junior Member Loyalty, and more Children of Warriors National Presidents' Scholarship recipients.



BE THE ONE: Auxiliary member Elizabeth Hallene and her husband, Post Commander Bill Hallene at Post 414 in Sutton, Mass.; below, Chaplain Pete Gauthier and Hallene (photos: Aram Boghosian/The American Legion).



That night, Hallene was able to sleep well for the first time in quite a while. Still, Brennan had a long road of physical and emotional recovery ahead.

‘Longest 20 minutes of my life’

A fulfilling job is an important part of a successful transition back to the civilian world for servicemembers. Brennan worked as an emergency medical technician. But the trauma he experienced as an EMT only compounded his situation.

“He has PTSD, both from his time in the service in Afghanistan for things that he had to see and do over there to survive, and from being a first responder, paramedic, EMT,” she explains. “At the time, I didn’t know. He didn’t want his wife to say anything to me because he didn’t want me to worry. He always looks out for Mom. It was a tough go. I guess he had been spiraling downhill for a minimum of a year.”

On Aug. 7, 2021, Brennan called his mother.

“Something seemed off. He was having a really hard time, a really difficult time in both his professional life and his home life,” she recalls. “He needed some advice from Mom. He was sobbing uncontrollably on the telephone. It wasn’t my boy anymore. It didn’t sound like him.”

After their hour-long conversation, Hallene knew in her heart her boy was not OK. “Everything in me, as his mother, told me he needed me and not just on the phone.”

She texted her daughter-in-law. Then waited. “The longest 20 minutes of my life.”

Finally, Hallene received a text back: “We need you to come.”

Time was not on their side. They were separated by an hour’s drive. Thanks to a police escort, Hallene arrived only 30 minutes later.

“Most of the officers are veterans and know PTSD is no joke,” she says. “That is why this Be the One campaign is so important, so other families can

A MOTHER’S LOVE, A SON’S STRUGGLE, AND A CALL TO ‘BE THE ONE’

Without hesitation, American Legion Auxiliary member Elizabeth Hallene illuminated a ray of hope when her son, Brennan, was mired in a dark place.

Her actions are perhaps the most shining example of The American Legion’s “Be the One” initiative to reduce the rate of veteran suicide. Through Be the One, The American Legion aims to encourage anyone — veteran or civilian — to take the appropriate action when a veteran’s life may be at risk and to raise awareness about reducing the stigma of seeking mental health treatment.

Mother and son are members of a proud military family, which was among the reasons Brennan opted to join the Massachusetts National Guard.

No green dot

Brennan joined the Guard in 2012 and was deployed to Afghanistan as an engineer with the 379th Engineering Company in May 2014. Not knowing whether he was safe gnawed at Hallene.

“My daily routine during his deployment was that I would get up at 4 or 5 in the morning, have a cup

of coffee, turn on the computer, and sit in front of the computer screen waiting for the green dot to appear,” she explains. “That green dot meant I was going to see my boy.”

One day, the minutes ticked by. No green dot. More time elapsed. Still no green dot. Instead, there was a news item about six U.S. soldiers being killed in Afghanistan.

“My heart left my chest. I didn’t hear from my son. Communication was blocked out. I thought my son had been killed.”

After two grueling days, the green dot appeared.

“I felt a sigh of relief. I was happy. I was ecstatic. He told me he was OK, but he really wasn’t.”

After Brennan’s unit repelled an enemy attack, he climbed into the back of a trailer truck. The rotted floorboards gave out, sending Brennan down. He suffered a couple of blown discs in his back, and a torn ACL and MCL.

Homecoming

After what seemed like an eternity, Brennan and Hallene were reunited.

“I’ll never forget the day he came home,” she says, beaming.

get the help for their loved ones before it's too late. When I got to my son, he was shaking uncontrollably, crying uncontrollably. I couldn't get him to calm down. I later found out he had a gun in his mouth earlier. He was ready to die."

A Be the One success story

Hallene greeted her son with a hug and tried to calm him down. Eventually, she convinced him to let her take him to a hospital. But as an EMT, Brennan didn't want to go to a local hospital where others would know him. He agreed to go to one closer to where his mother lives.

About 10 minutes into the drive, Brennan started confiding in his mom.

