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# Auxiliary

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# Auxiliary

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**ON THE COVER:** ALA member Amy Luft and veteran Michele Skanks at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial during the national ALA-sponsored Lone Eagle Honor Flight to Washington, D.C. Veterans toured the memorials and built friendships with their comrades in arms (photo by Alexa Freeman/ALANHQ).

**ABOVE:** Illinois Unit 96 members take part in the inaugural National Poppy Day Virtual 5K. People across the country completed their 5Ks in a variety of ways.

My installation seems like yesterday, but here I am writing my final magazine article as your national president. What a year it has been! As I traveled this country, I was so excited to see how our unit members work our mission every day. Do we all do it the same way? Of course not. Do we all focus on the same parts of our mission? Again, no. Whether it is wearing Be the One branded shirts on the first day of each month or Remember Everyone Deployed (R.E.D.) branded shirts every Friday, we dress for the mission.

Maybe it is serving our military and their families through baby showers, KDH2 programs, or holiday parties. Or you may be distributing poppies to assist a veteran to go on an Honor Flight or provide much needed items to the VA. So many ways to serve! I visited many VAMCs and state veterans homes this administrative year. What an honor to see the care our veterans are receiving. However, it is our ALA volunteers who make their day. The veterans know them by name and look forward to seeing them. I feel that the veterans also make the day of the volunteers. What a rewarding way to serve our mission.

Please consider volunteering. We know not everyone can be a regularly scheduled volunteer, but there is so much you can do — help with bingo, help with a monthly birthday party, or sit and visit with a veteran for an hour. All of these things help! It makes me so proud to be an ALA member when VA directors tell me, “Whenever I need anything for our veterans, I know I just have to call our Auxiliary volunteers.”

One of my favorite things

***“Whenever I need anything for our veterans, I know I just have to call our Auxiliary volunteers.”***



**MISSION FIRST:** National President Pam Ray met many veterans, military, their families, and American Legion Auxiliary members throughout her travels across the country during the 2025-2026 administrative year.

to do when I visit a VAMC or Community Living Center is to visit with the veterans and get to know them. I met a man at the Tibor Rubin VA Medical Center in California. He asked to take a picture with me. How could I resist?! After the photo, he said to be sure I put his picture in a magazine. So ... here it is — Marine Michael! We will be sure our wonderful ALA volunteer gets a copy to him.

I recently was in the wonderful state of Wyoming. I visited two small communities: Green River and Rock Springs. Talk about being known in their communities! Rock Springs held a veterans walk while I was there. We had 181 participants from The American Legion Family, as well as the community — JROTC, Legion baseball team, a school

drumline, and many community participants. It raised awareness and funds for our veterans. Way to go, Rock Springs! That same evening, we had a masquerade ball to raise funds for veterans and the community. In support of the Legion Family USA 250 Challenge, they raised over \$250 for their community senior center, which runs on donations and grants only. What great community service!

Thank you, American Legion Auxiliary family for welcoming me into your communities and posts. I feel I have many new, lifelong friends, and I KNOW our mission is alive and well. Mission: It is who we are, it is what we do, and it is why we are here.

*Pam Ray*  
Pam Ray  
National President

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**REPRESENTING ALA** (from left): National Headquarters' Janela Watford, Hannah Amos, Maggie Smith, and Alexa Freeman attend a memorial service on National Poppy Day® in downtown Indianapolis.

Every year at ALA National Headquarters, we receive a listing of department conventions from The American Legion. By the time this issue of *Auxiliary* hits mailboxes, most



of the states will have hosted these large gatherings of members, electing new leadership and starting on new outreach initiatives.

In the Auxiliary, our members sometimes refer to each administrative year as “one and done” because operations-wise, we work year to year. Leadership changes annually, and with that comes an annual focus area, different fundraising efforts, and so on.

That’s our structure — we are an organization that more or less

rebirths itself every year.

But there is one thing that never, ever changes: our mission of serving veterans, military, and their families.

