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Auxiliary contents



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ON THE COVER: U.S. Air Force veteran Sherman Watkins paints at Red Rocks Park and Amphitheatre in Denver during the 2024 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (photo: Sara Fowler/ALANHQ). **ABOVE:** Tracy Levay, former commander of American Legion Post 451 and an ALA member, gives a speech commemorating the lives of those who died in battle. Levay was introduced by Post 37 Adjutant Bob Hock during Memorial Day activities in Michigan City, Ind., on May 27, 2024. Levay also listed the deaths of two Navy SEALs who died while deployed overseas. (Donavan Barrier/*La Porte County Herald-Dispatch* via AP).



Photo: Jeff Thorne

Not meant to take away from our heroes — our veterans and servicemembers — I feel we need to recognize and acknowledge our American Legion Family members who go that extra mile to support those heroes.

In my travels throughout the country — even the world — I am astounded at the mission work of our members. Some projects are huge with many months or even years of planning; some are as simple as a kind word and listening ear.

Together as a Legion Family, we continue to bring awareness to the suicide epidemic of our military and veterans and the Be the One mission. I've seen our members support therapy facilities

that help veterans with PTSD, military sexual trauma, addiction, and mental health issues — all incredible places that have tangible results in saving lives. I am a firm believer that if we save one life — just one — this year's Legion Family focus is exactly the right mission at the right time.

To save a life doesn't mean we have to take on all the problems of the world at once. We don't have to host a huge event or make a substantial donation to a program that provides therapy. It can be as simple as listening to a veteran when they want to talk. And in many cases, it can save lives.

Research shows that 70% of suicide deaths happen within one hour from the first thought. Some studies even show that 48% of attempts occurred in less than 20 minutes, and there is evidence that it can happen in less than five minutes. So, we know if we can build time between the impulse and the actual action to harm oneself, we can change lives and save lives.

For example, while passing out donuts to veterans at a VA medical center, a veteran stopped and talked with us. He was joking with us a bit, but eventually he asked if we visited lonely veterans. After ensuring he wasn't considering self-harm, we learned he was lonely and wanted to

talk. He had tears in his eyes, which made me tear up as well. A couple of our ALA members immediately stepped up and exchanged phone numbers with this veteran. And he headed out with a smile on his face.

It goes to show that being in the right place at the right time, while really listening and being kind — all things we typically do as Legion Family members — helped this veteran.

I should tell you that the veteran called one of the ALA members while we were at dinner that evening, and I believe they have forged new friendships. And more importantly, he's no longer lonely — simply because we listened.

Another act of kindness simply from a conversation happened in a different VA medical center. While visiting with a terminally ill veteran, an ALA member said she would return soon so that he could go shopping in their Christmas catalog. Again, I had tears in my eyes when he said he didn't need anything, implying that he wouldn't be around. But that member — reading between the lines and really listening — reminded him that he could shop for his wife. His eyes lit up, and you could feel the true love he had for his wife.

The truth is that listening is a form of kindness: one that can make someone feel heard and understood. The next time you ask someone how they are, really listen to what they have to say.

This administrative year has been incredible, and I thank all of you for what you do — generally, for the ALA mission, and for how you have embraced Be the One. Remember: It can be as simple as listening, and I know you're doing that!

Lisa Williamson
National President

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Serving Veterans, Military, and their Families
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PLANNING TIME: Members from the Departments of Missouri and Iowa gather for a smile at the Department Leadership National Conference in May.

Summer and fall — in August, you could say one season is heading out the door while the other is making its way in. For ALA National Headquarters, it's a time when we exhale one busy administrative year and inhale the next.



You see, summertime is crazy busy for us here in Indianapolis. We're on a fast-moving train to get major publications like this August issue of *Auxiliary* to press, planning is nearing final stages with our National Convention, and we're working on the next fiscal year budget. There are plenty of other to-do items we could tell you about, but the list would be longer than what Santa Claus uses during the holidays.

Paper pushing aside, we want to make sure you know how much we

care about serving the mission. In May — a month dedicated to our military, veterans, and their families — several staff attended memorial services, and our military spouses at ALA National Headquarters were treated to a lovely card signed by volunteers. And then, in Denver, lots of veterans attending the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival gushed and praised the ALA for all of its support of today's military and veterans.

We love our mission ... and we love you, our members!



The ALA proudly sends a heartfelt welcome to Rodney K. Rolland as The American Legion's next national adjutant. Rolland was appointed to the position after Daniel S. Wheeler announced his retirement following a 45-year career at The American Legion National Headquarters. You can read more about Rolland on page 46 in this issue of *Auxiliary*.



Auxiliary magazine publishing schedule explained

Was there a March ALA magazine? I don't think we received one. Both my mother and I are ALA members. The last issue we have is February. We are at the same address. What was on the cover of the March magazine? We have not yet received an April issue either. Thank you.

— Barbara and Ruth Sheridan, Ohio

Editor's response: Thank you so much for reaching out about the national magazine. It publishes quarterly — four times a year — in February, May, August, and November. So, good news: You have not missed anything. We so appreciate you both being avid readers of Auxiliary magazine. Have a great day!

Disappointed in chaplain's omission of Flag Day

I always enjoy the ALA magazine and contents. The activities recognized throughout the United States of Auxiliary members and Legion members is fun to hear about. I was disappointed in the chaplains Reflections for June 2024. There was recognition of various events, but one of the

most important dates on the June calendar is Flag Day. It is too bad this significant holiday was left off of Brister Thomas' list of June holidays in her Reflections on page 41 of the May 2024 American Legion Auxiliary.

— Kaila Mailahn, Nebraska

Editor's response: Thank you for the feedback! A proud military brat and spouse, our national chaplain celebrates Flag Day and did not intend for any disrespect. We greatly appreciate you writing us. Readers — want to tell us more about the Reflections? Email alahq@ALAforVeterans.org.

Grateful for story shared in May magazine, ALA blog

Just wanted to reach out to you and thank you for the blog. I also wanted to tell you a little story. When I went to Fort Irwin in March, I got to talk to 8-year-old Emma who got a Good Deed Award for the Anchor4Life



program. She expressed how she was so excited to receive the award, and she proceeded to tell me she was moving soon because they have been at Fort Irwin for two years already and her daddy has to go to Germany. I told her to continue to be kind and help others, and hopefully we will cross paths again. She said she would and that she is going to show her Good Deed Award to her new classroom

in Germany. She gave me a big hug and a kiss on the cheek, and said, "I will see you again one day." I walked away and cried, and it truly made me realize these children are heroes too.

— Christine Evans, California

Appreciative of being featured in magazine

Thank you so much for featuring me in your May 2024 magazine!



When Sara Fowler approached to take pictures when we were meeting with our congressmen, I just thought she was gathering info from all of the departments for recordkeeping. I had no idea I would be featured in your magazine and quoted regarding some of my remarks made on her questionnaire. When I started receiving comments about my remarks is when I realized I had been included in the article. I am proud and honored to be a part of such a wonderful organization, and I always look forward to your issues of our national magazine. Thank you again!

— Terri Ouellette, New Hampshire

Poppy proclamation received

I was honored to receive from our Jefferson County legislators a National Poppy Day® proclamation. The legislators were very attentive as I read a short speech about the poppy.

— Deborah Atkins, New York

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.

TIPS FOR STARTING A JUNIOR GROUP IN YOUR UNIT

Are your Juniors already assisting with unit activities? Following are guidelines to help your Juniors become an active group.

Phase I — Getting Started

1. Share your plans with the unit and post.
2. If you are not planning to be the leader, identify a member who is motivated to organize your Juniors.
3. Once you've identified a leader of your Juniors, gather resources that will assist in organizing the girls. Start with the *ALA Junior Activities Handbook* and the ALA Academy class *ALA Juniors E-Learning Course* (both available at www.ALAforVeterans.org).
4. When you are ready, go to your unit meeting and present your plans to start an active Junior Activities group. Follow your Constitution, Bylaws, and Standing Rules.

Phase II — Your First Get-Together!

1. Send a letter to all members explaining what you are going to do. Don't forget to utilize social media.
2. Consider holding the meeting at a fun location like a pizza place or game arena.
3. Phone calls or texts a couple

of days before the meeting will remind the girls and their parents/guardians of the upcoming meeting.

4. Fun MUST be part of the meeting.
5. Have an easy project planned that the girls can take home and share with others.
6. Share information about the ALA's mission of helping veterans.
7. Tell them about the ALA Patch Program and how easy it is to earn patches.
8. Take pictures. Action photos are always the best, but some posed shots are fine as well. Be sure to have signed photo/video release forms and don't post on social media until after the event has ended, for the girls' privacy.
9. Let them know if dressy attire will be required at future meetings and events — such as a Memorial Day ceremony — but not every meeting. Remember: It is not as important what they are wearing as it is that they are attending.
10. Let the Juniors and their guests choose the location for the next meeting.
11. It is OK to have informal meetings for several months.
12. After several meetings, utilize the Juniors course and other ALA Academy courses to see what members have learned, and to enhance their knowledge of the ALA.

Phase III — Meetings and Installation

1. When you're confident you have support from the post, unit, the girls, and

parents/guardians, plan the first formal meeting with the girls and their parents/guardians.

2. Encourage them to bring a friend to the next meeting — perhaps a friend who is eligible to join the ALA.
 3. Offer refreshments.
 4. Ask the girls to dress nicely for this special meeting when the new officers will be installed.
 5. Invite the post, unit, district president, district Junior Activities chair, and the department Junior Activities chair to the meeting.
 6. Utilizing the *ALA Junior Activities Handbook*, create an agenda for your next meeting.
 7. Plan on an election of honorary Junior officers. You don't have to fill every office.
 8. Once again, emails, phone calls, and texts as a reminder will help ensure attendance.
 9. Invite the unit president to be your installing officer.
 10. The evening of the meeting, have a regular head table set up with a gavel, the script, a notebook for the secretary, and desk flags or floor flags.
 11. Open the meeting in normal fashion.
 12. Hold an installation for your honorary new officers.
 13. Once the meeting is complete, offer refreshments to congratulate the new officers.
 14. Be sure you have set the time, location, and date of your next meeting.
- For a more detailed look at these tips, download the *ALA Junior Activities Handbook* at www.ALAforVeterans.org.



Junior-designed T-shirt available at Emblem Sales

Rylee Turowski from the Department of Wisconsin won ALA National Headquarters' T-shirt design contest for Juniors at the end of 2023. That shirt is for sale at American Legion Flag & Emblem Sales for both Juniors and adults.

ALA Junior members ages 8 to 17 years had an opportunity to participate in a National Headquarters-hosted contest to design the next T-shirt to be worn at ALA national Junior meetings. Seventeen entries were submitted, with 585 votes online.

To purchase the T-shirt, visit emblem.legion.org.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT THE AUXILIARY?

*"I can learn a lot of stuff."
"It's fun: crafts, songs, games."
"The smiles on other people's faces."
"I get to do a lot of fun stuff."
"Making new friends."
"Giving back to our community."
"Meetings are fun."
"They help veterans and their families."
"Doing fundraisers."
"The people and experience."
"Handing out poppies."
"Connections you make."
"Helping people."
"Scholarships."
"Being with family."*

WHAT, IF ANY, REASONS WOULD YOU NOT CONTINUE YOUR MEMBERSHIP?

*"Too long of meetings."
"Not able to have opportunities."
"Long car rides to get here."
"Bad energy."
"Being disrespected."
"Going to college."
"If my aunt quit being a member."
"Very rude people."
"Too busy."
"If my post/unit became unfriendly."
"Not being able to attend meetings."*

WHY ARE YOU A MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY?

*"I can help our veterans and give them hope that the younger generations still care."
"Makes me feel good to help others."
"It is fun and cool."
"Because I pay tribute to veterans."
"My friend told me."
"I was forced but now I like it."
"Because of my family to honor family members."
"My dad and grandpa served."
"I want to learn new things."
"I enjoy doing it."
"Family members introduced us and they are active in our community."
"My mom told me it would be fun."
"To help those serving/support veterans."
"Makes me feel good to help others."
"Signed up at birth."
"To show appreciation toward military."
"Want to continue family legacy."
"Advocate for veterans and their families."
"Love helping veterans."
"Family!!"*

WAYS TO SPARK DISCUSSION ON MEMBERSHIP, ENGAGE JUNIORS

One of the activities at the 2023-2024 national Junior meetings was a fun, easy, and informative way to get Junior members thinking more about their ALA membership.

This activity can be replicated at the unit level.

National Junior Activities Committee Vice Chair Robin Dorf first completed this activity nine years ago with Minnesota Juniors.

"They were great then in sharing information on why they joined, why they continue their membership, asked questions about mentorship, and if they would continue their membership once they turn 18," Dorf said.

Juniors were asked six membership questions:

1) What would you tell your

friends about the Junior program to convince them to join the ALA?

2) Why are you a member of the American Legion Auxiliary?

3) How can the Auxiliary keep you as a member?

4) What, if any, reasons would you not continue your membership?

5) How can you as a member help get new members (adults and Juniors)?

6) What do you like about the Auxiliary?

"The Juniors were very engaged during this activity, and we received only a handful of answers that didn't pertain to the questions," said National Junior Activities Committee Chair Barb Washburn. "We received no inappropriate answers, which shows the knowledge of our Juniors."

After writing their answers on flipchart pages, several from each question sheet were read to the group. Washburn said this activity

doesn't have to be done on a flipchart — index cards or regular notebook paper can be used to record answers for one question at a time.

Juniors were excited and proud to hear their answers read aloud to the group.

"This was a great team activity for the Juniors as we paired older and younger Juniors to read the questions and write answers," Washburn said. "We observed the younger Juniors providing their answers to be written on the page. It was truly remarkable to read what these young members had to share."

The activity was a success at the national Junior meetings and can be beneficial if conducted at the unit, district, and department levels for younger members.

"It is great receiving feedback from our Juniors," Dorf said. "It builds trust and good mentorship. We continue to say they are our future leaders."

“...being a member of this wonderful organization and The American Legion Family is what I was meant to do.”

FRANCISCA MASSEY



The first time Francisca Massey stepped foot in an American Legion post home was in 2016. After that, her life changed forever. She immediately joined the American Legion Auxiliary.

“At the post, I listened to stories from veterans, Sons of The American Legion, and Auxiliary members about what their roles were and how they helped veterans. I knew then I wanted to be a part of that,” said Massey. “My life was not what I wanted it to be — I was sad and felt unfulfilled to that point. However, when I joined The American Legion Family, that all changed. I now had a purpose for going forward in my life.”