"He began opening up about some of the stuff that he saw over in Afghanistan and as a paramedic EMT, some of the things he had to do to make sure he and the members of his unit could survive over there," she says. "It wasn't pretty. It was heart-wrenching. My heart breaks for all soldiers, but mostly for my son."

Hallene's approach was perfect: "All I could do was sit there and listen. And that's what the Be the One program advocates: Just listen, don't interrupt, and be there for the veteran."

After spending a couple of weeks in the hospital, Brennan lived with his mom, stepdad, and their 14-year-old daughter. That's when Hallene's Be the One mission transitioned to her family and their American Legion Family.

Family and fellowship

Hallene's husband, Bill, is commander of Dudley Gendron Post 414 in Sutton.

"We thought the camaraderie with the other veterans and the fellowship would help him, knowing these veterans could understand more of what he was going through," she

explains. "And it proved to be right."

Brennan's two primary veteran supporters are Bill Hallene and Pete Gauthier, or Chaplain Pete, the role he has held at Post 414 for about 20 years.

"I did everything I could to help him, to ground him, to be a dad," recalls Bill, who served with the Army's 82nd Airborne during Panama. "And I'm convinced the person who helped him the most was Pete. Family can only do so much. I'm his dad — it's my job. You [Pete] actually did more than you will ever know."

Gauthier, who served in the Navy during the Vietnam era, helps other veterans dealing with mental illness and substance abuse through his counseling role at the Providence (R.I.) VA Medical Center. He brought his experience in leading groups for post 9/11 veterans dealing with PTSD, anxiety, and depression to the post.



The post was a safety zone where veterans and first responders would meet, share their stories to their own comfort level, and form bonds. Over weekly sessions for six months, Brennan and other participants found healing.

A changed Brennan

Thanks to their mentorship, Brennan is doing much better. He

became junior vice commander at the post and also joined the Sons of The American Legion. Hallene is thankful for the Legion Family's role in her son's recovery.

"Before Chaplain Pete started the therapy, Brennan would sit around the house," she says. "And when Chaplain Pete started the counseling groups, he went from not wanting to get dressed and just sit in front of the TV or play video games to wanting to go to the post."

Be the One resources

It's worth noting that Hallene's action took place before Be the One launched in May 2022. She took great pride in sharing her family's story with American Legion National Commander Vincent J. "Jim" Troiola when he visited the post.

"I thanked him because without the Be the One campaign and him getting the message out there and letting people know there are tools

that families can access through veterans service officers, through the Legion website to help them be able to help their veterans or their loved ones get the help that they need. I had to find the help on my own. I didn't know where to turn."

Read more about Hallene's Be the One story and watch a video at www.Legion.org.

By Henry Howard

Media Training Workshop

The American Legion Media & Communications Division will sponsor an in-person and virtual Media Training Workshop on Monday, Aug. 28, at the Charlotte Convention Center from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Eastern, with a break for the awards luncheon. The workshop will be streamed live at Facebook.com/AmericanLegionHQ. Registration for the luncheon opened July 1 at legion.org/talma/banquet.

What do you get when you mix the desire to help those who have served their country with a love of nature and a home on a 200-acre farm?

For Carol Cook, it was the nonprofit organization Vets in Nature.

Since 2020, the program has hosted hunting and fishing events for military veterans. Vets in Nature pays for veterans' trips to the farm in Newfield, N.Y., that Cook shares with her husband, Marine veteran Bernard Cook. Their land serves as a home base for experiences in hunting for deer, geese, and ducks or fishing at nearby Cayuga Lake.

Cook, a member of American Legion Auxiliary New York Unit 907 in Candor, is a founder of Vets in Nature and serves as its event coordinator. The organization, which offers hunting or fishing expeditions nearly every month, grew from Cook's experience with Wounded Warriors in Action Foundation. That nonprofit hosts sporting trips for Purple Heart recipients.

Intrigued by the reports of veterans who participated in WWIA's trips, Cook and her husband decided to develop their own, similar organization. But this one would be broader in scope, providing all-expenses-paid experiences for any man or woman who has served in the military.

Now, former servicemembers, whose ages typically range from their 20s to their 70s, regularly visit the Cooks' farm. There, through Vets in Nature, they enjoy hospitality, hunting and fishing expeditions, and — perhaps most importantly — camaraderie built in the great outdoors.

To date, Vets in Nature has served mainly New York veterans. But Cook is spreading the word about the organization, hoping to expand its reach to people from other parts of the country and world.