Pretty much since our founding in 1919, we’ve had our sightlines on those who wore the uniform, as well as their unsung heroes (spouses, children, parents, etc.) on the homefront. All of these people are special to us and always will be. Our organization was created to take care of them.

Leadership, projects, and focus areas may come and go every year, but our mission remains. Forever.



Watch our National Convention livestream Aug. 31 to Sept. 2 to see how members fulfilled our enduring mission. View the happenings at [www.ALAforVeterans.org](http://www.ALAforVeterans.org).

## AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY

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Serving Veterans, Military, and their Families*  
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**Focus on the poppy important year-round for Juniors**

The Junior Auxiliary placed 700 poppies in front of the Baden American Legion near the crosses

that represent those who gave all and to represent Flanders Field along with a poster that had the poem, *In Flanders Fields*, written by John McCrae, on it.

— Sue Dunlap, Pennsylvania



**Sharing the ALA mission through local library**

I am part of the Auxiliary, and



I am a reading teacher at our local library. Each year, my students

invite veterans to talk to us about their service and we, in turn, make a craft to hand out to the veterans at our Veterans Appreciation Event. We also do a craft for the veterans for Memorial Day.

— Robin Boyle, New York

**Gathering our young members positive for mission**

The annual Department of Illinois Junior & Young Sons Conference was held in Monticello, Illinois. In support



of Department President Jill Layton's theme of "BELIEVE," senior, Junior, and young Sons from Unit 208, Squadron 208 (Arlington Heights), Unit 690, and Squadron 690 (Palatine) donned "believe" T-shirts because, after all, anything and everything can be accomplished if you believe!

— Donna Locher, Illinois

**Florida Legion Family unites for National Guard event**

Members of American Legion Post 15 and Auxiliary had the honor of volunteering at our local National Guard Family Day. Our volunteers helped run activity tables and assist throughout the



event so that the soldiers and their families could spend the

day doing what mattered most — relaxing, connecting, and enjoying time together. Several American Legion posts from our district also helped make the day special through their generosity — Post 34 and Post 4 contributed donations that helped provide gift baskets, kids' grab bags, face painting, balloon artists, and even a petting zoo for the families to enjoy. Post 15 and our Auxiliary also hosted a table where attendees could learn more about The American Legion Family and how to become members.

— Jennifer McGregor, Florida

**Female veterans honored with annual brunch**

Each year, our small unit honors female veterans with a



brunch. This year, we had 26 attend. They came from many different communities and even from another state. We advertise by putting up posters, Facebook, newspapers, radio, and churches. We give them favors and had a door prize this year. We also give the ladies an opportunity to talk about their experiences in the military. We get inquiries months ahead of time of when it will be held. This is one of our favorite projects.

— Julia Moore, Illinois

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**FAMILY FUNDRAISE:** Junior members from the Department of Colorado Unit 134 raised funds through a blanket toss for two veterans who were in a car accident.

### SUCCESSFUL BLANKET TOSS FUNDRAISER FOR VETERAN FAMILY

ALA Department of Colorado Junior members and the community rallied together for a simple, yet effective fundraiser for a local family who was in a car accident.

During a weekend-long basketball tournament, Unit 134 members were able to raise about \$1,000 for the family through a blanket toss.

Helping the two veterans — the mom is a teacher at the local school where many Junior

members attend — and their family was an easy way to make a 100% profit that could go back to the family in their time of need.

When the Juniors found out a blanket toss to raise money for this family was in the works, they were very supportive.

“A lot of them had [the injured mom] as their fifth-grade teacher or were friends with the daughter,” said Unit 134 Junior Activities Chair Kaitlyn Foos. “We are a close-knit community.”

Other nearby communities were there as well, contributing to the cause.

They used a throw blanket for the fundraiser, with many people getting out of their seats to contribute.

“It’s a coin toss, but people were adding paper money — \$50s, \$100s,” Foos said. “We were just blown away. We thought maybe we would get a couple hundred but did not expect that.”

For those who were unable to easily maneuver down the bleachers to the blanket, Junior members walked up and down the stairs with a basket to easier collect donations.

