

A watercolor illustration of a bird of prey, possibly a hawk or eagle, with a grey head, yellow eyes, and a large, colorful, multi-colored crest. The bird is shown in profile, facing left. The background is a mix of blue, orange, and yellow washes, with small black and red speckles scattered throughout.

American Legion Auxiliary

www.ALAforVeterans.org

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ART CHANGES LIVES

Veterans experience passion
and purpose at annual Festival



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ON THE COVER: National Veterans Creative Arts Festival visual artist Robert Jump from the Bay Pines, Fla., VA health care system was a therapeutic arts scholarship recipient for this year's Festival for his work, *Anticipation*. Jump served during Vietnam. **ABOVE:** Participants with an Honor Flight veteran at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. Honor Flight takes veterans to D.C. to see their respective memorials.



WHAT A YEAR (above): ALA members proudly wear their Renew Crew shirts; (below): TAPS Government and Legislative Affairs Senior Director Candace Harper Wheeler, National President Trish Ward, and TAPS President and Founder Bonnie Carroll.

Our pride. Our passion. Our purpose. Every day, and in so many ways, we put our mission front and center to ensure the needs of those we serve are prioritized and their service to our country is valued and appreciated.

During the Memorial Day weekend, I spent time with the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) community and attended several workshops to understand more about how those who have lost so much can heal and find purpose as they evolve from catastrophic loss and grief.

The 31st Annual National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp reminded me of how playing a role to help build courage and resilience among people who have realized adversity and trauma saves lives and rebuilds hope. I had the opportunity to spend one-on-one time with TAPS President and Founder Bonnie Carroll, who inspired me with her message of “connection, healing, and purpose. Honoring life and service, not passing judgment on the moment or the manner of death” is critical to helping those

who struggle to evolve to find peace and a safe sanctuary where love endures. Collaborating with others who share a like-minded



mission of service is a way we can help each other, and most importantly, provide greater support to those we serve.

The stories are many, and it is the people I’ve met who have forever touched my soul. Thank you, Utah, for “Leading the Way” by giving me the joy of meeting the military kids at Hill Field Elementary

School. I have proudly been “anchored for life” and am an honorary “Patriot” as I enjoyed the onboarding experience led by four young students. I was able to engage with three classrooms of children who shared what it’s like to be part of a military family. The good and the not so good. What do you say to a child who shared, “My daddy went off to war and came home in the hospital”? Thanks to the mission of the American Legion Auxiliary, I was able to tell him, “We will take care of your dad, and we will take care of you.”

As we look forward to ALA National Convention in Tampa, Fla., I remain inspired by all that our members have achieved in support of our mission.

Our veterans, children, and communities are better off because we prioritized their needs and made great things happen across our country. The journey is not always easy or smooth, but with focus and resolve, we will continue to Lead the Way.

Trish Ward
National President

Growing membership through Renew Crew

As a membership organization, we must remain focused on growing and building membership capacity. Did you get your Renew Crew together? Who is the Renew Crew? It’s those members who may or may not have a title, but want to help their departments with hands-on activism. Bravo to Arizona who put their Renew Crew front and center and aligned their members to support a collaborative outreach. The results speak for themselves. Arizona has been consistently ahead of their previous year’s numbers, and by June, was over their 100% goal benchmark.

Get your Renew Crew gathered, active, and involved. The more hands on deck, the stronger we are. Scan this QR code to order yours today. A portion of each sale supports the ALA Foundation Veteran Projects Fund.





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IN SERVICE TO OTHERS: Caregiver companions of National Veterans Creative Arts Festival attendees were invited to ALA National Headquarters for a tour and to learn more about the Auxiliary.

Volunteering runs in American Legion Auxiliary members' blood. It's true that we step up to the plate when we're needed; you'll find multiple examples of that in this issue of *Auxiliary*. We were founded in 1919 on the principle of helping our veterans and military. Through the decades, we've also taken care of their families.

That mindset is no different for our ALA National Headquarters staff. We're always finding ways we can contribute our time in service to others. When the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival was in our hometown of Indianapolis in May, we of course jumped in to help! Our staff volunteered at the airport, Festival hotel, and stage show — offering a hand, welcoming face, and cheers to our gold-medal winning veterans.

The veterans' caregiver companions also received some love from National Headquarters. They were invited to our building for a tour and social in our large meeting room. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs arranged for this special group to take part in a community service

project, as well as a period of caregiver wellness education during their time at National Headquarters. We so enjoyed having them with us!



Here at National, we talk a lot about training because it's



important for members to have resources that will help them learn more about working the ALA's mission, as well as boosting membership. We encourage you to register

for ALA Mission Training! Coming in 2025-2026 to a location near you:

Nov. 15: Albany
Nov. 15: Minneapolis
Jan. 31: Las Vegas
Jan. 31: Indianapolis *
Feb. 7: Atlanta *

*Events will be held with The American Legion National Information Conference and the SAL Regional Meeting.

Learn more and register at www.ALAforVeterans.org.

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY

*A Community of Volunteers
Serving Veterans, Military, and their Families
August 2025*

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AMERICAN
LEGION
AUXILIARY

The American Legion Auxiliary, founded in 1919, is a community of volunteers serving veterans, military, and their families. ALA members assist veterans in hospitals, advocate for veteran issues, support therapeutic creative arts festivals, distribute poppies for remembrance, and much more. In addition to serving the military community, the American Legion Auxiliary hosts

ALA Girls Nation and the ALA Girls State programs that teach future leaders about government and civic responsibility. Learn more at www.ALAforVeterans.org and @ALAforVeterans on Instagram and Facebook.



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Appreciative of receiving magazine for our veterans

On behalf of the Louis A. Johnson VA Medical Center patients and staff, we would like to extend our appreciation to you for your donation of American Legion *Auxiliary* magazines for veteran patients. We are always looking for opportunities to collaborate and enjoy the opportunity of working alongside you. It is through the efforts of community partners like you that allow us to continue the quality care and services that we seek to provide for our deserving veterans. We look forward to the opportunity to work with you again for future events. Thank you for your continued support.

— Michael White, Chief, Center for Development and Civic Engagement

There's no age limit on volunteering

You are never too old to volunteer, especially when it comes to doing it for the veterans. I'm 93 years old, and I volunteer at the VA Clinic in Monterey, Calif., three days a week, about five to seven hours a day. Also, I have 10 Compassionate Contact Corps Care People I contact two to three times a week. We chat and

they tell me what is important to them or just want to chat. I'm also a 44-year member of Monterey Cypress Unit 694. So, if you have time and some veteran needs help or an institution could use someone for whatever reason, go for it. I enjoy what I do, meet some wonderful people, and they enjoy my company as I do theirs. Try it — you may like it. *Service Not Self.*

— Elisabeth Billingsley, California

Thank you for a great article

I read the article in the May issue [Mural, Bench bring Positive Focus to American Legion Family Post] and it is awesome! Thank you so much for constructing such a great piece. You are a very talented writer, and we thank you for what you are doing for all the Auxiliary and the *Auxiliary* magazine.

— Kyleen Lockard, Indiana

Unit 51 in Minnesota focus of magazine story

The article published! Yeah! Well done. Wish there had been mention that this is from Pine City, Minnesota. I'd bet there are many Unit 51s in the U.S.

— Linda Setterlund, Minnesota

Editor's response: We are so happy to hear you liked the article! Thank you so much for sharing your story. We apologize for not including the unit's location in the article.

Junior member positively involved in community

Lea Wyman, 11, is a Junior member for American Legion Auxiliary Unit 290, Stafford, Va. She supports many community

events and helps military children as an ambassador for her school's Military Kids Club.

On April 11, Wyman greeted members of the community to include Superintendent of Stafford County Public Schools Daniel Smith, Teen Miss Military Star 2025 Savannah, Military Family Advisory Committee Vice Chair Carrie Weir, Principal Scott Elchenko, Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 3103 Commander Sheri Moore, VFW Post 290 Youth Activities Chair Isabel Wyman, and many military-associated family members at the school's annual Purple-Up Breakfast.

The breakfast was a thank-you to military families from her school as part of the Military Kids Club of which she is the ambassador and liaison for the American Legion Auxiliary Unit 290 Juniors. She helped to establish this club and has continued to be a part of it



for over two years and three breakfasts as a way to reach the community. She has continued to instill the relationships and ensure the students have an understanding that "You are not alone" during their moments of transitions.

— Isabel C. Wyman, Virginia

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SUPPORTING LOCAL VETERANS: Helping veterans and their families motivated Junior member Grace Otey to fundraise and bring attention to those in her state who may need extra assistance.

INDIANA JUNIOR SUPPORTS VETERANS THROUGH FUNDRAISING EFFORTS

Department of Indiana Junior member Grace Otey has been focused on raising funds for veterans since July 2024.

Through discussing the fundraising project at ALA units and churches, as well as fundraising through raffles and painted glass bottles, Otey began with a goal of \$10,000 but increased it to \$25,000 as the project gained success over the months. Otey has raised over \$20,000 as of press time.

Otey's special focus has been geared toward an organization in Indiana, Helping Veterans and Families (HVAF).

"I have worked with them since I was 8 years old and have loved every minute of it," she said. "HVAF was formed to help veterans reintegrate into society, but it has shifted to help veterans and their families when

times get tough. I originally chose HVAF when I was 8 when I heard about the work they do. I thought it was really cool how much they do for those who gave so much for our country."

It means "the world" to Otey to be helping HVAF in this way.

"It is the least I can do to support an organization that helps the heroes of our country," she said. "HVAF does so much for veterans and their families, with rehabilitation

programs, job training, their food pantry, education programs, and career preparation with things like resumes and interview preparation. It is truly amazing and such an honor to be able to work so closely with such an extraordinary organization. The work they do always manages to blow me away. They even have



military family events like Easter egg hunts and summer cookouts to offer community for veterans' children and themselves."

Otey said it's important for the ALA to partner with other local organizations throughout the country to help our veterans in the most ways possible.

"It's important because it is the local organizations that know the true need and can help the most effectively," she said. "HVAF, for example, works directly with veterans in the community and addresses their needs based off what the majority of veterans need and how to help them. Nothing beats hearing straight from those most closely involved with the veterans. And organizations like HVAF can't do it alone — they need community support to continue helping veterans."

Otey offers advice to other Juniors from her experience of helping HVAF.

"I would advise Junior members to start small — don't



overwhelm yourself, especially if you're young," she said. "Start with small service projects — make cards to give to veterans at veterans homes or for Veterans Day, do bake sales and donate to one of the charities or organizations near you. Work your way up to the bigger stuff. Speeches can be scary, and some things are just too much for one person. No contribution is too little — do what you can do for your age and abilities. The best way to contact organizations is to get in contact with their community engagement or community representative teams: the people in charge of garnering support for an organization. They usually know best what is needed at a certain time. Just being present in community events, like bake sales or craft fairs and having a booth where you can sell something with the proceeds going toward your chosen organization is a great way to get people's attention on your project simply due to exposure. Talk to people about what you're trying to do — like your senior ALA members — they will be able to help you reach more people in your community."

ZOOM PRESENTATION GIVES JUNIOR MEMBER OPPORTUNITY TO BE PART OF SENIOR ALA MEETING

Junior member Aubrey-Aundrea Adair from New Jersey participated in the Junior Activities presentation for the Department of New Jersey's Mentoring Monday Zoom, presenting Adair a great opportunity to get involved at the senior level of the organization.

"In my part of the presentation, I spoke about the importance of the Patch Program and how easy it is to complete and earn them, and to wear the patches very proudly since it shows the accomplishment that you've made," she said.

Adair has completed several patches in the program, so it was easy for her to talk about and explain to others on the Zoom call. But, she was still nervous when presenting by herself.

"I went over it a couple of times to make myself more comfortable," she recalled.

It meant a lot to Adair that as a Junior member, she was asked to talk during the Zoom session.



I felt very proud that they asked me to present," she said. "I've gone through a lot, and to actually bring myself to present in the Zoom was not only an honor, but it changed the way I viewed other public speaking events."

Encouraging Junior involvement at senior meetings can help Junior members feel supported by senior ALA members.

"Just try your best no matter what," Adair said. "Even if it doesn't seem as if they are interested, they are, and you will most likely hear lots of applause from the senior members."

Adair said she loves being a Junior member and that passion was shown in the Zoom presentation and beyond.

"It brings me lots of pride to know that veterans and my community benefit from what I do," she said.

JUNIORS, SAL YOUTH PARTICIPATE TOGETHER TO SUPPORT MISSION



PROUD JUNIORS: ALA Juniors and Sons of The American Legion members attending national Junior meetings this administrative year learned about the importance of the poppy and the ALA's relationships with Wreaths Across America and Honor Flight Network — all while participating in fun, educational games and service projects.

Is your young member interested in attending a 2025-2026 national Junior meeting? Following are dates and locations:

- Nov. 15: Albany
- Nov. 15: Minneapolis
- Jan. 31: Las Vegas
- Jan. 31: Indianapolis*
- Feb. 7: Atlanta*

*Events will be held with The American Legion National Information Conference and the SAL Regional Meeting. Visit www.ALAforVeterans.org to learn more.

***“You could be having a bad day
and I might be the right person
to talk with.”***

TAMMI SAY



The heart of our mission is our veterans, military, and their families. United States Air Force veteran Tammi Say of

Texas represents The American Legion Family as a veteran and member of the American Legion Auxiliary, The American Legion, and The American Legion Riders.

One could say that serving our country is in her blood. Her grandfather, Robert Wilson Boil, was a World War I veteran. Her father, Thomas Say, served in the United States Army. Her three brothers also served: one in the Army, one in the Air Force, and one in the Navy. And it doesn't stop there — she has cousins who also served.

Say's military service began in 1980 in the California Air National Guard. While there, she spoke with an Air Force recruiter and decided that was the direction she wanted to take her military career. While in the Air Force, she was a jet engine mechanic.

Say joined The American Legion briefly in the 1990s but didn't renew her membership after the first year. At the time, all the members at the post were much older and she didn't feel comfortable, she said. In 2022,

she decided to try again, and joined The American Legion in El Paso, Texas, where she is now a judge advocate. She also decided to join ALA Unit 36, and, in March of this year, became a Paid Up for Life member.

Why did you decide to serve in the military?