ALL FOR VETERANS: Carol with her husband, Bernard; below: veterans with the fish they caught during a 2022 Vets In Nature fishing trip.



How did you begin coordinating hunting and fishing activities for veterans?

We hadn't done many fishing trips and thought it would be fun to get some boat captains and people around Cayuga Lake

involved in it. So, I talked to a friend who is an avid fisherman. He said he would love to do something. Then I Googled a number of boat captains and contacted several of them to see if they'd be interested in working with us, knowing that it was my first time putting together an event like this. And it just blossomed from there.

Why are Vets in Nature activities beneficial to veterans?

I think it is the peace and

solitude, just sitting out in a deer blind watching nature for four or five hours. You have a chance to really think and look at what's around you. And then when you come in to have a meal, you have other people who understand what you've been through, and you're able to talk about your experiences. I think it really makes a difference to be able to get rid of some really bad memories they have and then fill them with good memories.

What do you hope the organization achieves next?

I believe so much in this cause and so much in the veterans. We are doubling and, in some cases, tripling our number of veterans we are able to get out. We are expanding outside of New York. ... And I know there are women hunters, but we just haven't been able to attract them yet. I'd like to build that up.

What is your background in assisting veterans?

I didn't have a lot of experience. My husband is not a combat veteran. He was in the service during peacetime. But it has meant so much to him to have the camaraderie of other veterans. I was amazed at how open and honest they were about their experiences, not only about life at home but also about combat and in the military. That prompted me to form our own organization.



To learn more about participating in the organization's hunting or fishing events or about providing support, call (607) 307-8101, email vetsinnature@yahoo.com, or visit the Vets in Nature page on Facebook.

IDEAS TO GET YOUR COMMUNITY INVOLVED IN VETERANS DAY EVENTS

Veterans Day — Nov. 11 — is a great opportunity for ALA members to fulfill our mission of supporting veterans, the military, and their families. Below are numerous ways to extend your sincerest thank-you to those who served so selflessly and courageously.

AT YOUR POST/UNIT HOME

- **Attend a Veterans Day event or parade** representing your unit — there are parades all over the country; find the closest one to you!

- **Organize a care package packing party.** Invite your friends, ALA Junior members, unit members, and their families to get together for this activity. Popular items to include are necessities such as sunblock, socks, underwear, flip-flops, lip balm, and powder. Snacks, including chips, salsa, nuts, cookies, beef jerky, non-melting candy, and trail mix in packaging that isn't easily crushed are also ideal. Drink mixes in single-serving packets are also a good addition. When you're ready to send, check out ALA member benefits provider Ship Thrifty to begin shipping hassle-free. Go to www.shipthrifty.com/rf/ALA or use code "ALA" at sign-up.

- **Conduct a mission-oriented service project.** Your unit can show appreciation for veterans and servicemembers by hosting a pitch-in. Team up, collect items for care packages from your community, or prepare meals and drop them off at a veterans home or a VA facility.

- **Volunteer your ALA unit to participate in a stand down.** Typically a one- to three-day event, stand downs provide supplies and services such as food, clothing, shelter, and health screenings for homeless veterans. The veterans can also receive referral services for substance use treatment, mental health counseling, housing



solutions, and health care. For more information, visit www.va.gov/homeless/events.asp.

IN YOUR COMMUNITY

- **Wear a red poppy** to honor the heroes who have fallen and the servicemembers who are continuously fighting for our freedom. Red poppies are worn to show support for the armed forces community, those currently serving, veterans, and their families.

- **Visit local schools.** Have a veteran from your post/unit visit your local schools to explain Veterans Day or conduct a ceremony at the school. Encourage your Junior members and Sons to make cards to thank veterans for their service, etc.

- **Visit a local U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs facility** and spend some time with a veteran. Many VA locations will host special activities and events on Veterans Day. If you don't have a VA facility near you, contact an assisted living center or nursing home nearby.

WITH YOUR WALLET

- **Donate to a cause that helps veterans.** Every dollar helps. Even a small donation is money well spent to support our nation's heroes. Consider donating to the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation to support veterans, military, and their families.

- **Support veteran-owned businesses.** It is estimated that 2.5

million U.S. businesses are owned by veterans. A list of veteran-owned businesses can be found at the American Veteran Owned Business Association. Visit www.avosba.org to find your state and county's veteran-owned businesses to support.

