

American Legion

Auxiliary



February 2026 \$3.75

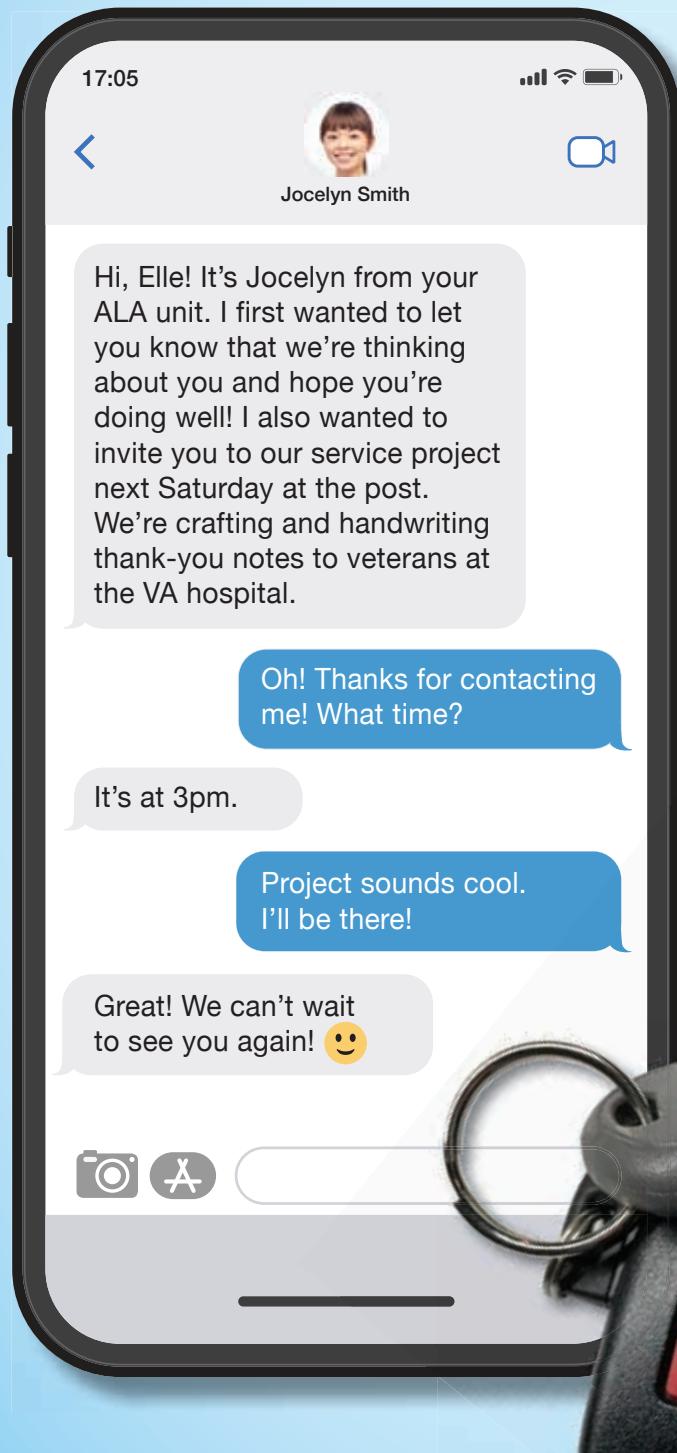
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Member retention is critical. Consider gathering active members in your unit to devise a plan on re-engaging people you haven't heard from in months ... or even years. You'll help the ALA and our mission of serving veterans, military, and their families.



Auxiliary

contents



FEATURES

26 HELPING EACH OTHER

The Auxiliary Emergency Fund is available for members in need of hardship and disaster assistance.

30 MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Young people are recognized with the ALA's Youth Hero and Good Deed awards.

IN EVERY ISSUE

4 NATIONAL PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

6 NHQ AT YOUR SERVICE

9 OUR READERS RESPOND

10 JUNIOR MEMBERS

12 HEART OF THE MISSION

14 MISSION FOCUSED

35 IMPACT ALA!

43 VALUE OF WHAT WE BRING TO THE MISSION

44 ALL THINGS ALA GIRLS STATE/NATION

45 ALA SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS: WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

46 LEGION FAMILY IN ACTION

48 WISE PERSON SAID

49 MISSION MATTERS

50 WE'RE DIGITAL

51 THE LAST WORD

ON THE COVER: Graduation day for U.S. Army basic combat training soldiers at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., before they are sent to their respective advanced individual training (photo by Aaron Meyer/ALANHQ).

ABOVE: Juan and Guadalupe Macareno visit the grave of their son, Marine Cpl. Juan Martin Rincon Macareno Jr. at Houston National Cemetery (Brett Coomer/*Houston Chronicle* via AP).



FAMILY FOCUS (above): National President Pam Ray with the Beebe, Ark., Legion Family. Bottom right: wreath laying at Arlington National Cemetery with American Legion National Commander Dan Wiley and Sons of The American Legion National Commander Bill Clancy (photo: Maansi Srivastava/The American Legion).

I hope you all had a wonderful Thanksgiving and a blessed holiday season. So much has happened in the few short months I have been traveling.

By Feb. 1, I will have visited 22 departments! I'm always amazed by our departments and all they do. How everyone works our programs is different. That is great! What works in the Northwest may not work on the East Coast or in the South, but the fact remains that you are doing the work of our mission.

Thank you to the units and departments that have donated to our national fundraising focus, Spirit of Youth Scholarships. What better way to mentor our leaders of today and tomorrow than to provide them with funds to further their education? If you would like to send a donation directly to ALA National Headquarters, that would be greatly appreciated. To donate, text SPIRIT to 1-844-940-3450 or go to www.ALAforVeterans.org/scholarships/spirit-of-youth.

The American Legion Family's Be the One mission is growing. If you attended a Mission Training, you saw how communities are

supporting this vital mission as well. The Legion Family of Beebe, Ark., held a Be the One walk in November. The community came out and supported this all-important mission. Way to go, Beebe American Legion Family!

I hear stories every day from friends and family who have loved ones who have died by suicide. In Washington, D.C., I visited Access Housing. On the wall was an article about a veteran who had served in Iraq. He never saw the article — he died by suicide before it was published. Remember: We never know what a person is struggling with. A good lesson for us all: Listen and help. And always be kind.

On Nov. 11, I was honored and humbled to represent all of you at Arlington National Cemetery's Veterans Day ceremonies. American Legion National Commander Dan Wiley, Sons of The American Legion

National Commander Bill Clancy, and I laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. ALA National Vice President Dr. Coral May Grout, along with American Legion National Vice Commander Steve Weismann, and Sons of The American Legion National Vice Commander Chris Casey, laid a wreath at the Vietnam Memorial and the Women's Memorial.

I certainly thought of my dad more than usual that day. The pride I have as his daughter is my reason for doing what I do. We need to continue to remember our eligibility — living or deceased. It will reignite our passion on a daily basis and keep us focused on the mission today and every day. By living our obligation,



we will be Mission Driven and Family Focused because we are better together.

Pam Ray
Pam Ray
National President

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WEBINAR AT WORK: Pictured are presenters (from left) Tamara Shumate, Chris Dickey, and Raushanna Christman during a governance/Constitution & Bylaws webinar via the ALA Academy.

New members and seasoned members — we're sometimes thrown into situations where we could use a little ALA guidance.

Take this scenario, for instance: Your unit Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Committee chair transferred

to another unit, so you stepped in because the important vacancy needed to be filled. You wanted to do a good deed, but now

what? Where do you go for some educational materials to learn more about this program?

The national website at www.ALAForVeterans.org has a multitude of resources available for all members. Another excellent training tool: the ALA Academy. This online bank of

courses and webinars on nearly every Auxiliary-related subject matter you can think of will be your best friend. And it's not just for the newbies — we offer a great deal of topics for members who are looking to advance their mission outreach knowledge.

Don't miss the live ALA Academy webinars! You can find out more about the upcoming courses via page 41 in this issue of *Auxiliary*, plus our social media at @ALAforVeterans.



Speaking of social media, we need to make sure our followers have a heads up: The spammers are getting better. They've been disguising themselves as military servicemembers and commenting on our members' comments by tempting you to "friend" them. Please be vigilant in what you click on or who you converse with. Not everyone is a good guy or gal.



AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY

A Community of Volunteers

Serving Veterans, Military, and their Families
February 2026

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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.

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



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Always available on the ALA blog: stories about our mission and members

“Thank you!”
— Julie

“Congratulations!”
— Evelyn

“Must-read poem! A lot
of thought went into it!
Thank you!”
— Sandra

North Carolina unit member brings community together for veteran cause

For a student still in high school and an American Legion Auxiliary unit that's one of the smallest in its state, planning and hosting a large-scale event to raise awareness for charity in only months might seem impossible.

But Lauren Godfrey and ALA Unit 436 in Angier, N.C., are proving that passion for a cause, dedication to succeed, and support from others can make the impossible possible.

“People would tell me, ‘I don’t know if that’s going to work. I don’t know how you’re going to get that done in such a short time frame,’” said Godfrey, who is now a freshman at North Carolina State University in Raleigh. “I’ve always been the type of person who, if you tell me I can’t do something, I’m going to try even harder to do it.”

Read more online!

Poppy presentation at ALA Girls State inspires poem

Participants in ALA Girls State programs learn more than just politics. They often discover more about themselves and gain more confidence. 2025 ALA Magnolia Girls State (Mississippi) attendee Madison Waters developed an appreciation for government, but she also honed her talent as a writer.

Waters said she always wanted to write plays and still plans to pursue that dream, but at ALA Girls State, her writing took another direction.

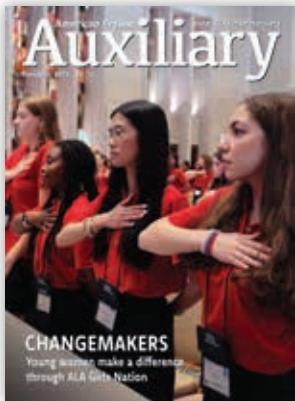
“ALA Girls State taught me how politics and advocacy can affect the world, so I’ve started to integrate more themes of social justice into my work,” said Waters. “I’ve started using my art as a tool to express my opinions instead of just creating something to be entertaining or good.”

Read more online!

“Excellent!”
— Carmen

“Thank for your service.”
— Judy

Check out these blog posts and more
at ALAforVeterans.org/blog.



**Poem published in November
Auxiliary magazine reestablishes
the meaning of the poppy to an
ALA member**

I am not a big fan of poetry, but the one by Madison Waters titled *Poppies on the Floor* (November 2025) not only caught my eye but



**Wisconsin VAMC sends
thanks for Auxiliary support**

On behalf of the Clement J. Zablocki VA Medical Center patients and staff, we would like to extend our appreciation to you for your donation of American Legion Auxiliary magazines for veterans. 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. Thank you for your continued support and advocacy.

— Bradlee J. Gietzel,
Wisconsin

**Dual member celebrates
milestone birthday**

We have a young lady who turned 102 years young on Veterans Day. She is a dual member as she was a Marine, and her husband was also a veteran. Her name is Lucy Engbring. Lucy has 11 children. She is as vibrant as a young person.

— Pamela Coplin, Illinois

brought tears. The last few times I bought a poppy, I proudly displayed it on my rearview mirror in hopes of inspiring others to see them as symbols of our gratitude for those who fought for our freedom ... not something that ends up in the trash. Bless you, Madison.

— Luann Kathol, Arkansas

**Unit 436 thankful for
Be the One 5K article**

On behalf of Lauren and all of our American Legion



Family, I would like to thank you for the excellent publication in the November ALA magazine. Reading it brought tears! You truly have a committed passion for your work, which shows not only in your writing, but in your interview skills. I am confident that sharing your article nationwide with other units — especially the smaller ones — will have a significant impact on the mission of our Auxiliary.

— Jo-Anne Martin,
North Carolina

**Wisconsin ALA unit helps USO
with donations**

American Legion Auxiliary Department of Wisconsin Senior Vice Amy Luft aids in dropping



off-in-kind donations from ALA Peter Wollner Unit 288 to the USO of Milwaukee.

— Natalia Genovesi-King,
Wisconsin

Correction: In the Members Speak Out section of the November 2025 Auxiliary magazine, we inadvertently printed that Jammie Phillips is from Wisconsin when it should have read Arkansas. We regret the error.

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NATIONAL JUNIOR MEETINGS CONTINUING TO BRING POSITIVE IMPACT ON YOUTH

Juniors and young Sons of The American Legion have already attended two of the 2025-2026 national Junior meetings, with a few more taking place shortly after this issue of *Auxiliary* hits mailboxes.

The annual meetings give participants an opportunity to make new friends from other states, work on a mission-focused service project, make crafts and play games, and learn more about what it means to be an ALA member and a member of the

Legion Family.

National Junior meetings in this administrative year included coloring America 250 birthday hats in celebration of the country's milestone birthday in July, learning lessons focused on National Security and Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, and more information on scholarships and the Patch Program.

Follow our socials @ALAforVeterans for information about upcoming national Junior meetings.

JUNIORS LEARN THE PLEDGE IN ANOTHER LANGUAGE

American Legion Auxiliary Junior members attending the national Junior meetings across

the country have learned the Pledge of Allegiance in American Sign Language (ASL).

“It’s been on my radar for a long time,” said ALA National Headquarters Senior Program Coordinator Kristin Hinshaw.

She had seen a document showing how to do it on The American Legion’s website and then saw a Facebook post of Illinois Juniors learning how to sign it. If two kids can teach other Juniors, National Headquarters can teach this too, she said.

After learning that a couple of staff members already knew how to sign

the pledge, a video was made so all of the Juniors attending the meeting could learn it together.

“It was a big hit, and the kids loved it,” Hinshaw said. “It’s in the agenda to come back to it a couple of times during the meeting for the kids to practice together on site and learn it.”

Hinshaw encourages senior members who had a Junior attend one of the meetings to ask that Junior to demonstrate how to do the pledge in ASL.

Learning this is a positive educational tool for participants.

“The pledge is important to members, and this helps open it up to more people,” Hinshaw said.



FUN FIGURINE TEACHES PATRIOTIC PRIDE

The ALA “Little Liberty” gnome made its debut at this year’s national Junior meetings.

Juniors and Sons of The American Legion youth enjoyed trading one of three figurines with each other.

The little gnomes are reminiscent of other figurines that have been passed around and collected, as well as finding and sharing kindness rocks. It made sense to add the gnomes to the Junior meetings.

Junior members are encouraged to give one out and say something like, “I’m a member of the ALA, and patriotism is very important to



us. Here is Little Liberty to help you remember what is great about our country, our veterans, and our military.”

Kids were asked to take photos with the gnomes after

the National Junior meetings and email them to National Headquarters at JuniorActivities@ALAforVeterans.org to track all of the locations where Little Liberty could be found.