Massey joined the Auxiliary under the service of World War II Army veteran Eugene Mohland. Coming from a long line of Army servicemembers in her family, Massey always had the utmost respect and appreciation for

veterans, military, and their families.

But since becoming an ALA member, Massey’s passion for helping veterans has flourished. She’s held numerous leadership positions at the unit, district, and department levels, and she is excited for the promising future of the American Legion Auxiliary. Massey is a member of Vermont Unit 63, and a Legion Rider of Post 59.

Many of your family members served in the Army. How have their military experiences shaped your life?

They taught me what real sacrifice is. It was difficult to not see them for a long time while they were deployed, but when they came home, I was so happy. They would share some stories with me, and it gave me a whole new sense of admiration for them.

How has being an Auxiliary member impacted your life?

Before the Auxiliary, I felt like I was just kind of sailing through life. I did things for veterans before I found out about the Auxiliary, but once I joined, everything changed. I feel like I have a real purpose now — like being a member of this wonderful organization and The American Legion Family is what I was meant to do. I am able to help so many more veterans, not only ones I know, but ones I haven’t even met yet. And I have met so many wonderful veterans and their families since joining the Auxiliary.

Do you have any favorite ALA committees or activities?

One of my favorite committees

I was a chairperson for was the Auxiliary Emergency Fund. I am very passionate about the AEF. I think it is so wonderful that if a member is in dire need of help because of a disaster that has struck, or because they fell on hard times, they can reach out and get that help.

What was the most memorable moment/experience when you were Vermont’s department president?

I will never forget the valuable mentoring I received from Past Department Presidents Janet Osmer, Elaine MacKenzie, Candy Huseman, Lynda Farmer, Terri Christie, and others who came before me. Without their guidance, I couldn’t have done this. They shared their experiences and knowledge and guided me through the entire process.

What does The American Legion Family mean to you?

In one word: Everything! My goal is to continue to put everything I can into this great organization. I really don’t think there are enough words or ways I can truly put out there to really convey what this organization means to me, but I can say it means everything.

Is there anything else you’d like to add?

Include new members. Don’t isolate them. Let them know you are there to help and to teach them. Give them advice, and ask them for their help at events or veteran places. Show them the good we do and can continue to do if we all work together to work the mission.



Share Your Membership Story

Tell us about yourself and how you support the American Legion Auxiliary as a unit member who also loves the ALA’s mission of serving veterans, military, and their families. Contact us at ALAMagazine@ALAforVeterans.org or (317) 569-4500.

“Where liberty dwells, there is my country.”

— Benjamin Franklin



For years, The American Legion has urged Congress to approve an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would allow Congress to prohibit the physical desecration of our flag. The American Legion Auxiliary stands with the Legion in full support of this amendment. Is it time to retire your Old Glory? Every American flag sold by American Legion Flag & Emblem Sales is proudly made in the USA. Your purchase directly supports American Legion Family programs that help our children, veterans, and military families. Visit emblem.legion.org.

Above: A garrison flag waves above The American Legion 500 Festival Memorial Service in Indianapolis in May (photo: Jennifer Donovan/ALANHQ).

Do you want to be national?



What does your membership mean to you?



"My membership lets me continue to honor my parents who both served in World War II, and my brother who served during Vietnam, as well as honor all veterans and service personnel today. It allows me to be involved with my community — especially our children — as they are our future."

— Kathleen Romanick, New Jersey



"My ALA membership highlights the honorable service of my father, husband, son, and grandson, of which I am very proud."

— Audrey L'Heureux, Maine



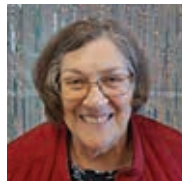
"My ALA membership means I keep the legacy my grandparents instilled in me going — giving back to not only our veterans, but their families and communities. I value my membership because I come from a family of deceased veterans who didn't get to live to share their stories."

— Kenesha Evard, North Carolina



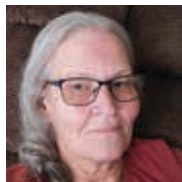
"I've been a member since 1978. I love serving our veterans and our community. It has enriched my life beyond what I could have imagined when I joined."

— Jennie Maune, Indiana



"My ALA membership is a tribute to my brother and his service in the Marine Corps during the Vietnam War. He and many of his high school buddies served and died way too young. They are gone but not forgotten. ALA is my way of giving back, though minor in comparison."

— Joanne Collins Leibold, Illinois



"It means I am honoring the service of my husband, dad, grandfather, uncles, and the many who came before them. The ALA allows me to make a difference in my community and promote the ALA."

— Vicki Docter, Texas



"My ALA membership honors my son presently serving in the Air Force. It provides me with the opportunity to educate, advocate, and communicate for and with our veterans and their families. God bless the men and women of our U.S. Armed Forces!"

— Nancy Smith Gilbert, Pennsylvania

Serve the ALA's mission from a different level: Apply for a 2025-2026 national committee! Check back later this year for application information.

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HONORING MILITARY SERVICE: Donna McCain presents a quilt to retired Gunnery Sgt. Anthony J. Allen, United States Marine Corps, on Veterans Day 2023.

ALA UNIT 104 MEMBER MAKES AND PRESENTS 87 QUILTS OF VALOR TO VETERANS

After moving to Pamplin, Va., in 2013, ALA member Donna McCain began quilting to keep herself busy in retirement. Around the same time, she joined ALA Unit 104 in Appomattox and quickly became an active member.

McCain started creating Quilts of Valor in 2014 and has made and presented 87 quilts since that time. According to the Quilts of Valor Foundation, a Quilt of Valor (QOV) is a quality, handmade quilt that is machine or hand quilted. It is awarded to a servicemember or veteran who has been touched by war. The quilt says unequivocally, “Thank you for your service and sacrifice in serving our nation.” To use the term Quilt of Valor, Quilts of Valor, or QOV, the quilt must be a specific size, have a label with required information, awarded (it is not a gift), and recorded.

Unit 104 President Linda Mays said McCain started out by giving quilted blankets to World War II, Korean War, and Vietnam War veterans who were active in American Legion Post 104. Then as Iraq and Afghanistan veterans became active in the post, she produced quilts for those veterans as well.

“The unit recognizes her efforts and has set aside money in our budget every year to help offset her expenses,” shared Mays.

“We appreciate all Donna does for our veterans with her beautiful Quilts of Valor.”

Mays reported that in addition to McCain’s Quilts of Valor, she quilts with a group of women at a local church and creates quilts for a variety of needs. She creates quilts for guest speakers at The American Legion Family post on Memorial Day and Veterans Day, and Lynchburg Unit 16 receives a quilt from her every year for its special observance of women veterans.

“For the past three years, she has made Christmas-themed quilts for the Auxiliary to raffle,” said Mays. “The funds from these raffles are used for the unit poppy fund and have enabled the unit to assist many veterans.”

About Quilts of Valor Foundation

Quilts of Valor Foundation began in 2003 with a dream — literally a dream. Founder Catherine Roberts’ son Nat was deployed in Iraq. According to Roberts:

“The dream was as vivid as real life. I saw a young man sitting on the side of his bed in the middle of the night, hunched over. The permeating feeling was one of utter despair. I could see his war demons clustered around, dragging him down into an emotional gutter. Then, as if viewing a movie, I saw him in the next scene wrapped in a quilt. His whole demeanor changed from one of despair to one of hope and wellbeing. The quilt had made this dramatic change. The message of my dream was: quilts = healing.

“The model appeared simple: have a volunteer team who would donate their time and materials to make a quilt. One person would piece the top and the other would quilt it. I saw the name for this special quilt: it was Quilt of Valor, a QOV.”

Requirements for a Quilt of Valor

- The recommended size of a Quilt of Valor is 60 inches by 80 inches; it must be a minimum of 55 inches x 65 inches and maximum of 72 inches x 90 inches.
- The quilt consists of a top, batting, and backing. It must be machine or hand quilted. A tied quilt is not acceptable for a Quilt of Valor.
- Backings provided to The LongArmy volunteer must be 8 inches wider in width and 8 inches longer in length. The Quilts of Valor Foundation LongArmy is a team of volunteers who donate their talents to QOV groups and individual members without access to longarming quilting services. Longarm quilting is the process by which a longarm sewing machine is used to sew together a quilt top, quilt batting, and quilt backing into a finished quilt.
- QOVF members in good standing may request quilting of their tops by a LongArmy volunteer, free of charge.
- Use quality, low loft batting such as cotton, cotton blends, polyester, or polyester blends. Quilting should be appropriate for the quilt and not overly dense, which can reduce the loft of the quilt.
- Double fold, also known as French fold, binding is recommended for durability. Hand stitch or neatly machine stitch binding.
- A Quilt of Valor must be labeled as such, and include the name of the veteran or servicemember.

For more information on the Quilts of Valor Foundation, visit www.qovf.org.

COMMUNITY FORMS UNITY TO HELP SERVICEMEMBERS OVERSEAS

American Legion Auxiliary Unit 215 in Nahant, Mass., truly reflected what it means to be a community of volunteers who honor the sacrifice of those who serve by enhancing the lives of veterans, military, and their families, both at home and abroad. Unit 215 organized a community-wide project to collect donations and needed items for servicemembers stationed overseas, and they exceeded all expectations.

"In one month, we collected and donated over \$10,000 worth of requested items to Operation Troop Support (OTS), a private nonprofit operating in Danvers, Massachusetts," said ALA Unit 215 President Esther Johnson. "It's a great organization and they do not take a salary or anything. Everything is 100% donated."

Founded in 2003, Operation Troop Support focuses on helping deployed troops and their families. Among the many amazing things they do, OTS has sent over 1 million care packages to deployed United States servicemembers. They also partner with organizations and individuals who want to support those serving our country. Operation Troop Support's mission is "Help Us Help Them," and that's exactly what Unit 215 accomplished.

Unit 215 teamed up with Operation Troop Support after Johnson asked the founder, Dick Moody, to be a guest speaker during one of the unit's monthly meetings. Following the meeting, everyone was enthusiastic to begin the care package project and help servicemembers stationed overseas feel appreciated and loved.

"It was just so rewarding to know we are helping someone," said Johnson. "I remember when I was a little girl, and my older brother was serving — it just means so much because I know how important getting these packages is for the

young men and women serving overseas. It made my heart feel good."

After receiving a list of requested items that servicemembers sent to OTS, Unit 215 was officially ready to begin their monthlong project. Johnson reached out to offices in town to ask if they would place donation boxes on their properties — everyone was thrilled to help such an important project. The unit placed five collection boxes at designated locations throughout their community where people could drop off donations.

"Everybody was so supportive," said Johnson. "Everybody enjoyed working on it — all the ALA members and the townspeople talked to us and said how important this project is. It was just a real feel-good project for everybody, so it was wonderful."

Unit 215 advertised the project by placing flyers around town, talking with neighbors, and posting on Facebook. They included the flyer in a local senior monthly newsletter, as well as the weekly elementary school letter. The unit sent emails to town departments and their American Legion Family members. Johnson also shared the message during an interview with the local newspaper. Word began to spread fast throughout the small town of Nahant, and residents were eager to contribute to a great cause.

"Something like this works very well in a small town. You can just call people and ask for things, and they deliver," said Johnson. "Everybody donated, and it exceeded our expectation on what we collected."

Johnson and Unit 215 divided the troops' requested items by location. The Johnson Elementary

School student council collected white socks; Nahant Fire Station gathered all food items; Nahant Town Hall was a dropoff spot for toiletries; Nahant Public Library collected paperback books, new playing cards, crossword and sudoku puzzle books, and other entertainment items; and American Legion Post 215 took in toiletry, food, and supply items.

"Included in the over \$10,000 worth of donated items was \$1,800 worth of checks and cash to help cover mailing expenses: ALA Unit 215 voted unanimously to donate \$500 to this effort, individual members donated \$780, our local



EXCEEDING ALL EXPECTATIONS: Members of Nahant Unit 215 and the Nahant Fire Department take part in the Operation Troop Support initiative by gathering food for deployed soldiers.

bank donated \$250, and the rest of the monetary donations came from local citizens," said Johnson. "We probably collected over \$8,000 worth of food, toiletries, books, and everything else. The people were so incredibly generous."

Johnson and Unit 215 would like to do something similar with Operation Troop Support in the future to show deployed servicemembers that they are forever grateful.

"This project was successful because so many people helped out, especially the ALA members, town employees, and residents," said Johnson. "It truly was a wonderful project for our small town. But mostly, it was a wonderful opportunity to do something for our heroic servicemen and women in a collaborative way."

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SUMMER APPAREL!



Allegiance Polo
(307.723X)



American Polo
(307.738X)



Rhinstone Flag T-shirt
(307.308X)



Rhinstone Logo T-shirt
(307.315X)



V-neck Performance Polo
(307.720X)



Open Neck Blouse
(307.616X)



Inspiration Polo
(307.725X)



Sleeveless Polo
(307.715X)



Men's Aqua-Dry Polo
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AUX MG 0824

ALA'S FOREIGN UNITS HELP PROMOTE OUR MISSION AROUND THE WORLD

For American Legion Auxiliary members, many know about the five geographic divisions of the organization: Central, Eastern, Northwestern, Southern, and Western.

But what's not as common knowledge is that the ALA has foreign units.

Auxiliary units can be chartered just about anywhere there is an American Legion post and people with the passion and desire to serve veterans, military, and their families — wherever they are.

We've had foreign units since the beginning of our organization. In the first national Constitution & Bylaws, it stated there would be departments in each one of the territories and anywhere outside the territories, there would be units. At the ALA's first National Convention, the Panama Canal Zone had five delegates.

As of press time, the ALA has units tied to six foreign countries: Australia, Canada, China, France, Mexico, and the Philippines.



Cary Ann Punsalan,
ALA Philippines
member

through her father, John Mebane, U.S. Air Force retired and a veteran of the Vietnam War era.

What do you enjoy about being part of the American Legion Auxiliary?

As the executive secretary and administrator of our Facebook

Number of Foreign Units of the American Legion Auxiliary

Australia: 37
Canada: 7
China: 28

France: 92
Mexico: 44
Philippines: 87



**Info from the 2023-2024 Red Book as of press time*

page, I find fulfillment in addressing inquiries from veterans, dependents, and their families, as well as recruiting members and elucidating the mission and objectives of the ALA, emphasizing our community service endeavors.

About how many ALA members does your unit have?

Around 200 members.

Do you have any favorite projects or outreach your unit coordinates?

Attending events such as Memorial Day ceremonies and other gatherings relevant to veterans allows me to engage with the community, fostering connections and spreading joy through activities like Christmas gift giving.

Many mainland ALA members haven't been to our foreign units and don't know much about them. What would you say about your unit in the Philippines?