About 12 Juniors helped with the fundraiser, from seniors in high school to kindergarteners.

“They have big hearts for giving back and helping,” Foos said.

### ***How to do a blanket toss fundraiser:***

- **If you are conducting a fundraiser like this at a school event, make sure to get approval and have a good explanation written of the fundraiser.**
- **Use social media as an additional tool for donations.**
- **Go into the crowd for donations too rather than relying on people coming down to you, especially if they aren’t able. Have a basket for collection while walking up and down the bleacher stairs.**

### CALIFORNIA JUNIOR MEMBER ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN LEGION FAMILY ACTIVITIES

Department of California Junior member Elizabeth



Carmichael has been involved with The American Legion Family for several years.

At 15, she has served as the honorary Junior Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation chair, as well as honorary Junior historian.

She also has helped put together and distribute gift bags for veterans receiving treatment at U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs facilities and has organized a clothing drive for a U.S. VETS homeless shelter that collected around \$12,000 in clothing, diapers, and other items.

“It feels like when I do stuff like this, I’m giving back to those veterans,” she said. “They fought for our freedom. We are supposed to help veterans and the community.”

Carmichael also has been very active discussing Be the One.

“Be the One is my passion

project,” she said. “I’ve had a ton of veterans I’ve seen get really affected with their past. Being so close to the veterans, I never want them to feel that way. It’s really nice to know they have those resources available for them.”

Carmichael offers advice to other Juniors on getting more involved with the mission.

“If there’s an event the Auxiliary is doing, go out and see if there’s something you can help with,” she said. “Any type of help within an event is valuable to the American Legion Auxiliary and helping you grow into a better Junior.”

## AUXILIARY YOUTH RAISE FUNDS FOR SOY AND EARN A PATCH

The Spirit of Youth Fund provides several scholarship opportunities.

A special Junior patch has been created for our Junior members and Sons of The American Legion youth to be involved in raising money for the Spirit of Youth Fund.

*Auxiliary* magazine highlights two Junior members who successfully earned the SOY patch:

### Ariyanah O'Dell, Kentucky Raised \$100; spoke to post commander and members for donations

O'Dell shared with American Legion Family members about



the importance of the Spirit of Youth Scholarship and why donations to this fund were needed.

At 11 years old, O'Dell had to do quite a bit of public speaking to get the donations.

"I can be nervous but end up doing it, and it can be fun," she said. "Nervousness goes away, and then it's more comfortable."

O'Dell said she likes knowing her efforts will make a difference for youth.

"Knowing I did all that hard work and everything to help means a lot to me," she said. "Makes me feel happy when I did that."

For other youth who are ready to earn their SOY patch by raising funds for the scholarship, O'Dell offers a piece of advice.

"Don't be nervous and just try your best and do new things," she said.

### Kayleigh Lawless, Texas Raised \$90 making and selling homemade dog and cat treats

"It's exciting, and it was fun to do the project," Lawless said



about earning her Spirit of Youth patch through fundraising.

This is her first patch — she has more to submit and is working on others.

Lawless said coming up with her idea for how to fundraise was pretty easy.

"I love animals, and it was just a good idea that came to me," she said.

Of course, there were some difficulties as part of the treat-making process.

"Some of the treats didn't turn out the right shape, but my dog enjoyed them," she said.

For Lawless, it was fun that a lot of people bought the treats quickly.

She sold them at Post 597 in Carrollton, Texas. She also sold some online and shipped them. Lawless had a table set up in front of The American Legion post home.

The feedback from her family, friends, and community was positive.

"[The feedback was that] I did great selling them, and the animals really liked them," she said. "I also donated some of the treats to the Carrollton Animal Shelter."

Like O'Dell, Lawless has advice for other youth who want to help fundraise for this scholarship.

"They should make something that a lot of people want or that they have multiple of," she said.

"That way, they can make a lot of money to send into the fund."