NEWEST PATCH HELPS SPIRIT OF YOUTH SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Juniors and school-aged Sons of The American Legion have been hard at work earning another patch to add to their ALA collection.

The Spirit of Youth (SOY) patch — added in August 2025 — can be earned by youth who raise funds for the ALA’s Spirit of Youth Scholarship.

For each year of age, it’s \$5. For example, a 10-year-old would raise \$50.

The patch was logical for ALA National Headquarters to create since the funds sponsor the scholarships for Junior members. And Juniors and Sons love new patches as part of the ALA Patch Program, creating a good fit.

Youth can choose how they want to raise the funds — bake sales, speaking at an Auxiliary or Legion meeting, community events, and more.

The Spirit of Youth Scholarship is an umbrella that supports three separate scholarship opportunities for participants in American

Legion Auxiliary programs. One is for American Legion Auxiliary Junior members, another for the Junior Members of the Year, and one is for participants in the American Legion Auxiliary Girls Nation program.

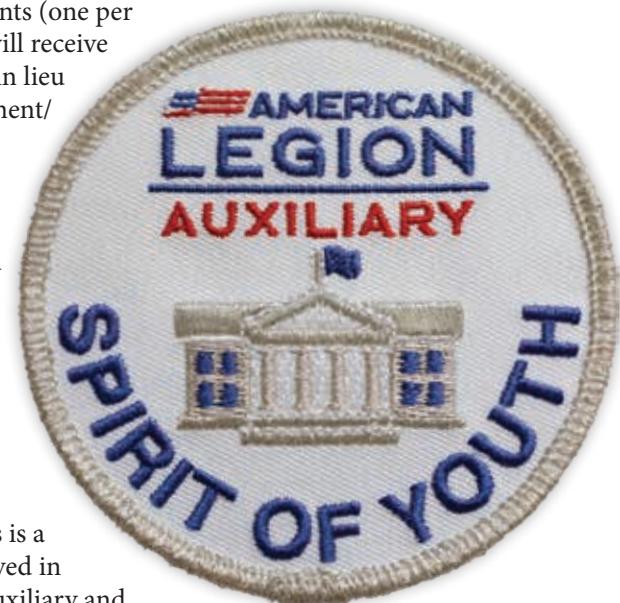
National Headquarters awards one department/state recipient a scholarship of \$1,000. From the potential 52 department/state scholarship recipients, the national Education Committee will select five recipients (one per ALA division) who will receive a \$5,000 scholarship in lieu of the \$1,000 department/state scholarship.

Patches for the ALA Patch Program can be earned for activities in Auxiliary programs such as Poppy, Leadership, Americanism, Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, and more, as well as fundraising, such as SOY. Earning patches is a good way to be involved in learning about the Auxiliary and

The American Legion Family, volunteering in the community, and serving our country’s veterans.

To learn more about the Patch Program, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/Member-Committees/Junior-Member-Activities/Patch-Program.

SOY is the national fundraising focus for 2025-2026. To donate, text “SPIRIT” to 1-844-940-3450.



PENNSYLVANIA ALA MEMBER PUTS TOGETHER SCRAPBOOK TO HONOR LOCAL VIETNAM CASUALTIES

Sometimes what we think is a simple, straightforward project becomes much more. That's where American Legion Auxiliary member Kelly Moyer found herself after being asked by local VFW Vietnam Memorial Post 4200 in Tire Hill, Pa., to create a scrapbook with biographies of 77 local Vietnam War killed in action.

Moyer realized her plan should change from the project's original scope.

Her initial thought of a book with 77 pages — one for each casualty — shifted into a scrapbook of roughly 300 pages taking four years to research while juggling her American Legion Auxiliary responsibilities, like Pennsylvania department president.

Digging through various sources in her research such as newspaper articles, the virtual Vietnam War Wall, bridge dedications, and talking to family members, Moyer's perspective of veterans was altered.

Moyer joined the ALA to honor her grandfather and father-in-law. Her grandfather never talked about his time in the service, so the project gave her a chance to understand him and other veterans a bit more.

Growing up, her vision of a

servicemember was an adult. During this project, she viewed the military members she researched as boys — many of them 17 and 18 years old when they were deployed.

"I call it a work of love. It gave me a new, not respect, but it's just I never realized what these young men went through when they went off to war," Moyer said. "All I know is my grandfather went to war, and he never talked about his time in the war."

This project — though solemn — opened her eyes and broadened her understanding. While she was completing the scrapbook, she wanted to not only honor the young men and their memory but also represent the tragedy.

"I had a hard time deciding how I wanted to put the book together," Moyer said. "I would make a page, rip it apart ... because it's a solemn book. It's full of sad stories."

In her research, she came across various stories like U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Elwood Eugene Rumbaugh, who was deployed in Cambodia for two days before he was killed in action and his body was never recovered.

To convey the solemnity, Moyer decided to design the



RECOGNITION TIME: ALA Department of Pennsylvania member Kelly Moyer is honored for creating a scrapbook with biographies of local Vietnam War servicemembers killed in action.

book in black and white.

It became a 300-page book due to the amount of information available for some servicemembers, with some men having six pages and others two.

"Every man was different because they each have their own different story," she said. "Some had a lot of information. Some had none."

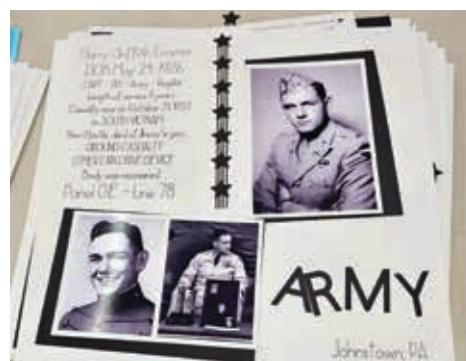
In the book, Moyer also includes messages left on the virtual wall, like those of a wife who annually leaves a message for her husband marked as missing in action. She never remarried.

VFW Vietnam Memorial Post 4200 held a ceremony and presented a plaque to Moyer to show their appreciation of her hard work.

Though honored by the recognition, Moyer's reward was providing a physical representation of these men.

"I'm not one to do something to get credit or be put on the news," she said. "I do it because I fell in love with [the ALA]."

While working on the project, Moyer found the importance of listening and telling veterans' stories. She encourages her fellow Auxiliary members to research their own loved ones' histories during service and listen to local veterans who tell their stories.



MEMBERSHIP ELIGIBILITY EXPLAINED

**Know a potential member?
Use this information for recruiting!**

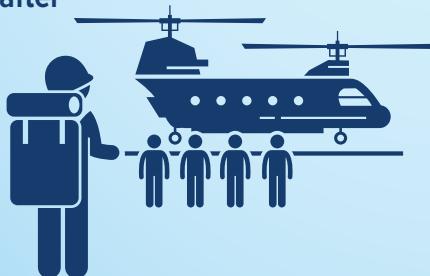
RELATIONSHIP TO VETERAN:

- ★ MOTHER
- ★ DAUGHTER
- ★ SISTER
- ★ GRANDMOTHER
- ★ GRANDDAUGHTER
- ★ SELF — FEMALE VETERANS WHO HAVE SERVED
- ★ MALE or FEMALE SPOUSE



ELIGIBILITY PERIODS:

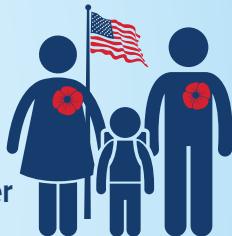
April 6, 1917, to Nov. 11, 1918;
and anytime after
Dec. 7, 1941



TWO PATHS FOR ALA ELIGIBILITY:

PATH ONE:

The potential member is related to a living veteran by one of the relationships stated at left and the veteran is living AND a current member of The American Legion.



If the potential member is a female veteran, she only needs to have served during the eligible time periods to be eligible for ALA membership.

PATH TWO:

The potential member is related to a deceased veteran who served during the eligible time periods and was honorably discharged.



The deceased veteran did not have to be a member of The American Legion in order for the potential member to join the ALA.

“Freedom is nothing else but a chance to be better.”

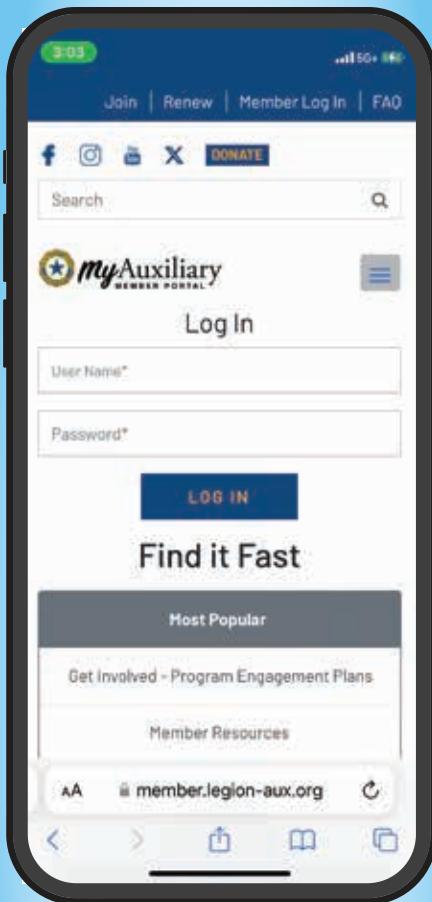
— Albert Camus, 20th century French-Algerian writer, philosopher, and journalist



American Legion Auxiliary members have a strong love of our country, freedom, and flag. The love of those Stars and Stripes and what they represent is what drives us every day toward our mission of helping our nation's veterans, military, and their families. The flag is an impactful part of our lives. We are honored to give respect to Old Glory and those who vow to protect her.

Above: The submarine tender USS Emory S. Land (AS 39) flies the national ensign during the Marine Corps Base Camp Blaz Reactivation and Naming Ceremony (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Luke Wilson).

Find it Fast!



Guides, marketing templates, program engagement plans, and more! It's all in the MyAuxiliary member portal.

Go to ALAforVeterans.org and click Member Log In.

During the winter, what activities does your unit do to stay active and involved in our mission?



“Our unit makes valentines for veterans and care center residents in late January to be delivered in February. We also gather in April and decorate and fill May Day baskets for our local veterans and hand-deliver them on May Day.”

— Cheryl Latham, Minnesota



“Unit 360, New Paris, Ohio: free veterans dinner, Poppy Fund raffle basket, monthly dinner for members and community in November. Shopping for the Toys for Kids Program and food baskets for the needy in the county.”

— Joann Ponder, Ohio



“ALA Unit 60 in Pulaski, Tennessee: We did a chili cookoff with great success, a turkey shoot raffle with the SAL, and coming up, we have a bake sale with the Riders.”

— Debbie McBride-Childress, Tennessee



“American Legion Auxiliary Unit 633 has an ongoing essential needs drive for those in need and veterans.”

— Ann Molina, New York



“Colder months are some of our busiest! We start with our monthly Steak Fry the first Saturday of the month. We also visit our veterans in the local nursing home. We continue our regular activities — weekly members drawing on Thursday with a meal, Treasure Hunt drawing on Friday, Cardo on Sunday, Bunco the second Wednesday of the month, Texas hold ‘em on Monday, and our always-active School Supply Drive.”

— Debi Hayes, Indiana



“We play Bunco — it is a great way to bring people to the Legion, provide the community with someplace to gather, and raises funds for our unit all at one time.”

— Tina Funchion, Illinois



“Unit 257 Michigan: Chili cook-off in January, Poppy Poster Contest in February.”

— Penny Wright, Michigan



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LOST WWII MEMENTOS RETURNED OVER 10 YEARS LATER THANKS TO ALA MEMBER

Memorabilia about a World War II veteran killed in action had been lost for more than a decade. When those materials turned up hundreds of miles away, it took American Legion Auxiliary member Katrin Phillips only about four hours to connect them to their owner.



Katrin Phillips

her whirlwind day of research and outreach. "I mean, it was better than any morning coffee you could have."

The story of Phillips' sleuthing takes place in September 2025. It was then that Vicki Hart, vice president of ALA Unit 81 in Lake Havasu City, Ariz., asked members for help investigating who owned a box dropped off at American Legion Post 81.



Francis O. Moore

Hart reported that someone had been driving on a local highway when the box had fallen from the back of a truck in front of them. The driver pulled



Larry Robbins

over to retrieve the box, which contained an old photo album and scrapbook, as well as paperwork and printouts of webpages.

The materials — some more than a century old — centered on Francis O. Moore of Gering, Neb., and his military service. The driver thought The

memorabilia about a World War II veteran killed in action had been lost for more than a decade. When those materials turned up hundreds of miles away, it took American Legion Auxiliary member Katrin Phillips only about four hours to connect them to their owner.

"It was a complete rush," Phillips said of

her whirlwind day of research and outreach. "I mean, it was better than any morning coffee you could have."

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over to retrieve the box, which contained an old photo album and scrapbook, as well as paperwork and printouts of webpages.

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REMEMBERING HEROES (Front row, from left): Cpl. Sheets, radio operator; Cpl. Jordon, left waist gunner; Cpl. Kincade, tail gunner; Cpl. Reeves, lower ball turret gunner; Cpl. O'Brien, right waist gunner. Back row: Lt. Levine, co-pilot; Lt. Mealer, bombardier; Staff Sgt. Rhodes, engineer; Lt. Schumm, navigator; and Francis O. Moore, pilot.

their owner.

Phillips volunteered to do the work. She immediately dug through the materials about Moore. He died just shy of his 22nd birthday in 1945 when the Army Air Corps B-17 he was piloting was shot down over Germany in WWII. The memorabilia chronicled everything from his parents' wedding to a telegram reporting he was killed in military action.

Among the materials, Phillips discovered items from 2003-2008 that suggested someone named Larry Robbins had compiled them.

"So now," Phillips said, "I had to research the researcher."

An online search led her to a 2019 obituary for Robbins, which listed Moore as his uncle who preceded him in death. Phillips found her researcher.

She contacted the funeral home and asked to be connected to his sister, Lois Robbins, whom the obituary listed as surviving. Less than an hour later, Phillips received a call from Nebraska.

It was Lois Robbins.

"I'm getting goosebumps as I'm talking about it now," Phillips said

as she told the story.

Phillips learned that Larry Robbins, who had briefly lived in Lake Havasu City, kept materials about his heroic uncle and added to them with his own research. The memorabilia had been missing since 2014.

"I thought they were long, long gone," Lois Robbins said of the mementos. "I couldn't imagine they would have survived. I got really excited because my uncle was really special to me. My mom told me stories, and I felt like I knew him a bit."

ALA Unit 81 sent the contents of the box to Lois Robbins, picking up the tab for shipping.

Phillips said she's glad she had the opportunity to be a part of such an important event for the family of a young pilot killed serving his country.

"This is one of those moments of unexpected hope," she said. "It takes a lot of time and effort and a little bit of emotional power and strength just to compile all this information. And to have that lost and then found again? I couldn't think of a greater wow factor."