Under the leadership of Carmenchita Mebane as president of our unit and district, there has been a significant enhancement in enforcing regulations and refining the recruitment process for eligible

members. Visits from the ALA national president and the historic visit by the first female American Legion National Commander Denise Rohan have provided valuable insights into unit operations in the Philippines.

Do many people in your area know about the Auxiliary?

The American Legion Auxiliary Philippines enjoys widespread recognition, largely due to our active presence on social media platforms like Facebook, handling inquiries from various countries and directing them to the appropriate channels, such as The American Legion Philippines Department.

Why is it important for the ALA to have units around the world?

The presence of ALA units worldwide is of paramount importance in spreading awareness about our organization, underscoring our status as a patriotic service organization, and highlighting our contributions to veterans globally.

For more information or if you have questions about foreign units, contact the Membership Division at ALA National Headquarters at Membership@ALAforVeterans.org.



THE BUSINESS SIDE OF OUR 2024 NATIONAL CONVENTION

The American Legion Auxiliary National Convention is just around the corner! With all the fun, it can be easy to forget — at its core — that National Convention is a business meeting. Representatives (delegates) of all 52 ALA departments join together and vote on the business of the organization.

You will see an increase in delegates at this year's convention. Remember: The 2024 National Convention delegate strength will be calculated using the new formula voted on by the 2023 National Convention delegates. Every department is entitled to seven delegates and one additional delegate for each 1,200 members or major fraction thereof (*Standing Rules, II National Convention, #2*).

Delegates don't have to be present to vote! Alternates can fill vacancies, and delegates without an alternate may still vote with the majority of delegates present from the delegate's department (*Constitution, Article VI National Convention, Section 7*).

Before these delegates can vote on business, we'll need a quorum. The National Constitution defines a quorum as 60% of the departments represented having paid their National Convention registration fees. Don't forget: Departments can only pay their registration fees by paying for all of their delegates, regardless of how many delegates can physically attend National Convention.

Here are some of the amendments delegates will be voting on:

Proposed Amendment #1

Submitted by: Department of Minnesota

Amendment to: National Constitution, Article VI, new section 7 (current section 7, 8, 9 will be re-numbered to 8, 9, 10).

Proposal: To make national chairs delegates-at-large to the National Convention. If adopted, it would go into effect for the 2025 National Convention.

Authority: National Constitution, Article VI, Amendments: The constitution may be amended at National Convention by a two-thirds vote of the National Convention delegates (provided proposal is submitted by July 22, 2024).

Proposed Amendment #2

Submitted by: American Legion Auxiliary Foundation

Amendment to: National Standing Rules, Article VII COMMITTEES, Special Purpose Committees, Ethical Conduct

Proposal: ALA national leadership is held to the Code of Ethical Conduct. The Ethical Conduct Committee exists to review allegations of code violations by ALA national leadership. The ALA Foundation seeks to broaden the committee's purpose to include reviewing allegations of code violations by directors of ALA subsidiary organizations. The ALA Foundation is a subsidiary organization, so essentially this proposal seeks to hold the ALA Foundation directors accountable

to the code and open to the Ethical Conduct Committee reviewing any allegations of code violations made against ALA Foundation directors and any other ALA subsidiary directors.

Authority: National Bylaws, Article VI, Section 3: The composition, terms, and purpose of the national standing committees and national committees shall be as provided in the Standing Rules. Amendments to the composition, terms, or purpose of such national committees may be determined only by a two-thirds vote of the National Convention delegates.

Proposed Amendment #3

Submitted by: ALA Foundation

Amendment to: Standing Rules, Article VII COMMITTEES, Core Committees, Risk & Compliance

Proposal: The ALA Foundation seeks to amend the committee's purpose by broadening the committee's responsibilities. Currently, the national Risk & Compliance Committee has responsibility only to the ALA. The ALA Foundation's proposal would extend the Risk & Compliance Committee's responsibilities to ALA subsidiary organizations, which would include the ALA Foundation. For example, Risk & Compliance Committee is currently responsible for reviewing and approving financial audits and IRS forms for the ALA. With this amendment, the Risk & Compliance Committee would also be responsible for reviewing and approving financial audits and IRS forms for the ALA Foundation and any other future subsidiaries.

The advanced submission deadline, according to the national Bylaws, is the first Monday after the third Friday in July. For 2024, that's July 22. Proposed amendments can be submitted to the national secretary via email: natlsecy@ALAforVeterans.org. And don't forget: You can always propose amendments after the deadline. You can even do it from the National Convention floor — it just means your amendment will need to be read at one meeting of the session of National Convention prior to taking the vote.

THERE'S A RIGHT WAY AND A WRONG WAY HOW TO REACH OUT TO SCHOOLS TO INTRODUCE ALA PROGRAMS

The American Legion Auxiliary has several great initiatives that focus on our country's youth — Give 10 to Education, Veterans in Community Schools, and ALA Girls State — to name a few.

It's important to contact schools in the correct way. For example, you won't be able to get your foot in the door if you just show up at the school with brochures. We suggest first emailing the general address listed for each school on your local school district's website. After contacting your local school, you should ask if you can be put in touch with teachers, counselors, etc., and what the process is. The school office will tell you what to do next. Follow these tips to explain and offer ALA programs to schools in the right way:

Give 10 to Education

The American Legion Auxiliary's Give 10 to Education program collects donations of school supplies in multiples of 10 — think 10 pencils, 10 notebooks, 10 glue sticks, 10 rulers, etc.

Here are a few ways to learn which supplies to collect:

- School supply needs differ according to school and grade. Check with local schools to see what they can use.

- Enlist the help of your fellow ALA members who are teachers.

- Reach out to your school contacts you use for ALA Girls State recruitment.

- Visit school websites for supply lists.

- Access the Give 10 to Education *Suggested Donation Items and Tracking Sheet*, available for download on the national ALA Education Committee webpage at www.ALAforVeterans.org.

Veterans in Community Schools

Make connections with teachers who would be interested in a Veterans in Community Schools presentation. You'll want to get on their schedule early so both you and the teacher can prepare. Download *How to Organize a Veterans in Community Schools Activity* from the Education Committee page in the MyAuxiliary member portal.

- Propose an activity plan.

- Identify veterans for speaking roles.

- Prepare the veteran(s) and audience.

- Implement the activity plan.

- Follow up with veteran(s) and school(s).

ALA Girls State

Approach all schools and any applicable organizations in your area about the American Legion Auxiliary Girls State program. This includes students who are homeschooled, charter schools, magnet schools, military schools, parochial schools,



etc. — not just public schools.

When approaching schools, be sure to:

- Be familiar with your ALA Girls State program, including dates, application process, and the unit chair's contact information.

- Encourage the student(s) sponsored last year to promote the program in their government class and to friends (if applicable).

- Contact guidance counselors (as they are usually the ones to handle scholarship opportunities) no later than four months prior to the deadline for submitting delegate and alternate applications.

- When speaking on the phone, give a brief overview of the program, and ask to meet in person, virtually, or mail them additional information.

- If funding is available from your unit, contact the school(s) to run an ad for ALA Girls State in the school paper or newsletter.

- Follow any processes already in place by your department.

AUXILIARY SUDOKU

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

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

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

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



BE ACTIVE, BE RESPECTFUL DURING POLITICAL SEASON

Months before Election Day, political ads fill commercial time as you're watching your favorite program or listening to the radio on your commute. Election signs are everywhere in your neighborhood. Trying to escape it, you look at your social media feed to see pictures of families and friends — and then you spot it...

A dear friend and fellow American Legion Auxiliary member has posted negative content about a candidate you support. You had no idea this friend felt so strongly, and now you're afraid this could cause tension. You decide to continue scrolling and you see another political post — your ALA unit is endorsing a candidate — and you wonder why because The American Legion Family is nonpartisan, and political endorsements aren't allowed. This leaves you frustrated, and you feel discouraged to be politically active.

Can you relate? As election season heats up, promote voting in your community while remaining respectful of all opinions.

The American Legion Family is nonpartisan

Everyone is entitled to their political opinions, and The American Legion Family respects everyone's right to have their voice heard. But be careful not to mix your personal opinions with your affiliation in these organizations.

The American Legion Family does not support, oppose, or provide aid to any candidate or political party. Here are tips to stay nonpartisan:

- Don't endorse candidates as the American Legion Auxiliary,

Get Out the Vote
 Since their 1920 National Convention, The American Legion with the ALA's support has shared the importance of voting.

Get Out the Vote encourages:

- Voting
- Volunteering to work the polls
- Helping others register and vote

Before Election Day

- Check your registration, or register to vote at vote.gov
- Make a plan for when to vote:
 - On Election Day
 - Early voting
 - Absentee ballot
- Research the ballot

The American Legion, Sons of The American Legion, or American Legion Riders.

- Think before you post about politics on social media. If you

are posting on an American Legion Auxiliary-related account, political posts are not allowed. We advise you to use caution on your personal account.

- If attending a political event, don't wear American Legion Family branded items that connects you to our organizations.
- If backing a particular candidate or party, do not use any American Legion Family organizations in connection to your endorsement.
- If hosting a Meet the Candidate night, invite all candidates of all parties.

Encourage voting participation

Even though The American Legion Family is nonpartisan, everyone is encouraged to be politically active. Voting is a civic responsibility. It's important for everyone to feel empowered to make their voice heard through their ballot. Here are tips on how to be involved:

- Get Out the Vote. Encourage your community to engage in the political process and vote in every election.
- Volunteer at a polling place. Some workplaces will let employees have time off to volunteer at a poll, so check with your employer.
- Provide transportation. Don't let a lack of wheels prevent someone from their constitutional right. Organize volunteers to help get voters to the polls.

Get to know IRS rules

The American Legion Auxiliary is a 501(c)(19) nonprofit veterans organization and must follow these rules as outlined by the Internal Revenue Service:

- Don't endorse or oppose a candidate for public office.
- Don't coordinate activities with a candidate.
- Don't make contributions to a candidate.
- Don't manage, fund, or organize a Political Action Committee.

Make your voice heard

We hope all American Legion Family members exercise their constitutional right and encourage others to do the same. Just remember to be respectful of others' opinions.



Get involved with Wreaths Across America Day

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

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



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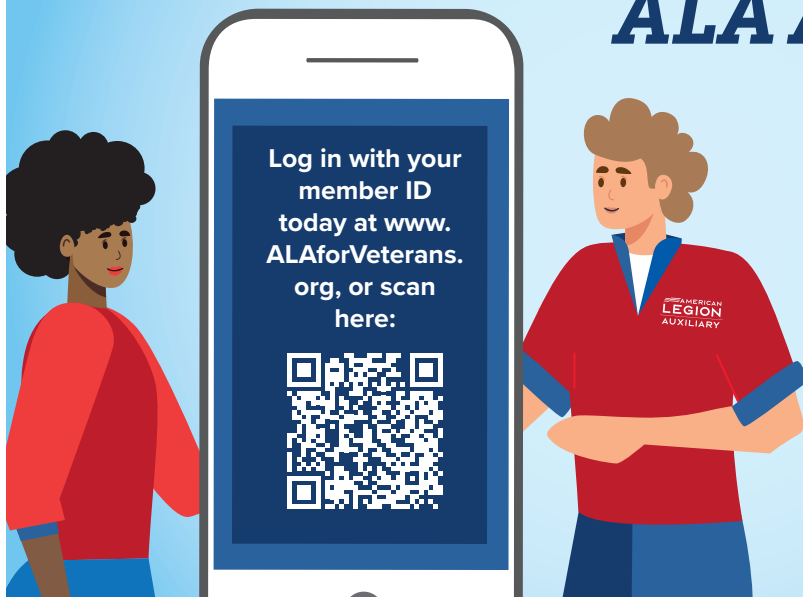


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RISE UP: LEAVE A LEGACY

Throughout history, what has set people apart from each other is not just their deeds in the moment, but the enduring mark they leave behind — a legacy.

The concept of leaving a legacy is often tied to human aspiration and the desire for significance. In *Hamilton: An American Musical*, Lin-Manuel Miranda portrays the theme of leaving a legacy through the character of Alexander Hamilton himself. Hamilton was a Founding Father of the United States, and a key figure in shaping the early political and economic landscape of the nation. His face is still displayed on the front of the \$10 bill.

Throughout the musical, Hamilton is depicted as someone driven by the desire to make his mark on history and leave behind a lasting legacy. This drive is evident in his relentless pursuit of success, his ambitious plans for the future of the United States, and his unwavering dedication to his principles.

At its core, leaving a legacy is about making a meaningful and lasting impact that extends beyond one's lifetime. Whether through acts of kindness, groundbreaking innovations, or philanthropic commitments, each person has the power to shape the narrative of their legacy.

After Hamilton's death in 1804, his wife, Eliza, began the journey

of solidifying Hamilton's legacy and leaving one of her own. While Hamilton focused on leaving a legacy with his political pursuits, Eliza was a staunch advocate for women's rights and played a significant role in promoting education and empowerment for women. She co-founded the first private orphanage in New York City, which provided shelter, education, and vocational training to young women. Eliza also supported initiatives aimed at expanding educational opportunities for girls and women, recognizing the importance of education in promoting gender equality and social progress.

A well-crafted legacy has the potential to endure for generations, influencing the course of history and shaping the collective consciousness of humanity, as proven by the Hamiltons.

Leaving a planned gift to a nonprofit organization is a powerful

way to leave a lasting legacy that reflects your values, passions, and desire to make a positive impact on the world. Your generosity and philanthropy will be remembered and celebrated by the organization and its beneficiaries, leaving a meaningful imprint on the world long after you are gone.

Each of us possesses the capacity to leave a positive imprint on the world, whether through advocacy like Hamilton or philanthropy like Eliza. By harnessing our talents, passions, and resources for the greater good — not self — we can sow the seeds of a brighter future and leave behind a legacy of resilience, innovation, and hope for the next generation of American Legion Auxiliary members.

Your planned gift can serve as a powerful example and inspire others to follow in your footsteps. By publicly acknowledging your support for the ALA or American Legion Auxiliary Foundation, you may encourage friends, family members, and peers to consider their own charitable giving and legacy planning, thereby amplifying the impact of your generosity.

Together, let us strive to leave behind a legacy that reflects the best of who we are and inspires future generations to rise up.

To learn more about your legacy giving options, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/planned-giving. To notify ALA National Headquarters of your intent to include the Auxiliary or ALA Foundation in your estate plans, please contact our Development Division at development@ALAforVeterans.org.



Legacy. What is a legacy?

It's planting seeds in a garden you never get to see.

I wrote some notes at the beginning.

Of a song someone will sing for me.