### How to earn your SOY patch

The Spirit of Youth Fund has several parts: American Legion Auxiliary Junior members, another

for Junior Members of the Year, one is for participants in the American Legion Auxiliary Girls Nation program, and the Non-Traditional Student Scholarship are all part of SOY.

Any Junior or SAL youth can earn the patch if they raise at least \$5 for each year old. For example, a 17-year-old would raise a minimum of \$85 (17 x \$5 = \$85).

Donations can be raised in a variety of ways. Juniors and SAL youth can solicit donations from family, friends, American Legion Family members, or contribute themselves. Fundraising activities can be coordinated, such as bake sales or other types of sales, etc. Funds can be raised individually or as a group, but each Junior or SAL youth receiving this patch needs to have raised the required minimum funds for their age. The goal is for the youth of our ALA and SAL organizations to be involved and aware of the scholarship project.



**FOCUSING ON SOY:** Ariyanah O'Dell at a lemonade stand during her local American Legion garage sale; Kayleigh Lawless advertising her homemade dog treats she sold for Spirit of Youth fundraising.



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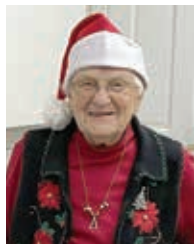
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***“...I believe it’s very important to involve our youth in supporting veterans and understanding their sacrifice, and how it makes their lives today better.”***

## ALICE JOHNSON

Alice Johnson’s parents signed her up as a Junior member the first year the American Legion Auxiliary created that level



of membership in 1934. Now, at 100 years old, Johnson is still dedicated to serving veterans, military, and their families. She has been a continuous member of ALA Unit 61 in Deep River, Conn., where her father, World War I veteran William Frederick Winschel, was a charter member of American Legion Post 61.

Johnson’s daughter, Cindi Stannard, is also a member of Unit 61.

“Seeing her involvement and volunteerism from an early age inspired me to become involved in volunteer organizations and nonprofits, including the Auxiliary. She showed me it was hard work but very rewarding,” said Stannard. “I would like people to know how hard her life was but how inspiring and positive she has been her entire life.”

*Auxiliary magazine interviewed Alice Johnson to learn more about how her ALA membership has evolved over the decades and why being a member is still so important to her.*

### **Over the years, how do you think the ALA has changed?**

More family-oriented in the beginning. District meetings and local meetings were held on Sunday afternoons and entire families would attend. After meetings, families stayed and had picnics.

### **Is there something the ALA no longer does that you would like to see the organization do again?**

It’s not something the organization no longer does, but I would like to see more involvement with younger servicemembers and families to carry the programs on to the next generation. It is very difficult to get newer members and help people understand what the organization does and why they should belong.

### **What are your favorite activities and events as an ALA member?**

Memorial Day activities, services, and the Poppy Program. Annually marching with my unit



in two parades where we’re joined by a 5- or 6-year-old who is named Poppy Queen.

The junior high home economics class also cooks breakfast the morning before their school Memorial Day programs as an outreach to all veterans in town. I love this tradition because I believe it’s very important to involve our youth in supporting veterans and understanding their sacrifice, and how it makes their lives today better.

For me, it’s all about respect for service and country. I feel very strongly about supporting our military during and after service, as both my husbands, both of my brothers, and my father served. I also believe in supporting the families.

One of the highlights was attending National Convention in Hawaii. I had never been there, and my first husband and my father served in the Pacific Theater and spent time in Hawaii. So, I always wanted to go there and see the memorial for WWII.

### **Why do you think others should join the ALA and keep their membership active?**

To support the work of the organization and the veteran programs. It is an important organization that supports servicemembers and families, especially the wounded and those in veterans hospitals and homes.



**COMMITTED TO THE MISSION:** Alice Johnson as a young girl dressed up for Memorial Day with her brother; years later, Johnson distributes poppies in exchange for a donation on Memorial Day.