USING DATA TO SUPPORT THE MISSION

A new study from the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy found that under 1% of charitable giving in the United States is given to organizations serving veterans, military, and their families. The inaugural Military & Veterans Community Index (MVCI) provides the most comprehensive landscape of charitable organizations serving this population.

Why does this research matter?

“Donors and nonprofits supporting servicemembers and veterans can use this data to help decide where their resources are needed most, whether for mental health services, housing, education, or other services,” said Jon Bergdoll, interim director of Data & Research Partnerships at the school. “The data helps us understand trends and gaps in giving. It can serve as a baseline to see where giving is today and how it has changed in the past 10 years.”

Should we worry about giving being such a low percentage?

Under 1% may be a shocking number, but it does add up to \$3.7 billion, up from \$2.6 billion in 2013 (adjusted for inflation). The percentage of giving doesn’t equal needs not being met; it just demonstrates where people are donating. The good news: There is room to grow. There are still funders and dollars to be had.

How can we use this data?

Organizations such as the American Legion Auxiliary can use this information to see if campaigns are moving the needle. Let’s use mental health as an example. Since 2013, giving for mental health grew by 178%. Why do you think that

is? Research doesn’t give us an answer; however, looking at the increase in awareness of this issue — from the Be the One mission and other mental health initiatives in the sector — may be moving that needle. With this data as a benchmark, you can compare it to initiatives and programming to see if the efforts are helping to move the needle when it comes to funding.

Other areas of growth

Another growth area was service animals, with an increase of 445%. This isn’t a surprise because we know there has been an increase in veterans who have a service animal, and the cost to obtain one and care for it is expensive. Knowing this data can better guide your giving by choosing to support ALA programs and ensures your donations have a direct impact on veterans’ needs, including

scholarships and financial hardship. The Veteran Projects Fund and the Veterans Creative Arts Festival funds directly support veteran initiatives.

However, even though funding for those two areas increased, it doesn’t mean the need no longer exists — it means that funding to assist with those needs is growing. It’s important to use this baseline with the needs we see in the community.

The bottom line: Use this data as a tool in the toolbox. It’s not going to answer all of your questions, but it can help you put the bigger picture together. Knowing where funding is going and where funding is needed is important as we plan our fundraising goals and service to veterans, military, and their families.

You can read the full report on the MVCI database at MVCIndex.org.

Key findings of this study:

- **Giving to organizations serving veterans, military, their families, and caregivers consistently accounts for under 1% of total U.S. charitable giving.**
- **This charitable giving reached \$3.7 billion in 2023, after a \$4 billion peak in 2022, up from \$2.6 billion in 2013 (inflation-adjusted).**
- **Mental health funding more than doubled from 2013 to 2023.**
- **Organizations providing service animals have seen the fastest growth — up 445%.**
- **The top services focusing on family support included mental health, survivor care and memorializing, housing, and employment and transition.**
- **The total number of supporting organizations declined in 9 out of 10 years studied.**

Source: Military & Veterans Community Index





FOCUSING ON ALL FAITHS: HOW CHAPLAINS AND MEMBERS CAN AVOID EXCLUSION

The Four Chaplains Memorial Foundation honors the memory of military clergymen from different religions who banded together in heroic acts, sacrificing their own lives to save others.

The Philadelphia-based organization's Executive Director Bill Kaemmer works to carry on this tradition of interfaith cooperation by encouraging individuals and groups to set aside differences to serve others.

Those differences include religion.

"What bound these four guys together was the fact that they had a really strong belief in humanity," Kaemmer said of the chaplains for whom the group is named. "And I think that's how chaplains need to act within an organization."

Putting humanity first requires chaplains and other members of the American Legion Auxiliary to be mindful of the many different religions that those in their units may practice. It requires an emphasis on

spirituality when offering prayer or guidance, instead of references to individual faiths.

2025-2026 ALA National Chaplain Nancy Magginnis understands how difficult it can be to refrain from focusing on a specific religion. But as a Christian, she said she works hard to ensure that she is conscious of other faiths, even as she honors her own.

"We want to include everyone in the things that we think, do, and say," she said.

Kaemmer and Magginnis provided suggestions to help ALA members offer the kind of inclusive prayer and guidance that Four Chaplains encourages. Here are four key tips:

1. Celebrate spirituality. The Army emphasizes the importance of thinking about something bigger than oneself. "The challenge for chaplains,"

said Kaemmer — who served in the Army's Chaplain Corps for 30 years — "is to get people to think outside of their lives and how they affect other people."

2. Enlist help. When ALA chaplains and other members prepare to pray with members of other faiths, those who practice that religion can be a resource. "I know a lot of chaplains," Kaemmer said. "So, often I will call them and say, 'Hey, I've got to talk in front of this group. What are your recommendations?'"

3. Be mission-focused. Just as the ALA's mission puts service first, so should the practice of providing spiritual guidance, said Magginnis. "If we can start by setting aside our religious differences, then I think that helps us in the long run when other issues come up."

4. Compile resources.

Kaemmer recommended compiling procedures and information to share with the next chaplain or anyone else who might be asked to offer prayer or guidance. "If you're doing an event," he said as an example,

"have something that says, 'Here's how we did it, here's where we held it, here's the contact, and here are some prayers I learned.'"

Ultimately, Kaemmer said honoring all ALA members' religions is about aligning with the motto of Four Chaplains: Unity without uniformity. "We're not trying to build congregations," he said. "We're trying to teach people to do acts of selfless service in the community and to teach people the idea of interfaith cooperation."

"We're trying to teach people to do acts of selfless service in the community and to teach people the idea of interfaith cooperation."



GIVING BACK: Minnesota Auxiliary member Tami Paul and her husband, Adam, pose with their back-to-school kits. Paul made 250 kits for the USA 250 Challenge for the community service category.

AUXILIARY MEMBERS CELEBRATE AMERICA'S 250TH BIRTHDAY PARTICIPATING IN DIFFERENT CHALLENGES

The American Legion is challenging The American Legion Family, veterans, and all Americans to celebrate America's 250th birthday in a uniquely Legion Family way. Members are challenged — either as an individual or as part of a team — to participate in three categories: community service, mental wellness, and/or fitness.

The yearlong initiative culminating on July 4 hopes to not only raise money for our veterans, but also encourage a commitment of physical activity, supporting mental health, and

serving our communities.

American Legion Family members are encouraged to engage in the challenge in any way they can.

To register, go to Legion.org/USA250. Registration is \$30 and you get your choice of a USA 250 Challenge T-shirt, or you can look at other USA 250 Challenge merchandise.

The American Legion Auxiliary is doing our part in this challenge. Read below to see how our members are participating:

Tami Paul, Minnesota

Paul made 250 back-to-school

kits with her husband for the community service category. She is now working on the fitness category by trying to walk 250,000 steps.

Sarah Wilson, Indiana

Wilson is completing the community service category by collecting 250 food items to distribute to veterans.

Dara Oliver, Florida

The Florida member rode over 250 miles on her bike for the fitness category. For the community service category, she delivered 250 shoes, blankets, and other necessities to the Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital in St. Petersburg, Fla. She is also wearing her USA 250 Challenge T-shirt and trying to talk to 250 people about the Legion Family while handing out applications. Along with that, she will be volunteering at least 250 hours to her Legion post, squadron, and unit.

Shannon Lee Widmer, New Jersey

Widmer will be making 250 sandwiches for her local shelter to fulfill the community service category.

Cathleen MacInnes, New York

MacInnes will be walking 250 miles for the fitness category.

Margaret Amos, Indiana

Amos is helping to challenge 250 members to donate \$1 to her unit's mental wellness challenge.

She is also challenging her fellow unit members to save their pennies for 250 days to donate to her Auxiliary unit. She hopes to reach out and connect to all of her unit's members and help give all members an opportunity to have a purpose and support veterans and community. The project aims to fulfill the community service category.



Check out page 46 in this issue of *Auxiliary* for even more information and ideas on the America 250 Challenge and how you and your unit can get involved in celebrating America's milestone birthday this year!



TWO LEADERS, ONE LEGACY: HOW GIVING AND VISION TRANSFORMED THE AUXILIARY

If you are a member of the American Legion Auxiliary, you've likely heard the name Helen Colby Small. She joined Ross Wilcox Unit 79 in Burlington, Wis., on Feb. 20, 1929, and upon her death in 1969, she bequeathed the bulk of her estate to the American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters. In her last will and testament, she declared, "All the rest and residue of my property of every nature, real, personal, and mixed, I give, devise, and bequeath to the American Legion Auxiliary national organization with headquarters at Indianapolis, Ind., to be used by said organization as the officers thereof shall see fit."

In spring 1970, the estate was settled and the ALA received approximately \$106,000 — the equivalent of about \$936,000 today — and a transformational gift with unlimited potential. Then-National President Marcella Davidson (1969-1970)

declared the funds would be used to start the Auxiliary Emergency Fund, and Small's gift would be endowed so the fund could live in perpetuity.

Small deserves recognition as a philanthropic trailblazer, but Davidson deserves equal credit. She ensured Small's gift was strategically used and laid the foundation for the Auxiliary Emergency Fund. Thanks to Small's bequest and Davidson's vision, the Auxiliary continues to assist members in financial

distress by providing AEF grants of up to \$3,000. Small's fiscal planning ensured her generosity would live on, and her example reminds us that reviewing our own financial and estate plans today can help secure the future of the Auxiliary's mission.

As we ease into 2026, February is a great time to review finances, begin tax preparations, and update estate documents. Gifts like Small's do not go as far without written instructions from the donor, and there's no better time to document your giving intentions. Oftentimes, donors include beloved organizations in their last will and testament as a final act of devotion. It is a way for them to ensure the mission work continues after their time serving has come to an end, but none of that can happen if you're not intentional about your wishes.

To learn more about your giving options or to notify ALA National Headquarters of your intent to include the Auxiliary or American Legion Auxiliary Foundation in your estate plans, please contact our Development Division at development@ALAforVeterans.org. Learn more about your planned giving options by visiting the ALA's website at www.ALAforVeterans.org/planned-giving.

We also honor the generosity of our Legacy Society members,



whose planned gifts will continue to support ALA programs for generations. Many thanks to:

Ann Crawford
Ann Fournier
Anne Parker
Carlene Ashworth
Dr. Coral May Grout
Desireé Stoy
Doris Hammek
Jane Montaney
Janet Jefford
Linda Boone
Linda Newsome
Lisa Williamson

Lynda Lancaster-Loyd
Marybeth Revoir
Nancy Brown-Park
Patricia Flaagan
Patricia Murray
Rita Navarreté
Sandra Sowers
Sharon Conatser
Tamara Shumate
We also remember those who have passed — In Memoriam legacy gifts that have left a permanent mark on the Auxiliary's mission:
Aileen Chitwood

Arvilla Norris
Barbara K. Smith
Ethel Wolansky
Grace S. Schulz
Helen Colby Small
Inez M. Shaffer
Jean Bender
Jeri Greenwell
Joyce Starr
Lillian Vitelli
Lois Lemke
Lydia Pickup
Marnette B. Ragon
Peggy Thomas
Rachel A. Grout



AD3 Sue McLendon, U.S. Navy
Adrian O. Klaeysen
All veterans
All who served
Andrew Barylski Jr.
Bill Chief Johnson
Carl Bromberg
Charles E. Grout
Clay Lofton
Clemens Schmidt and
Thomas Burkhalter
Dad, Mike, Ray, Tim
Dale E. Richard
Dale Phillips
Daniel A. Ward
Darrell J. Emery
David A. Reed
Derick Baxter
Donald F Killian Sr.
Donald George Popadince II
Donald Palmer Oliphant
Dr. Keith Boone
Dr. William Schamadan, Air
Force
Earl L. Comstock
Earl McMahon, CMS (Retired)
Edward Wayne Cooley
Emmet Elwood Lockhart
G. Michael Long
Gary Stanton
Gregory J. Avis

The third annual American Legion Auxiliary Foundation Veterans Day of Giving Honorees:

Harold Bals
Harold Lee Johns, World War II
Korea Vietnam
Hubert Gearld Fowler
James F. Hey
James Higuera
Jerome Kranig and Barbara
Kranig
Joe Hernandez
John D. Helm
John Macchio
Ken Lowe, GMG3 U.S. Navy
Kenneth L. OBrien
Linus J. Bertke
Lowell Huber
Lt. Col. William J. Flynn
Major Darrel K. Johnson
Marty Wilson
Mary Archambault
Michael Mort
My late dad, Philip E. Racquet,
Army WWII
Our veterans
Patrick J. Sullivan, USN
Perry Rowley
Ralph, Joyce, and John
Retired Staff Sgt. James "Ed"
McClung
Richard Dzinbal
Richard L. Milton
Richard L. Parrish

Richard Wm Anderson
Richard Young
Robert Akright
Robert Danner
Robert F. Wallace
Robert H. Thompson
Robert L. Billig
Robert Melgard and
Stanley Rapport
Robert S. Ellett
Robert Taylor
Robert Zavitz and
Kenneth Baldwin
Rodel Wilson and
Roland Vogel
Roger Brenneman
Rudy Kraemer
Sgt. William Patrick Rudd
Steve Isensee
Thomas Hanley
Tony Annesi and Richard Rowe
Troy Edwards,
SMC U.S. Navy (Retired)
Velter James Barrow Jr.
Veterans
Walter Lyndsey
William F. Kmelius
William J. Cook

*Honoree names are from gifts received Oct. 28, 2025 to Nov. 13, 2025.

WHAT DO YOUR GOVERNING DOCUMENTS SAY? A CLOSER LOOK AT THE APPEALS PROCESS TO THE NEC

A topic that keeps the governance team at ALA National Headquarters on its toes: appeals to the National Executive Committee (NEC). While many may think it's the final resource to attain instant justification and disciplinary action when a member is experiencing a problem, it is not quite that simple. We encourage unit and department members alike to take an opportunity to get familiar with your governing documents.

What are governing documents? These are your unit and department's Constitution, Bylaws, Standing Rules, and policies. This is the first place you should look when you are trying to decide how to handle a governance situation. National may be "the (wo)man behind the curtain" in a lot of aspects, but even the national organization has limited authority regarding governance of units and departments.

When it comes to the matter of filing an official appeal to the National Executive Committee, there are certain criteria that appeal must meet to be presented to the board committee, and the appeal process is limited to determining whether the proper procedures were followed. The NEC appeal process does not consider whether the original decision was "right" or "wrong," only whether it adhered to the correct process.

When someone submits an appeal via the national website, the appeal is first assessed by internal review by the governance

team. This group identifies what type of governance violation is being alleged and whether the allegations fall within the categories of review by the NEC. Appeals that reach the NEC will fall into one of two categories: violations of members' rights and violations of governing documents.