America, you great unfinished symphony, you sent for me.

**You let me make a difference.
A place where even orphan immigrants
Can leave their fingerprints
and rise up.**

**I'm running out of time.
I'm running, and my time's up.
Wise up. Eyes up.**

— Lin-Manuel Miranda, *The World Was Wide Enough* from *Hamilton: An American Musical*



HONORING HEROES: Members of ALA Unit 430 with retired flags that will honor veterans one last time.

TEXAS UNIT RETIRES AMERICAN FLAGS WITH DIGNITY

The American flag is a symbol of freedom, justice, and sacrifice that our veterans and servicemembers fought so hard for. American Legion Auxiliary Unit 430 in Odessa, Texas, believes that even the most tattered and torn American flag can serve one final purpose.

“The ‘Retire with Dignity’ program allows us to retire a flag the dignified way while honoring a veteran,” said Unit 430 President Paula Roberts. “This happens when your flag is no longer worthy of being displayed. We can honor it one last time by draping the retired flag over a veteran’s coffin before cremation.”

Unit 430 began the project when they noticed they had a surplus of American flags at their post home, but due to a local burn ban, they had to think outside the box to retire the flags. After talking to her loved ones and a veteran family member, Roberts decided draping an American flag over a veteran’s casket before being cremated was the perfect solution.

Roberts contacted local crematoriums and funeral homes explaining her idea, and they were all on board. All members of Auxiliary Unit 430 participated by spreading the word of the Retire with Dignity program, purchased containers to store the flags safely, and brought the flags to the four locations willing to participate. They asked the Junior

ROTC cadets to help fold the flags, and taught them what the 13 folds represent. Unit 430 put identifiable labels on top of the containers that included their Auxiliary unit’s name and phone number, along with a brief description of the importance of this project.

In January 2024, Unit 430 initiated its first veteran with the Retire with Dignity cremation. Phillip “Phil” Graves was a proud U.S. Army veteran who loved his country greatly.

“He never wavered from his love for our country and his admiration and support of the military,” said Graves’ daughter, Kelly Graves Phillips. “From as long as I can remember, my father always had a flag flying at home and was proud to do that. To cremate him with two flags was our way of showing Dad respect for what he held important and what he instilled in us.”

Although originally intended for veterans and servicemembers, Retire with Dignity can be an option for anyone who is patriotic and has a love for our country.

After their loved one passes, Unit 430 gives a certificate to the family that assures them the last good deed of service for the flag was to drape it on their casket to give the veteran an honorable farewell.

“Having your veteran’s urn and inside of it is not only their ashes, but the ashes of an American flag because that flag is embedded in them now — I think that’s taking care of them after they are gone,” said Roberts.

Retire with Dignity project how-to steps:

1. Have a need to dispose of American flags. Collect them at your post home.
2. Reach out to local funeral homes and crematoriums and ask if they would be willing to participate.
3. Find containers to store the flags.
4. Create a label for the containers. Put your Auxiliary unit on there with the unit’s phone number and address. Include a description of what the project is and that they can contact you if they are running low on flags or have questions.
5. Fold the flags, and store them in the container.
6. Take some of the filled containers to the crematoriums or funeral homes that agreed to participate. Store the rest of them in a safe place at your post home.
7. Involve the community: Ask people to bring their torn or tattered flags in to be retired with dignity.
8. Make sure to talk to your Legion Family about this activity. Let them know that when the time comes, they have an opportunity to be cremated or buried with an American flag.



‘This is one of the greatest events of my life’

Sharing stories of healing at the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival

By Sara Fowler

U.S. Air Force veteran Gaylie Cotton was at a point in her life when she thought she wasn't going to make it. The stress, the anxiety, the trauma — it was all too much. She was at her low. Cotton didn't have a plan but was thinking if she wasn't here, things would be so much greater not only for herself, but for other people.

Then she was introduced to the art therapy program at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs medical center in Indianapolis.

“I had my first session, and it saved my life,” she recalled. “I never knew the power of putting crayon to paper and just letting it flow. Art, writing, talking — it saved my life. It really did.”

The feeling runs true for many veterans who participate in art therapy at VA facilities around the country. Entering their local Veterans Creative Arts Festival gives many — like Cotton — the chance to heal from trauma, PTSD, and more.

Co-presented by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the American Legion Auxiliary, the national Festival showcases our veterans' many talents, creates camaraderie, and truly helps in the healing process of invisible wounds our veterans carry.

This year, 3,000 veterans submitted over 6,000 entries to their local creative arts competitions from 125 VA facilities in the divisions of art, creative writing, dance, drama, and music, with all branches of the military represented. In its 43rd year, 125 veterans from 67 VA facilities attended the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival in Denver. Over 60 percent first-time participants were at the national event.

During the week, 70 veterans came to be part of the stage show. Some performed individual or group acts, and others were part of the chorus. They spent much of the week rehearsing.

Writers and artists had the opportunity to participate in many different workshops and the chance to show their art or read their writing in front of fellow veterans. There was nothing but positive, proud support shown for each other.

Auxiliary magazine talked to a few veterans in Denver to learn more about how the Festival is life-healing and life-changing.



Healing Power of Words

Gaylie Cotton, Writer
U.S. Air Force

Indiana, First-time attendee

“I was floored and confused because I was like, “There’s no way; I’m sure there are many talented, gifted people out there,” Cotton said when she found out she won at the national level. “I was greatly surprised and humbled and excited because this is really my first time sharing any of my work — especially the nature of my work.”

Cotton won for two writing pieces, *Pharmakeia* and *I Never Told: A Sexual Assault Story in Two Parts*.

“The *Pharmakeia* personal essay coincided with photographs with the same name and it’s all the medications that have been prescribed to me through the VA trying to help me with some of my struggles, my mental health, depression, anxiety,” she said. “When I looked back and saw all the medications I was on — some of them worked; some of them didn’t — I thought that would be a great way to express myself through *Pharmakeia*.”

Cotton’s other writing piece was about her experience as a victim of military sexual trauma while serving in the U.S. Air Force. She couldn’t believe it happened to her.

“A big part of the #MeToo movement that came out gave me voice enough to even talk about it,” she said. “I had been in therapy through the VA and didn’t even speak about it. I went through the military sexual trauma class through the VA and started to share and put it out there.”

For Cotton, writing about this trauma was cathartic on one hand and raised anxiety on the other.

“A weight was lifted after I wrote *I Never Told*,” she recalled. “I’m brave enough to say this is what happened. One of the concerns was this might be too much,



but it's the truth. I can't pretty it up and put it in a nice presentation — something that was not so pretty that was done to me and a lot of women."

Overall, Cotton said there is definitely a healing power to the arts.

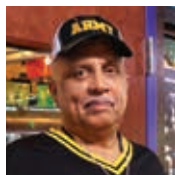
"[Before art therapy] I went from having so much anxiety and grief to 'OK, I can laugh a little, I'm not feeling as bad, some of my medications I'm not taking anymore,' and I really contribute that to the art therapy," she said.

For writing about and talking about such an intense, personal subject, Cotton said the camaraderie experienced at the 2024 Festival was crucial to her well-being.

"This is one of the greatest events of my life to come here," she said. "I feel like this is one big family reunion. I've never met some of these people, but the camaraderie, the support — they've been through the things I've been through. The struggles, the depression, the mental illness — I've seen people embrace each other. I've been embraced by strangers."

For other veterans who have experienced sexual assault, Cotton said it *can* get better and to seek help.

"Don't be afraid," she said. "Don't feel stigmatized. Don't think your problem is so minute it doesn't matter. Everything matters when it comes to your well-being and mental health. Seek help through the VA art programs and recreational programs."



Thankful to Have a Voice Again

**Hugh Bowe, Performer
U.S. Army**

Pennsylvania, First-time attendee

Hugh Bowe regularly sang the National Anthem for various groups for years. That is until he was diagnosed with thyroid cancer.

"I was told I would never sing again by two doctors," he said. "I accepted that. At that time, I just wanted to feel better."



A FESTIVAL TO REMEMBER (opposite page): Devon Stewart plays his guitar at the famous Red Rocks Amphitheatre. This page: Artists and writers celebrate receiving their gold medals; Jerry Zabel poses with his self-portrait; ALA member Tracy Trujillo helps a caregiver; Dan Wetmore discusses his writing; Nancy Frideres explains her mosaic kit; ALA member Lisa Boyer (right), helps caregivers with knotting blankets.

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



Watercolor
Coffee Soldier
Armanxdo Villarreal



Paint by Number Kit
Fall Flowers
Deborah Wippler



Crocheting/Knitting
Birds in Flight
Alexandra Brown



Black and White Photography
Hastings Bank
Jim Thompson



Glazed Ceramics
Kato and His Family
Jerry Lee Coleman



Craft Coloring Kit
Fancy Feet
Nina Herron



Carving
Special Friends Deserve Special Care
William Howrilla



Combined Kit
Valentine's Gift
Jeremiah Caudill



Military Combat Experience
War
Jerry Zabel



Sculpture
Pony Express Hazards
Allen D. Eckman



Woodworking
Camouflage
Ron Clements



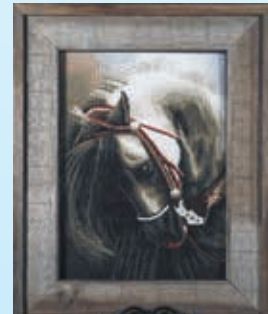
Pyrography
El Jibarito
Ronald Riley



Group Art
The Lure of the Lore
Drop In Room Group



Glasswork
In Flanders Fields
Mary Ellen Radloff



Needlework Kit
Loyal Steed
Alma Sue Kenney



Wood Building Kit
1937 Pre-War Dread-28
Acoustic Guitar Kit: Charley
Michael A. Nickel



Assemblage
Belle The Vintage Beauty
Denise Gardner



**Original Design
in Fiber Arts**
Excitement
William Drehfal



Weaving Kit
*Spiritual Dreams with
Tree of Life*
Manuel Ornelas



Latch Hook Kit
Arizona Forest
Verne Casavoy



Mixed Media
The Assumption
Dennis Linn



Leather Carving/Tooling/Stamping
Imperfectly Perfect
Vernon Love



Colored Drawing
*Through the Eyes
of a Veteran*
Jeff Montelo



Scroll Saw/Fretwork
Never Wilt Flowers
Robert Nause



Mosaic Kit
Seize the Day
Nancy Frideres



Diorama
Mini She Shed
Krystal Anspach



Pastels
Heavy is the Burden
Lorenzo Miller



Beadwork
Medicine Wheel
Tina Heim



Mosaic
Waves of Grace
Joanna Larsen



Pottery
Cut Out
Fred Carelli



Fabric Art Kit
Rocky Ride
Tami Biniaz



ENJOYING THE EVENT (clockwise): Writers take advantage of a workshop to hone their craft; veteran John Peyton plays the harmonica and the drums; 101st Army Band entertains the veterans; the ALA welcomes participants during registration; stage show performers rehearse.

Time went on and he healed. After that, he decided he wanted his voice back. After about a year, he received a letter in the mail asking if he would sing the National Anthem again.

“I knew when my cue was to start singing, and I was a little nervous,” he recalled. “I had never really tried it for a year and a half. I just stood at attention, took a couple seconds to look at everybody, the room got real quiet, and then I hit the note. I didn’t realize I was singing the song.”

People in the crowd took videos of Bowe singing. He went back to see the doctors again about his thyroid.

“I showed one doctor and her eyes got big and she said, “You had angels around you,” Bowe said. “She called her whole staff in because they could not believe what they were seeing. People could probably get their voice back, but my projection was coming out better than it was before I had cancer. I was singing notes I never hit before. I was also told by another doctor I was a walking miracle.”

Attending the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival was “one of the top experiences I’ve ever had in my life,” he said.

Like many veterans, Bowe really enjoyed the camaraderie aspect of the event.

“All the meals we have, that’s all we talk about — our [military] experiences,” he said. “Some negative, but mostly positive. We understand the negative.”

Because of all the benefits the Festival brought to him, Bowe planned to go back to Pittsburgh and spread the word about the local and national events.

“When I get back home, I’m not going to isolate myself anymore,” he said. “I’m going to open up my phone to my family again. I’m going to be a beacon of light for veterans in Pittsburgh. I’m going back to tell them what the experience is.”



Honoring Family through Art

Tina Heim, Artist

U.S. Army

Kansas, First-time attendee

“This was the first time I really stretched myself with my beading, and I tried to do more traditional because I was trying to honor my grandfather,” Heim said. “There is just so much symbolism to each little piece of that necklace.”

Heim’s grandfather passed away about five years ago, followed by her father and then her grandma.

“I was going through a lot emotionally and I just decided last year with the 2023 entry piece that I’m just going to start honoring my family, and the best way to do that is handcrafted beaded jewelry,” she said. “I had to learn some new styles to do the entire piece with four different beading techniques into the one necklace. It was a learning process, a healing process, a grieving process.”

Heim said her grandfather, Chief Charlie Little Coyote, was a southern Cheyenne Indian chief.

“I remember in grade school he made me an exact replica of his powwow gala, all the way down to the fringe,” Heim said. “I would wear it to school for Heritage Day and he would come in and paint my face the exact way he would paint his face for the powwow, so everything looked authentic with that. That is what brought on the colors for the necklace and everything else. It was the colors that were in his powwow gala.”

It took Heim about a week to create the entire necklace — after she tore it apart twice. She doesn’t use big, chunky beads — she uses the itty bitty ones — the second tiniest beads that are made.

She said it was a huge honor to be at the National

Veterans Creative Arts Festival. The local competition is still young in Wichita, so Heim said she was proud to represent her VA.

“I am just overwhelmed and extremely honored that I am able to represent everyone back home, and I hope I can do everybody justice,” she said.

Like many other veterans, Heim experienced great friendships while attending the national event.

“We kind of pick on each other, but that’s just normal for the different branches,” she said laughing. “No matter what, these are my brothers and sisters. They could be from Vietnam, they could be from Korea, they could be from Afghanistan, Desert Storm, it doesn’t matter. I got a little emotional when I was talking up there about the necklace and when I got back to my seat, I felt like five hands start rubbing my back.”

Heim said there is a huge healing power to the arts — something she experienced while creating her piece and also while at the Festival.

“The art therapy the VA has for veterans does a lot of healing and does a lot of good,” she said. “The veteran is able to express a lot of things they might have had pent up and built up for years.”

For the 2024 competition year, Heim plans to honor her grandmother by submitting a necklace in the Festival competition.

ALA is a proud co-presenter

The American Legion Auxiliary helps with the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival through volunteer hours and monetary donations. At the national level, the ALA has been involved since 2000.