I wanted to be part of something bigger than myself and how much bigger can it be than to serve your own country? I loved it — every minute of it. No regrets.

What would you say to someone who is eligible for Auxiliary membership, but not yet a member?

Well, actually I haven't asked anyone to join. Instead, I've been inviting them down for Taco Tuesday and Friday night music and dancing. It's a gentler approach. The door is open for them to make the decision on their own.

Why is it important to be a member of The American Legion Family?

It's important for the camaraderie and compassion between one another. You could be having a bad day, and I might be the right person to talk with. Maybe I've been there, or maybe I've had a similar situation.

DID YOU KNOW? FACTS ABOUT OUR NATION'S WOMEN VETERANS

Women are the fastest growing group in the veteran population. ALA member Tammi Say is among the more than 2 million U.S. women veterans. In 2000, women veterans were only 4% of the veteran population. By 2040, they are projected to make up 18% of all veterans.

Women veterans have served across all military branches and divisions. The number of women veterans is expected to continue to grow. By 2025, the anticipated numbers of women veterans:

- Army: 916,948
- Air Force: 464,069
- Navy: 409,586
- Marines: 124,169
- Reserve: 157,385
- Non-defense: 28,900

Women veterans are racially and ethnically diverse. In 2020, 43% of the women who used the Veterans Health Administration's health services belonged to a racial or ethnic minority group.

Three of four women veterans who used U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs health services in 2019 had an urban residence, but the number of rural women is increasing.

Every woman veteran has access to the VA health system which provides care at 1,293 health care facilities, including 171 VA medical centers and 1,112 outpatient sites.

VA resources for women veterans:

- Women Veterans Call Center: 855-VA-WOMEN
- Veterans Crisis Line: 988 (press 1)
- Caregiver Support Line: 855-260-3274
- VA Benefits Hotline: 1-800-827-1000

Source: www.womenshealth.va.gov



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**“Family is not an important thing.
It’s everything.”**

— Michael J. Fox, actor



Family — what a powerful word. The American Legion Auxiliary is a family. We support those who have sacrificed for our country so they can come home and hold their baby, kiss their spouse, hug their loved ones. Many of us are eligible for Auxiliary membership because a family member served our nation. That one word truly says it all — we are part of this storied organization because *family* matters.

Above: Machinist's Mate, Nuclear Power, 2nd Class Chris Gailiatabarez plays with his son after the Virginia-class fast-attack submarine USS Vermont returned to Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam following a scheduled deployment (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Scott Barnes).

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY

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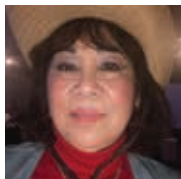


How do you recruit new ALA members?



"We are having events where we talk to our community about what we are doing to help support our local veterans. We are trying to have a larger presence on social media, posting what we are doing, and networking with other local businesses to help make the biggest impact we can in our community."

— Debbie Scanzano, California



"Recruitment is easy. Retention must be emphasized. If you have happy members, they will bring their families and friends to join in."

— Ginny Pattison, Indiana



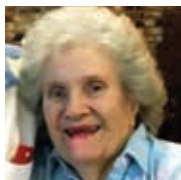
"Poppy drives are an excellent way to be in the community and chat about who we are and what we do. A successful opportunity for Adolph Pfister Unit 1038 in Valhalla, N.Y., is our annual Operation Baby Shower. This year, we held our seventh annual event. We announced it in advance so the community could show their support by creating or purchasing baby items, attending the event, seeing Auxiliary members in action, and again chatting about who we are and what we do. Not only did we gain one new member from the event, three are working on getting necessary documents. It was an amazing day!"

— Emmy Creskey, New York



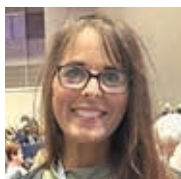
"Not only a member of the American Legion Auxiliary but a county veteran service officer. We will display the *Auxiliary* magazine at the Greene County Veterans Service Office and provide a list of the veteran organizations with contact information and when and where the organization meets."

— Charlotte Gunn, Arkansas



"The first thing you have to do is ASK if they are a member, then if they are eligible, explain HOW they can be, then after they've signed and joined, keep them busy. Give them a job, interact with them. BE FRIENDLY!"

— Audrey Steffan, Arizona



"We set up at community events and collaborate with other nonprofit veteran organizations. We spread awareness using our social media page."

— Jana Rowland, Arkansas



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in an upcoming issue of *Auxiliary*.



WORKING TOGETHER: American Legion Family members (above and below right) deliver gift cards for veterans' use at the Riviera Beach, Fla., U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs medical facility.

GIFT CARD PROGRAM HELPS VETERANS WITH EVERYDAY NEEDS

About 14 years ago, American Legion Family members Frank and Kathy Cook organized a gift card donation through American Legion Riders to the Riviera Beach, Fla., U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs medical facility. Since then, all Legion Family groups in the Palm Beach area have generously supported the mission.

"All of us working together toward any project is the only way to go," Cook said.

The idea for the gift card program first began 14 years ago when the Legion Riders president asked each of the members to come up with an idea on how to help local veterans.

"My husband and I reached out to the local VA to see what the needs might be," Cook recalled. "At that time, we had a lot of veterans returning from Iraq and the funds weren't available to assist getting them back into society. The needs were so vast that we agreed on gift cards — Walmart was decided on because you could get food, clothes, gas — about anything needed."

These are items they don't have to take away from their

living budget and helps them get the extra things needed, Cook added.

"We've had previous veterans come up to us and say that we bought their newborn their first diapers, and another bought a pair of work boots for a new job," she said.

The social services department at the hospital disburses the gift cards throughout the year to veterans in need. Those needs can range from putting food on their table to clothes for a job interview to gas to drive to chemo treatments — or even just a little boost to show that someone cares.

The partnership with their local VA has grown stronger over the years as the gift card program has expanded.

"When the program started, the VA social services department had the largest need for Operation Iraqi Freedom returning veterans," Cook said. "Then communicating with them over the next few years, as the program grew, we discussed reaching out to additional support areas. We then added women veterans, then cancer patients, then homeless, etc.

Now, because we have such a long, strong partnership, we donate and let the VA decide what veterans are in the greatest need."

ALA Unit 47 actively generates funds for the program through letters asking for contributions or to local retailers asking for items to either raffle off or place in baskets, etc. Fundraising efforts have also included a monthly dinner with all proceeds going to the VA gift card program.

The amount raised in the last 14 years is around \$185,000 in gift cards.

For other ALA units that may want to start a similar gift card program, Cook suggests contacting the social services department at your local VA hospital. They confirm the veterans' eligibility and needs and can lead the unit/post to where the greatest needs are and make sure the gift cards are distributed.

"Without the generosity of all the post families and other local supporters, this project could have never continued," Cook said. "Having a program like this in our community helps show our veterans they are not forgotten. We want to give a hand up, not a hand out. We hope the program will continue to be supported and would encourage other posts in the country to talk with their local VA hospitals and see how they could begin a program in their area."



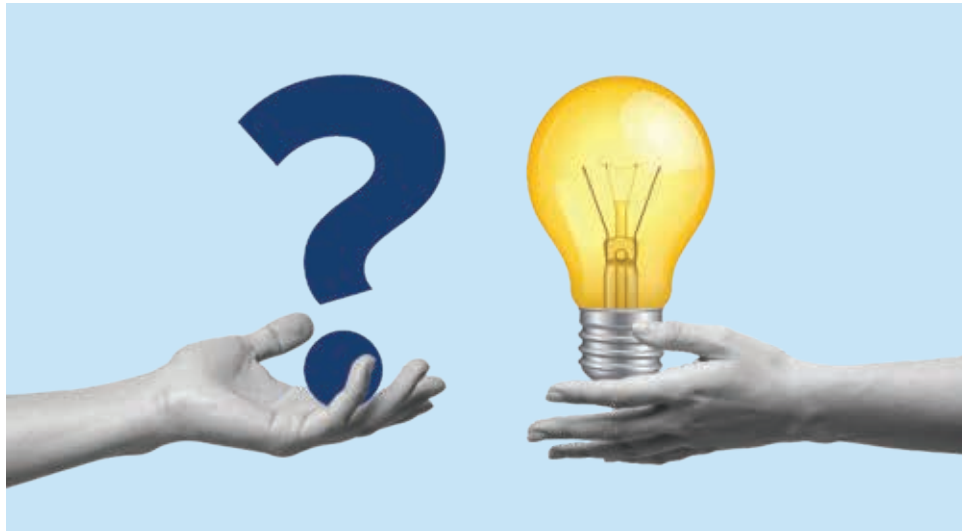
WHAT DOES YOUR UNIT DO?

Do you know how you would answer this question: What does your unit do? Would you start naming all of the American Legion Auxiliary's programs, mention events, use our tagline — a community of volunteers serving veterans, military, and their families?

None of those things are wrong ... but they're more of what you would use for a broad elevator speech (see the May 2025 issue of *Auxiliary* magazine for more about elevator speeches). For this question, let's think about a specific and focused response about your unit. This would be for someone who knows who the Auxiliary serves but may not know what your ALA does in your community.

Also, consider this: Think of what your unit does as a "product." What is the function of the product — why is it needed? Knowing the answer to this important question will help you in the promotions and marketing you do for your unit and with member recruitment. Potential members will have a clearer understanding of the organization they're considering joining.

You may be thinking, *My unit does so much; how do I come up with an answer that's not too long?* We get it — the ALA has many programs, and members serve



the mission in multiple ways. It can be overwhelming to explain them all. So, it's best to focus on the ones your unit does best. Let's examine a few questions to narrow down what your unit does best:

- What are local activities your unit does specific to your community?
- What events or service projects do people in the community probably picture when they think of the ALA?
- What activity or program is your unit most proud of?

Now that you've answered the questions above, let's elaborate. Think of how you can toot your own horn in the answer. For example, if your answer is, "We host stand downs for homeless veterans." Instead, boost that statement by showing your worth, and adding: "We've hosted

stand downs for 10 years, and in that time, we've served over 500 veterans." See the difference in those two statements? Which one would pique a prospective member's interest more?

If you're struggling to find what your unit is good at because you feel stretched too thin to do everything, think of doing less. Ever heard the phrase less is more? Maybe focus your unit's energy on two big ALA programs like Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation and Junior Activities, for example, vs. the myriad of other programs we offer. This will help you run things more efficiently and devote time to areas that need it most.

Just remember: Your answer to this question is your time to brag on your unit and make it shine!



How does your unit spread the word about what you do? Are you using:

- Social media?
- Posting and distributing flyers at community events/meetings?
- Hosting public events?

These are great (and often free!) ways to get people to know more about you.



Feeling overwhelmed?

- Choose the ALA programs your unit can do well.
- You don't need to do everything.
- Devote your time and energy to just a few ALA programs and activities or events.

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(307.720X)



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AUX MG 0825

PHONE CALL LEADS TO ALA MEMBERS HELPING SAY GOODBYE TO YOUNG VETERAN

When ALA member Terry Rose Lena's phone rang at work one morning in February 2025, she didn't know it would be the beginning of a 24-hour sprint to ensure a veteran would get the farewell he deserved.

That effort would reveal the power of quick action — and serve as a testament to the importance of being ready to support veterans and their sacrifice.

"You never know what kind of call you're going to get," Lena said. "But you want to help with any call that comes in for a veteran."

Lena is secretary/treasurer for the American Legion Auxiliary Department of Colorado and a member of ALA Unit 23 in Aurora. When she answered that call at work, there was a hospital chaplain on the other line.

"You never know what kind of call you're going to get."

A 22-year-old patient was near death, and he was an organ donor. He also was a U.S. Air Force veteran.

UCHealth Highlands Ranch Hospital was organizing an honor walk for the following morning to salute the patient's generosity and sacrifice in choosing to donate his organs. The chaplain asked Lena — as someone from an organization that supports veterans and their families — if she and others from the ALA could join the patient's loved ones at the hospital. They would line the halls as medical

professionals walked by with him at the end of his life.

Though she didn't know the patient or his family, Lena quickly answered yes.

"The fact is that someone is at the last of their life and giving what they have left to other people to create life and go on," said Lena, whose own niece is a kidney transplant recipient.

She knew that she and her partner — Bruce Occhipinti, a U.S. Navy veteran and member of American Legion Post 23 in Aurora — would attend. Now it was a matter of finding others from The American Legion Family who could also be there.

Lena started by calling and sending emails to people she knew were likely to help. Among those contacts was Diane Erickson, a Past Department President of Colorado and a member of Unit

1 in Denver, who Lena knew could find additional volunteers. Soon, six ALA members were

lined up to attend the ceremony the next morning.

Joining the patient's loved ones at the event were the ALA representatives, active-duty Airmen, and members of other veterans organizations. What Lena experienced at the honor walk — from the passing by of the flag-draped patient to the whirl of his life support machines to the cries of family members — made a lasting impression.

"It shook me to my core," she said. "This was the final tribute to this veteran, and it was important



FINAL GOODBYE: ALA members in Colorado answered the call to be part of a goodbye ceremony for a young veteran who was donating his organs to help save others' lives. It was truly an emotional experience.

that the family knew they had backing beyond just themselves."

Lena credits community connections and response systems for the ALA units' quick action to address medical professionals' and family members' needs in support of the veteran. That's why — for other ALA units looking to prepare for unexpected requests like this one — she recommended a set process for providing last-minute help.

"Be hypervigilant about it and notice everything," she said. "And have a list of people to call."



Prepare for the Unexpected

American Legion Auxiliary units may receive unexpected and urgent requests for veteran assistance. ALA member Terry Rose Lena of Colorado, who led the response to a recent emergency request to honor a veteran, shared these tips for preparing:

- Establish a phone tree, noting who will contact whom.
- Create an information sheet, explaining where to call for various requests.
- Stay alert for opportunities, connecting to the community to identify needs.



FUNDRAISING, ADVOCACY, AND THE LASTING IMPACT OF ALA NATIONAL PRESIDENTS

Over the last 100-plus years, the ALA has had extraordinary people from all over the country represent the national organization and make an impact on the ALA mission during their term as national president and long after their goodbye from the National Convention stage. They are deeply committed to the mission of the Auxiliary, and their passion has enabled them to drive meaningful improvements in ALA programs and raise substantial funds for initiatives like the Auxiliary Emergency Fund (AEF). Two strong examples of this dedication are Past National Presidents Sharon Conatser and Diane Duscheck, who made a significant impact on fundraising and program awareness during their time in office.