**“Leadership is not about a title  
or a designation.  
It’s about impact, influence, and inspiration.”**

**— Robin S. Sharma, leadership expert and author**



Leaders have been part of our organization since our founding over a century ago. Members rise to the leadership call at all levels of the Auxiliary — from unit to department to national — and then pass on the knowledge gained to the next person in line. This time of year, there can be a lot of change in American Legion Auxiliary leadership as we wrap up one administrative year and prepare for the next. But no matter the position or years of leading at the helm, one thing is true for all Auxiliary leadership: We are a community of volunteers serving veterans, military, and their families, and our mission is the focus of all we do.

*Above: From the ALA National Headquarters’ archives, Executive Committee members meet early in the ALA’s history. Strong leadership has been at the forefront of our organization since the beginning.*



*How does your unit engage with schools during the academic year to serve your community?*



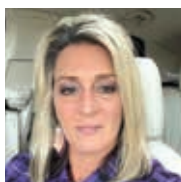
“New York Unit 1360 in the Cherry Valley Springfield Central School district provides the ALA coloring books to the second grade at three different times during the year. We are also lucky enough to have five members teach at the school!”

— Brenda Lamouret, New York



“Ricard Stewart Unit 505 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Our members have quarterly story time at local elementary schools. We help with uniform purchases and winter coats. We also provide supplies to teachers for families in financial situations, along with helping teachers replenish their supplies mid-year.”

— Monique Batiste, Louisiana



“Auxiliary Unit 39 collects school supplies, shelf-stable food/snacks, and hygiene products for our local school district before the year starts and throughout the year. We received so many generous donations last year [that] they asked us to pause collection because they were out of storage space.”

— Angela Schaffer, Minnesota



“Post and Unit 25 work together getting personalized backpacks to first-graders filled with school supplies. We have the Americanism Program, we go to the school during Veterans Day, and we go to the school to see if we can get junior boys and girls to sign up for TAL/ALA Boys and Girls State.”

— Yvonne Kosteletzky, Montana



“We work with a local company to bring dictionaries to the third-graders at our local elementary school every year. We also collect school supplies for both first and second semesters. Unit 528 Alto, Michigan.”

— Andrea Clark Boyd, Michigan



“Unit 62 engages with local school principals during the summer to build a strong partnership and identify ways the unit can support students, teachers, and families. Our unit coordinates back-to-school drives tailored to the schools’ specific needs and specific programs. We also assist with classroom projects, education activities, and community needs.”

— Michelle Ayen Katzenberger, Arizona



“Unit 1776 is a new unit, but we have already worked with local schools by providing posters for their Poppy Poster Contest and information on the Americanism essay. We provided chess sets for a local Catholic school. More than two-thirds of their students are now in the chess club!”

— Kimberly McInnis, Oklahoma

**AMERICAN  
LEGION  
AUXILIARY**

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**GAMING GRANT:** Veterans participate in a variety of games at the Robert J. Dole VA Medical Center. The interactive technology helps with memory, education, and entertainment.

## DEPARTMENT OF KANSAS AWARDED ALA FOUNDATION GRANT TO PROVIDE VETERANS GAMING EQUIPMENT

For her term as 2024-2025 Department of Kansas president, Tracy Kinnick chose a project near and dear to her heart.

After seeing interactive gaming systems and the benefits they can provide veterans and their families at an ALA National Convention, Kinnick decided to

bring those benefits to Kansas' U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) hospitals and veteran homes.

"I liked the fact that with the gaming system, it got the veterans moving. It got them talking. It got them laughing and having a good time," Kinnick

said. "With our main focus of Be the One and engaging our veterans, I truly felt that was a good project to get them just to interact and talk with each other some more."

To aid in Kansas' endeavor, Kinnick applied for and received an American Legion Auxiliary Foundation Veteran Projects Fund grant.

The grant enabled the department to provide projectors and other interactive technology for the Robert J. Dole VA Medical Center in Wichita.

The equipment provides over 150 games for memory, education, and entertainment that can be projected on the wall, floor, tables, or other accessible locations for patients.