Members of the national Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Committee help throughout the week with various tasks ranging from meal count to ironing, to always being a helping hand, listening ear, and smiling face. They work alongside VA staff members to ensure the event runs smoothly.

In addition to the national VA&R Committee, the Department of Colorado hosted the always popular hospitality room, giving veterans a place to grab a snack and chat throughout the week.

The American Legion Auxiliary is proud to be part of this event, always putting veterans’ needs first so they have a wonderful week at the Festival.

Moving forward

Veterans often leave the national Festival with new friends, a renewed sense of healing, and more confident in themselves. It’s one step in the journey to a better self.

“I’m not healed 100 percent, but I’m well on my way,” Air Force veteran Cotton said. “I’m a different person. I’m a different veteran.” ★

Next year’s Festival will be in Indianapolis! Stay tuned for more updates by following @ALAforVeterans on social media.



WHAT A WEEK (top to bottom, from left): Christopher Bryce sings; Victor Collins plays the tuba; Matthew Jones plays an original; ALA members Theresa Montoya and MaryAnn Paul greet veterans during registration; the national VA&R Committee, ALA National President Lisa Williamson, and NHQ staff; stage show performers; Janet Martin rehearses; veteran Dave Smith with his dance partner Tara Scime; veterans during a jam session.

VETERAN SUICIDE PREVENTION



BE THE ONE TO SAVE ONE

By Jennifer Donovan

September is National Suicide Prevention Month, an opportunity to bring extra attention to reducing the veteran suicide rate because no veteran should die by suicide. 2023-2024 American Legion Auxiliary National President Lisa Williamson has made The American Legion's Be the One mission her focus as she visited departments across the country.

According to the National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report, it's estimated that between 17 and 22 veterans or servicemembers take their lives daily. On average, each death by suicide affects an estimated 135 individuals — family, friends, co-workers.

We can all Be the One to save one by doing things that will impact a veteran's life. Simple acts can make a large impact and even save a life. Here a few examples:

- An ALA member who is also a veteran hasn't shown up in a few weeks, which is unusual because she is usually there. You decide to make a call. You don't know it at the time, but that phone call changed the direction of her life. She hadn't come to any events lately because she was struggling with depression.

That call made her feel noticed and cared for. She realized she needed help.

- A unit hosted an event and gave out free gun locks. A veteran who received one of the locks had placed it on his firearm. He was having suicidal thoughts and grabbed his gun. The lock made him take a second, and he realized this wasn't what he wanted to do. He realized he was in crisis.

- Your post family hosted a booth at a community event when a veteran struck up a conversation with a member about Be the One. Learning about the mission, that veteran realized there were others facing the same issues and that help is available. The ALA member helped the veteran find local resources.

These are just a few examples of how American Legion Family members can make a big impact.

Joining forces to put an end to veteran suicide

The American Legion Family is not alone in this mission. Columbia University, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and USAA are among the many partners joining The American Legion Family in this mission. They all provide valuable training and resources that align with the Be the One mission.

Columbia Protocol – a training to help identify risk

Just 90 minutes of your time in a virtual training can help save a life. Everyone is invited to a virtual training to learn how they can be part of the solution. The American Legion has partnered with Columbia University to train and educate Legion Family and community members on how to interact and respond to a veteran in crisis.

The Columbia Protocol, also known as the Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale, supports suicide risk assessment through a series of simple, plain-language questions that anyone can ask. The answers help users identify whether someone is at risk for suicide, assess the severity and immediacy of that risk, and gauge the level of support that the person needs.

After the training, participants will be able to:

- Use the Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale to determine at-risk individuals.
- Identify risk factors and warning signs.
- Outline the types of suicidal ideation and four behaviors that indicate imminent risk.
- Communicate effectively with an individual who may be at risk of hurting themselves.

This training is available virtually and in person. To find a training, visit www.BetheOne.org.

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs S.A.V.E. training

The VA offers training to give you the tools to help a veteran in crisis or having thoughts of suicide. The VA's S.A.V.E. training is free and can be done virtually or in person. The S.A.V.E. acronym stands for:

- S: Signs that indicate a veteran might be thinking about suicide.
- A: Ask, "Are you thinking of killing yourself?"
- V: Validate the veteran's experience.
- E: Encourage treatment and expedite getting help.

In this training, you will learn about the signs and symptoms of suicidal thinking, how to identify risk, ask questions in an objective and non-threatening way, and what to do when you identify a veteran who is at risk for suicide.

To learn more about VA S.A.V.E. training, visit www.PsychArmor.org.

In addition to this training, the VA is working to keep lethal means from being easily accessible through the VA Keep It Secure Program. According to the VA, nearly 7 out of 10 veteran deaths are the result of firearm injuries. A suicidal crisis can be short — the time it takes for a firearm to be retrieved from a safe, remove a gun lock, and load the gun can give the veteran enough time to change their mind.

This program also includes safely storing medications, alcohol, opioids, other substances, ropes, cords, or sharp objects. Again, it's about adding time between the suicidal thought and obtaining an item that can be used to cause death.

The VA is also taking action by making sure every veteran gets the help they need. Any veteran in suicidal crisis can now be seen at any VA or non-VA health care facility free of charge. The veteran doesn't have to be enrolled in the VA system for this benefit. It includes up to 30 days of inpatient or 90 days of outpatient care at any VA or non-VA facility.

USAA's Face the Fight

The American Legion has teamed up with USAA for joint prevention efforts with Face the Fight, a coalition of corporations, foundations, nonprofits, and veteran-focused organizations joined together to raise awareness and support for veteran suicide prevention.

According to USAA, more than 120,000 veterans have died by suicide since 2001, and the veteran suicide rate is 57% higher than the national average. The goal of Face the Fight is to make a significant reduction to the veteran suicide rate by 2030. This will be done by starting conversations and increasing support by breaking the stigma surrounding mental health.

Hitting the road to share important training

The Department of Maine American Legion Family is spreading the Be the One mission by taking training on the road. The department has presented VA S.A.V.E. training at posts across the state.

No matter what you're going through, you don't have to face it alone.

The Veterans Crisis Line offers 24/7 support.





BE THE ONE: The Department of Maine offers VA S.A.V.E. training at department headquarters and at posts around the state.



They also host the trainings at department headquarters every other month. At these events, they provide free gun locks to participants. The Togus VA Medical Center provides the locks at department trainings, and units and posts work with local police departments in their areas to give them out. Local law enforcement also is invited to participate in the training and give their perspective as officers.

“Since January, we have trained over 120 members with many more trainings to go,” said Debra Rumery, ALA Department of Maine National Security chair. “I believe the members who receive the training are appreciative for the gun locks. We have pre- and post-surveys on the training, and they do thank us for the lock. It’s an added bonus.”



TRAINING: Julie Flynn, Commander of Maine Post 86, and Debra Rumery, ALA Department of Maine National Security chair, facilitate the VA S.A.V.E. trainings.

Members have heard several stories about how Maine’s training has helped veterans.

“A Squadron 86 member who took the training and immediately knew the signs he learned pertained to a friend of his who was in a crisis, and called him right up and made arrangements for

a talk,” Rumery said. “They have talked several times and we do believe that just by having someone there to listen to his struggles and validating his thoughts, has saved his life.”

Rumery said several other veterans have taken the training and realized they had been in a mental health crisis in the past. The training helped them heal, and in turn, they reached out to others who were in need of help.

Rumery recommends the VA S.A.V.E. training for all American Legion Family members.

“Get the word out to all of The American Legion Family in your department that this training is available for them, and they have an opportunity to Be the One to save a veteran’s life,” said Rumery. “Be prepared for difficult stories to be told. Make sure everyone feels they are in a safe environment to be able to share their stories. Offer resource kits to members who attend so they can use it for themselves and to share with their post, unit, squadron, and Riders chapter.”

During the post trainings, local law enforcement officers attend to share their perspective.

“They explain exactly what happens when someone calls 911 for a person in a mental health crisis. When the members hear what they do, it just solidifies all of the Be the One VA S.A.V.E. training,” said Rumery. “They do and say exactly what we train them to do and say. It also shows our communities what we do for our veterans and sheds a positive light on our organization.”

The department includes empathetic listening in the training sessions.

“Helping members understand how their body language, the way that they react, and their listening skills play a very important role in helping someone in a crisis and to get the best assistance for that individual,” said Rumery.

This isn’t the first year for Maine to be involved in suicide prevention. The 2022-2023 department

president's project, "You will never walk alone for veteran suicide awareness and prevention," raised a record-breaking \$60,000 in donations for the Togus VA's psychiatric ward and veteran suicide prevention outreach program.

A simple phone call

Reaching out to veterans and fellow members can make a huge difference in someone's life. They may be afraid to ask for help, or they may feel isolated. Calling them will let them know they are cared for and gives them an opportunity to ask for the help they need. This is the purpose of The American Legion's Buddy Check program — in the first four years, more than 1 million veterans received needed assistance.

American Legion Auxiliary Unit 253 in New York practices Buddy Checks. Members reach out to fellow members who have been absent to meetings. They

deliver food to those suffering from illness.

The VA also is involved in Buddy Checks. In support of the STRONG Veterans Act of 2022, the VA established Veteran Buddy Check Week. This year, it is planned for Oct. 21-25, 2024.

Providing funding to an organization with the same goal

ALA Unit 697 in Illinois is helping veterans in need of service dogs. In partnership with K9s for Veterans, they are raising funds to cover the cost of a service dog for a veteran with PTSD. As of press time,

they have raised more than \$4,700. Money has been raised through donations, raffles, dinners, T-shirts, bake sales, and more. Unit 697 has promoted the project at Post 697 by using a donation box and a thermometer poster to visually track their progress.

The cost of fully funding a service dog is \$7,500 and includes a lifetime of food and veterinary care so the veteran never has to worry about those costs for their dog.

"To many, raising this amount of money in a short period of time seemed unimaginable, but we knew that with the help of our members and our community, this was a goal that could be reached," said Patty Grigutis, Unit 697 member.

"This project has gotten a lot of support from the community. ALA members knew this project would be a great fit for the organization after meeting with K9s for Veterans and seeing firsthand how the dog comforted a veteran. We all knew at that point that every veteran who needs a service dog should be able to obtain one," said Grigutis. "We knew we had to help make a difference — even if we can only help one veteran."

Find opportunities to discuss Be the One

You can save a life by starting a conversation. Sharing the Be the One mission is a great way to get someone to open up or seek help on their own.

Indiana ALA Unit 104 distributes Be the One cards during its monthly meat sale. The event gives members an opportunity to talk to veterans and share information with them. This gives veterans an opportunity to ask questions and learn more about Be the One.

Spreading the word that there are resources available and that people care makes a huge impact. It helps reduce the stigma around mental health. Don't be afraid to ask a veteran if they are OK, because they may not be and just don't want to ask for help.

You can make a difference:

- Be the One to ask veterans how they are doing.
- Listen when a veteran needs to talk.
- Reach out when a veteran is struggling.
- Call 988, extension 1, if you are a veteran who is struggling. You can also text 838255. ★



PROVIDING COMFORT:
Marine veteran Joaquin and his service dog from K9s for Veterans.

BE THE ONE

COLUMBIA PROTOCOL TRAINING

- 90-minute training
- Register for a webinar or find an in-person training by visiting www.BetheOne.org.

SAVE THE DATE

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' Veteran Buddy Check Week
Oct. 21-25, 2024



See you in New Orleans as We Celebrate the ALA's 2023-2024 Year

By Travis Perkins

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 2024 National Convention is Aug. 23-29 in New Orleans. The event will be the 103rd National Convention for the American Legion Auxiliary and 105th for The American Legion.

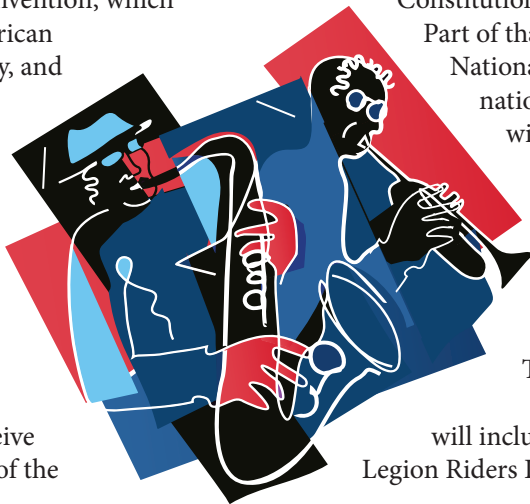
The purpose of our National Convention is to elect officers, receive reports, and conduct the business of the

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 2023-2024 NEC will meet in New Orleans on Saturday, Aug. 24, and the new 2024-2025 NEC will be convened by the newly elected national president on Thursday, Aug. 29.

A few highlights of the week will include color guard and band contests, Legion Riders Legacy Run arrival, pre-convention



committee meetings, a patriotic memorial service, opening convention session, and the installation of the 2024-2025 national officers.

Several major ALA awards are also 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 those serving at the unit level who exemplify the values and ideals of the Auxiliary and whose accomplishments significantly impact the program work in their units.

- **Junior Members of the Year** recognizes Junior members actively serving the ALA mission.

- **The Public Spirit Award** recognizes outstanding individuals and organizations for contributions that positively impact communities through service to our veterans, military, and their families.

The 2024 ALA Public Spirit Award will be presented to Wreaths Across America. In August 2023, the American Legion Auxiliary national organization joined forces with Wreaths Across America to build a stronger awareness of each group's common missions while supporting fundraising efforts nationwide. Established in 2007, Wreaths Across America has become synonymous with its annual wreath-laying ceremonies each

December. However, its mission to Remember the fallen, Honor those who serve, and Teach the next generation the value of freedom is yearlong.

Wreaths Across America has participating locations in more than 4,220 communities nationwide, engaging volunteers and organizations like American Legion Auxiliary units in educational initiatives, and sharing veteran stories of service and sacrifice.

During the ALA's National Convention week, attendees will also have an 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.

Also held during convention week: The historical States Dinner in the famed city of New Orleans will have a Mardi Gras theme this year. Start shopping now for those ornate masks!

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 103rd National Convention:

- **How to register to attend, agenda details, and more:**

www.ALAforVeterans.org/convention.

- **Stay connected through social media: Follow us @ALAforVeterans and use #AuxCon24.**

Catch It Live!

Unable to attend National Convention in person? Our livestream is available for general sessions starting Monday, Aug. 26, as well as installation of national officers. Viewers of the livestream can post comments during each session, and archived video recordings from each session will be available following convention so you can watch it at your convenience. In addition, 2023-2024 National President Lisa Williamson will share stories from her travels and visits to departments in a heartfelt end-of-year report shown as a video presentation during convention.