Conatser of Illinois was elected national president during the 95th ALA National Convention in 2015. She came into office with a tremendous amount of history with the organization and passion for AEF.

Conatser educated departments, units, and members on the importance of this granting initiative and it paid off — literally. Conatser raised over \$250,000 for AEF. Her commitment to the cause was deeply personal, rooted

in firsthand experience with the impact of AEF assistance.

“I chose the fundraising focus AEF because a tornado hit close to our home, and I was involved in helping members fill out their applications and getting them submitted,” Conatser said. “When I returned to give the checks to the members, two ladies showed up and wanted to know why they didn’t get a check.

Upon checking, they had let their membership lapse, not understanding the ramifications of the lost benefits.

I made it my mission to inform members of the importance of continuous membership to qualify for AEF assistance. It is all about members helping members.”

Following Conatser, Diane Duscheck of Wisconsin, 2017-2018 ALA national president, emphasized long-term sustainability and growth, becoming the first national president to choose the ALA Foundation’s Mission Endowment Fund as the national fundraising focus.

Duscheck recognized the potential of the fund to secure the organization’s future and

shared her motivation behind this strategic choice.

“The ALA Foundation was almost 10 years old and in the infancy of providing grants when I was planning for the national focus,” she said. “The purpose of the endowment is to function as a permanently restricted pot of money where donor contributions are held in perpetuity. As a young Foundation, funds were needed to build the capacity of the endowment so the interest earnings could be used to fund ALA programs. I set my sights on the size of the fund that would be needed for the endowment to be self-sustaining. Generous contributions of ALA members throughout the nation helped the ALAF grow by almost \$475,000 during the 2017-2018 fiscal year.

“As the endowment continues to grow, investment interest also grows,” Duscheck continued. “That interest is used to support ALA programs like Spirit of Youth scholarships and ALA Girls Nation.

My belief in the ALA Foundation was important when I was national president and is the driving force for my continued involvement on

the ALA Foundation’s Board of Directors.”

The national president is the highest elected leader in the ALA and represents all members as an ambassador of the organization. When they take an active role in fundraising and advocacy, like Conatser and Duscheck, it sets a powerful example that inspires departments, units, and members across the country to get involved and remain focused on the mission.

Fundraising and advocacy are not just about short-term goals; they sustain the ALA’s programs over time. These programs require continuous financial support to remain impactful.

“As the endowment continues to grow, investment interest also grows. That interest is used to support ALA programs.”

OHIO UNIT HELPS HOMELESS VETERANS DURING STAND DOWN

Since our founding, the American Legion Auxiliary has remained steadfast in our commitment to advocate for solutions that address our nation's homeless veteran epidemic. Despite progress and the efforts of so many organizations, this heartbreaking and serious issue is still affecting thousands of veterans and military families every single day. On any given evening in our country, there are over 32,000 veterans experiencing homelessness.

"We don't know what has happened in their life for them to be in the position they are now, but if we can help them and make them feel just a little bit better, then we have done our duty," said Deb Gelenius, member of Ohio Amherst American Legion Auxiliary Unit 118.

To help address this critical crisis in our country, Auxiliary members continue to answer the call of *Service Not Self* by hosting or participating in stand down events that provide support and services to veterans in need.

ALA members of Unit 118 have been strongly involved in their community's annual stand down for several years. Ohio's Lorain County Task Force for the Homeless hosts this heartfelt event to help their displaced community members, including military veterans.

"It's important to give back, especially to give back to the people who went to war and fought for us and gave us our freedom," said Gelenius.

Since the stand down is held in October each year, Unit 118 donates and purchases items that will help keep those in need warm during the upcoming



HELPING HOMELESS HEAL: Homeless men in Lorain County having their hair cut during stand down; members of Ohio Amherst American Legion Auxiliary Unit 118 help homeless veterans and community members; a happy veteran receives first haircut in a long time.

winter months. They encourage their fellow American Legion Family members to partake in the event by making a donation. Once the funds are collected, members of Unit 118 purchase any clothing items needed to survive a cold Ohio winter, and most importantly, warm winter coats, which everyone was so thankful for.

"This year, we helped over 150 homeless veterans and community members," said Gelenius. "Everyone was so grateful and thanked us over and over again — it's a very touching and rewarding and just very humbling day."

Several local businesses and organizations that support homeless individuals were invited to share valuable information and provide resources on mental health, medical care, housing efforts, and addiction recovery. Attendees had the opportunity to receive health screenings, as well as vaccinations by the Lorain County Public Health, and they were provided with hygiene kits. Naloxone kits and HIV testing were also available.

Additionally, 15 local barbers and two beauticians donated their time to offer free haircuts

for the homeless men, women, and children. A nail technician also was available to do manicures.

"This experience reminds me just how thankful I am for what I have," said Gelenius. "We need to continue praying for these people who aren't as lucky as we are."

The 11th annual Lorain County Homeless Stand Down was held at a local church and open to any community members in need. Those who attended the event were given a hot lunch and provided with snacks, treats, drinks, and even meals that they could take home with them.

ALA members of Unit 118 were instrumental in the success of this year's stand down. They prepared for the event by cleaning, sorting, and packing the winter items in Ziploc bags for safe holding and easy distribution. On the day of the stand down, unit members helped set up tables, organize items, and spent time visiting with veterans.

"Bringing a smile to their faces is the important part — if we can make their day, we have accomplished our goal," said Gelenius.



WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE FOR MALE ALA MEMBERS?

Have you thought of this question or were asked: What resources are available for male American Legion Auxiliary members?

It might stump you for a moment because it's actually a trick question. Men in our organization have access to all the same resources our female

members do in terms of mission and organizational support! All members are on the same page when it comes to access and benefits. All members can access the MyAuxiliary portal at www.ALAforVeterans.org.

But, taking it a step further on the question of available resources...what about ALA

branded items? Where do men go for these? Also, another trick question. It's the same places as our female ALA members go to find all kinds of Auxiliary shirts, hats, and more items featuring our logo — men also have options online both with American Legion Flag & Emblem Sales and Lands' End for all apparel and accessory needs.

We want our male ALA members to have the chance to proudly wear their American Legion Auxiliary attire at ALA meetings, public events, and more. It's important for members to be branded! Wearing attire with the Auxiliary's logo can spark great conversations in public and continue to help get the word out about our organization, all while attracting more members, volunteers, and donors.

To order branded ALA attire, visit Emblem Sales at emblem.legion.org and Lands' End at <https://business.landsend.com/store/ala/>.

Moral of the story: Although we were a women's organization for decades, 2019 changed us for the better by allowing male spouses to join the ALA in honor of their wife's service. So many of these spouses are very proud of their veteran, and joining the ALA is a great way to show it. We've already seen several male ALA members fulfill various leadership roles with the Auxiliary, bringing new perspectives and fresh ideas to the unit, department, and national levels.

Be sure to reach out to your local eligible male spouses of veterans. By having them as part of our organization, they will bring more membership, volunteer hours, and potentially donation dollars — all big wins for those we serve — our veterans, military, and their families.

A look back at the membership eligibility change



American Legion Auxiliary membership eligibility was extended in 2019 to include male spouses of U.S. veterans and servicemembers who served in either of the following periods: April 6, 1917 to Nov. 11, 1918; and any

time after Dec. 7, 1941. Other eligibility requirements can be found at www.ALAforVeterans.org.

This change in ALA eligibility regarding male spouses became official when ALA delegates at the Auxiliary's 99th annual National Convention in August 2019 voted to update the ALA's Constitution & Bylaws so that it states the following: "Eligibility for membership in the American Legion Auxiliary is determined by The American Legion." The Legion's delegates to its 2019 National Convention, also in August of that year, voted to change the wording in the ALA's membership criteria — replacing "wife" with "spouse" — in the Legion's Constitution & Bylaws.

Expanding membership opportunities to eligible male spouses of veterans and servicemembers adds another dimension to the already inclusive and diverse American Legion Auxiliary and The American Legion Family.

There is strength in numbers for our organization — and supporting our mission.

To learn more about eligibility and to join, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/eligibility.

BREAKING DOWN YOUR DONATION OPTIONS — ALA AND ALA FOUNDATION FUNDS

Nonprofit organizations rely heavily on philanthropic support from donors like you, and there's no shortage of opportunities to give. Individuals have been so inundated with asks for donations that in the late 1990s-early 2000s, the term “donor fatigue” was coined in an effort to name that feeling of being overwhelmed that has since led to a decline in charitable giving.

This decline in giving can be due to a myriad of things like the frequency of donation appeals, confusion about where the money is going, or economic strain.

And while we can't solve all of the problems relating to donor fatigue, we can make sure you understand exactly where your money is going and take the confusion out of ALA National Headquarters and American Legion Auxiliary Foundation funding opportunities.

If you want your money to make a difference *right now*, you have three options:

1. ALA's **Auxiliary**

Emergency Fund provides grants up to \$3,000 for ALA members who are facing financial hardship as a result of a personal crisis or natural disaster.

2. ALA Foundation's **Veteran Projects Fund** provides grants up to \$10,000 to ALA entities for a wide range of community-based projects that benefit

veterans and military families.

3. ALA Foundation's **Veterans Creative Arts Festival Fund**

provides grants up to \$2,500 to ALA entities hosting a local Creative Arts Festival that showcases the artistic achievements of veterans who use creative expression as part of their rehabilitation and healing process.

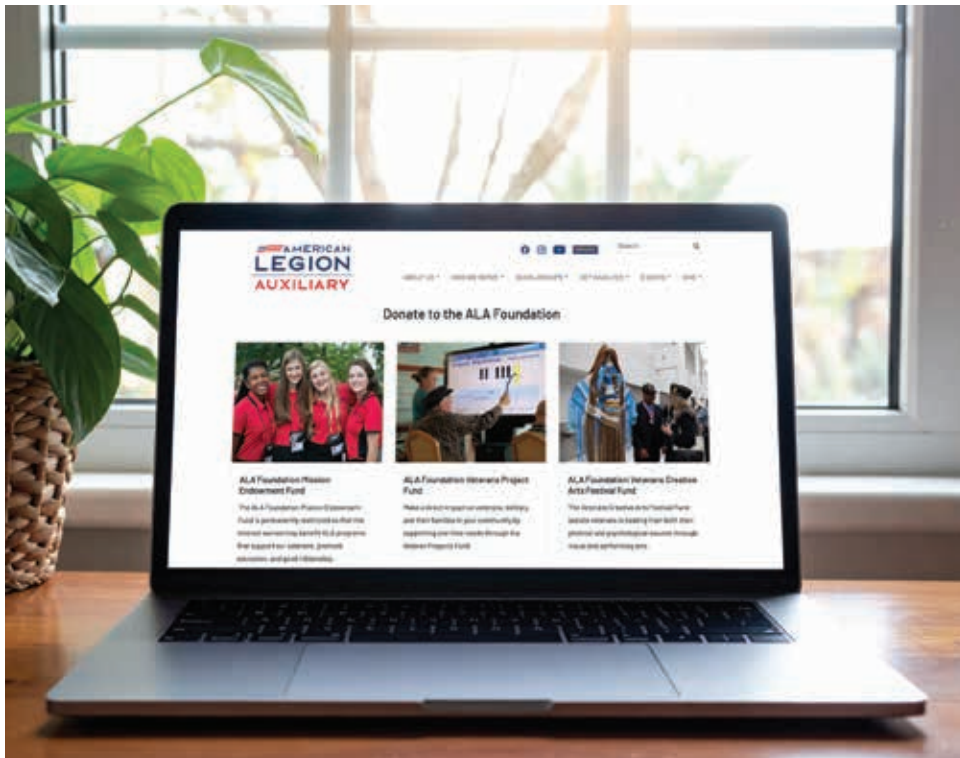
If you want your money to sustain the *future*, you have three options:

1. ALA's **Spirit of Youth Scholarship Fund**, which invests in young women leaders committed to service and civic duty.

2. ALA's **Children of Warriors National Presidents' Scholarship Fund**, which helps children of veterans access higher education and build a brighter future.

3. ALA Foundation's **Mission Endowment Fund**: Designed to generate perpetual income, this fund fosters the longevity and continued impact of the ALA's work by financially supporting the programs of the Auxiliary, including ALA Girls Nation.

Donating to ALA National Headquarters or the ALA Foundation is a powerful way to directly impact the lives of veterans, their families, and future generations. If you're ready to make a difference, there's just one question you need to ask yourself: Do you want your money to have an impact right now, or do you want your money to sustain the future? To donate to ALA National Headquarters or to the ALA Foundation, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/donate.



Did you know?

2024-2025 ALA National President Trish Ward is raising funds for the Veteran Projects Fund as the national fundraising focus for this administrative year. There is still time to contribute! To donate, text “LEAD” to 1-844-940-3450. For more information on VPF grants, visit www.ALAFoundation.org/veteran-projects-fund-grants.



FATHER'S SERVICE TO OTHERS INSPIRES DAUGHTER TO JOIN ALA

Honoring our veterans is at the core of what we do. Many of our members join the Auxiliary to honor a veteran or veterans in their life. For T. Brienne Berg Hall, being a member of the American Legion Auxiliary honors her father's military service.

Berg Hall is eligible for ALA membership through her father, U.S. Army Maj. Clarence Victor Hall. She remembers taking her dad's military background papers to the ALA unit in Kent, Wash., 13 years ago when she became a member. She has since transferred her membership to Wickenburg, Ariz., where she honors her father's service by volunteering, helping with events, and holding positions in her unit.

Maj. Hall joined the Army in 1940, working primarily in the field artillery brigade, spending time overseas in Africa, France,

and England. He retired as a major after 33 years of service to his country.

"His men loved him as a leader," said Berg Hall. "As a child, I saw him in parades and later as a major at a podium where several groups marched in perfect unison facing him. What a wonderful tribute and display."

In addition to Maj. Hall's service, he graduated from the University of Washington with a degree in science and earned his Master of Business Administration from the University of Minnesota to become a microbiologist. He worked for Boeing for a year and then spent 30 years at the Washington State Health Department.

"His interests were many — photography, playing the organ, cars, reading, gardening, writing charming stories, and woodworking," said Berg Hall. "He helped build his home in Bellevue, Washington, and his dad's home on Lake Washington in Lake City, Washington." He acquired his building skill in his early years in the military helping build living quarters for the military in Alaska.