"The biggest user of the system is a veteran who suffers with some cognitive processing, and this system has allowed him an avenue to share his life stories with staff," said Sara Monckton, Community Living Center nurse manager. "As he is playing, he reminisces about his life and the things he has accomplished. This system gives the veterans something to look forward to, and, since it has a wide range of games and multiple proficiency levels, it accommodates everyone."

When the gaming equipment was installed, Kinnick said veterans' reactions were great.

One instance that stuck out was a resident who repeatedly played a fishing game. He opened up and joked that he's a fisherman,

but he'd caught more fish in the game than in real life.

The impact of the equipment wasn't limited to the residents — it also spread to the staff. Kinnick noticed and was overjoyed to see.

"The staff were just so appreciative, so grateful, and so excited," Kinnick said. "That made my heart overjoyed to see the interactions — not only with the veterans and the family there, but also with the staff — and how they were all able to mingle and just have a good time."

Monckton said VAMC staff felt blessed and honored that the ALA helped them receive the technology to better care for their residents.

"We believe it's going to benefit all our veterans, both those with cognitive decline and those without. This system will help restore a sense of

camaraderie that's been missing since COVID, encouraging our veterans to work on games together, get out of their rooms, and enjoy some fellowship," she said.

Kinnick's goal was to fundraise for similar equipment for other VAs and veteran homes in Kansas. The Veteran Projects Fund grant made the department's goal more achievable.

"The Foundation's support through the additional funding helped turn this idea into a reality and eased the burden of raising extra funds on our own," Kinnick said. "Without the Foundation's assistance, bringing this project to life would have been much more challenging."

She greatly appreciated the support the ALA Foundation provided throughout the process.

With help from the Foundation, the grant process went smoothly.

Kinnick encourages other ALA members to connect with the ALA Foundation, finding it to be a great support system to help with projects and the ALA mission.

"If you have any idea — any thought at all — of something you think you want to do, reach out to the Foundation and ask them. They might say, 'No, we can't do that, but we can do this,'" Kinnick said. "They're very helpful."

To learn more about the ALA Foundation's grants and how you can positively impact our mission, go to [www.ALAFoundation.org](http://www.ALAFoundation.org). Contact the ALA Foundation by calling (317) 569-4500 or emailing [ALAFoundation@ALAforVeterans.org](mailto:ALAFoundation@ALAforVeterans.org).

## AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY

### TO DO LIST

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

## It is never too early to renew!

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

**You can pay your dues online at [www.ALAForVeterans.org](http://www.ALAForVeterans.org), by phone at (317) 569-4570, or mail your dues to your unit.**

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



**IN HONOR OF:** ALA Department of Texas members Catherine Boyce and Peggy Mondy joined the Auxiliary in honor of and in memory of the military service of U.S. Army veteran Clement Ray Mondy Jr. — Boyce’s father and Mondy’s late husband.

## FATHER’S MILITARY SERVICE INSPIRED FAMILY MEMBERS TO JOIN THE AUXILIARY

ALA Department of Texas member Catherine Boyce joined the Auxiliary to honor her late father. Clement Ray Mondy Jr. served in the U.S. Army during the Korean War.

Following his military service, he joined American Legion Post 201 in Shiner, Texas, so his sister could join the Auxiliary.

“Over the years, he was busy running a business and raising a family in Houston, so he never

moved his membership from his home post,” said Boyce. “He enjoyed the monthly magazine, renewed his yearly membership, and sent donations to the post to support their projects.”

On his 85th birthday on July 10, 2013, Mondy suggested that Boyce and her mom, Peggy Mondy, should join the American Legion Auxiliary.

“He pulled out his yellowed, onion-skin DD214 and had me make a copy,” Boyce recalled. “I flew home but was too busy helping my husband run our sawmill business to actually look up a local unit and join. Sounds a bit like ‘chip off the old block.’”

Boyce’s father passed away on Christmas Day in 2013.

“His obituary was published in both the *Houston Chronicle* and the *Shiner Gazette*,” she said. “A short time later, we read online the article where Dad’s membership was moved to post everlasting. It touched our hearts.”

Mondy’s military marker was placed in July 2014.