ACCEPTED APPEALS TO THE NEC

- 1. Violation of Members' Rights**
Principles of Fundamental Fairness
 - Proper notice
 - Right to be heard
- 2. Violation of Governing Docs**
 - Improper elections
 - Issues with quorum
 - Board reporting
 - External audits
 - Overstepping authority

The process actually begins at the unit level. If suspected governance violations have occurred at the unit level, these issues must first be brought to the attention of the unit. If a resolution cannot be found at the unit level, the member has the right to seek resolution through the department appeal process. If the member believes the issue is still unresolved after pursuing the department appeal process, then they may initiate the NEC appeal process. Remember: It's all about the process. So, how do you go about filing an appeal?

HOW TO MAKE APPEALS TO THE NEC

1. Online form
2. ALANHQ review
3. NEC accepts/rejects
4. Report to NEC/vote

When you decide to file an official appeal via the ALA national website, the governance team is notified. Your appeal will be acknowledged and reviewed to determine whether

it meets the appropriate criteria, and you will be notified. If the appeal meets the criteria, it will be presented to the National Executive Committee at a board meeting in executive session. It is important to know that the NEC votes to accept or reject appeals. If the appeal is accepted, a subcommittee will be appointed to investigate the claims of the appeal within a specified timeframe dictated by the national standing rules.

The subcommittee will investigate parties on both sides of the appeal, and, if needed, may ask for extensions during the process, which are also voted on by the NEC. When the investigation is complete, the subcommittee will submit a final report to the NEC outlining its findings and recommended remediation or disciplinary actions. The NEC is responsible for reviewing and voting on these recommendations.

While we all wish for expedited justification in tough situations, the reality is that oftentimes this process can take months, even pushing a year in some cases. It's not uncommon for appeals to span more than one ALA administration.

To ensure that all processes are being followed, a right to be heard is being given, and fundamental fairness is being allowed, you must be patient and cooperative. Keep in mind that when an appeal has been submitted, the claims being made are sometimes months to years in the making. If they have taken that long to progress, it can take that long to resolve them. Be vigilant in getting to know your governing documents so that you have a better idea of what the best course of action is for you. You can also utilize your unit or department parliamentarian for tough questions.



A LONG-AWAITED PURPLE HEART FOR WORLD WAR II VETERAN

Edward B. Meyer, United States Army World War II veteran, waited more than 50 years to receive a Purple Heart because of a paperwork error. Meyer is the late father of Department of Kentucky American Legion Auxiliary member Betty Butler.

Meyer was drafted into the Army in September 1941.

"Even though he was drafted, he didn't hesitate to go," said Butler. "He spent over three years overseas away from his family to defend our country."

He began his service in Hawaii where he qualified as a rifle sharpshooter, bayonet expert, and combat infantryman. He first saw combat on the island of Saipan and then later served as a staff sergeant in Okinawa.

Meyer served in Okinawa until he was injured during combat when a sniper shot him in the leg. He was then sent to a hospital in Guam to recover before being discharged. He returned home in August 1945.

Upon his return, his injury wasn't listed on his discharge papers, so he didn't receive a Purple Heart. Meyer didn't dispute it at that time because he was eager to get home to his family

and his farm.

In the late 1990s, a member of American Legion Post 204 in Sellersburg, Ind., learned that Meyer, who was 82, never received a Purple Heart. The member knew something needed to be done about it. He talked with Meyer, who decided he



Purple Heart

- The Purple Heart medal is awarded to a member of the U.S. Armed Forces who has been wounded, killed, or died of wounds received in combat.
- It's the oldest military award presented to U.S. servicemembers.
- Recipients of the award are honored annually on Purple Heart Day, Aug. 7.

Bronze Star

- The Bronze Star medal is awarded to a member of the U.S. Armed Forces for heroic or meritorious achievement or service in a combat zone.
- John McCain, Bob Dole, Ernest Hemingway, Henry Fonda, and Oliver Stone are all recipients of a Bronze Star medal.

We want to hear from you! Tell us about the veteran(s) in your life. Send an email to PR@ALAforVeterans.org. Your submission may appear in national ALA media.



wanted to get his medal so he could leave it to his family after he passed. The two began the process of getting his medal, and then-U.S. Rep. Lee Hamilton joined in to get the paperwork moving through the system. About a year later, Meyer received his Purple Heart and a Bronze Star.

Meyer received the medals just in time — he passed away about two months later.

"My mother received a letter from the president after he passed away," said Butler.

Influenced by their father's service, Butler's brother also served. He was in the National Guard from 1968-1974.

"I am proud of their service and all veterans who served our country and those still serving today," Butler said.



RECRUITING + RETAINING MEMBERS PART OF EVERYONE'S ROLE

It's hard to believe we are already in a new year! 2026 is a chance to start fresh on new ideas for recruitment, retention, working the programs, and more. Use that positive momentum of the start of a new year and recruit new members to the Auxiliary, as well as continue focusing on renewing current members.

Start off right for new members

New members are joining the Auxiliary for the first time in 2026. That means a lot of firsts this year — first time at a meeting, first time volunteering at an ALA event, first time bringing a Junior member to a meeting, and many other firsts that come along with being a new member of our storied organization.

Their initial impression of how they are made to feel at a meeting or outreach event will determine if they continue coming to in-person functions or not. It's crucial to ensure their first experiences and interactions are warm and welcoming — and that positive atmosphere continues for them into their first year of

membership, their fifth year, and so on.

When we think about new members, consider all of the ALA information they need to be successful. Following are just a few suggestions:

- A welcome letter from the unit president
- Why the ALA matters
- The unit's Constitution & Bylaws
- The unit's calendar of events
- A list of resources on where to find information
- A list of current unit officers to contact
- A list of acronyms you use at your meeting
- Junior Activities information

A great way to have a new member feel extra welcome is to have a seasoned member sit with them during the meeting to lead and guide them on what is taking place. Think back to when you first joined the ALA — think of ideas that would have made it better for you at the start of your membership, and implement those for your new unit member.

Current member renewals, new recruits still matter

By actively engaging with members, not only will they want to renew, but they'll share their stories with others about their experience with your unit. Word of mouth is one of the most valuable tools we have to help grow and enhance our organization's membership.

1. Remember our purpose.

The American Legion Auxiliary is focused on *Service Not Self* — we honor our veterans, military, and their families. We have a legacy of support and patriotism across the world.

2. Embrace your fear.

Talking to new people can be scary, but think of your experience in the ALA and all of the positive things you and your unit have done for your community. This is what you want to share with new members.

3. Focus on our impact.

How does your unit impact your community, your veterans, or your local military?

4. Be passionate. Make the person feel your excitement when you're sharing your positive stories about your experience.

5. You are not alone! You are not alone when it comes to serving. Many people want to serve and connect in their communities; they just don't know how or they have never been asked. By reaching out, you are asking them to be part of something great. Invite them to join you at a meeting or at an event. Even if they are not a member yet, let them meet unit members and get to know them. It may encourage them to join!

2025-2026 National
Membership Committee Chair
Tracy Kinnick contributed to this
article.



WEEKLY TRADITION CONTINUES TO SUPPORT DEPLOYED SERVICEMEMBERS

Many units across the country participate in R.E.D. Friday. The tradition stands for “Remember Everyone Deployed,” a weekly reminder that freedom is not free and that many of our brothers and sisters are still away from home protecting our way of life.

Auxiliary members nationwide actively wear red every Friday — until all troops come home.

American Legion Auxiliary Unit 259 members in Maryland proudly wear red to recognize and honor the men and women who serve our nation.

Unit 259 incorporates R.E.D. Friday into its ongoing mission of service. Whether it's through community drives, veterans' support programs, or youth outreach, members ensure military families know they have a network of support here at home.

“We are heavily involved in our community, and we are close to Andrews Air Force Base, and have a really good relationship with the readiness center there,”

said Unit 259 member and First Vice President LaTia Jones.

“When we are out and about, we try to educate the community about R.E.D. Friday. We definitely made it an initiative.”

The unit works hard to help new members understand the significance of wearing red on Fridays, as well as educate community members who attend bingo on Fridays who regularly see members in red shirts.

“We definitely try to encourage everyone to wear the red shirts on Fridays and we give them a poppy and special recognition and thank them,” Jones said.

It means a lot to the unit to participate in R.E.D. Friday and bring positive attention to those who are still deployed. The unit has a few members who are active duty, as well as dual members of the ALA and The American Legion, so members try to do what they can to remember those deployed.

“We do a lot of things together as one team — we honor those who are deployed and

we remember them,” she said. “We are a big American Legion Family and have been doing things together.”

For something seemingly small, wearing a red shirt on a Friday can make such a big impact to our servicemembers who are still deployed and help remind them that they are supported by the Auxiliary and The American Legion Family as a whole.

“To me, branding is everything and I believe it makes a big impact because we can tell people about a lot of things, but when people see unity and they see the shirts and see us in the community and know we are with the ALA, it creates a conversation,” Jones said. “Others can identify with that, even if they aren’t able to be in the Auxiliary. They may have a cousin or relative who is deployed and they can identify with that.”

Are you wearing red on Fridays? Be sure to share on your social media to help spread the word in our communities.



Our focus is always on our veterans, military, and their families. R.E.D. Friday gives an extra emphasis on those deployed, still showing our support until all servicemembers come home.



Through disasters and hardships Members helping members

By Sara Fowler

Hurricanes, floods, fires, tornadoes, or a personal crisis. The American Legion Auxiliary Emergency Fund (AEF) provides disaster and hardship assistance to ALA members.

Established in 1969, the AEF was created by then-National President Marcella Davidson and funded with a bequest from the estate of Auxiliary member Helen Colby Small of Burlington, Wis. Five decades later, the AEF is still helping fellow Auxiliary members get back on their feet.

Last fiscal year (October 2024 to September 2025), the ALA awarded over \$529,000 in AEF grants — the most impactful year on record. One hundred and seventy-eight Auxiliary members received grants for disaster assistance after enduring devastating events like fires, floods, and hurricanes. Another 96 members received grants for financial hardship to help them avoid homelessness and during crises like a medical emergency or job loss. The numbers represent stabilized families, safety, and hope.

Auxiliary magazine talked to a few members who were recipients of the funding, sharing the life-changing difference AEF made.

Tornado tears apart home

“It was absolutely terrifying,” recalled American Legion Auxiliary Department of Illinois member Amy Gebhart on being inside her house during a tornado in March 2025.

Gebhart, her wife, and Gebhart’s mother-in-law were living together in a double-wide manufactured home. Without a basement, they all huddled in the walk-in closet.

The first tornado warning had expired, she said. Then, a second was issued.

“I left the closet [before the second warning] and saw a window in the master bedroom bow toward me,” Gebhart recalled. “I got back in the closet and pulled the door shut behind me and felt air at my back.”

She estimated they probably had about 20 seconds from when the hail started to when they had to be in the closet. The hail was so loud the three women couldn’t hear each other talk, despite standing beside each other.

“As soon as we walked out of the bathroom closet, there was debris all over the floor, hail on our bed, the window was gone, rain coming into the house — water was puddling all over the hardwood floor,” she said.

“The hail was so heavy it had piled up against the front door. It looked like someone had bombed our house. Our house was shredded — you could see through the siding.”

The worst damage was on the front of their house.

“Houses south of us had the whole backend ripped off, water coming through fixtures, rooms were flooded, roofs destroyed,” she recalled seeing the neighborhood once they were able to get out of their home.



AEF FUNDING MAKES A DIFFERENCE (opposite page): Nancy Branch lost her home she’d lived in for over 70 years in California’s Palisades Fire. This page: ALA Illinois member Amy Gebhart received assistance to help rebuild her home after a tornado ripped through it in 2025.

Your generous support is the reason why we can continue helping members in need. You can donate to the AEF by scanning this QR code:





HOME DESTROYED: Ohio member Tresa "Tess" Kelly's home sustained severe damage and just about everything was lost during an early morning fire in 2024. After, an AEF disaster assistance grant helped her move forward.

Thank you for the AEF: Member sends gratitude for funding

I am writing to express my deepest gratitude for your incredibly generous and timely assistance with my back rent. I was facing an immediate eviction, and your support truly was a lifeline for me.

When I was at my most vulnerable, worried about losing my home, the AEF stepped in and provided the help I needed. Your act of kindness not only saved me from eviction but also gave me an immense peace of mind and a chance to get back on my feet. It's hard to put into words on how much this means to me.

The commitment of the AEF to supporting veterans and their families is truly remarkable and I am grateful to be a recipient of your compassion. Your actions demonstrated the true spirit of community service that AEF embodies.

Thank you again from the bottom of my heart for your extraordinary generosity. I will never forget the support you provided during this challenging time.

— Lisa Martel, New Hampshire

They lived with their house boarded up between March and June 2025.

"After we got a new roof, we could move back in," she said. "But we couldn't touch the windows, and the front door was still covered, so the only access was through the back door."

The drywall had to be re-hung, so everything was ripped down to the studs, and they lived like that for almost three weeks. They had to repaint the walls because debris had come inside and damaged them so badly.

"We needed the AEF money at that dire moment," Gebhart said. "We couldn't move home without that money. We wouldn't even be here. We couldn't move with our cat because we had a subfloor and couldn't move home until the flooring was done. We got the flooring because of the AEF funding."

Nightmare experiences like this are why the Auxiliary Emergency Fund exists to help ALA members in times of need.

Gebhart knew about the AEF before the disaster; she's been a member of the Auxiliary most of her life.

"It meant the world to us because it was so surreal when it happened," Gebhart said. "You see [disasters] on TV, and you know it's a possibility, and then it does happen and you see neighbors band together. Meant a lot for people to care. It meant a lot for me since I've been part of the American Legion Auxiliary."

To donors who contribute to the AEF, the couple is grateful for members helping members.

"We cannot thank you enough," she said. "It absolutely changes lives. Please continue to do that. We can never repay those people back enough. We didn't have money to pay for all this. Every penny helps immensely."

Fire destroys house

Department of Tennessee ALA member Peggy Monroe received her Auxiliary Emergency Fund grant years ago, but she continues to advocate for its importance and the difference it makes in the lives of Auxiliary members.

Monroe's husband was at work the day their house caught fire. It started in an outside furnace.

Monroe's 3-year-old son saw the fire — he was outside in the backyard when it started.

"I looked and saw the smoke," she recalled. "Once I saw my house was falling down, I just went blank and into a state of shock. I saved nothing from inside the house but my purse."

The fire was quite traumatizing for her son. The family couldn't use the grill for a few years because he

couldn't take the sight of flames.

Monroe had joined the Auxiliary in 1988 just three years before the fire. After the devastation happened, her unit president said she might be able to get help through the AEF and that she should apply.

"We found a house we could rent and for six months, that money went toward rent," she said. "Once we had a place to rent, we could get furniture. I really never forgot about AEF and always remembered the kindness."

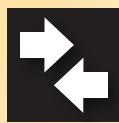
And what a difference that funding made.