- **Pick up the tab.** If you see a veteran in line at the coffee shop or out at a restaurant, pay for their drink or meal. Those serving them are more than happy to bring you the check, and it's a nice surprise to honor these heroes for their service.

ONE ON ONE

- **Don't forget to always thank veterans for their service.** It is a simple gesture, but it can make a huge impact. And whenever you see someone in uniform, take the time to show them your appreciation for everything they have done for our country.

- **Make it personal.** If you know a veteran, ask them what they need. Transportation to and from community activities on Veterans Day is one idea. They might like for you to drop off or pick up their mail, stop by the grocery store for a few things they need, or mow their lawn. If they are reluctant to share a need, feel free to ask a friend, caregiver, or loved one how you could meet a need. Whatever you commit to, make sure you deliver on your promise that day or the next few days.



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



DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT ALA SOCIAL MEDIA? WE'VE GOT THE ANSWERS!

Q: Why should I follow ALA National Headquarters on social media? I already follow my unit.

A: Great question! It's great that you're following your unit to stay informed of local activities. Following National in addition to your local unit will keep you up to date on the latest changes, updates, happenings, and more. It's also a great way to stay connected between issues of *Auxiliary* magazine. You can learn about other members and how units across the country are working the mission.

Q: What social media channels does National use?

A: While we are on several platforms, our most popular are Facebook and Instagram. Search for @ALAforVeterans.

Q: If I follow National on Facebook, why should I follow on Instagram?

A: Some content does overlap, but you will find different things on each social channel. Our Instagram features more visual content, and sometimes, we give you a peek behind the curtain to see behind-the-scenes work.



MYAUXILIARY MEMBER PORTAL AT WWW.ALAFORVETERANS.ORG

- Pay dues online
- Get member resources such as forms and guides

- Access the ALA Red Book
- Program information for ALA national committees
- Learn about member benefits

NEW AUXILIARY LOGO APPAREL!



* Proceeds support American Legion Family programs

American Legion Emblem Sales

1-888-453-4466

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AUX MG 0823



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 happening soon:

ALA NATIONAL CONVENTION:

- Aug. 25-31
- The 2023 ALA National Convention will be in Charlotte, N.C.
- You can follow along on our social media @ALAforVeterans and our livestream at www.ALAforVeterans.org.
- You can also read our blog posts about convention before, during, and after the event.
- If you are attending, take pictures and post on social media! Use hashtags #AmericanLegionAuxiliary and #AuxCon23.

ALA MISSION TRAINING:

- Dates and locations available at www.ALAforVeterans.org

VETERANS DAY:

- Nov. 11
- We will remember the brave men and women who served to protect our freedoms.



A GO-TO RESOURCE FOR ALA MARKETING MATERIALS

Are you looking for Auxiliary newsletter templates, posters, brochures, or other materials to bring awareness to your ALA unit? You can find several downloadable resources at www.ALAforVeterans.org.



WHERE TO FIND US ONLINE:

- ALA website: www.ALAforVeterans.org
- ALA blog: www.ALAforVeterans.org/blog
- Social media: @ALAforVeterans

“Reach for it. Push yourself as far as you can.”

— Christa McAuliffe, American teacher and astronaut



American Legion Auxiliary Junior members and young Sons of The American Legion members can be active participants of the ALA Patch Program. Children can earn the membership patch, a longstanding pillar of the program, by completing activities such as inviting friends to join the ALA or SAL, researching the heritage of their unit, post, or squadron, and volunteering at a community event, fair, or social and promoting the Legion Family (check out the entire list of activities at www.ALAforVeterans.org). With the new branding ALA National Headquarters received last fall, the membership patch was updated when a restock was needed.

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

Veteran Projects Fund Grants Available

If your Auxiliary unit, district/county, or department is hosting a local Veterans Creative Arts Festival, the ALA Foundation wants to help! Funding opportunities available:

- Transportation for veterans to and from the local VCAF
- Festival venue costs
- Craft items (including, but not limited to paintbrushes, easels, markers, canvases)
- Special recognition for veterans
- Promotion of event (including, but not limited to advertising, posters, printed materials)

APPLY TODAY
Grants awarded to
ALA units, districts,
and departments
up to **\$2,500**



Contact us today!

(317) 569-4500 | ALAF@ALAforVeterans.org | ALAFoundation.org