“Before going out to the cemetery to see it, my mom and I decided to honor Dad first by driving over to our neighborhood American Legion Post 560 in Houston with a copy of his DD214. We completed the ALA application and soon became members,” said Boyce. “A short time later, Post Commander Richard Voorhies heard my mother talking about her service in the Marine Corps. He brought her an application to become a dual member.”

Boyce lives in New Jersey but remains a Texas ALA member.

“I fly home to Houston quarterly to be with Mom. Together, we enjoy working on projects to serve our veterans,” said Boyce. “My mom celebrated her 93rd birthday on April 30. She is so supportive of veterans, children’s projects, and sharing her patriotism with everyone she meets. Joining the Legion and ALA was a natural fit for her and me.”

Boyce said she thinks her father would be proud to know they took his suggestion and finally joined.

“He would also be proud of our service in the American Legion Auxiliary,” she added. “The program has been an excellent venue to use our individual and collective talents to support our veterans, active-duty military, and community. Mom and I enjoy this incredible outlet to use our love of country, veterans, and children to support programs that can make a difference for others in a meaningful and creative way.”



**We want to hear from you! Tell us about the veteran(s) in your life.**  
Email us at [PR@ALAforVeterans.org](mailto:PR@ALAforVeterans.org).



**HELPING THE HOMELESS:** Finished sleeping bags are ready to distribute to veterans in need. Auxiliary members in Florida work hard year-round to make these.

## THANKS TO FLORIDA UNITS, HOMELESS VETERANS HAVE A COMFORTABLE PLACE TO SLEEP

Many hands make light work.

Auxiliary members of Unit 25 and Unit 69 in the Department of Florida make sleeping bags and quilts for homeless veterans and others.

Over the years, volunteers have been able to collect over 8,000 plastic bags and bring them to unit members for assembly,

keeping them out of the landfill.

“Hundreds of ALA members as well as citizens provide plastic bags as two communities are involved in the project,” said Joanne Bishop, Unit 25 historian. “It takes approximately six to 10 people to complete one mat. They normally work on more than one mat in a sitting.”

Each individual mat takes approximately 850 plastic bags and a week to assemble. The quilters also require days to complete.

This is a constant, year-round project for these units.

For other units that may want to take on a project like this, it's a chance to demonstrate the Auxiliary's *Service Not Self* mindset.

“The teams develop great fellowship and camaraderie while working together to make sure our homeless veterans know they are not forgotten,” she said. “Just knowing what an impact you are making to ensure these veterans are taken care of makes all the difference in the world.”

For Bishop, knowing the units are making an impact in the lives of our homeless veterans means so much.

“Two American Legion Auxiliary units that are in close proximity can join together to help our veterans,” she said. “It is unusual and amazing. Sometimes it takes a village.”

### Ready to take on this project?

#### Follow these steps:

1. Put the word out to members, the community, etc., to drop off plastic grocery bags at your designated location.
2. Flatten bag, fold in half, then again until approximately 2 to 3 inches wide.
3. Cut the fold into approximately 2 to 3 inch wide pieces.
4. Open a piece (circle) and do the same with the rest of the pieces. Wrap one piece through the other like you would two rubber bands. Stretch them together tightly to form a small knot. Continue knotting the long strips until long enough to form a ball the size of a small soccer ball.
5. Pass ball from baller to crocheters. The crocheters crochet the mats as you would regular yarn to complete a mat approximately 6 or more feet long and 4 or more feet wide.
6. The quilters sew the quilt and pass it to the group that assembles them together.
7. Distribute to veterans in need.



## SHARED VISION IN LEADERSHIP BENEFITS ENTIRE AMERICAN LEGION FAMILY

Department of Wisconsin American Legion Auxiliary Unit 288 member Maggie Geiger and American Legion Post 288 member Bob Shappell (who is a tri-member — Legion, ALA, and Sons), share more than pride in our country and a history of dedicated service and leadership to The American Legion Family.