"I love to share my story — that's when I started to get involved in the ALA and wanted to give back," she said.

For those who have never donated to the AEF, Monroe said the funding is always needed.

"I really think this is the second most important thing we have," she said. "Number one, our veterans. And number two, we have to take care of each other in times of disaster." ★

Disaster Assistance



An Auxiliary Emergency Fund grant may provide immediate emergency

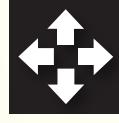
assistance to eligible American Legion Auxiliary members in areas devastated by a natural disaster, such as fire, flood, hurricane, tornado, earthquake, and/or other severe weather. The applicant must have either received damage to their primary residence, been displaced/evacuated from their residence, or experienced basic out-of-pocket emergency expenses as a result of the disaster. Grants may be awarded up to \$3,000.

Basic criteria for qualification

The applicant must be a current American Legion Auxiliary member. Junior members are not eligible to apply. Applicant must have maintained continuous membership for a minimum of 36 consecutive months, based on their initial join or rejoin date and the date in which the application is submitted. Disaster application must be received

within three months of the disaster. Applicant must be able to provide documentation such as photos of damage to the primary residence (exterior/interior/contents), itemized receipt(s) for emergency expenses, damage repair estimates, FEMA/insurance documents, current driver's license, and other information as requested. Only one AEF grant (disaster or hardship) per grantee will be awarded in a 12-month period.

Hardship Assistance



An Auxiliary Emergency Fund grant may provide temporary assistance to eligible American Legion Auxiliary members during a time of financial crisis to pay for past due expenses related to their primary residence, essential household utilities, or a recent verifiable loss of employment income by the member or spouse. Grants may be awarded up to \$3,000 with the intent to help members who have suffered a financial setback and offer a helping hand to help re-establish

financial stability. Assistance will not be granted to pay medical expenses, credit card debt, or any other expenses not related to shelter, basic household utilities, or recent loss of employment income.

Basic criteria for qualification

The applicant must be a current American Legion Auxiliary member. Junior members are not eligible to apply. Applicant must have maintained continuous membership for a minimum of 36 consecutive months, based on their initial join or rejoin date and the date in which the application is submitted. Applicant must be able to provide full copies of past due bills for shelter (mortgage statement or landlord letter), essential household utilities (electric, gas, water, sewer, trash), documentation for loss of employment income, and other information as requested. Only one AEF grant (hardship or disaster) per grantee will be awarded in a 12-month period.

For more information or to apply, visit www.ALforVeterans.org/AEF.

Recognizing our nation's youth for acts of valor and good deeds

By Sara Fowler

A memorial destroyed. A child 20 feet down in a well. A lost little boy. Two motorcyclists crash after a mudslide. These are just a few examples of scenarios that involved youth helping others, which culminated with them receiving an American Legion Auxiliary Youth Hero or Good Deed Award.

The two awards are presented throughout the year to recognize the heroism and leadership in community service of youth high-school aged or younger.

Since its inception, thousands of Youth Hero and Good Deed awards have been presented to deserving youth.

Nominations for the awards are made by individual ALA members or ALA units. The nominated youth doesn't have to be an ALA or American Legion Family member.

Good Deed: Arkansas memorial cleaned up

In September 2025, three teenagers — Enzo Dallaportas, Koda Aastrup, and Riley Morphew — from Northwest Arkansas came across a memorial that had been destroyed in front of the Benton County Courthouse. The three of them cleaned it up and put the memorial back together.

“Seeing these young men going out of their way to clean up a mess that someone else made is heartwarming,” said ALA member Michelle Henning, who nominated the boys.

She saw the news story on Facebook, and was grateful that someone was able to capture the job well done.



HONORED YOUTH: Enzo Dallaportas and Koda Aastrup are honored with Good Deed Awards from Post 77 Adjutant Rodney Robinson, Unit 77 President Michelle Henning, and Post 77 Commander Shawn Henning. Not pictured: Riley Morphew.

“I believe it is important for not only children, but adults to give back in their community,” Henning said about the importance of the award. “Recognizing children for their good deeds shows them that what they do is important, and hopefully they will carry it along to adulthood.”

The Good Deed Award helps get the ALA name out even more in communities.

“Locally, our community knows the Auxiliary will recognize youth who participate in doing good deeds,

so I think the program reflects positively on the community," she said.

The young men and their families were invited to an ALA meeting to receive their awards.

Recognition for actions can be a positive confidence builder for our nation's youth.

"I am an advocate for children and know that programs like this help children grow and feel confident about themselves," Henning said. "My own children were raised to give back and do good deeds daily, and that has now been passed down to my grandchildren."

Good Deed: Helping a lost boy

From the nomination form: While on summer vacation, the Zaleski family went for a walk on the beach after dinner. Ryder and Brayden Zaleski saw a little boy around 4 or 5 years old walking by himself with no one in sight. The boys started walking with him and asked who he was with. He said, "My mommy is lost," and he was looking for her and kept on walking. The boys called to their father, who came and asked him to call police with a description of him. At this point, the boy wanted to leave the beach as he told the brothers that a building looked like his. The brothers got down on their knees to be at eye level and learned his name was Jeffrey.

The police said Jeffrey had been reported missing

and told the boys to stay where they were. It took about five minutes for the first police officer to arrive, but Jeffrey would talk only to the brothers, who stayed on their knees and told him Mommy was found and coming to get him. It took another 10 minutes for Jeffrey's mother and two police officers to walk down the beach to where they were. The mother and police were amazed that Jeffrey walked so far down the beach, and while there were people on the beach, no one but the boys noticed him alone. The police praised them for keeping Jeffrey from going any further or off the beach, and for their actions in getting Jeffrey to talk and stay with them.

"At first, I wasn't sure what was going on, just that they were talking to a little boy," said Ellie Zaleski,



ASSISTING ANOTHER:
Brayden Zaleski, top, and
Ryder Zaleski helped a little
boy who was walking alone
along a beach. The boys
earned a Good Deed Award
helping the boy reunite with
his mother.

What's the criteria for ALA Youth Hero and Good Deed awards?

Youth Hero Award

Recipients receive a medal and certificate.

- Demonstrates a physical act of valor.
- Serves as an inspirational role model for the organization and the community.
- American Legion Family membership is not a requirement for consideration.
- Examples:
 - Performing the Heimlich maneuver
 - Rescue from fire or water peril
 - Performing CPR
 - Providing assistance in a medical situation

Good Deed Award

- Project demonstrates leadership in community service by planning, organizing, and executing a service project.

- Project must be initiated by the youth being nominated.
- American Legion Family membership is not a requirement for consideration.
- Examples:
 - Planning, organizing, and preparing a Veterans Day dinner
 - Arranging for donations to a charity instead of birthday presents
 - Organizing an event to fill backpacks for homeless veterans and arranging for their distribution

To nominate, fill out the form online at www.ALforVeterans.org/Youth-Hero-Good-Deed-Awards. The form then goes through ALA National Headquarters and you will be notified if more information is needed, if it's not applicable, etc.



LENDING A HAND: Hannah Kopmeyer was serving as ceremonial bugler during a POW/MIA ceremony when an elderly Honor Guard member suddenly collapsed. Her response earned her a Youth Hero Award.

grandmother of the boys and who submitted the award. "When I realized what was happening, it brought back the memory of when Ryder and Brayden's father — who was 3½ years old at the time — walked out of a store while we were shopping for his older brothers' back-to-school clothes. When I saw my son, I dropped to my knees hugging him, crying along with my 8- and 9-year-old sons. This brought back all these memories, and I cried with Jeffrey's mother."

The Zaleski boys will be presented their Good Deed Awards at a county meeting in February where 11 ALA units will join together, along with county Legionnaires.

Ellie Zaleski said it's important to acknowledge our youth who are good kids.

"In the news every day are stories about the ones who get into trouble and break the laws," she said. "But I feel they are in the minority and that the deeds of many who are good, decent, caring, helpful young people deserve to be recognized, especially when what they do may seem to them as just what you should do, but their actions rise to a higher level."

She added the Auxiliary needs to do a better job in letting our communities know who we are and what we do — this award is a good example of that.

"Many do not know it's available to our youth," Zaleski said. "That is why I will be presenting the award at a county meeting with Legionnaires present so they can bring this back to their units. I'm ashamed to say only one member in my unit had a vague idea about this award. If I wasn't involved on

the department level, I may not have known. Also, I plan to send a copy of the award along with the national letter to their teachers, which states, 'As an opportunity to show your deed as an example for your friends, classmates, and family to do selfless acts in their communities."

Youth Hero: Saving a neighbor boy trapped in a well

ALA member Sofia Blake learned about 11-year-old Juliana Fischer's story in the local newspaper.

"Most adults wouldn't be able to do what she did," Blake said when she heard about Fischer's bravery.

Fischer's 5-year-old neighbor fell down a well in Massachusetts. She heard screams from her neighbor who had been playing in his front yard, but a well cover gave way and he fell 20 feet down. Fischer called 911, grabbed a ladder, and worked with the boy's mother to help him get out of the well.

Blake said it's important to have an award like this for youth "to let them know we care when they do something brave."

Fischer was also awarded the Young Hero Award from the Tyngsborough Fire Department and Massachusetts state fire marshal for her heroic act.



NEIGHBORLY HELP: In addition to earning an ALA Youth Hero award, sixth-grader Juliana Fischer received a citation from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in Tyngsborough, Mass., related to her helping a young neighbor who had fallen into a well.

Youth Hero: Providing immediate medical assistance

From the nomination form: In September 2025 during a POW/MIA ceremony at the Poynette American Legion Post 271, Hannah Kopmeyer was serving as ceremonial bugler for *Taps* when an elderly Honor Guard member suddenly collapsed. In that urgent moment, Kopmeyer set aside her instrument and sprang into action. Calmly assessing the situation, she immediately called out for medical assistance, instructing her dad to call 911.

Kopmeyer was constantly evaluating the situation and responding to questions and instructions from 911 and provided comforting reassurance until emergency responders arrived. Her quick thinking and composed leadership ensured the gentleman received prompt care, preventing further harm.

Beyond this courageous act, Kopmeyer serves her community as a certified nursing assistant at a local nursing home. She plans to attend nursing school after graduation; she is on a clear path to a lifelong career of service and healing.

Youth Hero: Preventing further mudslide mayhem

From the nomination form: On the evening of Sept. 30, 2025, following a volleyball game, Ryley Rasmussen, a sophomore at Payette High School in Idaho, was driving home along Highway 52 when she encountered a dangerous and unexpected mudslide that had overtaken the roadway.

Rasmussen witnessed two motorcyclists lose control as they struck the mud, followed by a pickup truck that skidded off the road and struck the riders. Without hesitation, she stopped her vehicle, assessed the scene, and immediately called 911. Despite the chaos and risk of further danger, she rushed to

assist one of the injured motorcyclists, staying with him and providing support until first responders arrived. Rasmussen's quick thinking, courage, and willingness to act in a critical moment demonstrated extraordinary bravery and maturity well beyond her years. Her actions brought calm to a tragic situation and ensured that emergency responders were notified and guided quickly to those in need. ★

How Auxiliary units can recognize award winners:

- High school football games
- Ceremonies at American Legion post homes
- Recognition during an ALA unit meeting

How did you recognize your Youth Hero/Good Deed award winners? Tell us at PR@ALAforVeterans.org.



MORE AWARD WINNERS: Members of Unit 360 in Weatherly, Pa., presented Rylee Minnick with a Good Deed Award. Minnick raised \$80 with her lemonade stand. The money was donated to the Citizens Fire Company No. 1; Brayden Roberts was out walking in the woods and came across a brush fire. He ran to get help and came back to the fire scene with buckets to assist in putting out the fire from a local brook; Julia Moore and Judy Shippee of the Illinois Lena American Legion Auxiliary presented Good Deed Awards to the children of the Lena volunteer firefighters. These children set up a lemonade stand prior to a parade. They earned \$400 for the fire department. Pictured are Chief Brad Strong, Emmett Blair, Jackson Alber, Blaine Drake, Evie Drake, Laine Thomas, Easton Blair, Logan Thomas, and Nathan Gable. Not pictured: Elliott Blair and Briggs Drake, also part of the Good Deed Award.





**AMERICAN
LEGION
AUXILIARY
FOUNDATION**

To honor the remarkable women in our lives, the ALA Foundation is celebrating its fourth “Celebrating Women of Service” day alongside International Women’s Day on March 8. Join us by donating in honor of a woman who inspires you, just as the ALA community inspires this special day of giving. Show your appreciation for

**Celebrate Women
of Service
on March 8**

women dedicated to service and volunteerism by supporting a cause that leaves a lasting impact.

Let’s make March 8 a day to honor the power of women in the ALA community. Give online or by texting WOMAN to 1-844-940-3450.



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PAYING HOMAGE TO PAST NATIONAL PRESIDENTS' LEGACIES



FAMILY FIRST: BARBARA KRANIG

American Legion Auxiliary Past National President Barbara Kranig was all about family, a sentiment she felt strongly about and brought to the ALA. She passed away peacefully on Sept. 21, 2025, at 91 years old, a deep loss to the ALA family.

Kranig was an individual full of heart, passion, and kindness — all traits she brought to the ALA and her 1997-1998 administrative term.

Shortly after marrying Korean War veteran Jerome Kranig, she joined the Auxiliary in 1954, gaining eligibility through his service. For 71 years, she was an active member of Berens-Scribner Unit 6 of Wisconsin. Her time there started her journey in the ALA, leading her to serve various positions at the unit, department, and national levels, including national Public Relations Committee chair.

While serving as PR chair, she met Meredith "Rusty" Beeg, who served on the committee. Beeg has fond memories of Kranig's humor and leadership while working with her at ALA Girls Nation, stating she was well-organized.

One of Beeg's cherished memories of Kranig is when she celebrated the birth of Beeg's grandson by welcoming Beeg to grandmotherhood and putting a stuffed cow — which she still has — on her door so that she'd always remember Wisconsin.

Past National

President Jan Pulvermacher-Ryan (2007-2008) was a close, longtime friend of Kranig. Beyond Kranig's kindness, Pulvermacher-Ryan respected her attention to detail, stating she was a sharp cookie and talented individual.

With their friendship beginning prior to their leadership in the Auxiliary and their husbands being close friends as well, Pulvermacher-Ryan will deeply miss Kranig.

"You miss those people who have been a source of input and friendship in your life, and you don't really replace them," Pulvermacher-Ryan said.

In addition to her ALA service, Kranig was an acting postmaster for three years, became one of three women in the 1960s to pass the Wisconsin exam to become a licensed stock and securities dealer, was

elected as the Stevens Point city clerk, and held other positions in government and insurance.

She cared deeply for providing a sense of family to anyone and everyone she could. She cared so much that she made it the ALA's national focus during her term as president.

"I believe there is nothing of greater concern today than deteriorating family life. ... Our goal this year in every program will be to assist families in whatever way we can to alleviate some of their hardships," Kranig said in her 1997 installation speech.