UNITS CAN HONOR FALLEN HEROES DURING WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA DAY

The American Legion Auxiliary and Wreaths Across America (WAA) officially joined forces in August 2023. Although our organizations have had an unofficial relationship at the local unit level for years, this partnership promises a positive future that serves both organizations' common missions. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) formally united the two organizations to support one another and build a stronger awareness of each group's visions, with the focus being on honoring and supporting our nation's veterans, military, and their families.

"The MOU confirms that relationship and gives us the potential to expand upon it, and the units can officially receive monies back with every wreath they purchase to be placed at a grave," said ALA National Headquarters' Senior Program Manager Chrystal Daulton.

Wreaths Across America's mission

is to remember the fallen, honor those who serve, and teach the next generation the value of freedom. Founded in 2007, WAA is best known for its annual wreath-laying ceremonies in December, but their appreciation and

generosity does not stop there. The continuous expansion of this year-round mission happens because of dedicated volunteers like ALA members who utilize the program to raise awareness and funds for their local organizations and community services.

This year, national Wreaths Across America Day is Saturday, Dec. 14.

Join the millions of volunteers and supporters who will place wreaths on veterans' graves across local, national, and military cemeteries, as well as veterans' memorials and historic sites to remember and honor veterans at more than 4,225 participating locations in all 50 states. We encourage all members of The American Legion Family to show their support.

"It's never too early to start planning," said Daulton. "If and how you would choose to support this — either as an individual member of the ALA or as your unit, your department, or your district — start planning today!"

There are two opportunities you can participate in national Wreaths

Across America Day:

1. Volunteer as a sponsorship group: ALA units can take part in the Wreaths Across America Sponsorship Group Program. You are provided an opportunity to further the organization's mission, raise sponsorships to place veterans' wreaths, and support programming, while offering ALA members an opportunity for fundraising as they honor veterans.

- Units that register with the "\$5 Back Plan" will earn \$5 for every \$17 sponsorship earned — allowing the donor to essentially "do good twice" and support both programs and missions. As a volunteer sponsorship group, you will be responsible for networking within your local community to gather wreath sponsorships. You will select at least one cemetery to support as a group, whether that's a national cemetery or another cemetery in your state or within your local community. To sign up as a sponsorship group, visit: www.ALAforVeterans.org/Wreaths-Across-America.

2. Sponsor wreaths: You can also support the ALA's efforts through the WAA program with a \$17 sponsorship.

- Visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/Wreaths-Across-America to sponsor a wreath and select the cemetery you would like to support.

Important reminder: Please note that ALA poppy funds CANNOT be used for WAA. For more information on how to use poppy funds to support our mission, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/Poppy-Funds.

ALA Academy Course: *How Your Unit Can Work Our Mission and Earn Money with Wreaths Across America*

ALA Academy offers a webinar to learn more information about how your unit can support our combined missions and earn money with Wreaths Across America. This webinar features guest speakers from WAA who share some history of Wreaths Across America, their partnership with the American Legion Auxiliary, our sponsorship program, and the tools available to help make this a successful endeavor for units nationwide. Visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/ALA-Academy and log in to the MyAuxiliary member portal to view the webinar.

MEMBERSHIP: SEVERAL TYPES OF COMMUNICATION ARE KEY FOR GROWTH

 www.Facebook.com/groups/alamembership



Florida took the lead early and hit 100% membership in February!

I asked

Department of Florida Membership Chair Lisa Hoyland how they do it. Is it the sunshine? According to Hoyland and other members, it is a little bit of everything! Think of those departments that rose to 100% shortly after Florida: Arizona, New Mexico, Michigan, and Alaska. It was certainly not warm and sunny in Alaska during National President Lisa Williamson's homecoming last fall, though the people all were.

Communication is key! Florida units provide new members with welcome letters, small gifts, American Legion Auxiliary information that includes the ALA

Preamble, and information on the benefits of being a member. Some units have initiation dinners and parties to introduce new and current members to one another. There are weekly social media communications, unit newsletters, phone calls, emails, group text messages, and birthday cards. The communication does not stop!

Florida has promoted the national membership theme by encouraging members to submit names for their sled dogs. Over 50 names were submitted, and "Sunshine" became their mascot. They also have a department membership theme — Ringing in Membership — as bells rang and bellflower seeds were distributed, planted, and shared.

I still think the amount of sunshine has something to do with those numbers. When people start

going outdoors, they are excited to get involved with our great organization.

Think about your department: What do you have to offer? How do you gain membership? We ask! We are great communicators. If you have not found what works best for you to gain and keep membership, keep looking and keep asking. And most of all, share what you do! Share with your unit, share with your department, and share on social media.

Visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/Member/Committees/Membership to locate key resources, important dates, award forms, and more.



Karen Toll has been a member of American Legion Auxiliary Unit 203 in Latonia, Ky., for 27 years.



2024-2025 ALA Mission Training dates now available



Mark your calendars for these one-day conferences that will help you learn more about the ALA mission!

- Nov. 16: Nashville, Tenn.**
- Nov. 16: Denver, Colo.**
- Jan. 25: Des Moines, Iowa**
- Feb. 1: Las Vegas, Nev.**
- Feb. 1: Boston, Mass.**

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

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LEADERSHIP: MOTIVATE ALA MEMBERS TO BECOME LEADERS

 www.Facebook.com/groups/ALALeadership



As an organization, it's important to seek out and develop our members into leaders. The ALA's future is dependent on each of us taking the time to mentor our members and help them become leaders.

Have you ever met an ALA member and thought to yourself, *This person could be a great leader in our group?* If you find someone with leadership qualities, you may have found the next person to mentor and develop as a leader.

As a mentor, you should lead by example and share your knowledge and experience with your mentee. You are responsible for providing guidance, feedback, and support while getting to know them better and identifying what they would

like to learn more about.

Set expectations early on, and work on a personal development plan that focuses on developing personal traits. Help your mentee with smaller tasks that may seem insignificant but are important in the grand scheme of things, such as crafting professional emails, creating great PowerPoint presentations, and dressing appropriately for different types of events.

One of the most important things a mentor can do is to listen. You don't have to have all the answers, but you can provide valuable feedback and be a sounding board for your mentee. Be honest, and provide constructive feedback. Encourage your mentee to attend as many county, district, and department meetings as possible to learn

more about the organization. Suggest they take ALA Academy courses and attend an ALA Mission Training event (visit www.ALAforVeterans.org for information about both).

And when your mentee is ready, suggest volunteer opportunities that allow them to gain experience and practice building their skills.

But your job as a mentor isn't finished once your mentee has developed into a leader. Remind them that you're always available as a resource. And throughout the entire process, be sure to praise and acknowledge their achievements while offering advice for improvement.



Linda Tome is a 27-year member of the Auxiliary. She belongs to James R. Hickey Unit 120 in Palmyra, N.Y.

FINANCE: PLAN AHEAD FOR POSITIVE PROGRESSION

 www.ALAforVeterans.org/Member/Committees/Finance

As another year ends and the excitement of a new administrative year is upon us, the roles and responsibilities of the department and/or unit Finance Committee are essential to safeguard the fiduciary needs of our organization.

There are several major areas of focus for Finance Committees. Asset development and protection/fundraising/budgeting entail how the department or unit may adopt targets for expected accomplishments — and suggest performance measures to evaluate progress toward those targets, which are outlined in the annual



budget development. Likely by now, most of your FY2024-2025 budgets have already been approved, but budgeting is a guide, which is an ongoing process.

Finance Committees often focus only on the current year's budgeting process and forget to look three to five years ahead. The committee should reflect on trends of the recent past and how those items can impact current and future planning. Each department or unit may want to replicate this process of setting goals through a long-range plan.

For the Finance Committee to advise the organization on how

to acquire and spend resources, it would be helpful if it is tied to those goals. The department or unit may measure where it is now and set goals to strive to reach the benchmarks for expenses and to broaden the sources of potential income streams. At each of your finance meetings, the progress toward those annual and multi-year goals should be reviewed.

Please remember: Members need to understand and be able to measure the progress of the organization through reports of the Finance Committee.



Nicole Clapp is a 49-year member of the Auxiliary. She belongs to Iowa Unit 127 in Gladbrook and is a Past National President.

SUPPORTING THE ALA'S MISSION THROUGH OUR PROGRAM ENGAGEMENT PLANS

As American Legion Auxiliary members, our purpose is to answer the call of *Service Not Self* by enhancing the lives of veterans, military, and their families. Auxiliary members serve in our communities, demonstrating the love and appreciation we have for our nation's heroes. Members' commitment to the mission keeps them very busy, and because of that, we recognize the need for information to be easily available.

With the ALA's Program Engagement Plans, all members have access to resources and guidelines that will further improve how they work the mission. The Program Engagement Plans (PEPs) aim to educate Auxiliary members in all things focused on mission delivery by including local and national ALA priorities.

Who should use the Program Engagement Plans?

The plans are directed at individual members but can be used to fit unit and department activities very easily. We know not every unit or department delivers the mission the same way, so this information is available for all members at all levels of the organization — and keeping us all on the same page.

What is the purpose of the plans?

PEPs are designed to easily direct members to ways they can get involved with a specific program. The plans are for unit members and departments to implement the ALA's mission in their communities, and further their knowledge of each program, offering support to continue and build upon what works and provide flexibility to try new approaches.

We're ready! How do we start?

The Program Engagement Plans should be used as a guide

or a roadmap to advance mission outreach efforts and overall membership engagement. They give us a clear purpose with key program statements to bridge gaps in information that members need to effectively work their program.

The plans provide valuable resources, real-life how-tos, links to beneficial information, links to our national committee Facebook groups, deadlines and important dates, brochures, submission forms, sidebars for easy access to important topics about the programs, in-depth knowledge of each program, and so much more.

All plans are located in the MyAuxiliary member portal at www.ALAforVeterans.org/member/program-engagement-plans.

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



Can't attend National Convention but still want to honor your hero?

Scan here to make a gift:



The Wall of Heroes, displayed at National Convention, gives attendees the chance to honor a hero in their life by donating to the ALA Foundation in his or her honor. Donors write the names of their honoree on a paper star and adhere it to a prominent wall. This year, you can participate from afar by scanning the QR code and making your tribute gift.

Sponsored by: 

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August is Make a Will Month.

According to Caring.com, approximately **68%** of adults do not have a will or estate plan. Making a will is easy and helps ensure your assets are distributed according to your wishes.

No matter the size of any individual donation, collectively, every gift adds up to helping ensure the Auxiliary and the ALA Foundation are here for generations to come. You can establish your legacy in the Auxiliary when you include the Auxiliary or ALA Foundation in your will, estate plans, and other financial preparations.

To learn more about your legacy giving options, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/planned-giving. To notify ALA National Headquarters of your intent to include the Auxiliary or ALA Foundation in your estate plans, contact our Development Division at development@ALAforVeterans.org.



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

AUGUST

The Strength of Connection

“The people who make the biggest difference in your life are not the ones with the most credentials, the most money, or the most awards. They are simply the ones who care the most.” — Steve Gilliland

In a world often driven by money and power, it may be easy to lose sight of what truly matters. Steve Gilliland’s words remind us that the real impact in our lives comes from folks who show care and compassion. This truth is at the heart of the American Legion Auxiliary’s mission.

We are bound by a commitment to serve veterans, their families, and communities. Consider the power of a kind word, a helping hand, or a caring ear. These simple acts can easily be forgotten in the hustle of our busy days. But, it is through these gestures that we honor the service and sacrifice of our military and their families.

Gilliland reminds us to “Find our purpose. Define it, and make it the core of what drives you.” We can do this in our daily interactions, even with little time and limited funding. It can be as simple as being there for a fellow member. As we move forward in our mission, let us strive to be the ones who care the most. Our devotion to building bridges of support cultivates a community where every member feels valued, and every veteran feels honored.

Prayer: We come to you today with open minds and seeking hearts. Please guide us with your wisdom and grace as we navigate how to connect and serve. May our actions take on your example by offering comfort and joy to those around us. Amen.

SEPTEMBER

Purposefully Positive

As September arrives and the transition from summer to fall may unfold, we are a part of nature’s transition. Each season leaves its mark, signaling passage of time and promise of the future. This could be a prompt for us to consider, how do we move forward, do we have seasons of change where we check ourselves?

In our professional world, we are often encouraged to “shop our resumes” as a measurement of our professional achievements and successes. When was the last time we turned inward to evaluate our personal growth? Who fills our inner circle, where do we invest our energies, do we cling to past mistakes or celebrate the good?

In Philippians 3:13-14, Paul urges us to leave behind the past and focus ahead, much like the changing of seasons.

How can we ensure we maintain purposefully positive thoughts and deeds? By being intentional. By setting clear goals and outlining specific practices we want to continue or change. These could be gratitude practices, celebrating achievements, or prioritizing meaningful connections with loved ones.

Prayer: We come today seeking your guidance. We thank you for the changing seasons which serve to remind us of your constant renewal opportunities for growth in ourselves. Please help us with purposeful thoughts and actions. Grant us the

courage to move on from past mistakes and negativity and to embrace joy. May our lives be a testament to your goodness serving to grow in purposeful positive power and inspire others. Amen.

OCTOBER

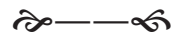
Don't Miss Heaven By 12 Inches

American Legion Auxiliary membership often transcends attendance at meetings or social gatherings — it can be a commitment in every aspect of our lives. With that comes great responsibility as we become ambassadors of our organization.

There is a special moment from my teen years that is a daily reminder for me to work hard every day to live my faith in every action and word. It was from my youth when I went to my teacher’s church on Sunday. His name was Reverend Morgan, and he spoke about inches in a sermon. He discussed the importance of not missing heaven by a mere 12 inches. His message emphasized the significance of the 12-inch journey from our hearts to our mouths. It’s about ensuring the words we speak represent the faith that resides inside us.

These 12 inches between our mouths and our hearts can make all the difference. Reverend Morgan continued cautioning that we must tread carefully, for our words hold power. They have the ability to shape feelings, thoughts, and actions of those around us. Are we mindful of the outcome we may have on others? While our intentions may be rooted in kindness, our words have the potential to inflict unintended harm. Therefore, let us be vigilant in our speech and choose our words with care. This way, we ensure that our 12 inches are not wounding or discouraging but are uplifting and inspiring.

As ambassadors of the American Legion Auxiliary, let us be mindful of the 12 inches from our hearts to our mouths. May we consistently endeavor to radiate light, support, and love and to ensure our words and actions foster a community that embraces all with warmth and acceptance.