Maj. Hall received several awards for his service.

"The most elegant military award was on rice paper, when he was in charge of the Fort Lewis Ammunition [now part of Joint Base Lewis-McChord]," said Berg Hall. "That one is worth framing."



The veteran who made me eligible for ALA membership:

"My late husband. He served in the National Guard, then was drafted into the Army. Honorable discharge sergeant 1st class."

— Ada Cannonie

"My father, Maj. Hugh B. McCreary Jr., Vietnam veteran. He was laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery."

— Jodi Brady

"My husband, a third-generation Navy Seabee, now retired."

— Linda McClellan

"My two Air Force proud daughters who were ALA Junior members under their grandfather until they went to boot camp."

— Kathy Warner

"My husband. He was drafted at 18, went to Vietnam, and was awarded the Bronze Star."

— Rose Anne Milne

"My grandfather. He was a Pearl Harbor survivor and lived well into his 90s. He was the kindest, gentlest man I knew."

— Amy Best



We'd love to hear about your veteran! We may feature your story in national ALA media. Email us at PR@ALAforVeterans.org.

August is Make a Will Month

55% of Americans have no estate plan at all, according to trustandwill.com, leaving their wishes and their loved ones unprepared. Don't wait to secure your future and leave a legacy. Every gift, big or small, helps secure the future of the Auxiliary and ALA Foundation, and you can leave a lasting legacy by including them in your will or estate plans.

Scan
here to
learn more:



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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Mark those calendars 2025-2026 ALA Mission Training dates



Nov. 15: Albany, N.Y.
Nov. 15: Minneapolis, Minn.
Jan. 31: Las Vegas, Nev.
Jan. 31: Indianapolis, Ind.*
Feb. 7: Atlanta, Ga.*

*These events will be held with The American Legion National Information Conference and the Sons of The American Legion Regional Meeting. Learn more about serving the American Legion Auxiliary's mission while networking with fellow members!

Scan
here to
learn more:



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'Art allows us to live'

Veterans, Auxiliary celebrate experiences of National Veterans Creative Arts Festival

By Sara Fowler



This year marked an important milestone for the American Legion Auxiliary's involvement at the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival: 25 years! It was extra-exciting to have the event take place in Indianapolis, home of ALA National Headquarters.

Sponsorship at the national level began in 2000 when then-National President Kristine West chose NVCAF as the national organization's focus. Auxiliary members were already providing hundreds of hours in support of the Festival. Under West's leadership, that additional volunteer relationship was established, and monetary support from the American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters for the national Festival began. In 2014, the ALA became the co-presenter of this great event — alongside the U.S.

Department of Veterans Affairs — and has been serving in that role since.

In addition to being part of the event for 25 years, the Auxiliary also provided the Festival with volunteers who work behind the scenes in supportive roles to assure that attending veterans have the most positive experience possible. Members of the ALA's national Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Committee helped with everything from assisting with meals to ironing costumes to being that friendly, welcoming face always needed throughout the week.

"I'm so happy we are a co-presenter as the veterans are our reason for being, and we need to honor them every day," said Linda Workman, Western Division VA&R Committee member. "I've volunteered at VAs and events from the age of 5 years old and it always brings happiness to my heart."

In honor and gratitude for the ALA, one of the stage show songs was dedicated to the Auxiliary. Members in the audience were moved by the performance.

Workman took away "happiness and gratefulness that we could honor our veterans" at the NVCAF.

First-time participation soars

This year, it was incredible to see 75% newcomer veterans attend the national Festival. This gave even more veterans the opportunity to experience the event, build camaraderie, show their talents, and make lifelong friends.

What sometimes begins as a week of mixed emotions and sometimes overwhelming feelings for veterans attending the Festival, the week often ends in lifelong friendships, increased confidence, and a renewed sense of self.

Throughout the week, veterans had the opportunity to participate in numerous workshops to learn different forms of art and writing, watch practice for the Indianapolis 500 at the world-famous track, make Itajime paper lanterns at the Fishers Library, and write a memoir in the Kurt Vonnegut Museum. The event culminated in the art and writing exhibition and the stage show performance. The week is truly an incredible experience for all the veterans involved.

The ALA had a chance to chat with a few of those veterans about their military life, getting invited to the Festival, and how it has changed their lives for the better.

Daryne Rockett

U.S. Air Force

Maine

Visual artist — printmaking

Rockett served as a Korean linguist with three consecutive tours in Korea.

"I needed a way to pay for college, so that's

what I did,” she said. “I wanted Russian — the wall had just come down and we were doing business with the Soviet Union, and I thought that would be a really good opportunity but because my scores were high, they wanted me in Korean.”

Rockett was a therapist at a veterans center for 18 years before going into private practice and opening an art studio. She encouraged her clients to participate and entered the local Festival herself periodically.

This year, she won in the printmaking category.

“With this kind of printmaking, you can be super-specific, or you can be abstract,” she said. “In this instance, I had no idea what it would look like.”

Rockett has been printmaking for about 10 years. Her artistic abilities, however, were impacted by a brain injury 11 years ago playing roller derby.

“It was a year and a half before I really worked full time again,” she recalled. “I couldn’t do much of anything. I doodled in little 3½-inch squares and colored them in so I would have something to show for the day.”

For Rockett, art has been the prescription for recovery for her head injury.

“I couldn’t play music for probably a year and a half,” she said. “It was too hard; it was painful. I still can’t learn new music like I did before. But doing visual art has been a path to something I would have never anticipated for myself.”

With 18 years as a therapist in the VA taking care of veterans, it could be a lot on her mental health, leaving little to no room for self-care. But entering

her art at the local level and finding out she won at national as well, led to a chance to have a week to focus on herself and healing again.

“This week, I had enough time and enough of an opportunity for that therapist role to go away so I could just be,” she said. “I actually got to be in that vulnerable space. There’s no medication that would ever assist me in getting to that point. This was a safe place to do it. I got to focus on me. I had the most beautiful conversations with people who I wasn’t responsible for taking care of them. And I just got to be with them. I haven’t had that in 20 years. I can’t think of another way I would have been able to get to this place without having had this [NVCAF] experience.”

Michael Dockery

U.S. Navy

Oregon

Visual artist — jewelry, not beads

Dockery said his life has been very complex.

“My grandparents died, parents died, all my best friends are dead,” he said. “After that, for a long time, I wouldn’t make friends. In fact, when I finally started, there was another military guy I know — he said, ‘I’m not going to be your best friend because all your friends died.’ I kind of chuckled, but it was true, so I would never let anyone get close to me. I might talk to them more like an acquaintance. I shut myself up until I finally found myself in a downward spiral of self-destruction where I lost all purpose, and I didn’t have any hope. I asked myself, *Could it get any worse?*”



WHAT A WEEK: Dena Taylor performs in the stage show; Daryne Rockett with her award-winning printmaking; Rhonda Seward with her creative writing on display; Joseph Streets dances to *Salsaeros* with his dance partner; National President Trish Ward and Past National President Vickie Koutz celebrate 25 years of the ALA’s involvement; veterans support Richard Kiser during the stage show; Michael Dockery with his bracelet at the art exhibition.

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



Mosaic
Untitled
Maja Kraft



Color Photography
Despite the Storm We Stand Ready to Defend
David Hester



Mental Health Recovery
Worthy
Tina Ontiveros



Assemblage
Military Uniform Wreath
Nicole Zettlemoyer



Mosaic
Lion Head
Janet Sorel



Scroll Saw/Fretwork
The Mysterious Treehouse
Charles Spooneybarger



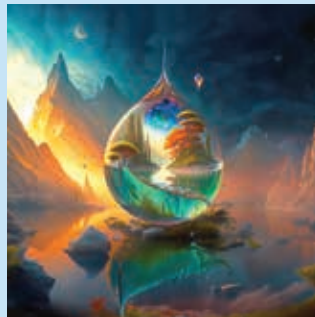
Color by Number Kit
Evening Fall Adirondack Scene
Kevin Lent



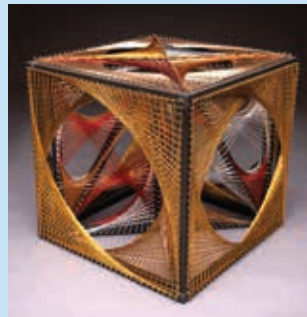
Pastels
Old Blue Eyes
Lorenzo Miller



Mixed Media
US Army Tank
Kurt Stone



Digital Art
A Universe in a Drop of Water
Mark Wayne Roy



Original Design in Fiber Arts
Esoteric
Clarence Williams



Wood Building Kit
Marble Maze
Jason Yoder



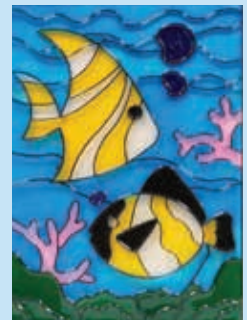
Crocheting/Knitting/Knotting
Linné Two-Toed Sloth
Alexandra Brown



Group Art
Amiens Cathedral
Kenneth Bicha, Sean Connolly,
and Dennis Linn



Drawing
Tears of a King
John Lewis



Suncatcher
Serenity
Martin Cruz



Watercolor
In Search for Freedom
Michael Graves



**Leather Carving/Tooling/
Stamping**
Bird Cowboy Boots
Annie Margarita



Combat Experience
Renegade 3-2 Bravo
Daniel Villarreal



Weaving Kit
*Native American
"Starburst"*
Thomas K. Moore



Original Design in Needlework
Baggage
Lorrin Arrington Savage



Model Building Kit
Tractor and Trailer
Ervin Kleinsasser



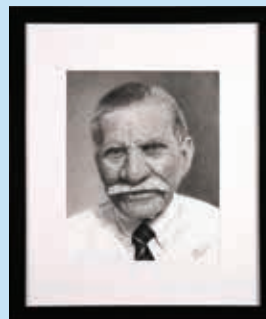
Physical Health Recovery
Deployment
Jim Stevens



Mosaic Kit
Fractured
Patricia France



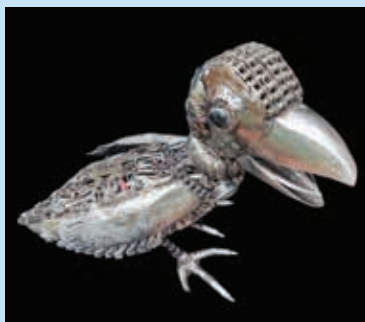
Needlework Pattern
Color of Life
William Hibbett



Monochromatic Drawing
Legacy (Carlos Carpena's Dad)
Carlos Carpena-Marrero



Pyrography
Between the Pines and Cliffs
Richard Owens



Metalwork
Raven
Carmen Rodolph



Fiber Arts Pattern
Bountiful Bushel Basket
Rebekah Picard



Needlework Kit
Flower Market
Jim Nickel

And I knew it could. I reached a point where I had to do something, so I checked myself into the Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program. I told myself when I went there: *I am going to actually be honest, open, and accepting.*”

Going into the RRT program was one of the best things Dockery did, he said. It led him to the local arts Festival and then to the 2025 national event.

He enjoys making things and it took him several weeks to create his bracelet to enter at the local Festival. He found that creating artwork was a very therapeutic experience.

“When I was making bracelets and giving them away, everybody was so grateful, so happy, and some of them still call me and thank me for that,” he said. “Yes, it was therapeutic for me. And I think the product was therapeutic for others.”

It meant a great deal to Dockery to be at the Festival after years of not asking for help and feeling at the end of his rope in life.

“Years ago, I was in a relationship. I got up in the middle of the night and what I am seeing is something completely different than reality,” he recalled. “I’m living in this war. So I go to grab one of the enemies by the throat and take his head off, turned out to be her. There is this transition period where you fade back into reality, kind of wake up, and I was mortified. I had her by the throat. I was just about ready to punch her lights out. I was absolutely mortified. That event coupled with some others, I knew I needed some help.”

Creative arts has been a great encouragement for Dockery.

“Not only were there other people encouraging me to do it, but also the actual efforts of doing it was very therapeutic and gave me something to look forward to,” he said. “It restored a little bit of hope, and a little bit of purpose, which I felt I had lost.”

He said he enjoyed the camaraderie at the Festival

with his fellow veterans.

“I never fully assimilated back into civilian society, so I struggled with that, but the best place is being around other veterans for me,” he said.

Dena Taylor

U.S. Navy

Texas

Performer

Taylor spent 12 years in the military, and upon leaving the military, was injured, and also suffered from PTSD. She was a crypto linguist in the Navy — basically a spy, she said. She spoke seven languages outside of English, the main being Vietnamese, but also Russian, Greek, Spanish, French, Italian, and German.

Taylor found out about her local Festival by seeing a poster about it.

“Music is where my joy lives,” she said.

She submitted her entry in August and didn’t hear until January, and admitted she had forgotten about it during that time. Even though she placed, she still wasn’t sure about coming to the national event.

“Coming out in the world has been difficult for me,” she said. “I don’t fly much anymore, and I don’t typically do veteran things truthfully. It’s not that I don’t like other veterans. They have a tendency to want to tell their stories. Most people do. Even at lunch they were talking about their horrible experiences. I had to finally tell one, ‘I don’t mean to be rude, but I have enough of my own horror story nightmares that I try to live with I cannot take on anybody else’s.’ I said, ‘I’m sorry, I’m not saying yours aren’t important; I’m trying to keep mine from killing me.’ I have a problem with suicidal depression and stuff like that.”

She admitted she tried to find a lot of excuses for not coming. But her counselor encouraged her to attend, and despite the overwhelming feeling of flying



Breaking down the numbers from the VA

- **Over 6,500 entries were submitted into local VA facility competitions in the art, creative writing, dance, drama, and music divisions**
- **Over 5,000 entries were judged at the national level from nearly 4,000 veterans enrolled in VA health care facilities throughout the country**
- **116 VA facilities participated in the 2024 competition**

2025 (44th) NVCAF

- **151 gold-medal winning veterans from the local competitions were invited to attend the national Festival (includes 7 therapeutic arts scholarship recipients)**
- **68 VA facilities represented**
- **75% first-time attendees**
- **30% women veterans**

she experienced, attending the event proved to Taylor she could do it.