Internationally, Kranig visited South Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines. There, she visited war memorials and had the opportunity to speak to U.S. troops stationed at the Demilitarized Zone.

Her time in the Auxiliary impacted her greatly, an impression she wanted members to continue doing and making on the United States.

"As an organization dedicated to serving our veterans, we must make sure this country does not forget the price of freedom, nor the brave men and women who paid that price," she said in the 1998 *National News* March-April edition.



PAYING HOMAGE TO PAST NATIONAL PRESIDENTS' LEGACIES



EVERY DAY IS VETERANS DAY: KRISTINE WEST

Celebrating veterans was the main priority for American Legion Auxiliary Past National President Kristine “Kris” West. She wanted the Auxiliary to view every day as Veterans Day — not just on Nov. 11.

With news of her death, the ALA will miss her commitment to the betterment and support of veterans and their families, as well as her kindness and determined character.

The ALA lost a remarkable 45-year member with West’s passing. She died peacefully at her home with family by her side in October.

West served as national president during the 2000-2001 administrative year, accomplishing a lot.

Getting her ALA start at New London Unit 40 in New Hampshire, West was eligible for membership through her husband George, a U.S. Air Force Korean War veteran, and brothers, U.S. Army Vietnam War veteran John

Spindler and U.S. Navy Vietnam War veteran Frederick Spindler.

When she was elected national president, West had been a member for 20 years, serving various unit, department, and national leadership positions in that time, including department president of New Hampshire.

During her term as national president, she focused on treating every day like it was Veterans Day. She wanted members and herself to do this by continuing the support the ALA gives veterans and their families, as well as members not forgetting this legacy of help and encouragement.

This commitment of every day being Veterans Day led the ALA to become a host sponsor of the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NVCAF). The Auxiliary pledged \$50,000 at the time to help fund the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs program.

NVCAF helps veterans achieve their rehabilitation goals through the mediums of art, music, dance, drama, and creative writing.

West pledging the ALA as a host sponsor laid the groundwork for the Auxiliary becoming a co-presenter of the festival with the VA in 2014.

Another major focus for West was increasing membership within the ALA.

“We must take every chance to remind our members that they do important work, that our ceaseless push for membership is not for numbers alone. We need to improve membership in order to build on the good works our members perform wherever a

unit exists,” West said during her installation speech in 2000.

Her membership focus led her to working closely with 2000-2001 Membership Committee Chair Carlene Ashworth, who later became 2010-2011 national president.

“She was just so absolutely dedicated to making sure our veterans — no matter who they were, where they were, or whatever — were a focus of our organization,” Ashworth said.

To help achieve this goal of increasing membership, West started the “Happy Trails — Kris Cross America” initiative to encourage members to crisscross their states, counties, cities, and towns to reach new members. West herself crisscrossed the United States, visiting 49 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico, and internationally, visiting Mexico, South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Australia, Germany, France, and Italy.

Internationally, she visited war memorials and stationed U.S. servicemembers. For every visit, she kept in mind her dream of every day being Veterans Day, which led her to having Thanksgiving with U.S. troops stationed in the Demilitarized Zone in South Korea in November 2000 and planting a tree at a veterans hospital with the then-Department of the Philippines, amid other events.

By the end of her term as national president, West felt proud of ALA members following the mission of celebrating and supporting veterans and their families every day.

“We have reached out to our veterans, lifted them into our arms and hearts, and made my dream come true: to have every day be Veterans Day, not just Nov. 11,” she said in the 2001 *National News* magazine, July-August edition, the last president’s message for her term.

AMERICANISM: HAPPY 250TH BIRTHDAY, AMERICA!

 [www.Facebook.com/groups/ALAAmericanism](https://www.facebook.com/groups/ALAAmericanism)

What will you be doing on July 4? Enjoying a day off? Having a picnic? Going to the local parade? Watching fireworks? The usual things we all do each year? Independence Day is always a day of celebrations, but in 2026, we will have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to celebrate our semiquincentennial!

On July 4, our nation will commemorate 250 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence. This will be our opportunity to reflect on the amazing history of our great country, honor those who fought



for our freedom, and contemplate our next generation of service.

Across the country, many plans are being made to celebrate this auspicious occasion with all the fanfare and ceremony it so richly deserves. This is also our opportunity as The American Legion Family to create events that show

the community how important our Americanism program is. This is our perfect chance to show our commitment to inspiring patriotism and responsible citizenship, respect for our flag, love of this great country, and honor for the men and women who fought to give us the freedoms we enjoy.

What will your group do to celebrate America's special day? It's not too early to start planning for one of the most significant birthday celebrations we may ever see. Planning great events will take time and commitment from the entire Legion Family.

Everyone enjoys attending a birthday party, and America's 250th birthday will be a celebration we will never forget. We are living in a piece of history. We are celebrating the great love we have for this country. What will you be doing on July 4?



Diana Sirovina is a 37-year ALA member of Unit 171 in the Department of Wisconsin.

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY

Planning your next getaway has never been easier — or more affordable! As an American Legion Auxiliary member, you get up to 20% off at over 9,000 Wyndham Hotels worldwide.

Whether it's a beach retreat, a roadtrip adventure, or a cozy weekend escape, Wyndham has the perfect hotel for you, at a price that fits your budget. Booking is fast and simple: Visit the ALA Wyndham page at www.ALforVeterans.org/wyndham-hotel-group, or call 877-670-7088 and use code 1000002807 to unlock your exclusive savings.

Travel More, Spend Less: Wyndham Discounts for ALA Members



AUXILIARY EMERGENCY FUND: CONTINUING THE LEGACY OF MEMBERS HELPING MEMBERS

 [www.Facebook.com/groups/AuxEmergencyFund](https://www.facebook.com/groups/AuxEmergencyFund)

The Auxiliary Emergency Fund (AEF) is a national grant program that offers financial assistance — up to \$3,000 — to eligible American Legion Auxiliary members facing emergencies caused by natural disasters or a personal hardship.

The Auxiliary Emergency Fund was established in 1969 as a result of an estate gift from Helen Colby Small. Small, of Burlington, Wis., joined Ross Wilcox Unit 79 on Feb. 20, 1929, and remained an active member until her passing on May 13, 1969. In her last will and testament, Small bequeathed the bulk of her estate — approximately \$106,000 — to American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters. This

transformational gift enabled the ALA to establish and endow the AEF, ensuring it could provide assistance to members in need in perpetuity.

In today's dollars, Small's gift would be worth about \$936,000. Her generosity laid the foundation for decades of AEF grants. Funding for the awarding of AEF grants today comes from generous contributions made by ALA entities, ALA members, and donors throughout the United States and Puerto Rico.

How can departments, units, and individual members help? By contributing a one-time or recurring monthly donation to the Auxiliary Emergency Fund. Every contribution — big or small — helps support members

of our Auxiliary family nationwide. To donate online, visit <https://donate.legion-aux.org/AEF> or text AEF to 1-844-940-3450.

The national AEF Committee is dedicated to raising funds and increasing awareness about this vital program. The AEF program is focused on providing direct support to our members during times of crisis. As a Mission Driven, Family Focused organization, we are called to rally behind each of our Auxiliary members during their time of need with compassion and generosity. Let's work together to ensure help is there when it's needed most.



Michele DeGennaro is a 23-year proud member of Hudson Unit 335 in the Department of Florida.

CHILDREN & YOUTH: SUPPORTING MILITARY KIDS THROUGH KDH2

 [www.Facebook.com/groups/ALAChildrenandYouth](https://www.facebook.com/groups/ALAChildrenandYouth)

The American Legion Auxiliary Children & Youth program emphasizes protecting, caring for, and supporting children and youth, particularly those of veterans and military families.

As a military wife and mother of one child while living in Germany, I saw firsthand the suffering our military children went through while one of their parents was deployed. We parents relied on each other for comfort while our little ones couldn't understand why Mommy or Daddy was gone for so long.

Past National President Mary Davis — also a military wife and

mother — started the Kids of Deployed are Heroes 2 (KDH2) initiative in 2013 to honor military children who may be experiencing a separation from one or both of their parents while deployed in a war zone having a short tour, or an extended temporary duty assignment.

This initiative produced our "I'm a Hero 2", "Proud Parent of a Military Child", and "Proud Grandparent of a Military Child" recognition buttons and stickers.

Visit the American Legion Auxiliary Children & Youth page in the MyAuxiliary member portal at www.ALAforVeterans.org/member/committees/

children-and-youth for information on how to download the file with instructions to make the buttons and stickers.

A commemorative honor button is a perfect way to remember and recognize the sacrifices of a military child. While their parent is serving our country, their birthdays, sports games, school recitals, and holidays are missed.

Let them know they are a hero too, and show that we honor and care about them with these buttons.



Melanie Taylor is a 32-year member of Unit 293 in the Department of California.

LEGISLATIVE: BE SURE TO USE YOUR VOICE

 www.facebook.com/groups/ALALegislative

Since the inception of the ALA Legislative Committee, the purpose has been to add assistance for Auxiliary members when advocating for The American Legion's legislative priorities. Advocating for our veterans, military, and their families is a *must* for every Legion Family member. We can do our part by staying abreast of The American Legion's agenda, as well as actively communicating with local, state, and national congressional leadership on these priorities. In doing so, we demonstrate solidarity and a show of being ONE voice as a Legion Family.

Let's do our part and continue as Auxiliary members to be a part of history as changes are made due to The American Legion's agenda.

We often hear communication is key; however, do we really

communicate effectively? A powerful way to communicate is by using your voice, advocating through various ways in support of the Legion's priorities.

Communication includes writing letters. If you don't know where to start, a handy letter template is available on the Legislative Committee page at www.ALforVeterans.org as a guide. Other communication methods include sending emails. One of the more frequent ways to contact your elected officials is by using the alerts through The American Legion's Grassroots Action Center where prepared emails are ready for your submission. Just a few clicks and you've sent an email to your national congressional representatives advocating for our veterans, military, and their families.

Voices are powerful. Let's not just talk about using our voices; let's be about using our voices — actively participating in the change and adding strength in numbers.

Knowing your voice has power, knowing your actions to utilize your voice when advocating for the Legion's priorities resonates in the souls of many that change and action is on the horizon. There is an old saying: "Why complain about something when you are not actively doing anything to help change it or enhance to make something better than the way you found it?" This is exactly what we all can do when contacting our local, state, and national elected officials.



April Sinclair is a member of C. Russell Huber Unit 57 in the Department of Alaska.

NATIONAL SECURITY: IDEAS TO HELP OUR MILITARY AND THEIR FAMILIES

 www.facebook.com/groups/ALANatlSec

Sometimes it is hard to find those in your community who are deployed. What can we do? With technology in today's world, our communities reach way beyond the city limits. It is also important that we reach out to help our servicemembers where they are serving.

Often, our religious leaders know families who are in the armed services and in need of help. They may not be able to share the name, but they could receive assistance from your American Legion Auxiliary unit and pass it on to the family. Have you thought of going to a

local military recruiter's office? They may need some assistance or be able to share the needs of others. The easiest way to find a military recruiter is using Google — simply type "military recruiter near me" in the search bar.

Armed Services YMCA provides food assistance programs for military families in need. These food banks are in several states. Your unit can use Poppy Funds to donate to food banks that provide food for military families. What a great way to support and use some of your Poppy Funds! Visit www.ALforVeterans.org/Poppy

Funds for more information.

Still looking for ways to make a difference in the lives of our military families? Check out Military OneSource for information to share with a military family at www.militaryonesource.mil.

Large or small, your contribution to assist our military and their families will be well-received and make a difference in their lives.



Norma Tramm, a member since the age of 3, belongs to Frank Kray Unit 455 in Minnesota.

POPPY: HOW TO RECRUIT POPPY MAKERS

 www.Facebook.com/groups/ALAPoppy

Every unit has members who continually pay their dues, but, for whatever reason, do not come to meetings. How do we get them involved? How do we encourage poppy making?

How about a poppy making party?

Invite the entire American Legion Family. Provide snacks or have everyone bring a snack to share. Plan ahead, and be sure to call or text members who may not be at your meetings or see information you might have posted online regarding the event.

Can you picture this member? I see an Auxiliary member sitting by their phone just waiting for a friend to call or text. Be that friend! Offer to pick them up.

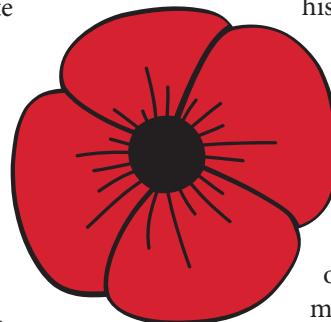
Let them know they are needed and that you appreciate them. Be sure to introduce them to other members, especially those who may share the same interest. Maybe they came because of the shared snacks, they enjoy cooking, or they don't drive and need to get out and socialize. They might just be curious how or why poppies are made and want to get involved but don't know how.

While everyone is making poppies, be sure to explain what poppies mean, and what the American Legion Auxiliary, your unit, or department does with

donations for poppies. Share the history of the poppy — you could even read *In Flanders Field*. This is a great time for your poppy chair or unit mentor to shine.

Ask veterans or other Legion Family members to share a story they hold dear regarding the poppy.

Make it a night they won't forget! You could create some active members who could blossom into many great things!



Karen Toll is a 28-year member of Unit 203 in the Department of Kentucky.

 **AMERICAN
LEGION
AUXILIARY
FOUNDATION**

Bring Your Veteran Support Initiative to Life with a Veteran Projects Fund Grant



The ALA Foundation provides grants up to \$10,000 to support programs that enhance the lives of veterans in your community. Whether it's wellness activities, creative initiatives, or support services, your project can make a meaningful impact.

Apply today and bring vital resources to the veterans you serve. Learn more and apply at www.ALAFoundation.org/grants.

The American Legion Auxiliary Foundation is a 501(c)(3) public charity that supports the American Legion Auxiliary. All gifts to the Foundation are tax-deductible as allowed by the United States Tax Code and U.S. Internal Revenue Service. © American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters. All rights reserved. 12/2025



ALA TO SPONSOR ALL-FEMALE VETERAN LONE EAGLE FLIGHT IN APRIL

After learning about Honor Flight in 2010, ALA National President Pam Ray took her father, a U.S. Army veteran, on a flight that truly impacted both of their lives. Ray has been a passionate advocate of Honor Flight's mission since, and her genuine connection to Honor Flight inspired her to lead the national American Legion Auxiliary in sponsoring an all-female veteran Lone Eagle Honor Flight in April.

Slightly different than a

traditional Honor Flight where veterans leave and arrive on the same plane, a Lone Eagle Honor Flight ensures all eligible veterans are able to participate in an Honor Flight experience, regardless of their geographic location. Veterans from across the country depart from their specific airport and fly into the same airport in the Washington, D.C. area to begin their momentous experience together.