As my time as your national chaplain draws to a close, please allow me to express my deepest gratitude for the privilege to serve alongside you this year. Together, we embarked on this journey recognizing how our unique contributions intertwine, like the flowers of a Hawaiian lei, to form something strong, beautiful, and impactful. “Like a lei, we are all connected.”

In the spirit of aloha, let us remain united and committed to advancing the ALA’s mission with courage, compassion, dedication, and inclusivity.

With heartfelt appreciation and blessings,
Me Ke Akua,
Amen.



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



**DO YOU TREAT POTENTIAL MEMBERS AS INVADERS?
HOW TO BEST RESPOND TO A NEWCOMER
AT YOUR POST HOME**

A person with an unfamiliar face enters an American Legion post. The face has the puzzled look of someone who’s seeking information but is not sure where to find it. As it turns out, the visitor is there to learn more about joining the American Legion Auxiliary.

What happens next?

If those at the Legion post handle the situation appropriately, the scene likely will end with a prospective member who’s excited about joining the ALA. But a bungled response could yield a very different outcome: The would-be member might never come back.

That’s why Linda Hartmann and Cheryl Yoder, unit president and past unit president of Florida Unit 273 in Madeira Beach, emphasize the value of outreach.

“Every member,” they said, “is an ambassador.”

But how can those at American Legion posts be effective ambassadors for the ALA? What actions should they take to ensure proper response when post visitors

ask about the organization?

Auxiliary magazine asked those from the Madeira Beach unit and from Indiana Unit 500 in Speedway — both of which have strong records of attracting and retaining members — what practices they follow and recommend.

Here are their top five tips for responding to potential members who visit their American Legion post home:

Be educated. Building awareness among members about what the unit does — and where to turn to learn more — helps to ensure that those at the post are prepared to answer questions. Hartmann and Yoder said their unit provides members with training about their group and the latest information on its projects. Equipped with this knowledge, members can provide an accurate picture of the ALA’s mission.

Be available. Having someone at the post to respond to visitors’ inquiries is vital, whether that person is someone working behind

the bar or an ALA member serving as a greeter. To ensure a person is available to address questions, the Madeira Beach unit has a team of 10 members who rotate days to work at their post addressing new and renewal membership concerns.

Be engaging. Allowing a visitor to stand around helplessly is not an option, said Vickie Bunting, president of the Speedway unit. The first action when a new person arrives should be to greet them and offer to help. Then allow the prospective member to lead the conversation, responding to their specific requests as they mention them. “We try to make everybody feel at home,” Bunting said.

Be thorough. It’s important to provide a clear explanation of the value the ALA brings to the community and its veterans — and the ways the prospective member could help support the group’s mission. To ensure newcomers get the full picture of the ALA and its work, those at the post should have resources like brochures, phone numbers, or web addresses to share so newcomers can learn more.

Be easygoing. Don’t force it, Bunting said. Sometimes people who come to a Legion post aren’t looking to become members. In those cases, the Speedway unit avoids high-pressure tactics that assume the person wants to discuss personal issues like family members or assistance they might need. Instead, the unit might simply invite the visitor to stay for dinner. Not only is treating everyone with this type of kindness the right thing to do, but that behavior also can pay dividends in the future. “Word gets around if the post is a friendly place,” she said.



Getting questions from visitors to your post home about the American Legion Auxiliary? Here’s how to respond:

- **Be educated:** Prepare to help.
- **Be available:** Offer assistance.
- **Be engaging:** Foster camaraderie.
- **Be thorough:** Ensure understanding.
- **Be easygoing:** Avoid high-pressure tactics. Simply, be nice and welcoming.

CONSIDER THE MONEY YOU RAISE GOING BACK TO ALA MISSION

American Legion Auxiliary members are passionate about supporting worthwhile causes. After all, in the ALA, they're part of an organization that last year provided more than \$227 million in volunteer and financial assistance to efforts ranging from help for veterans to scholarships for students.

But what types of community programs and organizations are appropriate for members to support through their ALA units? The answer is simple, according to Carley Schutz, Development Division director at ALA National Headquarters.

ALA units should consider targeting their financial support to causes that assist veterans, military, and their families.

A broad range of charitable organizations — funding causes from cancer research to animal shelters — can be good choices for ALA members to support on their own. But when it comes to the assistance they offer through their ALA units, Schutz said that sticking to the Auxiliary mission is best.

That means units are encouraged to target their efforts to align with the following American Legion Auxiliary areas in support of veterans, military, and their families:

- Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
- National Security
- Americanism
- Children & Youth

“In the capacity of an ALA member, our number one priority is serving veterans and military families,” Schutz said. “Why join a membership organization that is solely focused on bettering the lives of veterans, military, and their families if that’s not what you’re passionate about?”

Questions to Ask

Before lending support to a cause, ALA units should make sure they can answer “yes” to the following four questions:

1. Does the service, fund, or program benefit veterans, military, or military families?
2. Does the organization’s focus align with the ALA’s mission to enhance the lives of veterans, military, and their families?
3. Is the organization in good standing with the IRS?
4. Would a prospective ALA member understand — without explanation — why the group is supporting this other organization as part of an effort to help veterans?

With that last question in mind, Schutz cautioned that when ALA units give to other veterans service organizations, it can be confusing for those who are thinking about becoming members of the Auxiliary. These prospective members sometimes are unclear about which group they’re joining.

None of this is to say there aren’t occasions when it’s OK to deviate a bit from these guidelines. During times of crisis — such as a natural disaster affecting an ALA unit’s community — there could be relief causes that are appropriate to support. The first choice for ALA units to support disaster recovery, however, is the ALA and its Auxiliary Emergency Fund.

Ideas for Giving

A variety of efforts qualifies as

appropriate for ALA support. Schutz offered the following ideas that help veterans, military, and military families:

- Contribute to a fund to enhance the quality of life for items such as wheelchair bicycles, beach wheelchairs, and accessible vans and other vehicles for families.
- Furnishing a housing facility for veterans and their families, supplying items such as beds, dressers, and kitchen appliances.
- Purchasing creative art therapy supplies — like paint, easels, pottery, leatherwork, kilns, and instruments — for a local U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs facility.
- Sponsoring any ALA Girls State initiative, such as participant attendance, travel, insurance, and housing.

This targeted support on behalf of the ALA shouldn’t diminish members’ support for other organizations or their willingness to offer those groups their own time and money.

“Having other passions is wonderful, and our members are so caring that I’m sure they have a variety of causes they would like to support,” Schutz said. “However, take your ALA hat off and put your other servant hat on. Let the two passions be separate.”

Should you give them your money?

Great Idea To:

- Provide ALA support to causes that benefit veterans, military, and their families.
- Ensure the answer is “yes” to four key questions about the cause’s mission and IRS status.
- Continue personal/individual support of causes not aligned with the ALA’s mission.

Reconsider If:

- The program or cause isn’t aligned with areas in support of veterans, military, or their families.
- You haven’t fully researched the program or organization and its relevance to the ALA’s work.
- It dedicates your unit’s money to nonaligned, personal interests.





A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE: Mallory Showalter Churning (left) and Caitlyn Bailey served as counselors at ALA Virginia Girls State. Churning enlisted in the U.S. Army and graduated from the Noncommissioned Officer Academy in 2010.

ALA GIRLS STATE EXPERIENCE LEADS TO SERVICE TO OUR NATION AND VETERANS

In 2003, Mallory Showalter Churning experienced a week that would shape her future — an experience that would lead her to military service and a career assisting veterans.

It all began when Churning’s high school counselor talked about ALA Virginia Girls State. As soon as she heard about the program, she made it her mission to get accepted.

She fondly remembers the welcome she received from ALA members as she arrived at Longwood University to begin her week at ALA Virginia Girls State.

“These ladies represented and embodied everything the American Legion Auxiliary stood for,” said Churning.

By the end of the week, not only did she have an increased knowledge of civic responsibility and government, she learned more about her family’s military connections.

“I applied for the coveted Samsung American Legion Scholarship — though I did not receive the scholarship,” Churning said. “Digging through old family records to find copies of DD-214s to support my application, I realized I

came from an incredibly long line of veterans, going back at least five generations. After sitting through the impactful POW/MIA ceremony at ALA Girls State, I knew I was going to look at ROTC programs in college to carry on this family tradition.”

Churning completed Army ROTC during college and enlisted in the U.S. Army as a medic.

“Many of the volunteers and Auxiliary members I met from my week at ALA Girls State were my biggest champions through college and the travels the Army took me,” said Churning. “I was so confident in these choices after my experience as a delegate to ALA Virginia Girls State.”

She also credits the program for emphasizing the importance of helping others.

“In one of the many amazing speeches we heard that week, we were all challenged to go back to our communities and do something that would help serve veterans,” said Churning. “I came back and connected with my local VA hospital and state veterans home to find out what needs they had, and was told socks.”

She then worked with her high school’s National Honor Society and created a service project called Sock Hop. To support the project, an event was created, and admission was a pair of socks. The socks were put into care packages for veterans.

To this day, Churning’s service to veterans continues. After she finished serving in the Army, she began looking for a job with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. For the past six years, Churning has worked for the Veterans Health Administration, ironically, at the same hospital where she donated socks in high school. In her current position, she helps veterans get access and apply for benefits they may be entitled to.

“I wholeheartedly attribute continuing to serve veterans to my time at ALA Virginia Girls State as both a delegate and volunteer,” she said.

Churning enjoyed ALA Girls State so much that she spent many years as a volunteer. She also met a lifelong friend who shared her love for the program.

“It was in the summer of 2004 that I met a fellow volunteer, Caitlyn, who has become my best friend,” said Churning. “For 10 years, we would go back to Longwood to volunteer as counselors.”

Churning said every time they get together, they reminisce about their ALA Girls State experiences.

“I would not be where I am at today if it wasn’t for ALA Virginia Girls State, both personally and professionally. The support and prayers I received from all the Auxiliary members I volunteered with gave me the confidence to take chances. While the days are oh so long for your week at ALA Virginia Girls State, the week is short, and the impact lasts a lifetime.”



ALA Girls Nation celebrated its 75th session in July. Visit @ALAGirlsNation on Instagram and Facebook to see pictures! Then watch for a feature on ALA Girls Nation in the November issue of *Auxiliary* magazine.

Have you seen the documentary *Girls State*? It’s streaming now on AppleTV+.



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

I grew up with my father being deployed. While for some, this may seem like a terrible thing — it filled me with extreme pride. My father was defending my and every American's freedom. Through the rest of my life, the military gave me guiding values like duty, honor, and country. By following the example set by my father and by internalizing military values, I have started

my own service to our nation as a cadet at West Point.

To earn this ALA scholarship, you had to complete 50 hours of volunteer service within your community during high school. What was it like to help in this way?

My community service consisted of my Eagle Scout project. I built a barbecue for my local post, of which my father and I are members. After a year of work as a concrete layer, mason, metal worker, and project

manager, the project summed up to 500 man hours and \$3,000. It felt amazing to give back to the veteran community that gave me the values I live my life by, and my future career.

Tell us about your college plans and what you are studying.

I am a cadet at the United States Military Academy at West Point, and I am majoring in international affairs with a focus in government, institutions, and development.

What piqued your interest in this career?

My lifelong connection to the military and the example set by my father is a large portion of why I chose my career. I also believe I have a true talent for leadership and motivating teams to success. I think the best place to use my talent for leadership and serve others as a servant leader is as an Army officer.

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

When considering your donation, please consider the students who will benefit. These are students who have been raised with high standards and high moral character given to them by their military connection. These things will make them into the future leaders of our nation. So, invest in our future and donate.

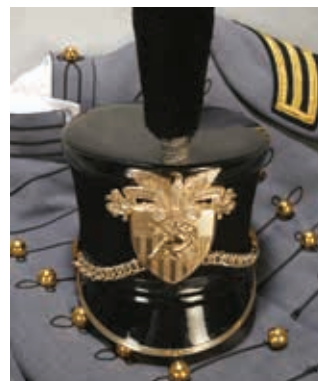
READY TO SERVE: Daegan Connolly is currently attending the United States Military Academy in West Point, N.Y. He is a Children of Warriors National Presidents' Scholarship recipient, eligible to apply through his father who served as an infantry officer and U.S. Army Ranger.

It is important to acknowledge the sacrifices of our servicemembers who preserve our freedom, but that is not enough. The sacrifices of the children of those who served should also be honored. Providing funds to assist these children so they can pursue higher education is a concrete way of showing how much we, as a nation, care.

See how the ALA Children of Warriors National Presidents' scholarship will help Daegan Connolly pursue a military career:

Who made you eligible for this scholarship? What does it mean to you to have a connection to the military?

My father made me eligible through his service as an infantry officer and a U.S Army Ranger. It means everything to me to have a connection to the military. It has defined my life through personal and family experiences, and has led me to become a future Army officer commissioning from West Point.



History Runs Deep at West Point

The United States Military Academy (USMA), established in 1802, is renowned for producing exceptional leaders. Situated in West Point, N.Y., the Academy was initially founded by President Thomas Jefferson to train officers for the rapidly expanding Army.

Throughout its history, West Point has evolved, adapting to the changing needs of the nation's defense. USMA has consistently upheld its mission of educating, training, and inspiring cadets to become leaders of character, prepared to serve their country with honor and distinction.

The Academy's rich history links its graduates as part of a Long Gray Line, and those graduates have played an integral part in the nation's history.



CHANGING LEADERSHIP (from left, clockwise): American Legion National Commander Daniel J. Seehafer, right, addresses the newly appointed National Adjutant Rodney K. Rolland; Rolland addresses the NEC; Daniel S. Wheeler, previously in that position; Wheeler and Rolland. (photos: Hilary Ott/The American Legion).

RODNEY K. ROLLAND NAMED 14TH NATIONAL ADJUTANT OF THE AMERICAN LEGION

The American Legion National Executive Committee (NEC) approved the appointment of Rodney K. Rolland as the 14th national adjutant in May. As national adjutant, he serves as the chief executive officer of The American Legion.

Rolland, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran, has been with The American Legion National Headquarters for 17 years in the

Human Resources Division. He was also the assistant national adjutant while simultaneously serving as human resources director.

He is a member of American Legion Post 333 in Columbus, Ga. Rolland earned a Master of Business Administration degree in 2007 from Indiana Wesleyan University, where, in 2005, he also received a bachelor's degree in



business. His wife, Sandy, served more than 20 years before retiring from the U.S. Army.

Rolland's appointment follows the departure of Daniel S. Wheeler, who retired May 9, ending a 45-year career at The American Legion National Headquarters. The U.S. Navy veteran was appointed in 2008 as the 13th national adjutant.