During the stage show, she performed a blues song, *Don't Touch Me*, and shined with her stage presence.

"This is something I would recommend to any creative veteran," she said. "I would highly push everyone to get veterans involved in creativity. This has been such a nice thing. I'm so grateful."

Rhonda Seward

**U.S. Army
Indiana
Writer**

Seward spent 23 years in the military between active duty and reserve. She retired from Fort Knox in 2018 as her final assignment. She's a combat veteran who served in Kuwait and Iraq.

Over the years, Seward entered the competition at the local level in various states she's lived in. In 2008, she made it to the national level for the event and then again, in 2025.

"It was exciting," she said of learning she won in her category and getting to attend the Festival. "With the military, it's almost like there's a common denominator. You get in and you talk and it's like being in the military again, regardless of branch of service. So, it was kind of nice to be back."

Seward wrote a piece, *Just a Thought*, that won in the rhyming poetry-general topic category.

"It examines the disparity of homeless veterans and serves as a call to action on some of the things we need to improve upon as a society," she said. "That's the point — to get people to pay attention. Let's reexamine what we are doing to raise awareness."

Seward enjoyed the week at the event, taking in all the experiences offered.

"There has been a lot of support by our sponsors, our vendors, the volunteers, the staff," she said. "It was above what I was expecting."

Like many other veterans who attended, Seward understands the positive power this event has on our nation's veterans.

"The Festival is necessary in transforming lives and building connections," she said.

Continuing to look forward

During the week, many veterans start thinking ahead to what they will enter for next year's local competitions. They already want to experience the NVCAF again.

"Even if I never get to do this again — I hope I do — this has been exactly what I needed," Rockett said. "It's been transformational. It's going to make my life better. And because it's going to make my life better, it's going to make my husband's life better, my clients' lives better, my family's lives better." ★



VETERANS SHOWCASE (opposite page): Writers sign their autograph books; James Otto with his woodworking piece. This page: Performers during the stage show; Jason Reid with his sculpture made entirely of duct tape; ALA Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Committee Southern Division Chair Julie Smith irons costumes; Richard Lilliston practices; 2024-2025 national VA&R Committee members and Program Director Chrystal Daulton; Tammy Harris, VA&R Committee Northwestern Division chair, at the ALA table during the expo; Marie Clarke performs *Pua Kiele*.



MISSION COMPLETE



*Auxiliary helps
Honor Flight veterans
experience their
D.C. memorials*

By Sara Fowler

Many American Legion Auxiliary members throughout the country volunteer with Honor Flight, an organization that transports our nation's veterans to see the war memorials in Washington, D.C.

Beginning in 2021, the American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters entered a formal partnership with Honor Flight Inc. to support their mission to celebrate America's veterans by inviting them to share in a day of honor at our nation's memorials. The partnership enables our units and departments to directly donate poppy funds generated from the distribution of poppies — the symbol of the sacrifice of service made by our veterans, military, and their families.

Our members often experience heartfelt moments with this organization, from volunteering at airports to serving as a guardian for veterans to writing letters for mail call.

A few ALA members share their stories with *Auxiliary* magazine and why a partnership with Honor Flight matters.

NANCY BABIS DEPARTMENT OF NEW YORK

It's been five years since ALA member Nancy Babis first got involved with Honor Flight and she has volunteered since. Her introduction to the program was simple — she read an article in a local newspaper that talked about their mission, and they were looking for volunteers. She joined the team and volunteered at a chicken barbecue.

"I had been an American Legion Auxiliary member for 60 years and always enjoyed serving veterans," Babis said. "My parents were in World War II and my husband in Vietnam era. It was a new way to serve veterans."

So far, Babis has been on five Honor Flights.

There are many memorable highlights as part of this shared experience with veterans, but the Vietnam memorial stands out in Babis' mind.

"I think helping Vietnam veterans find their comrades' names on the wall at the Vietnam memorial is the most touching experience," she recalled. "The tenderness in their voice when they share memories of their time in combat is so touching. The app that helps find names on the wall now has faces of most of the young men and women who gave their all. It makes you picture the veteran as a young man full of hope for

their future. Hearing a veteran talk with teens at the wall and answering their questions and encouraging them to serve their country sent chills up my back.”

Babis offers advice for ALA members who have not yet participated in an Honor Flight.

“Visit the websites of Honor Flight programs in your community and state, and complete the volunteer application,” she suggested. “Channel the many creative ways ALA members have to fundraise and commit to raising Poppy Funds for one veteran at a time. Another way would be to help veterans at post homes to complete applications.”

The ALA’s partnership with Honor Flight helps create this experience for veterans across the country.

“I hope it will help make these missions possible,” she said. “I look forward to speaking to more groups of ALA members to educate them on the program and the eligible veterans.”

DARLENE ALLEN **DEPARTMENT OF NEW MEXICO**

A guest speaker at the New Mexico Department Convention introduced Darlene Allen to Honor Flight in 2019.

“My commitment to honoring and supporting veterans motivated me to participate in the Honor Flight program,” Allen said. “Upon learning that this organization provides flights for our veterans to visit our nation’s memorials for a day of tribute, I realized it was an exceptional opportunity and knew the experience would offer invaluable memories that I will cherish for a long time.”

Darlene has assisted with being part of the sendoff and welcome-home ceremonies at the airport, as well as serving as a guardian to a

Vietnam veteran on an Honor Flight. It took her five years to be selected to serve as a guardian.

“During the flights, the captains made special announcements to the passengers, recognizing the veterans onboard,” Allen recalled. “The captains played Lee Greenwood’s patriotic song *God Bless the USA*, which prompted the veterans and passengers to sing along. Pride and joy were evident on the faces of the veterans as they moved through the airport. They were cheered and applauded by passersby who learned of their mission. It was a deeply emotional experience for me to witness the joy and pride of standing beside these veterans and honoring their service. It was hard to hold back my tears.”

For Allen, the partnership between the ALA and Honor Flight is incredibly important for both organizations.

“As a long-standing member of the American Legion Auxiliary, I have continuously supported its mission to serve and support veterans,” she said. “The Honor Flight program provided me with the invaluable opportunity to honor my family members, my grandfather, uncles, brother, and son — who have bravely served in the military.”

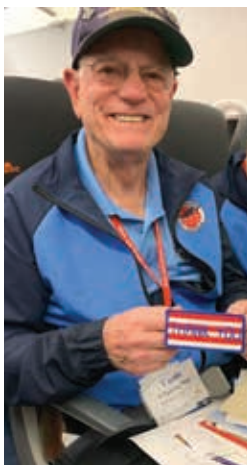
The collaboration efforts — contributions through Poppy Funds and support from the ALA — will enable more veterans to participate in Honor Flight by helping cover expenses, such as airfare, lodging, meals, and all transportation.

AMY LUFT **DEPARTMENT OF WISCONSIN**

In 2009, Amy Luft’s journey with Honor Flight began when she served as a guardian for two World War II veterans. For her, it was a life-changing experience.



EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE: Veterans and guardians are welcomed back at the airport from their Honor Flight to Washington, D.C. For many veterans, the experience is truly a life-changing event; ALA member Dara Oliver (in green) with her father, David Bulterman Sr., on his return from Honor Flight.



ENJOYING THE DAY (clockwise): Past Department of New York Commander Charles Herschlag arriving in Baltimore; Amy Luft with a veteran; Legion Family members greet a veteran; Dara Oliver with veteran Louie Montante, who she was a guardian for on a flight; Darlene Allen with a veteran; veterans on the plane hold their mail call packages.

She was asked to join the board of directors in 2010 and served as vice president for six years. To date, Luft has participated on 54 Honor Flights.

Like some ALA members, Luft found out about Honor Flight through a community newspaper article.

“At the time, I was president of my local ALA unit,” she said. “Two days before the second flight, the organizer contacted me and said, ‘What are you doing on Saturday?’ Of course, I dropped everything to take part in the flight. Little did I know what an impact this program would have on me.”

The mission of Honor Flight — similar to the ALA — drew Luft to the organization to help our nation’s veterans.

She has experienced many touching moments so far. One veteran experience she recalled was one who had not spoken to his son or seen him in 12 years, so he didn’t have someone to be his guardian for the flight.

“Part of our confirmation process is contacting family members to inform them that their family member is taking a flight and to ask them to assist with mail call and attend the homecoming celebration,” Luft said. “I contacted his son, and he

indicated that he would help with the mail call but could not promise to be at the airport. Upon the return home, the veteran was being pushed in his wheelchair through the homecoming parade when suddenly he put his feet down and stopped the wheelchair. There in the crowd at the parade stood his son. The son and veteran hugged and embraced each other and everyone around was crying. The son contacted us afterward and thanked us. He said if it wasn’t for Honor Flight, chances are that he and his dad probably still wouldn’t be talking. But now, they talk every day.”

Luft experienced another meaningful flight back in 2012. It was a WWII veteran who was unsure about going — he was wheelchair-bound, on oxygen, and had no one to fly with. His only child served in Vietnam and was killed in action. The veteran went on the trip and wanted to find his son’s name on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

“As I stood next to him, I watched this wheelchair-bound veteran use all his might to reach out and touch his son’s name,” Luft recalled. “He then struggled to push himself up out of his wheelchair, stood straight up, and saluted. It’s the most profound thing that I have ever witnessed. The veteran then sat back down and tugged at my jacket and said, ‘I can now go home.’ That veteran

passed away four days later and now I know what he meant. He needed that closure in his life.”

Luft said there are many ways to get involved with Honor Flight as a unit member: Help a veteran get signed up to be on a flight, attend a homecoming event, write cards and letters for mail call, and assist monetarily through Poppy Funds.

“The goal of Honor Flight is to create a nation where all of America’s veterans experience the honor, gratitude, and community of support they deserve,” Luft said. “With the help of the American Legion Auxiliary, this goal will become a reality.”

DARA OLIVER DEPARTMENT OF FLORIDA

Mission complete.

Dara Oliver took her father, David Bulterman Sr., on an Honor Flight in 2024 and 13.5 hours later, he passed away.

“He died knowing he had the opportunity to thank his comrades who didn’t make it home,” Oliver said. “This was the biggest gift Honor Flight could have ever given us. I think that was completion for him.”

He was looking forward to the trip despite having congestive heart failure. Oliver was her dad’s guardian for the day.

“I had never seen my dad get choked up about his military service, but this was a healing and forgiveness trip,” she said.

Originally, they were scheduled for a flight in September versus April as there were WWII and Korean War veterans ahead of him. Oliver talked to the head nurse at Honor Flight, concerned her father wouldn’t make it until September.

He received the call in February that a spot had opened on the April flight, so he had a few months to prepare.

“I need sneakers; I need a hat,” she recalled her dad telling her about wanting to prepare for the trip. “He wanted it to be perfect.”

Oliver had challenge coins made for him to hand out on the trip, and he loved doing that, she said.

The trip with her dad was Oliver’s highlight with Honor Flight so far. She also had the opportunity to be a guardian for Louie Montante, a veteran she has known since she was 17 years old. It was also a memorable experience for her to have the role of guardian.

Oliver’s involvement with Honor Flight began in 2015, donating snacks for flights. She has continued to serve in different capacities with the organization since.

“I love the connection, the partnership we have with Honor Flight to know that Auxiliary members have an opportunity to participate in the program by donating snacks, volunteering at the airport, and as a guardian,” she said. ★



USING ALA POPPY FUNDS TO SUPPORT HONOR FLIGHTS

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

OPTION ONE: DONATE TO A LOCAL HUB/LONE EAGLE PROGRAM

To locate a hub, visit www.honorflight.org/find-a-hub. For more information on the Lone Eagle program, visit loneeagle.honorflight.org.

OPTION TWO: DONATE TO THE NATIONAL ORGANIZATION

FOR THE VETERANS

- Food and nutrition
- Oxygen
- Wheelchairs
- Medical teams on each flight (one medic per bus — and there are sometimes up to six medics per flight — funds cover the medic’s food, identifying apparel, medical supplies, travel expenses, and hotel)
- Wheelchair-accessible buses

FOR THE GUARDIAN (COMPANION/ CAREGIVER WHO ATTENDS WITH THE VETERAN)

- Airfare to accompany veteran on the trip
- Food and nutrition
- Hotel accommodations to remain with veteran during the trip
- Guardian training and associated needs to execute necessary tasks — food, room rental, medical training, and identifying articles of clothing
- When required — transportation to the airport with veteran
- When required — hotel for the night before the flight with veteran

Poppy Funds may be used for the above listed items by donating directly to Honor Flight Inc. by visiting www.honorflight.org/donations. Once on that page, you may click on “Poppy Funds from The American Legion Family” located on the bottom right.

OPTION THREE: BUY ITEMS AND COORDINATE WITH LOCAL HUB

You will first need to coordinate with your local hub or with the Lone Eagle program. Regardless of which method your unit chooses to donate their Poppy Funds, please know the money will go to the support of veterans and guardians attending an Honor Flight in the ways listed above.

August 22-28

TAMPA

FLORIDA

What to know about the ALA's 2025 National Convention

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.

A few highlights of the week will include color guard and band contests, the Legacy Run arrival, ALA national governing board meetings, a patriotic memorial service, our opening convention session, and the installation of our 2025-2026 national officers. ALA general sessions will begin on Monday, Aug. 25, and continue through Wednesday, Aug. 27. The national offices of president, vice president, national division vice presidents, chaplain, and historian will be elected by National Convention delegates on Wednesday and installed thereafter.

What happens at our largest national gathering?

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 (NEC) — the national governing board of the ALA — with fiduciary, policy, and strategic responsibility for the organization. The 2024-2025 NEC will meet in Tampa on Saturday, Aug. 23, and the 2025-2026 NEC will be convened by the newly elected national president on Thursday, Aug. 28.

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 <https://donate.legion-aux.org/Hero>.

Several major ALA awards will also be presented at our National Convention to honor outstanding



Catch our 104th convention live!

Unable to attend National Convention in person? Our livestream is available for general sessions starting Monday, Aug. 25, 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 at your convenience. In addition, 2024-2025 National President Trish Ward will share stories from her travels and visits to departments in an end-of-year report shown as a video presentation during convention.

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

www.ALAforVeterans.org/convention. Stay connected through social media: Follow us @ALAforVeterans and use #AuxCon25.