Background on the collaboration

The American Legion Auxiliary and Honor Flight Inc. entered a formal partnership in 2021 to support their mission of celebrating America's veterans by inviting them to partake in a special day of honor at our nation's memorials and monuments in Washington, D.C. The official collaboration between our organizations allows ALA units and departments to directly donate funds that are generated from the distribution of our poppy.

ALA Poppy Funds can be used to support Honor Flights

With National Poppy Day® right around the corner, here is your reminder that Honor Flight is one of the three major national mission outreach activities where ALA Poppy Funds can be used. First, money may be donated directly to Honor Flight hubs or to the Honor Flight Lone Eagle program. Second, funds may be used for any veteran and guardian items needed for a successful flight by donating directly to Honor Flight Inc. The last way to utilize Poppy Funds to support Honor Flight is by purchasing specific items that are needed. For more information about Poppy Funds and Honor Flight, visit [www.ALAforVeterans.org/Poppy-Funds](http://ALAforVeterans.org/Poppy-Funds).

Stay updated on this all-female veteran Honor Flight through our social media

Make sure you're connected to our social media accounts for updates on this historic ALA experience:

- Facebook: [@ALAforVeterans](https://www.facebook.com/ALAforVeterans)
- Instagram: [@ALAforVeterans](https://www.instagram.com/ALAforVeterans)

SNEAK PEEK: SEE WHAT ALA ACADEMY COURSES ARE COMING UP IN 2026

With a new year, it's time to start looking forward and growing. One good way to follow your New Year's resolutions is by registering for the American Legion Auxiliary's live webinars.

In these webinars, experts will teach you about various topics — member benefits, ALA programs like National Security, Legislative, Junior Activities, Membership, and more, and

ways to improve how your unit functions (to name a few!). These experts are a resource for you to ask questions and simply talk through your ideas.

Upcoming webinars will be covering subject areas like how you can best use social media to promote your local unit, how the Auxiliary Emergency Fund can help you, and learning the various challenges military families face and the best ALA programs to help based on the challenge.

Keep a lookout on our social media [@ALAforVeterans](https://www.instagram.com/ALAforVeterans) for when ALA Academy courses

are happening.

To register for a course or look at upcoming courses, go to the ALA Academy webpage at www.ALAforVeterans.org/ALA-Academy.

Unable to attend at a specific time? That's OK — all of our live webinars are recorded so you can watch afterward. Just go to the ALA Academy webpage and look through our catalogue to find the right course.

Do you have an idea for a future ALA Academy course? Tell us at ALAAcademy@ALAforVeterans.org.

Provided by Nancy Magginnis, National Chaplain 2025-2026 | www.facebook.com/groups/ALACHaplains

FEBRUARY

In February, most of us think about Valentine's Day and those we love, whether the love is for a spouse, significant other, or for the various family and friends in our lives. For me, it took a number of years before I met and fell in love with Ira. As our relationship moved from a casual friendship to a love story, I know I always felt, *Could this be real? Could this be what God intended for me? Do I really deserve the love Ira shows me?*

Throughout our lives, God has always been there for us to believe in or turn to when we need His support, but if you are like me, I'm sure at times, you might feel like the words expressed in Cory Asbury's song *Reckless Love*: "I couldn't earn it/I don't deserve it/Still You give yourself away/Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God."

Unlike a love partner, who may give up, God continues His pursuit to show us His love. Asbury's song underscores God's commitment: "There's no shadow; you won't light up/No mountain You won't climb up coming after me/There's no wall You won't kick down." God is always willing to let us know He wants to be a part of our life.

Please bow your head in your faith as we pray: Dear God, thank You for always loving me, and no matter how many times I tried to avoid You or run away from You, You were always there for me. Your love is constant and forever, even though I don't deserve it. Thank you that Your love is never-ending! And all God's people said: Amen.

Psalm 100:5 — For the Lord is good. His unfailing love continues forever, and His faithfulness continues to each generation.

MARCH

As an ALA Junior, one of my favorite memories was visiting the disabled veterans in our community. One veteran was homebound due to his service injuries. When I visited him, he would smile and thank me. I was his light and joy. God chose to use me, just as God uses many of our members to reach out to veterans today. Whether it's through programs like Be the One, the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, or another way, it is the ALA mission to touch the lives of veterans.

In the song *God of this City* by Aaron Boyd and other members of Bluetree, God shows me; He uses us to represent Him. "You're the light in this darkness/ You're the hope to the hopeless/ You're the peace to the restless/ You are ... You're the strength in the weakness/ You're the love to the broken/ You're the joy in the sadness/ You are." What a true statement — there is no one like an ALA member when we allow God to use us in the lives of veterans. When we are Mission Focused, there is nothing we can't do! Ask God to use you — to serve veterans — then sit back and let Him lead you.

Let us all bow our heads in our individual faith: Dear God, thank You for helping me to be a light in the darkness and hope to the hopeless. Through Your leading, I can serve veterans and be the person You created me to be. Thank You for using us as we serve those You have asked us to assist. And all God's people said: Amen.

Galatians 5:13 — For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another.

APRIL

In my condominium association, I happen to serve as treasurer to the board of directors. In this position, I deal with paying bills, recording payments from each owner, and preparing a financial report each month. While I enjoy working with numbers, there are times when balancing the accounts seems impossible. Fortunately, I work with an accountant who can make sense of the records and the numbers. I utilize the accountant's talents to help me with making sense of the records.

God is better to us than any accountant. God not only finds the mistakes, He guides us through them and gives a way to avoid them when we listen to Him. In the song *All That I Need*, Vicky Beeching shows how God is always there guiding our lives. "Every mountain I face/Every step of this race/I have nothing to fear for You are here/All that I need to know for tomorrow/All that I need to know for today/Is that You'll be/With me each moment/Holding me close to You every step of the way."

Please join in prayer using your individual faith: Dear God, I am so thankful that You guide my life, that You are with me every step of the way. You guide me through every situation that comes in my life. Please help me lean on You because You have promised to never leave me, no matter what I may face in this life. And all God's people said: Amen.

Jeremiah 29:11-12 — I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord; they are plans for good and not for evil. Plans to give you a future and a hope.



Nancy Magginnis is a Paid Up For Life member from Kendallville Unit 86 in Indiana.



AUXILIARY MEMBER'S HANDMADE BRACELETS PROMOTE BE THE ONE

Tina Burgess is a veteran first and foremost. After serving 22 years in the U.S. Air Force as an intelligence officer, she and her husband — who is also a veteran — were looking for a place to volunteer.

That's how they found Veterans Memorial American Legion Post 347 in Lady Lake, Fla. Eventually both joined as Legionnaires, along with becoming Riders.

Joining Post 347, Burgess was hesitant to also join the Auxiliary unit, wanting to be seen as a veteran, not just as a spouse.

"You feel invisible as a female veteran. That's the best way I can describe it," Burgess said.

After two years with her Legion post, the Auxiliary unit president approached Burgess about an open unit historian position. That began her involvement with the ALA.

"When I joined the Auxiliary — even though I was hesitant

— I found that their embrace of me as a veteran was significant," she said. "My opinion mattered when it came to veteran matters they were supporting."

She enjoys the hands-on volunteering Unit 347 does. One program she is heavily involved in is Be the One, a veteran suicide prevention program.

Be the One stood out to Burgess for multiple reasons — one of which was American Legion Past National Commander Daniel Seehafer.

In March 2024, Burgess watched the livestream of Seehafer testifying before a joint meeting of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs about Be the One, which hit home with her.

Another reason was her own journey as a veteran who experienced PTSD symptoms. In 2004, she was deployed to Baghdad, Iraq. She said she "came back thinking I was 100% whole and I wasn't, but it took years to discover that."

"[PTSD] impacts people differently and it manifests over time, and I wasn't in the know even about my own symptoms," Burgess said. "If it wasn't for my husband, I wouldn't have sought help. So to me, it's personal."

When she participated in Be the One activities, she would always wear a rubber Be the One bracelet as she helped veterans find mental health resources.

One night, an idea struck her. She wanted to "class [the bracelet] up a little bit" for herself. So, she made a beaded red, white, and blue bracelet that

had the words "Be the One" on it.

Burgess wore her new bracelet, not expecting much of a reaction. After a week or two, a fellow Auxiliary member noticed it and asked for one.

From that first ALA member, Burgess made bracelets for her whole unit. Eventually, she would make some for unit members attending conferences to hand out.

Her only requirement for someone to get a bracelet is they need to ask for one, and they must learn about Be the One.

When Burgess learned of The American Legion's USA 250 Challenge, she decided to challenge herself to make 250 bracelets under the community service category to spread the message of Be the One.

Burgess described the bracelets as her niche.

"It's become my way — as insignificant as it seems — just a simple bracelet that wraps around a wrist that's a little bit more glamorous than a rubber bracelet," she said.

As of press time, she's gifted 168 of 250 bracelets. Some bracelets have been gifted as far as Alaska.

With her demand of bracelets increasing, Burgess and her husband are designing a bracelet for men so that male veterans and other Legion Family members are also included.





A NEW OUTLOOK: California ALA Girls State alumna Elisa Nay credits the Auxiliary program for positively shifting her college and career goals to study political science along with education. She also helps with AquaEmpowers, providing clean water filters to people in impoverished communities.

CALIFORNIA ALA GIRLS STATE: A TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEY

In just a short period of time, ALA Girls State programs make a big impact on the lives of participants. Not only do they learn about government, attendees also gain confidence, find new interests, make new friends, and much more. For one 2025 alumna, the week was a transformative journey.

“ALA Girls State truly changed my life,” said Elisa Nay, ALA California Girls State. “So much change, empowerment, and inspiration took place over that week. I’ve met incredibly determined, caring, and supportive women throughout this journey, and it truly has made my life so much better.”

One change that came out of the program: college and career goals. Before ALA Girls State, Nay saw her future as a special education teacher, but now she has an additional vision — she wants to study political science along with education.

“I’ve always had an interest and passion in politics, but ALA Girls State helped me

realize how much I want that passion to become a reality for me in my daily life,” said Nay. “After spending numerous years as a teacher, I plan to get involved in local politics, and eventually work my way up to state government. My goal is to become a congresswoman and work on legislation that will benefit all communities, specifically advocating for those with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities and their education.”

At ALA Girls State, Nay felt empowered to make a suggestion about something she felt was missing.

“We were honoring veterans, but I felt we were lacking in paying tribute to those who were prisoners of war and those missing in action. So, I talked to one of the leaders and she suggested I create a speech and do a presentation,” she said. “I was happy to do so. I love knowing I was able to help educate others about these important people in our country

who I believe should be honored at the highest level.”

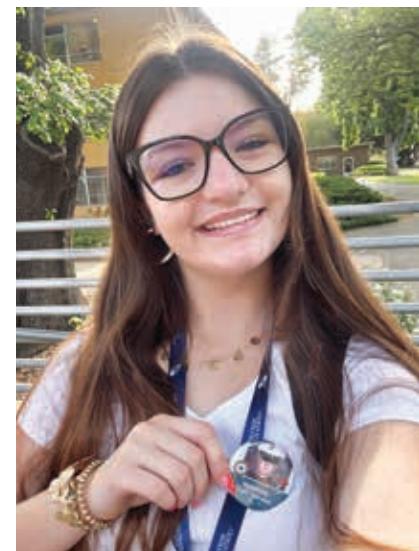
Nay was already familiar with the topic. Her grandfather’s best friend, a World War II pilot, was a prisoner of war in Germany.

Attending the program also led to a new membership.

“I am now a proud member of the American Legion Auxiliary and was not before ALA Girls State,” said Nay.

Her eligibility is through her father who is a Marine veteran. “My dad’s service is something our family is extremely proud of, and his dedication is something I have always admired,” she said.

Nay’s life has already been impacted by the new friendships she developed. After ALA Girls State, one of her new friends founded a nonprofit called AquaEmpowers. The friend invited her to help with the organization. She agreed and now serves as the international relations director for AquaEmpowers, which provides clean water filters to people in impoverished communities. The organization has already provided sanitation kits to 200 families in Africa, which will provide 200,000 gallons of clean water for five years.



ALA MEMBER FURTHERS HER EDUCATION WITH THE HELP OF AN AUXILIARY SCHOLARSHIP



The ALA offers five \$2,000 scholarships for non-traditional students. The Non-Traditional Student Scholarship aids American Legion Family members, veterans, active-duty servicemembers, or veterans' spouses to pursue a degree later in life or pick back up to finish. To learn more, go to [www.ALAforVeterans.org/scholarships](http://ALAforVeterans.org/scholarships).

Tiffany Orlando received the Non-Traditional Student Scholarship to further her education, pursuing a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree at the University of Phoenix. She is on track to graduate in 2026.

Orlando is a Paid Up For Life American Legion Auxiliary member eligible through her family's long service in the military, with her father Michael Immel, U.S. Navy veteran, and her grandfathers Terry Grozinger, West Virginia Air National Guard veteran, Lyle Immel, U.S. Navy veteran, and Paul Sine, U.S. Marine Corps veteran. She also had great-grandfathers who served during World War I and World War II.

What does your Auxiliary membership mean to you?

Being a member of the American Legion Auxiliary represents a deep and enduring commitment to honoring and supporting those who have served our nation. I view my involvement as both a privilege and continuation of my family's proud legacy of military service. Through meaningful acts of service, I strive to strengthen

veterans, their families, and my community.

What degree are you pursuing, and how will this degree help you on your professional journey?

I am currently pursuing an MBA. This degree is enhancing my leadership, strategic planning, and organizational management skills — key areas that support both my professional growth and my continued service through the American Legion Auxiliary. The program allows me to apply business principles to real-world challenges, strengthen decision-making, and lead with purpose in both my career and community initiatives.

Tell us about your non-traditional student journey, and how you qualify for this scholarship.

After earning my bachelor's degree eight years ago, I entered the workforce and began building my professional career. Over time, I realized that continuing my education would help me grow as a leader, strengthen my business knowledge, and create new opportunities for advancement.

How does this scholarship benefit you?

The Non-Traditional Student Scholarship has been an incredible source of support throughout my educational journey. It has helped ease the financial burden of returning to school while allowing me to focus on my studies and professional development. It reminds me that the American Legion Auxiliary believes in investing in its members' growth and success, and it motivates me to continue giving back

through service, education, and leadership.

Based on your journey, what would you like ALA members to know about the impact of this type of scholarship?

Providing scholarships like the Non-Traditional Student Scholarship truly makes a lasting difference in the lives of members who are striving to further their education. For many of us, returning to school while managing careers, families, and community responsibilities can be challenging, both financially and personally. This scholarship not only helps relieve financial stress but also serves as a powerful reminder that the Auxiliary stands behind its members — encouraging us to grow, achieve, and lead. It represents more than financial assistance; it is a vote of

confidence that empowers recipients to continue serving others while pursuing their academic and professional goals.