Wheeler began his career at National Headquarters in 1979 as an assistant editor at *The American Legion Magazine*. He also served as editor and publisher. In 1995, he was named executive director of The American Legion National Headquarters.

Wheeler is a member of American Legion Post 137 in Richmond, Va. He served as president of the Citizens Flag Alliance between 1994 and 2009, fighting for a constitutional amendment to protect the U.S. flag from deliberate acts of desecration.

In honor of his service to The American Legion, the National Executive Committee passed two resolutions in his honor. They elected him as a Past National Commander, and a conference room at National Headquarters in Indianapolis is now named the Daniel S. Wheeler Conference Room.

ROARING INTO NATIONAL CONVENTION

The 2024 American Legion Legacy Run will kick off Aug. 18 from Independence, Mo. The run is 1,100 miles. Participants will ride through Missouri, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana. The final stop will be American Legion

Jefferson Post 267 in New Orleans.

Prior to and along the route, Riders will raise money for The American Legion Veterans & Children Foundation, which is in its first year of being the fundraising project of the Legacy Run.

For more information, visit www.Legion.org/Riders/LegacyRun.



(Photo: Hilary Ott/The American Legion)



September is National Suicide Prevention Month. See pages 30-33 in this issue of *Auxiliary* magazine to learn how you can make a difference.

TIME RUNNING SHORT TO FILE CAMP LEJEUNE CLAIMS

With the filing period for Camp Lejeune claims winding down, The American Legion and American Legion Auxiliary would like to ensure clear messaging to its members and their friends. Here are answers to some frequently asked questions:

Who may file and what is the deadline to file a claim under the Camp Lejeune Justice Act (CLJA)?

Individuals who were exposed to toxic water at Camp Lejeune for at least 30 days between 1953 and 1987. A claimant must file an administrative claim before Aug. 10, 2024.

is reasonable? Veterans should not be charged unreasonable legal fees, especially ones with added “costs” that can easily amount to over 50% of a veteran’s award. It is important to remember that a legal fee includes attorney fees *and* costs. Bergmann & Moore’s fees/costs are limited to 33.33%. *This is a hard cap.* That means no additional “costs” will be added on top of the attorney fee. This arrangement is different from many other firms, who charge a set attorney fee plus “costs” that are not determined until after the litigation.

Who can I call for help? The American Legion and the Auxiliary have selected Bergmann & Moore to help assist their members in filing CLJA claims. Claimants

RAISE AWARENESS BE THE ONE

NEW BE THE ONE RESOURCES AVAILABLE

Be the One — The American Legion’s mission to reduce the rate of veteran suicide, as well as increasing awareness and identifying solutions to help a veteran in crisis.

To aid American Legion Family members in delivering the mission in their local communities, new resources are available at www.BetheOne.org. Under the resources and media tab, you will find:

- Frequently asked questions: A list of common questions and answers about Be the One, such as how a post can support the mission and more.
- Sample media advisory and press release: Download the documents, update them with your Be the One event information, and distribute to local media, community partners, and others.
- Sample speech: Use this prepared speech for any event to educate on the Legion’s Be the One mission and how others can support it.
- Social media graphics: Share these downloadable Be the One graphics on your social media channels to promote the Legion’s suicide prevention mission and drive people to the website to learn how to take action when a veteran is in crisis.
- Table banner: Decorate your post or event with a Be the One branded table banner.
- Videos: Learn best practices to hosting a successful Be the One event.

• Virtual training: The American Legion has partnered with Columbia University to provide training for those who want to learn more about interacting and responding to veterans who may be in crisis. Members of The American Legion Family are encouraged to take part in this training and share the training with their communities.



Will an award made under the CLJA reduce my monthly VA benefits payments? No. VA is on the record that ongoing VA disability benefit payments will not be reduced by awards received under the CLJA. We are watching this issue carefully as we know how important this is to Legion members.

May I file a VA disability claim at the same time I file a CLJA claim? Yes. To file a VA disability claim, you should contact your American Legion representative. To file a CLJA claim (which can result in a one-time lump sum benefit), you should reach out to Bergmann & Moore.

I have a family member who died at Camp Lejeune. Can I file on their behalf? Yes, survivors and loved ones may bring an action so long as they are an appointed representative of that person.

Attorney fees and costs related to a CLJA claim — what

who believe they were exposed to toxic water at Camp Lejeune may speak to someone personally by calling toll-free 877-838-2889, or by navigating to Bergmann & Moore’s website at www.vetlawyers.com. Their dedicated staff will evaluate the claim and provide an honest no-cost assessment of the merits of each case.

If you have questions before filing a claim, please call Annita Best, Bergmann & Moore’s CLJA spokesperson, at (301) 290-3148. Best is a retired U.S. Marine who served 31 years, most recently as a public affairs officer at II MEF, MARFORPAC, MARFOREUR, and MCIEAST, as well as Headquarters Marine Corps.



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



Maj. Gen. Janeen Birkhead joined the U.S. Army on a dare from her mother, who presented Birkhead with the challenge of an Army ROTC scholarship. She was up for it and was awarded the scholarship. Now, she is the adjutant general of Maryland and commander of the Maryland National Guard. The two-star general heads the military department and exercises powers and duties under the Militia Law of Maryland.

We are proud of your dual membership in The American Legion and in the American Legion Auxiliary! What does your membership in these organizations mean to you?

It was through my daddy — a Legion member and a Navy veteran — that I am long acquainted with The American Legion Family. Growing up, my sister and I were thrust into the oratorical and essay contests. There was always a Legion event on the weekends. So, it was a natural fit to become reacquainted with the organization after my father passed, and I became a military member in my own right.

Membership in The American Legion and in the Auxiliary provide that sense of shared values one finds in uniform. It's meaningful to me to know that I can go to any Legion in the state and be welcomed because of our shared service.

My Legion is Post 166 and my Auxiliary is Unit 166.

What advice would you give to younger Auxiliary Junior members who may strive to someday join the military?

I advise each of you to seek mentorship, regardless of the path you follow. Rely on these strong relationships for guidance and support in times of uncertainty or hardship.

My journey from a young

second lieutenant to the adjutant general of the Maryland National Guard would not have been possible without great mentorship. I observed these characteristics in my mentors: resilience and grit, the ability to adjust to unwanted change, and to persevere to achieve your goals, despite obstacles. You will find obstacles. Accept that you will stall and even fail on the road to achieving your goal. Do your best to view failure as a learning opportunity rather than a setback. Learn to do the small stuff well. Remember that the greatest leaders are also great followers, and lifelong learners.

You currently hold the top Army National Guard position in Maryland. You are also the only Black woman in the country leading a state military and the second woman to do so in Maryland's history. We love that! How does it make you feel on a professional and personal level?

I feel blessed to have this phenomenal opportunity. At the same time, I feel compelled to bring others along so we can stop counting. My perspective comes from being both a woman and Black. Some of the challenges I have faced are related to stereotypes and bias. However, I have also had opportunities to break barriers, serve as a role model, and contribute to a more inclusive culture, especially at the Maryland National Guard.

When I think about the women who came before and those yet to lead — I think of empowerment, influence, and impact. For me, these words of power suggest legacy — making a difference in the lives of others, showing up, extending

influence beyond what one person can bring about, and creating enduring opportunities for others.

Is there anything else you want to share?

My philosophy is D to the power of three:

- Diversity: not just with race or gender but with skills, ways of thinking, and processes to accomplish missions. Diversity and teamwork will prove to be the essence of our community's success.
- Dedication: setting your own course, making a plan, and not being afraid to change your plan.
- Discipline: committing to excellence — every day taking time to improve yourself, evaluate your place, and take responsibility for your outcomes.

Read more about Birkhead in an extended post on the ALA blog at www.ALAforVeterans.org/blog.





KENTUCKY UNITS DESIGN HELPING HAND BASKETS FOR LOCAL CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Department of Kentucky Children & Youth Chair Karen Goodlett really wanted to build teamwork within units, while also coming together to work toward a great cause that would benefit children and youth in Kentucky.

In her professional role as a social worker/case manager, Goodlett is aware that many children in the public school system far too often lack access to school supplies. Additionally, she understands too many family resource centers established in public schools to reduce this stress on families and children, also lack enough supplies to meet the needs of students.

Goodlett was determined to meet the challenge so students could show up in the classroom with the tools necessary to learn. The idea? A statewide challenge where every unit in Kentucky would design an original custom basket filled with school supplies to be donated to area family resource centers.

Units were asked to pick an age group between kindergartner to 12th grade, filling their cleverly designed basket with helpful donated school supplies such as grade-appropriate reading books, coloring books, toys, clothes, shoes, backpacks, pencils, pens, and other such needed items to promote student success in the classroom.

More than 20 baskets were presented during the department

winter conference. Members were invited to purchase \$1 voting tickets to determine the winning design baskets and placed tickets for their favorite design in a cup in front of the baskets. The top five baskets that

received the most votes were awarded trophies.

In addition, Goodlett presented each member who worked on a basket — in any way — both a flag pin and a pin that read “You make the difference”. Money raised from the sale of the voting tickets was donated to the department’s Children & Youth programs.

“The overwhelming support of this activity was amazing,” Goodlett said. “We had a unit bring in a basket disguised as a hot air balloon containing the needed school supplies inside the basket. It was absolutely beautiful and very creative.”

Goodlett was thrilled to donate the needed school supply baskets to family resource centers in three Kentucky counties. She plans to add additional counties to the project next year.

Tips for Hosting a Basket Project:

- **Determine the need in your community.** Reach out to local organizations or resource centers and ask them what items they need the most, i.e., school supplies, clothes, food, etc.
- **Ask for donations.** Involve American Legion Family members for donations of supplies or money. If you are looking for lots of things, contact outside sources for contributions and help. Reach out to local schools, businesses, or relatives and friends



Elaine Josleyn and Karen Goodlett

of members. Use monetary donations to purchase needed materials at discount stores.

- **Set a deadline and establish a drop-off location.** Provide enough time to collect everything, and set an appropriate date and time to receive all donations.

- **Set a date — after the donation deadline — for members and volunteers to**

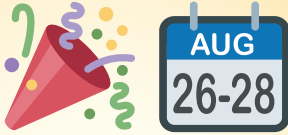
come together and assemble baskets. On assembly day, sort all like items in a pile. For example, put all clothes together, all supplies together, etc. It might be best to start with larger things first, and then move to the smaller items.

- **Communicate with the organization you’re working with and determine how and when to get the baskets to the organization.** Make arrangements to drop off baskets at a designated location. In case of inclement weather, secure the baskets with plastic wrap.

- **Bonus tip: Have members compete for a title or award.** Come up with a contest like the “Best designed basket.”

Goodlett emphasized when planning and implementing a community project, have fun, be creative, and build unity within the unit. She suggests including a friendly competition among all the units in your state.

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



A DIGITAL EXPERIENCE FOR ALA NATIONAL CONVENTION IN NEW ORLEANS

Follow along from anywhere with these online options:

- General sessions (Aug. 26-28) will be livestreamed at www.ALAforVeterans.org.
- See the convention in pictures on Facebook and Instagram @ALAforVeterans.
- Read blog posts at www.ALAforVeterans.org.



JAZZ UP YOUR BACKGROUND FOR VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Show off your pride in the American Legion Auxiliary with an ALA branded background! Virtual backgrounds are available in the resources section of the MyAuxiliary member portal at www.ALAforVeterans.org.



COMING UP:

- ALA National Convention in New Orleans: Aug. 23-29
- National Suicide Prevention and Awareness Month: September
- American Legion Auxiliary 105th birthday: Nov. 10
- Veterans Day: Nov. 11



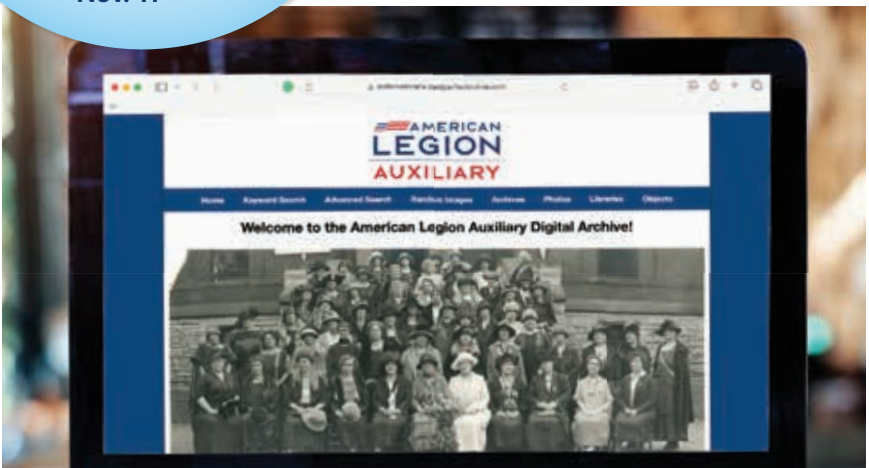
LATEST NEWS AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

In between issues of *Auxiliary* magazine, you can follow the latest news from American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters digitally. Follow the ALA blog, social media, ALA eNews, and website.



ONLINE TEMPLATES ALWAYS AVAILABLE

Is your unit hosting an event for Veterans Day? Let the media know! Press release templates are available for Veterans Day and other holidays in the member portal of our website under resources.



AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY

Travel to the past with ALA history-focused blog series

Through the *American Legion Auxiliary History's Mysteries*, every month you can learn more about the Auxiliary's Cavalcade of Memories Museum, ALA members, projects in the archives, recent acquisitions, and so much more.

Visit ALAforVeterans.pastperfectonline.com.

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Auxiliary Sudoku answers from page 19:

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

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

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

“History never looks like history when you are living through it.”

— John W. Gardner, educator, leader, and activist



Hundreds of American Legion post homes nationwide have murals pictorializing the military or our veterans' experiences. Send us a photo of your building or community mural! Indoors or outdoors — we'd love to learn more about your special display. Contact ALAMagazine@ALAforVeterans.org.

Above: Artist Corban Lundborg of Atlanta works on a mural outside American Legion Post 6 in Dubuque, Iowa. (Jessica Reilly/*Telegraph Herald* via AP).

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

TO DO LIST

- Honor our veterans
- Remember their sacrifices
- Thank their families
- Express gratitude
- Inspire others
- Always do a little more
- Renew ALA membership
- Never stop!

***It is never
too early to
renew!***

Your yearly membership matters! Your dues at the unit, department, and national levels enhance the lives of our veterans, military, and their families. Every dollar adds up to make a difference.

You can pay your dues online at www.ALAforVeterans.org, by phone at (317) 569-4570, or mail your dues to your unit.

**Renew today to support
the ALA mission!**