Scan
here to
register:



successes in service to veterans, military, and their families, both within the ALA and out in the community:

- **Salute to Servicemembers** 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 2025 ALA Public Spirit Award will be presented to Ann Mills-Griffiths. She has led the National League of POW/MIA Families since Aug. 1, 1978, first as executive director and since Aug. 1, 2011, as chair of the board and CEO, continuing responsibilities for the nonprofit 501(c)(3) humanitarian organization in Washington, D.C. Having stepped aside from administering daily league operations, Mills-Griffiths focuses primarily on U.S. policy, operations, and sustaining the league's financial ability to achieve accounting objectives. Since 1970, the league has fought for the return of all POWs, the fullest possible accounting for those listed as MIA, and the recovery and identification of remains of those who died serving our nation during the Vietnam War.

Cmdr. James B. Mills, U.S. Navy, Mills-Griffiths' brother, was listed as MIA on Sept. 21, 1966, when the Navy F4B on which he served as radar intercept officer disappeared on a night, low-flying bombing mission over North Vietnam. He was serving his second tour, assigned to Fighter Squadron 21, USS Coral Sea, when the F4B in which he and the pilot, Navy Capt. James Bauder, were last seen and disappeared off radar. Despite uncertainty surrounding this incident, and due to nearly miraculous site discovery and sincere dedication by DPAA's under-water archeologists, the remains of Bauder were recovered and identified in August 2017, and those of Mills in August 2018. He was interred with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery on Aug. 24, 2019.

Mills-Griffith is a member of American Legion Auxiliary Unit 364 in Virginia, and has spoken at many American Legion National Conventions. ★



What to do in Tampa: local museums and military-related tours

Tampa offers various military-related tours and attractions, including the American Victory Ship Mariners Museum, the MacDill Air Force Base, and the Tampa Bay History Center. The American Victory Ship is a World War II ship that is now a museum, while MacDill Air Force Base offers tours and opportunities to learn about its history. The Tampa Bay History Center participates in the Blue Star Museums program, offering free admission to military families.

Here's a more detailed look at each option:



American Victory Ship Mariners Museum:

This museum, located on Channelside Drive, is a fully operational WWII ship that visitors can tour. It's one of only four such ships in the U.S. The museum offers a chance to explore various areas

of the ship, including cargo holds, radio rooms, and the hospital. Admission costs vary depending on age, with free admission for members and children under 3. The museum is open Monday noon to 5 p.m., and Tuesday-Sunday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Learn more at www.americanvictory.org.

MacDill Air Force Base: This military installation, located south of Tampa, offers a chance to learn about local military history. Visitors can explore the base and learn about its role in various military operations. Learn more at www.macdill.af.mil.



Tampa Bay History Center:

This museum participates in the Blue Star Museums program, which offers free admission to military families during the summer months. This is a great opportunity for military families to learn

about the local history of the Tampa Bay area. Learn more at tampabayhistorycenter.org.

(Photos: Visit Tampa Bay)



HONORING THE LEGACY OF PAST NATIONAL PRESIDENT PEGGY THOMAS

With hearts full of love and remembrance, we are deeply saddened to share the passing of Past National President Peggy Thomas of Virginia. Thomas, who served during the ALA's 2012-2013 administrative year, motivated the American Legion Auxiliary in "Soaring to New Heights" as we focused on increasing membership.

"My dream for the Auxiliary is to help it grow and flourish. We are members of a very noble and prestigious organization that has made a difference in the lives of many men, women, and children for decades," Thomas said at her installation as national president.

Thomas' warm sense of humor and unwavering passion for our mission touched the hearts of all who knew her, leaving a lasting impression that will be deeply missed.

"When people speak of her, the most frequent things I hear are that she was a mentor to many and a friend to more, and she had a smile that lit up a room and also a dry sense of humor," said Thomas' daughter, ALA National Children & Youth Committee Chair Lisa Chaplin.

department, and national positions before becoming ALA national president in 2012-2013. The ALA's focus during her term as president was the Children of Warriors National Presidents' Scholarship Fund. As ALA national president, Thomas traveled the country visiting fellow ALA and American Legion Family members, military bases, and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers, as well as servicemembers in South Korea and Germany.

"I think some of her most fulfilling times were when she was visiting with veterans, military, and their families during her travels as national president," said Chaplin, a member of Virginia ALA Unit 284.

After Thomas' presidency, she continued her work with

After a lifetime of love, laughter, and service, Thomas passed away on April 24, 2025, leaving behind a trail of beautiful memories and a true legacy of *Service Not Self*.

A Paid Up For Life member of Virginia Colonial Heights Unit 284, Thomas' service to the American Legion Auxiliary began over 40 years ago. She served in many local,

the Auxiliary by guiding and mentoring new leaders, serving as a VA Voluntary Service representative at the Richmond VA Medical Center, and as a parliamentarian.

"She was my biggest influence regarding all things ALA, with true dedication to the mission above all," said Chaplin.

Often referred to as a steel magnolia, Thomas was eligible for Auxiliary membership through her late husband, John C. Thomas, a U.S. Army veteran. Her deep military connection extended through her family, with all seven of her brothers and her sister serving in the U.S. Armed Forces.

Thomas was preceded in death by her parents, her husband, her seven brothers, and her sister. She leaves behind her daughter,

Chaplin, and son-in-law Kevin, and a host of nieces, nephews, and extended family.

"As we soar to new heights in the Auxiliary to become angels in service to our veterans, please be mindful of the mission



of the ALA which is to serve veterans, the military, and their families," said Thomas in the November 2012 issue of *Auxiliary* magazine. "We need to renew our commitment to the four founding principles of our organization: Justice, Freedom, Democracy, and Loyalty. We have a great love of tradition, God, and country. Working together as a team, we will soar to new heights in service."

FINANCE: WORKING TOGETHER WITH DEC TO STRENGTHEN AND MAINTAIN FINANCIAL STABILITY

We talk a lot about “working the mission,” but have you thought about how poor financial management can jeopardize your department’s ability to fulfill the mission? Without strong financial oversight, provided by the Finance Committee and the Department Executive Committee working together, departments can struggle. Good financial oversight is more than just balancing the books — it ensures financial resources are used wisely, and that trust is maintained with our members and donors.

What is financial oversight?

This refers to the processes and structures that monitor an organization’s financial health. It involves budgeting, financial reporting, risk management, and compliance with legal and ethical

standards. Nonprofits rely on financial oversight to ensure funds are used effectively and responsibly. It will help your department fulfill the ALA’s mission.

What can the Finance Committee do? First, teach. Many members of the DEC may not have a lot of knowledge about finances. The Finance Committee needs to teach board members how to read and interpret the year-to-date budget, the balance sheet, and the profit and loss statement. These documents need to be presented and reviewed in depth at every board meeting — don’t just hand them out. Make sure board members understand them and can use the reports to help ensure the financial resources

are being appropriately used.

What can the DEC members do? Your homework. There are valuable resources available online that can help you become financially savvy (*Board Source*, for example). Ask questions. Don’t be embarrassed if you don’t understand something. If you don’t understand, others probably have the same questions. Ask questions about what internal controls are in place to ensure proper financial management and avoid fraud. Assure your department is compliant with all of the federal and state reporting requirements.



Janet Jefford is a PNP and 57-year member of the ALA. She belongs to Glastonbury Unit 56 in Connecticut.

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Not Attending National Convention but Still Want to Honor Your Hero?

The Wall of Heroes at National Convention, sponsored by AmWins, offers a meaningful way to honor someone special. With a donation to the ALA Foundation, attendees can recognize a hero in their life by writing their name on a paper star and placing it on this powerful tribute wall. This year, you can participate from home by scanning the QR code or texting HERO to 1-844-940-3450 and making your tribute gift online.

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LEADERSHIP: PLANNING FOR FUTURE LEADERS

 www.Facebook.com/groups/ALALeadership

Succession planning involves identifying and developing future leaders within an organization. How does that apply to the ALA — specifically your unit, district, or department? Is there a plan for feeding the leadership “pipeline?” Have the same members held leadership positions for more than five years? Have you considered what your leadership will look like in 10 years?

As our organization moves forward, it is critical that thought has been given to those who will lead it forward and keep it vital in the future. One facet of leadership is taking an active role in this area through training and mentoring members. More importantly, leaders must

actively search for and identify members with the passion and knowledge of our organization.

Members with ALA knowledge who may not want to serve in a formal leadership role can be encouraged to chair a committee or partner with an officer to better understand the ins and outs of that position. Introduce newer members to ALA Academy courses, and invite them to ALA Mission Training to increase their Auxiliary knowledge. Point them to the MyAuxiliary portal at ALAforVeterans.org, where they can review the *Unit Guide Book* and the wealth of information about our organization. As a mentor, work with that member

to answer their questions and prepare them for success as a leader, at a time when they are ready. We must not push a newer member into leadership before they fully understand their responsibilities.

Grow your leaders from within, and do it at a pace that ensures the members are prepared to serve in a leadership role ... and succeed in that position. All of us are leaders — each in our unique way — which keeps our organization relevant today and into the future.



Barb Washburn is a 49-year PUFL member of Bickel-Nelson Unit 360 in Cook, Neb.

MEMBERSHIP: BE CREATIVE AND CONSISTENT WITH MEMBERSHIP EFFORTS

 www.Facebook.com/groups/ALAMembership

What an amazing year we have had in “Leading the Way” to membership excellence.

2024-2025 began with an announcement to the departments that they’d take an active role in their department objective goals for the year by pledging a percentage of their previous year-end totals, ranging from 1% to 6%. Many departments were conservative, and some were optimistic and pledged a higher percentage.

Leading the Way to membership excellence was inspired by the Kansas state motto: “Ad astra per aspera” — to the stars through difficulties. We were up for the challenge to find our North Star.

Department leaders rallied to project their year goal for their departments. Goals were locked, friendly challenges were

negotiated, membership teams were formed, and in addition, each division embraced the nature elements assigned: air, water, earth, fire, and energy — a creative way to inspire, keeping membership fun and engaged.

Everyone was encouraged to think outside the box with their ideas and have fun while Leading the Way to membership in excellence, and that they did.

The race was on. Creative themes were developed: “It’s Raining Members” by Department of New Hampshire; “Catch the Wave” chaired by Kellie Bergen from the Department of Delaware; the Department of West Virginia President Laura Clark ran with a “Willy Wonka” theme where a golden ticket was provided as part of their membership card disbursement; the Department

of Maine chose “Piece by piece: completing the membership puzzle.” Also, “S’mores” was the theme for membership chair Elizabeth Bryant out of the Department of South Carolina.

No matter the theme or idea, every action was inspired by dedicated members, leaders, and teams across the nation to continue enhancing the membership program and building a stronger membership foundation for years to come.

Membership is in everything we do. Remembering our *why* is important as it honors our veterans for whom we are eligible. Your membership is valuable and precious!



April Sinclair is a 15-year member of the ALA and an honorary life member of Unit 57 in Fairbanks, Alaska.

BEHIND THE MAGIC: HOW NHQ STAFF PREPARE FOR NATIONAL CONVENTION

It's that special time of year again! As summer begins to fade and memories of your department's convention celebrations still linger, excitement is building for the 104th ALA National Convention. This year, we will celebrate the end of the ALA's 2024-2025 year in Tampa, Fla.

Although National Convention is typically held at the end of August each year, ALA National Headquarters staff begin preparing for the weeklong event well in advance to ensure convention runs smoothly.

EVENTS: Every year, their to-do list for convention is endless, but some tasks they can check off that list: an on-site visit to the National Convention location to see the space with The American Legion Family; planning an initial agenda to accommodate all of the meeting spaces; updating and publishing all convention information for members; designing a production "look" for our members; working with the national president to plan the agenda and all special events; inviting speakers and distinguished guests to speak; planning content for breakout sessions; packing materials and supplies to send to the convention city; and working with vendors and American Legion staff on all logistics related to the convention.

ADMIN: Our National Headquarters' Administration Division is instrumental in the success of convention which helps establish expectations during the new administrative year. A fraction of their pre-convention duties: convention stage/podium scripting; pre- and post-National Executive Committee meeting packets as well as scripts; Constitution & Bylaws scripting for stage presentation of



amendments to delegates; national president scheduling; presentation and ratification for national appointments; updating all government documents based on amendments made by convention delegates, board, and NEC meetings; scripting for luncheon and States Dinner; planning governance breakouts; installation rehearsal and organizing installation badges, pins, sashes, etc.; stage/tech/production rehearsals; and running and scripting onsite pre-cons for C&B and ALA resolutions.

PROGRAMS: Turning efforts into impact, the Programs Division prepares in many ways: They assist the national committee chairs with platform remarks, end-of-year reporting, as well as pre-con meetings; they print and distribute awards to departments and prepare the awards spreadsheet for distribution during pre-cons; finalize edits on reporting questions and Program Engagement Plans for the next admin year; gather and process impact numbers; process awards address verifications for Poppy Poster winners, Americanism Essay Contest winners, 10,000 hour and 20,000 hour VA volunteer award recipients, and our VAVS Volunteer of the Year nominee.

COMMUNICATIONS: Some of this creative team's convention preparations: coordinating national committee and officer

reports for the annual Book of Reports (written) and with National Convention producer for spoken/platform remarks; editing platform remarks before they are sent to the producer and editing after all have been formatted into scripts for big screens; coordinating all photography during National Convention for ALA media; acting as lead for national president's end-of-year video report; coordinating with award recipient(s) for interviews, photos, and media releases; managing on-site media.

DEVELOPMENT: Our Development Division team members are the driving force behind raising funds to fulfill our mission of *Service Not Self*. Their pre-National Convention tasks include, but are not limited to: ordering Wall of Heroes installation; ordering giveaways for donors at Wall of Heroes; working with sponsors; designing invitations to send to top donors and legacy donors; purchasing gifts for Top Donor Reception; and ordering giveaway items for drawings at the American Legion Auxiliary Luncheon and States Dinner events.

MEMBERSHIP: Before convention, the Membership Division helps pull membership reports which determine the delegate count/strength for each department for National Convention. They also conduct the membership pre-convention committee meeting.

Provided by Monique Batiste, National Chaplain 2024-2025 | www.Facebook.com/groups/ALACHaplains

AUGUST

Damaged is Not Your Destination

Many of us suffer from depression, sadness, fear, etc. due to trauma and brokenness.