It has helped ease the financial burden of returning to school while allowing me to focus on my studies and professional development.

It reminds me that the American Legion Auxiliary believes in investing in its members' growth and success, and it motivates me to continue giving back through service, education, and leadership."

What advice do you have for other non-traditional students?

Believe in yourself and trust that it is never too late to continue your education. Returning to school as an adult can feel overwhelming at times, but persistence, organization, and self-confidence make all the difference. Set clear goals, manage your time wisely, and remember that progress — no matter how small — is still progress. Surround yourself with supportive people who encourage your journey, and celebrate your achievements along the way.



WORKING TOGETHER: Women Legionnaires in California complete the American Legion Family USA 250 Challenge categories: mental wellness, physical exercise, and community service (photo by Jeric Wilhelmsen/The American Legion).

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS AVAILABLE TO HELP PROMOTE AMERICA 250 CHALLENGE

Four new public service announcements on The American Legion's YouTube channel feature Auxiliary National President Pam Ray, Legion National Commander Dan Wiley, and Sons of The American Legion National Commander Bill Clancy promoting the USA 250 Challenge and sharing how they are participating.

The PSAs available:

- **USA 250 Challenge promotion.** This PSA features all three leaders explaining what the challenge is and how to join.

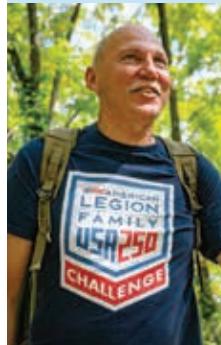
- **Mental wellness.** Wiley shares how mental wellness can be involvement in the Legion's Be the One suicide prevention mission, making Buddy Check phone calls, or personal visits to check on the needs of veterans.

- **Physical exercise.** Clancy

reminds participants that anything fitness related counts, such as walking your dog, chair yoga, running, or pickle ball.

• **Community service.** Ray gives examples of how to achieve 250 hours of community service through the serving of 250 meals to homeless veterans, sending 250 care packages to deployed troops, or making 250 quilts for veterans.

GEAR UP FOR THE USA 250 CHALLENGE WITH NEW APPAREL



(Photo by Jennifer Blohm/
The American Legion)

New USA 250 Challenge branded apparel is available for purchase to celebrate America's 250th birthday. Items include hooded sweatshirts, polos,

FLY THE FLAG PROUDLY FOR AMERICA'S BIRTHDAY

As our nation approaches its 250th anniversary this year, there's no better way to honor America's legacy than by proudly displaying the Stars and Stripes. American Legion Flags offers high-quality, made-in-the-USA flags for your home,

business, or community.

Every purchase supports veterans

and programs that strengthen our nation. Be ready to celebrate this historic milestone — order your American flag today and let it wave with pride as we count down to USA 250.

Shop now at AmericanLegionFlags.com.



crewnecks, T-shirts, long sleeves, quarter zips, and a hip pack. Prices range from \$20-\$46.

The American Legion USA 250 Challenge is a yearlong celebration for America's 250th birthday on July 4. The challenge consists of three categories — fitness, mental health, and community service — where participants can participate in one or all three to log 250 miles or hours. Your \$30 registration fee supports The American Legion Veterans & Children Foundation.

Visit the store or register for the USA 250 challenge at Legion.org.

HELP CELEBRATE THE 250TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SIGNING OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

On July 4, our nation will commemorate and celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The journey

toward this historic milestone is an opportunity to pause and reflect on our nation's past, honor the contributions of all Americans, and look ahead toward the future we want to create for the next generation and beyond.

A couple of projects are already in the works, encouraging national participation.

State America250 commissions are moving forward with projects to mark the nation's 250th birthday, with some encouraging participation from across the country — and around the world.

The Hawai'i America250 Commission has initiated and is coordinating Sharing



the Spirit of America, an effort to get Americans around the world to read the Declaration of Independence aloud on July 8 at the same time.

According to the website, "Just as the Declaration of Independence was read to the people on July 8, 1776, now, 250 years later, Americans in all 50 states, five territories, the District of Columbia, and Minor Outlying Islands of the United States will read the Declaration ... together."

America as a whole stretches today over 9,500 miles — from the Caribbean Sea across North America to the western edge of the Pacific Ocean — and through 10 time zones. The idea is that starting at 6 p.m. EDT (commemorating the first public reading in Philadelphia, although that was at around noon), people and groups in communities around the world will read the Declaration aloud.

Learn more at hawaiiamerica250.org/sharing-the-spirit-of-america.

Visit Williamsburg is celebrating America250 with call for contributions for the Great American Birthday Quilt; deadline is Feb. 28.

Williamsburg, founded in 1699, is part of Virginia's "Historic Triangle," which, according to Visit Williamsburg, is "known as the birthplace of America and home to the world's largest living U.S. history museum ... this is where the nation's story began." In that spirit, as part of both the national and state semiquincentennial celebrations, the destination marketing organization is inviting all Americans to contribute handmade quilt blocks that, combined, will form a Great American Birthday Quilt in 2026.

The project's website offers design guidance:

- Quilt block must be exactly 12" x 12", 12" x 14", 16" x 16", or 16" x 20".
- Quilt block can be made from any type of fabric.
- Quilt block can be sewn or glued together.
- Only fabric glue that adheres to muslin can be used.

- Bonus: Incorporate red, white, and/or blue in each block.

Acceptable materials to adhere to the fabric are buttons, yarn, felt, paper, ribbon, sequins, and feathers. Any other materials adhered to the fabric may result in the submission not being used in the quilt.

Prepare your quilt block for shipping by wrapping in plastic.

Once complete, blocks can be mailed to or dropped off at the Greater Williamsburg Chamber of Commerce by Feb. 28. Submission of a block does not guarantee inclusion in the final quilt. For specific questions related to the project, email info@visitwilliamsburg.com.

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U.S. Air Force veteran Renee Pea spent 22 years in the military, shaping every part of who she is today. She started off as a communication, navigation, and penetrations aids journeyman, responsible for maintaining the systems that kept one of our nation's premier fighters mission ready. She later cross-trained into financial management, stepping into a world where strategy, resources, and global operations intersect. Her final nine years were spent at U.S. Special Operations Command.

Today, she is a florist — a franchise owner of FauxReal Flowers in Florida — and had the honor of providing flowers for the 2025 ALA National Convention stage.



Can you explain your path from the U.S. Air Force to becoming a florist?

My journey into floral design began during one of the hardest periods of my career — my deployment to Iraq. Doctors encouraged me to find an activity to help manage anxiety. I turned to gardening and floral design, and it became more than a hobby; it became healing. Working with flowers helped quiet my mind and gave me a form of therapy I didn't know I needed.

After retiring from the Air Force and transitioning into Department of Defense contracting, I continued designing florals. Conversations with community leaders guided me toward entrepreneurship.

That guidance led me to the FauxReal Flowers franchise in Raleigh, N.C. — a model built on luxury, real-touch faux florals that you can rent. The concept aligned perfectly with my creativity, desire for sustainability, and commitment to service.

What began as therapy during deployment evolved into a business that allows me to continue serving others in a meaningful way.

What did it mean to provide florals for the 2025 American Legion Auxiliary National Convention?

It was a profound honor to

“Service doesn’t end when the uniform comes off — it simply evolves into new ways of giving back.”

provide the stage florals for a national event of this significance. As a service-disabled, veteran-owned small business, being chosen to support the American Legion Auxiliary National Convention meant far more than designing arrangements — it

was an opportunity to represent veterans, service, and resilience on a national platform.

Seeing a sea of delegates from every state fill the convention hall — and then seeing our florals showcased on that stage — was a moment I will never forget. It felt like a bridge between my past and present: from serving in uniform to now serving through my craft and business.

It was a moment of validation — that what began as therapy during deployment has grown into something that stands on national stages.

This experience reaffirmed something deeply personal: Service doesn't end when the uniform comes off — it simply evolves into new ways of giving back.

Do you have any advice for navigating career changes?

Find your passion and go for it. Career

transitions take courage, resilience, and a willingness to start fresh. Trust your instincts, trust your gifts, and don't be afraid to build a life that looks different from the one you imagined. When passion leads, everything else eventually aligns.

Is there anything else you want to add?

My commitment today is the same as it was in uniform: to serve with integrity, excellence, and purpose.

Every experience — from deployments overseas to building a business here at home — has shaped this chapter. And I am deeply grateful to the Tampa Bay community for embracing us and allowing FauxReal Flowers to be part of so many meaningful moments.

Read an extended version of this Wise Person Said article on the ALA blog at [www\(ALAforVeterans.org/blog](http://www(ALAforVeterans.org/blog).



BEAUTIFYING THE STAGE: The 2025 ALA National Convention stage flowers were made by U.S. Air Force veteran Renee Pea.



ARKANSAS UNIT EMBRACES MOBILE-FRIENDLY TECHNOLOGY FOR RECRUITMENT OF NEW MEMBERS

With 24 years of experience in the technology sector, Arkansas Unit 17 President Jana Rowland has seen firsthand how forward-thinking solutions can drive engagement and build partnerships. Rowland applied this same mindset to her unit's recruitment efforts, recognizing that a mobile-friendly, scannable solution could simplify the process in recruiting potential members.

Rowland designed and printed ALA-branded business cards that include her contact information alongside a QR code. When scanned with a smartphone camera, it opens a link to The American Legion Family membership brochure without the user having to type in the web address. Rowland hands out the business cards, along with a membership application, to potential members to ensure interested individuals can reach out with questions.

For the card design and QR code creation, Rowland used the online graphic design platform Canva and researched resources on the ALA national website to maintain consistent branding for the design. In addition to Canva, Rowland said there are many user-friendly design platforms

available for QR code creation and design templates. Some paid options offer analytics to track how often the code is scanned.

"The cards have been a game-changer," shared Rowland. "We've seen increased engagement and membership interest, especially from individuals who appreciate the ease of scanning a code

rather than navigating a website manually."

The response has been overwhelmingly positive, Rowland said. Active and potential members appreciate the modern approach, and often it's the first time they've seen recruitment done this way. Other members in her department have embraced the cards, carrying them in their wallets, purses, and event kits, ready to share whenever the opportunity arises.

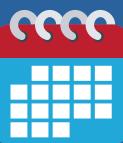
One of the unit's proudest successes has been helping reestablish members to form charters after inactivity and provide new memberships to establish new charters.

Rowland noted that challenges have included educating some current members on how to use QR codes and ensuring the links remain current and functional. But overall, Rowland said the simplicity and accessibility of the cards have made them a powerful recruitment tool.

Tips for creating a recruitment business card for your ALA unit

- **Use a clean, branded design.** Use official ALA colors and logos for consistency.
- **Include a QR code link.** Rowland's cards link to The American Legion Family application found at [www\(ALAforVeterans.org/brochures](http://www(ALAforVeterans.org/brochures)). Another helpful link is [www\(ALAforVeterans.org/joining](http://www(ALAforVeterans.org/joining)).
- **Choose the right platform that works for you.** Canva is great for design and QR code generation, but explore other user-friendly tools or editing tools you already have access to and may be comfortable with.
- **Print professionally.** Work with a local print shop or an online service to ensure quality.
- **Educate your member recruiting team.** Make sure everyone knows how to use and explain the cards.
- **Use QR code links on other materials.** Add QR codes to flyers linking to Facebook events or your website to boost participation, donations, and followers.
- **ALA-branded stationery templates can be downloaded at member.legion-aux.org/Member/Resources/Stationery-Templates.**





IN BETWEEN ISSUES OF AUXILIARY MAGAZINE, YOU CAN FOLLOW THE ALA BLOG, ALA ENEWS, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND OUR WEBSITE. HERE'S WHAT'S COMING UP:

February 2026

- Feb. 7: Last Mission Training and national Junior meeting — in Atlanta with American Legion events
- Feb. 16: Presidents Day
- Feb. 28: ALA Mid-Year National Executive Committee Meeting
- Feb. 28 - March 4: The American Legion Washington Conference

March 2026

- March 1: Deadline for ALA national scholarship applications
- March 8: ALA Foundation — Celebrating Women of Service
- March 15: The American Legion's 107th birthday

April 2026

- April: Month of the Military Child (#MOMC)
- April 13-15: ALA-sponsored all-women veterans Honor Flight
- April 15: Purple Up! Day for Military Kids — wear your purple!
- April 25: American Legion Family Day

May 2026

- May 8: National Military Spouse Appreciation Day
- May 16: Armed Forces Day
- May 22: National Poppy Day® — always the Friday before Memorial Day
- May 25: Memorial Day



PROMOTIONS FOR NATIONAL POPPY DAY:

National Poppy Day is right around the corner! Always the Friday before Memorial Day, this year's National Poppy Day is May 22. To help get you started on promoting this important date, ALA National Headquarters provides resources and information on our website: www.ALAforVeterans.org/National-Poppy-Day. Learn the history of the poppy, information about our ALA Poppy Program, and how you can use Poppy Funds to support veterans. Resources:

- Poppy Day media templates
- Downloadable National Poppy Day flower (JPEG form)
- Downloadable poppy poster templates (PDF form)
- Downloadable 8x2' and 8x3' National Poppy Day banners (PDF form)
- Link to the Poppy Shop at Emblem Sales: the ALA poppy coloring book, National Poppy Day pins, event supplies, products, and more



DO YOU READ THE ALA BLOG?

These brief, online articles are captivating stories about members in the ALA, program ideas, upcoming events, and much more! Check it out at www.ALAforVeterans.org/blog.

LEGISLATIVE ALERTS:

As a member of The American Legion Family, you have a powerful voice to advocate for veterans' issues. To stay in the know and continue making your voice heard, sign up for The American Legislative Action Alerts at www.votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/home.

Awareness of the Legion's legislative priorities prepares ALA members to effectively communicate with legislators concerning impending legislation at all levels of our government.



WINTER IS A GREAT TIME TO TAKE ALA ACADEMY COURSES:

Stay mission-focused this winter by taking free ALA Academy courses that will enhance your membership experience. Learn new skills and gain fresh ideas to help fulfill our overall mission of better serving veterans, military, and their families through these educational webinars. If you missed a previous course, past ALA Academy webinars are recorded and available to watch at www.ALAforVeterans.org/ALA-Academy.

**“No person was ever honored
for what he received.
Honor has been the reward
for what he gave.”**

— Calvin Coolidge, 30th president of the United States



Our members know the meaning of honor and the sacrifice that comes along with it: family members not around for holidays, birthdays, kids' sports games, and choir performances. For some, the absence is temporary due to deployment — for others, the absence is permanent. This is the price we pay for our freedom. May we never forget the honor of those who wear our nation's uniform and pledge their allegiance to our flag. To our military — past, present, and future: You deserve all the honor for what you have done for our country.

Above: Atmosphere at the 106th annual Veterans Day Parade on Nov. 11, 2025, in New York City (Andrea Renault/STAR MAX/IPx).



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

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today:



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