Some find themselves suffering from a brokenness they thought could never be repaired. Sitting in a bedroom closet for months, crying to the point that you cannot sleep or think. Blaming yourself. Being numb and confused. Not knowing what's next.

This is the time we need to ask God to be with us — when we are at our lowest. Guide us through the darkest moments, when we cannot see the light at the end.

Sometimes our brokenness is so bad, and we are so damaged that we feel we cannot be repaired. But God says different!

The most delicious meals can be prepared from the cans of veggies with the most damage. A beautiful home can be rebuilt after the worst natural disaster. You can heal from any damage or brokenness and become the best you that you can be. The you God designed you to be.

Don't ever forget that value is still in you. You may be damaged, but you can heal, and God is still good.

Philippians 1:6 says, "He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it."

We are living testaments that God won't let any of our stories go to waste. There is purpose in your pain. Start healing. Are you ready?

Dear God, While I navigate through this pain, I ask You to be with me. Guide me through this darkness. Be with me 'til the end. And, please help me heal from the hurt. Amen.

SEPTEMBER

Believe the Impossible

Ever feel like the goals you've set for yourself are never going to be accomplished? You've wished for and applied for that dream job

or promotion that seems out of reach? Feelings of the impossible are normal. Goals and ambitions you have set to complete, that have you feeling like they are never going to happen?

In Genesis 18, God told Sarah she would do the impossible — she would have a child during a time she knew had long passed. Sarah was beyond childbearing age, but God told her to trust Him. He promised her a child. He didn't say when. He just said He would, because that was His plan for her. He was testing her FAITH. How big is your FAITH? How big are your prayers? Don't be afraid to pray big. If you don't ask God to answer your biggest prayers, don't expect them to happen. Believe the impossible. Even when it seems so far out of reach. Believe it can happen.

Ask God to remove any doubt and misunderstanding. Remove the people from your life who place that doubt and steer you wrong. Pray for the removal of distractions and negative thoughts. Oftentimes those things can cause us to put up a protective wall around ourselves — a defense mechanism. A stronghold.

Every negative thought, every negative word, becomes a brick. Every brick becomes a distortion of the truth. And every wall it builds up must come down. It's natural to defend yourself from negativity from others who want you to believe your impossible is impossible.

"But with God, all things are possible. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God." 2 Corinthians 10:4-5

Dear God, Please protect me from all negative thoughts I may have and anyone who has set out to destroy my thinking. You have created me in the image designed just for me. Give me the patience and understanding needed to receive all the blessings that await me. Amen.

OCTOBER

God Provides

"Where God guides, He provides." Isaiah 58:11

If you are ever in a place in life where you feel anxious or nervous, close your eyes, take deep breaths, and whisper prayers of calmness.

Staying calm can be challenging when your nerves are what I call "shot," or you don't have the answers to things you feel are of urgency. God knows that need. God senses and sees those issues. And God will guide and provide.

Monthly unit meetings are getting harder to organize and get members to attend and engage. People are fearful of change. Fearful of losing the way things were. The values of the American Legion Auxiliary will never leave. The mission and vision are still the same. And every need we ask God for, will be provided because of our strong faith in Him.

Because of our faith, God will always provide for us. Always provide for our veterans. And always provide for the American Legion Auxiliary.

So, the next time you hold a unit fundraiser, and you fear you won't meet your goal, remember to put your trust in God. You may say, "Oh, it's just a fundraiser." So what? Because the cause is a good one and it takes care of God's people. Having a heart like God means to cultivate qualities that reflect God's character such as love, compassion, and serving others.

Dear God, You are our provider. Please give us reminders to help us remember You are always with us. You will never leave us or forsake us. Even in our toughest times, You are always with us. Amen.



Monique Batiste is a 43-year member of the Ricard Stewart ALA Unit 505 in Baton Rouge, La.



IMPORTANCE OF LEADERS: Over the years, ALA Department of Missouri member Rosemarie W. Hauck has led through various roles within the Auxiliary.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO PARTICIPATE AS A MEMBER CAN INSPIRE LEADERSHIP

Rosemarie W. Hauck chose a seat in the last row, staying away from the action and avoiding attention from others in the room. She had no intention of participating in the event, much less becoming more visible in the groups that were running it.

But a simple introduction and encouragement from another person in attendance led Hauck to a more prominent location in the room. And the conversations that followed started her down a path to leadership and mentoring roles with one of the organizations conducting the meeting.



That group was the American Legion Auxiliary.

Hauck's story is evidence of the importance of seeking ways to connect with potential and current ALA members. Every encounter, she said, could lead someone to join or strengthen their engagement with the Auxiliary — just as she did.

Inspiring a leader

Hauck, current Central Division national vice president and a member of Unit 444 in Florissant, Mo., recently told the story of her attendance at a 1980s district meeting for The American

Legion. It was at this event — where she initially kept her distance from the rest of the group — that June Stolte walked from her seat at the front of the room to introduce herself to Hauck.

Stolte, the 1982-1983 national president of the ALA, invited Hauck to sit with her.

That experience — and the relationship with Stolte and other members that followed — sparked

Hauck's interest in leading and supporting others in the ALA.

"It created a person who believes in mentorship," said Hauck.

She went on to hold positions ranging from district chaplain to her current role as her division's national vice president.

Protecting the future

The key to personal outreach that attracts new members and increases participation among those who've already joined is twofold:

- Seek opportunities in the community to network with those who might be interested in the ALA.
- Initiate conversations with ALA members who might want to increase their engagement.

Now Hauck regularly engages in both kinds of outreach. After all, she said being friendly is easy. But just as importantly, it's vital to the future of the ALA.

"It doesn't hurt you to walk over and speak to someone and give them a smile," she said. "It doesn't cost a thing. And it is 100 percent necessary if we plan to continue to grow this organization."

4 tips for connecting

Whether seeking interest from potential members or increased participation from those who already belong, Hauck said taking some key steps makes the effort easier:

1: Start a conversation. Hauck is so committed to being friendly with others that her granddaughter once believed every person they encountered was someone Hauck already knew. "If we don't treat people kindly," Hauck said of ALA members, "we won't be here in another 100 years."

2: Focus on listening. Ask people what interests them. Think about how they could support veterans and their families in ways that align with those interests. "Then take someone under your wing and walk with them," she said. "Don't dictate."

3: Stay in touch. After Stolte initially approached Hauck, she and other ALA members periodically followed up. "I started getting phone calls from people telling me how nice it was to have met me," Hauck said. By the next meeting, she was district chaplain.

4: Tout the ALA's value. Hauck recounted a conversation she had with a stranger on a flight. The man turned out to be a veteran, so she shared with him what The American Legion Family does and asked if he was a member. "We have a magnificent organization," she said. "But people are not aware enough of it."



ALA GIRLS STATE MEMORIES: Kennedy Gerber (far left) at ALA Hoosier Girls State in 2022. Attending the program positively influenced the direction of her college plans.

A WEEK THAT INFLUENCED A COLLEGE DECISION

“Attending ALA Hoosier Girls State profoundly changed the trajectory of my life,” said Kennedy Gerber, who attended in 2022 and has returned twice as a counselor. “Being in an environment with other powerful girls made me realize I wanted to attend an all-female college.” After the program, Gerber applied to several women’s colleges because she loved the energy she experienced at ALA Girls State.

In May, Gerber completed her sophomore year at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania. Gerber says that if she hadn’t attended ALA Hoosier Girls State, she wouldn’t have considered applying to Bryn Mawr. Now, she can’t imagine going to college anywhere else. Gerber is a double major studying history and public health.

How did attending ALA Hoosier Girls State influence your career goals?

It influenced me to center my

public health career goals around public policy. I discovered my interest in policy serving at ALA Girls State. I plan to attend graduate school for either public health or epidemiology and work for a government agency.

What is something you learned from the program that sticks with you today?

It made me realize the power of local elections. I have now voted in every election since I’ve been eligible, and I hope to continue performing my civic duties for life.

Why do you return as an ALA Hoosier Girls State counselor?

I want to help girls realize their full potential. I went to a disadvantaged rural high school. No one was really doing what I wanted to do, and it was isolating. As a counselor, I get to encourage the girls to chase their dreams. I want to be a voice of support and encouragement for the girls who may not be getting it from their schools and peers.

What is something you know now that you wish you would have known when you attended ALA Girls State?

To take risks. I was afraid of trying something and failing, but that’s the point of ALA Girls State — even when you lose an election, you are surrounded by so much support and so many friends.



What was your favorite thing about ALA Hoosier Girls State?

I loved getting to form relationships with girls from all over the state. I learned so much about so many different people, and I’m still in touch with them to this day.



ALA Girls Nation 2025 was held in Washington, D.C. in July! Take a look back at this year’s program on our social media channels @ALAGirlsNation. Watch for the November issue of *Auxiliary* magazine for a recap of this year’s session.



We want to hear from ALA Girls State and ALA Girls Nation alumnae of all ages! Email us at ALAMagazine@ALAforVeterans.org.

JUNIOR MEMBER'S ALA INVOLVEMENT PAYS OFF FOR COLLEGE

A Spirit of Youth Scholarship recipient, Mackenzie Brotherston, became an American Legion Auxiliary Junior member in 2014. She is eligible for membership through her grandfather, Raymond A. Miller, of Post 129 in Toms River, N.J., who served in the U.S. Air Force. Her father, Michael Brotherston, served in the U.S. Marine Corps and is a member of Post 129.

Do you have any favorite events or programs you participated in as an ALA Junior member?

An event participated in by the ALA is Wreaths Across America Day, and it is my favorite. It is a day in December when we honor those who serve and remember those who have fallen. And for those who have fallen, we lay a wreath on their headstone. As an ALA Junior member, I organized a group of my peers at a cemetery in my hometown to participate in this event.

Why do you think it's important for Juniors to be involved in the ALA?

It teaches you the value of giving back and being a positive influence in your community. It also teaches patriotism, builds character, instills camaraderie, and aids in the development of leadership skills — all of which set us up for a future filled with success.



GIVING BACK TO OTHERS: Mackenzie Brotherston (third from right), a Spirit of Youth Scholarship winner, encourages others to get involved.

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

I am attending Binghamton University in the fall of 2025 where I will major in human development and families studies and minor in education. My goal is to become a physical education teacher, as well as a coach for a school soccer program.

What sparked your interest in this area of study?

The relationships I have built with many of my teachers, as well as members of the administration, coaches, and guidance counselors. In addition, because of my experiences as an athlete, I have a great affinity for fitness, body mechanics, and a health-conscious lifestyle. I would love the opportunity to inspire others to lead a wholesome life.

What inspired you to apply for an ALA Spirit of Youth Scholarship?

Wanting to do my part to help pay for my college education.

How did you feel when you found out you won this scholarship?

Honestly, I experienced the feeling of disbelief when I found out I won. I had to keep reading

the letter repeatedly to make sure I was reading it correctly. Once the disbelief wore off, elation came over me, and I felt fulfilled.

What would you say to other Junior members who are eligible for this scholarship?

Apply! You have nothing to lose, and everything to gain.

What would you say to donors who support the ALA's scholarship funds to help students like you?

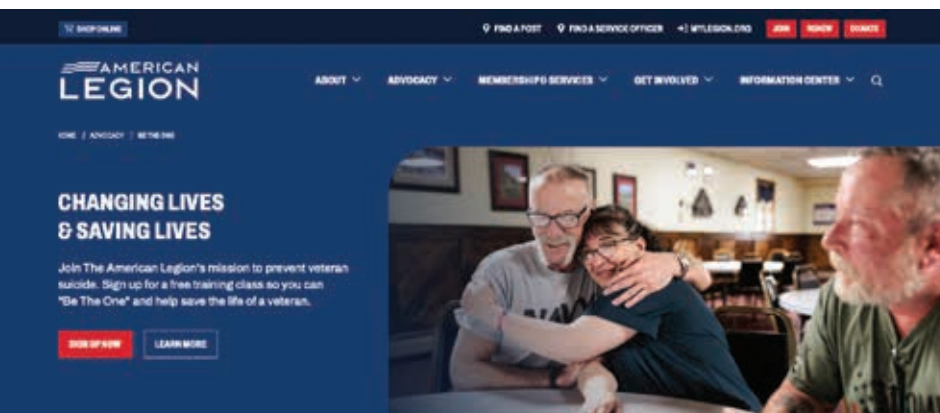
I would tell them how incredibly thankful I am for their generosity and that they are deeply appreciated. I'd also like to let them know when students like me hear that we are the recipients of an ALA scholarship, we experience happiness, but more so, a sense of relief as a large portion of a financial burden is alleviated.

Is there anything else you want to add?

Growing up in The American Legion Family has been special to say the least. Many memories have been made, and I've met amazing individuals along the way. Thank you to those who shaped me into the person I am today, and thank you for this opportunity. I am honored and humbled.

It teaches you the value of giving back and being a positive influence in your community. It also teaches patriotism, builds character, instills camaraderie, and aids in the development of leadership skills — all of which set us up for a future filled with success.





BETHEONE.ORG WEBPAGE GETS A REFRESH, NEW RESOURCES

The updated webpage features easier navigation of resources to support the Legion's veteran suicide prevention mission.

The American Legion continues to empower Legion Family and community members to save the lives of veterans through its Be the One suicide prevention mission by providing the resources they need to help a veteran in crisis and bring awareness to the cause.

How-to videos, training, and more veteran suicide prevention resources are located at betheone.org, which has been refreshed for easier navigation and new resources have been added.

Visit betheone.org to find:

Training. Whether you're looking for in-person or virtual, there are several training options to help you intervene safely and confidently when a veteran

may be at risk. These suicide prevention training options include the Columbia Lighthouse Project, QPR (question, persuade, refer), and VA S.A.V.E.

How-to videos. If you are coordinating an event at your post, district, or department related to Be the One, two videos share how to organize an event and engage the media.

Social media images and messages. Promote your Be the One event or spread awareness about the Legion's suicide prevention mission with this social media promotional kit.

Merchandise. Show your support for Be the One with branded shirts, hats, pins, coins and more.

Media awareness. Personal stories, public service announcements, Be the One-focused American Legion *Tango Alpha Lima* podcast episodes are featured on the Legion's YouTube channel's Be the One playlist.

CELEBRATE AMERICA WITH THE USA 250 CHALLENGE

American Legion National Commander James LaCoursiere has announced the USA 250 Challenge, a way to display our American Legion Family's love of our nation. The challenge is modeled after the successful 100 Miles for Hope initiative that took place during the pandemic.

However, the challenge is different in several ways. First, it is not just about fitness. Secondly, it broadens participation so that American Legion Family members can participate as individuals, as part of teams, or both.

"This patriotic challenge celebrates the nation's 250th birthday that incorporates American Legion Family values while offering options for everyone to participate," LaCoursiere said. "It kicked off July 4 and concludes a year later on the

250th anniversary of America."

Completing challenge goals can be done individually or in groups (like units or posts), in three categories:

Fitness: Participants walk, cycle, or cover 250 miles any way they choose. Or they can aim to do 250 hours of activity like playing pickleball, strength training, or kayaking.

Wellness: Participants complete 250 hours of wellness activities such as yoga, meditation, and other forms of mindfulness. Other options include tallying 250 participants in Be the One training, completing 250 Buddy Checks, etc. American Legion Riders chapters (or individuals) could create an event where they ride at least 250 miles.

Community service: Participants achieve 250 hours of community service or reach the 250 threshold of a specific

community service project. Examples include volunteering for 250 hours, cleaning up 250 graves in a veterans cemetery, teaching flag etiquette to 250 students, or sending 250 care packages to deployed troops.

Participants will register for \$30 and will receive a USA 250 Challenge T-shirt, with the proceeds going to the Veterans & Children Foundation.

"Not only are we embracing physical activity, supporting mental health, and serving our communities, we are giving back to disabled veterans and military families," the commander said. "Please join me in celebrating America while engaging in healthy activities, supporting mental wellness, and serving our great nation."

Learn more by visiting legion.org/250challenge where you can also register and donate.



BOOKAZINE UPDATED FOR 2025 AND AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD

The Whole Child bookazine has been updated for 2025 to reflect The American Legion's continued commitment to children and youth. The bookazine highlights the origins of the Whole Child concept, ways The American Legion supports children and youth through its Temporary Financial Assistance program, Child Well-Being Foundation, and other advocacy efforts, and the impact had at the local, state, and national level.

For example:

\$5,210,706 — the amount

that local American Legion posts provided in cash aid to benefit children in need in their communities in 2024.

8,701 — local American Legion child health and safety programs conducted by posts in 2024.

11,161 — number of children whose homes were stabilized between 2013 and 2023 with help from American Legion Temporary Financial Assistance grants.

\$5,430,738 — amount in national American Legion Temporary Financial Assistance grants awarded over the last decade to military and qualified American Legion families with minor children at home who



are confronted with unexpected financial emergencies.

\$21,536,485.50 — amount The American Legion Child Well-Being Foundation has awarded in grants since 1954 to nonprofits that contribute to the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual welfare of children and youth.

Download *The Whole Child* at legion.org.



WANTED: YOUR AMERICAN LEGION BASEBALL STORY

In celebration of American Legion Baseball turning 100, posts and players are encouraged to share their stories, photos, and more to commemorate this milestone. And American Legion posts and Legion Baseball alumni can help. If your post sponsors or has sponsored an American Legion Baseball team, or you played Legion Baseball, please share details and mementoes through the Baseball category on Legiontown.org.

DISCOUNTED TICKETS TO VIETNAM WAR 'ROCK JOURNEY' AVAILABLE TO LEGIONNAIRES

Rolling Thunder VNM opens July 10 in New York City and brings together legendary songs of the period of the 60s and 70s with storytelling inspired by Vietnam veterans and their families.

Rolling Thunder VNM will make its U.S. premiere for a limited engagement this summer at off-Broadway's New World Stages (340 West 50th Street). Tickets are on sale now at www.telecharge.com/Rolling-Thunder-Tickets. For all information, go to www.rollingthunderus.com.

Legionnaires can purchase tickets at the discounted rate by visiting www.telecharge.com/Rolling-Thunder-tickets and using the promo code RTLEGION25. Those attending the musical also will have the opportunity to donate to The American Legion both at New World Stages and after viewing the musical.

Rolling Thunder was originally developed and produced in Australia. The book is by journalist/writer Bryce Hallett. This new U.S. production will be directed by Kenneth Ferrone (*The Wanderer, Prelude to a Kiss, Cruel Intentions*).

Part rock concert, part documentary, this exhilarating and moving show tells the heartfelt stories of young soldiers caught in the abyss of the Vietnam War and the galvanizing protest movement that sought to end it.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War.





Greg Jensen began his military career in the U.S. Marine Corps in 2005. Once he graduated Officer Candidates School, the basic school, and became certified as a judge advocate at the Naval Justice School, he entered the fleet serving as a judge advocate at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego. He transitioned to the Marine Corps Reserves in May 2009 where he currently serves as a reservist working within the Marine Corps Recruiting Command. Jensen recently became a member of The American Legion.

What does your American Legion membership mean to you?

My American Legion membership means a great deal to me. It is an organization that is committed to providing a “hand up” to our veterans. I love the impact they not only make within the veteran community, but also within my community as a whole. First and foremost, this is an educational opportunity — one in which I get to both learn about the past interest that veterans have faced, as well as helping to identify current and future concerns we must address for our nation to be the very best version of itself.

Explain more about the Marine Corps Scholarship Foundation and your involvement.

I become involved with the Marine Corps Scholarship Foundation shortly after moving back home to Indiana and joining the Marine Corps Reserves. I am a volunteer member of the team and am blessed to spend time and serve alongside our amazing Gold

Star Family members and those who love and support them. Every year, the Marine Corps Scholarship Foundation - Indiana puts on a golf tournament that routinely brings out approximately 300 golfers and approximately 50 volunteers. Through the steadfast leadership of Gold Star Parents like Kevin

“It is an organization that is committed to providing a ‘hand up’ to our veterans.”

Rankle, Gary Strader, and Melanie Smith, and Marines Edward Smid, Tyler Mensch, and Sean Dixon, this event routinely

nets more than \$100,000 and therefore can permanently endow a scholarship in the name of a fallen Marine from the state of Indiana. The entire Indiana chapter of the Marine Corps Scholarship Foundation is an absolute and dedicated force.

Can you talk about the Marine Corps Scholarship Foundation and specifically its work with Gold Star Mothers?

Our Gold Star Mothers and Fathers are the backbone of our organization. I have never met such a dedicated and

impactful group of individuals in my life. Nobody outworks our Gold Star Moms and Dads at the golf tournament. They are the first to arrive to set up, work all day providing support, and the last to leave at the conclusion of the tournament. Through their presence, strength, and understanding, I have found it is always our Gold Star parents who are the strongest members of our event. Their ability to love and impact our veterans is life changing. When people leave, they often say, “I thought I came here to support our Gold Star Families, but it ended up being them who gave me hope and inspiration.”

Do you feel it’s important for like-minded organizations — the Marine Corps Scholarship Foundation, Gold Star Mothers, and the American Legion Auxiliary — to work together?

100%! We live in a world that often seems absolutely committed to tearing itself apart for no other reason than to generate a fictional or egotistical “win.” Organizations that are truly committed to making this world a better place have to be committed to supporting one another and their respective missions.

VIRGINIA UNIT HONORS ITS POST HOME VETERANS THROUGH MONTHLY RECOGNITION

Mechanicsville, Va., Unit 175 is recognizing its American Legion Family post veterans through a newly formed program dubbed the Honorable Veteran Program.

Unit President Fayth Heath shared the program came about as a way to enhance community awareness of local veterans, and at the same time, let veterans at their post home know how much they are appreciated.

"In recent years, I attended a number of ALA Department of Virginia conferences, conventions, and district conferences and gleaned valuable information about the many programs that support the four pillars of the mission of The American Legion," recalled Heath. "It seemed easy to garner support for the care and comfort of our veterans, the military, and their families; however, it seemed that little was directed at our own post's Legion members."

Heath shared her idea with Elizabeth Navas, District 13 president and chair of the unit's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Committee, who recalled being floored by the idea.

"We spend our time scouring our communities looking for someone to help, honoring those who currently serve, caring for our veteran families and our communities at large, but often forget that our members may need a simple 'tip of the hat' that

shows we see their sacrifice to our country and appreciate them too," said Navas. "As a unit, we jumped at the chance to honor our own."

To recognize Post 175 veterans, the unit works with Post Commander Warren Rice to choose two members each month and present each with a proclamation certificate of honor, as well as placing a yard sign highlighting the honor in each recipient's yard. In addition to the yard signs, members place 13 4x6-inch sticks mounted with the American flag, representing the number of their district.

For those members who do not have a yard, a placard was created that could be placed on the veteran's front door. When



HONORING VETERANS: Virginia Unit 175 created the Honorable Veteran Program to honor local veterans for all they have done for others and continue to do.

the yard/door sign and flags are installed, the certificate of appreciation is given to the recipient and photos are taken. At the ceremony, honorees are given the opportunity to share stories of their military and community service, as well as their time as members in The American Legion Family.

Criteria for the award can include the length of time of their membership in The American Legion, service to the local community, or any other criteria that the commander finds appropriate to honor.

The first two recipients were Jackson Ward, a 34-year member of The American Legion who served in the U.S. Air Force, and Dr. Robert Evans, a 51-year member of The American Legion who served in the U.S. Navy. Both received honors for being the longest serving members of The American Legion post.

Unit 175 continues to recognize veterans each month, and the response has been overwhelmingly positive.

"We may never know how the community feels about our show of support, but our veterans have certainly received a much needed, renewed sense of mission importance," said Navas. "We love our veterans — every one of them — and we are happy to show them the depth of our gratitude for what they have given to this country."

Tips on honoring veterans in your post home

- **Recognize them with a certificate or special gift.** Presenting a certificate in their honor is one way to bestow accolades, but we can also recognize our amazing veterans and members with small gifts, gift cards, or flowers.
- **Host a special event in their honor, or have a ceremony during one of your existing events.** These can be anything from small impromptu get-togethers and coffee hours to planned luncheons or dinners.
- **Recognize honorees with a shout-out on social media.** Create appropriate posts on your unit's social media accounts to highlight veterans and recognize members.
- **Say "Thank you."** Our veterans and members do what they do because of their commitment to service and compassion for others. Perhaps the most important thing we can ever do is simply say "Thank you."





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



COMING UP:

In between issues of *Auxiliary* magazine, you can follow the latest news from American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters digitally on the ALA blog, social media, ALA eNews, and our website. Here's a look at military holidays and ALA events happening soon:

- Aug. 4 – U.S. Coast Guard birthday
- Aug. 7 – Purple Heart Day
- Aug. 22-28 – ALA National Convention in Tampa, Fla.
- September – National Suicide Prevention and Awareness Month
- Sept. 11 – Patriot Day
- Sept. 18 – U.S. Air Force birthday
- Sept. 19 – National POW/MIA Recognition Day
- Sept. 28 – Gold Star Mother's and Family's Day
- Oct. 13 – U.S. Navy birthday
- Oct. 26 – National Day of the Deployed
- Nov. 10 – U.S. Marine Corps birthday
- Nov. 10 – American Legion Auxiliary 106th birthday
- Nov. 11 – Veterans Day



ALA'S NATIONAL CONVENTION IN TAMPA

Can't make it in person to National Convention this year? Don't worry — we will keep you updated throughout the week on our socials and through our livestream service! Follow along anywhere with these online options:

- Livestream: www.ALAforVeterans.org
 - Facebook and Instagram: @ALAforVeterans
 - Blog posts: www.ALAforVeterans.org
 - If you are attending, post photos on social media and tag us!
- Hashtags to use:
#AmericanLegionAuxiliary
#ALAforVeterans
#AuxCon25



FREE ONLINE RESOURCES ALWAYS AVAILABLE TO ALA MEMBERS

The ALA website provides members with templates, recruitment tools, member discount information, unit/department membership material, and so much more. Log in to the MyAuxiliary member portal at www.ALAforVeterans.org. Here are a few free resources you may find helpful:

- Media, banner, poster, PowerPoint, newsletter, and stationery templates
- Virtual meeting backgrounds
- ALA brochures
- Public relations toolkit
- ALA youth coloring books
- American Legion Flag & Emblem Sales information
- Donation can templates
- And so much more!



STAY CONNECTED THROUGH ALA FACEBOOK GROUPS:

Join the ALA program/committee Facebook groups that interest you! These forums are designed for ALA members to discuss information, ask questions, and share ideas. Groups provide a safe place for organic discussion about your favorite programs. We encourage our members to use ideas that are shared, and

implement those ideas into action within your unit/district/department. The ALA has 22 Facebook groups and five ALA Junior Activities groups by division. Go to www.Facebook.com/ALAforVeterans → click "More" tab → click "Groups" button. Answer a couple of ALA questions to join the group you're passionate about.

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY

Go live or at your own pace with ALA Academy!



Log in with your member ID today at www.ALAforVeterans.org, or scan here:



LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES:

- Lunch-and-learn webinars
- Evening webinars
- Recordings of previous webinars
- Self-paced courses

Watch our social media channels @ALAforVeterans for upcoming course information!

“The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members.”

— Coretta Scott King, American author, activist, and civil rights leader



American Legion Auxiliary units are in thousands of communities, both here and abroad. In the U.S., we encourage residents and businesses to proudly display the American flag. Our members are in schools teaching the next generation about patriotism. We are an integral part of our communities — from participating in summer parades to distributing poppies on major military holidays. Our commitment to our communities has run deep since 1919, and we aren't slowing down.

Above: For over 65 years, Wisconsin Unit/Post 469 have sponsored a community event, Marathon Fun Days. The event includes a carnival, food, entertainment, a Kiddy Day, and a parade.



AUXILIARY

American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters
3450 Founders Road, Indianapolis, IN 46268

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

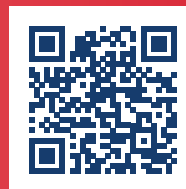


Auxiliary Members Need Your Help

If you're an ALA member facing serious financial hardship due to a natural disaster or personal crisis, the Auxiliary Emergency Fund (AEF) national grant program is here to help.

For those looking to support fellow members in need, your donation can make a real difference. Help us ensure the AEF is ready to respond today and in the future.

Scan here
to make a gift
today:



Feeling inspired to make a difference?
Learn more at www.ALForVeterans.org/AEF.