Both have led at their unit/post, county, district, and department levels — and today, they continue that service at the national level — representing their department and unit/post as members of their respective National Executive Committees (NEC).

Members involved at all levels of The American Legion Family help with bringing a cohesive leadership structure to the unit/post to ensure the mission is fulfilled for our veterans, military, and their families.

*Auxiliary magazine learned from Geiger and Shappell why joint leadership matters and how others can do the same to bring the most benefit to your Legion Family.*

Being from the same post home and serving at a national level is very special to both.

“Bob has been a longtime friend and encourager, mentoring me and helping me grow as a leader,” Geiger said. “At first, I didn’t realize how unique [our situation] was until speaking with other NECs. Attending the Washington Conference together and meeting our senators and representatives was wonderful. Hearing Bob present the Legion’s priorities from his perspective gives better insight into the importance of supporting legislative priorities. Being from

the same unit has allowed me to encourage and support Bob as he has taken on larger roles within our unit and department.”

Shappell agrees that it has been a noteworthy situation and hopes other units/posts will follow suit with joint leadership in some capacity.

“I love that we have this unique opportunity to represent our local Legion Family in Cedarburg at the national level,” Shappell said. “It is definitely a very special time for both of us. We both love our community and the members of the Cedarburg Family. I also love that I am an Auxiliary member for six years, making this situation even more unique for my unit.”

### Does having two national leaders from your unit/post seem to be encouraging others in your post home to work together and strive for leadership positions too?

Geiger: I believe it has. Members are asking more questions about structure, programs, and leadership. They aren’t intimidated by titles. For the 2026-2027 administrative year, members have stepped up into leadership roles in our Auxiliary. It will be a pleasure to support and encourage these new leaders and watch them grow.

Shappell: We have great cooperation at our local Legion Family already, but I have experienced quite a few members — especially new members — ask about the red cap I wear and what it means. That gives me



a chance to explain more about our organization and the amazing number of great programs we support.

### What advice would you give other Legion Family members about working together throughout all levels (unit to national)?

Geiger: If you feel called to try a leadership role, don’t be afraid to step up. Many members are available to help, answer questions, and bounce ideas off. My greatest learning came from members who challenged me, made me research, and reach out. Leadership is not about “I”; it’s about “we.”

Shappell: In Wisconsin, we refer to the community post/unit/squadron/Riders as the local Legion Family. In some ways, we are like a family business, and in some communities, we are among the oldest family businesses in town. We love family businesses because they have great products and services, and they are trusted members of the community. Working together, we can create the same reputation for our local Legion Family.

*Check out the ALA blog at [www.ALAforVeterans.org/blog](http://www.ALAforVeterans.org/blog) to read an extended version on leadership from Geiger and Shappell.*



**Does your unit/post have shared leadership across the Legion Family? Tell us about it! Email [PR@ALAforVeterans.org](mailto:PR@ALAforVeterans.org).**

## AGE IS JUST A NUMBER WHEN IT COMES TO VOLUNTEERING IN THE AUXILIARY

Visit American Legion Auxiliary units across the country and you will find volunteers ranging from Junior members to individuals serving well into their 90s — proving that age is just a number when it comes to making a difference.

Lillian McGivern, a member of Merkel-Bockholdt ALA Unit 107, Keystone, Iowa, is one such member who is engaged and energized by the Auxiliary's mission. Now in her 90s, McGivern has spent more than 30 years dedicating her time to a monthly event that serves female veterans. Her commitment to the event began in 1995 as part of her Iowa department president project to serve women veterans at the Iowa Veterans Home (IVH).

Each month, the women residing at the facility are invited to an afternoon of bingo, refreshments, and social time. Because these residents live in three separate buildings scattered across the campus, many of them only see each other at the monthly social.

The idea for the event struck McGivern in the 1990s while she was volunteering at IVH. She noticed that many female residents missed the same thing from home — the card clubs where they would get together with other women to play games and socialize. To fill this void, McGivern, along with then-Iowa 3rd District President Lois Slaba

and then-IVH representative Pauline Kinder, decided to create the Ladies' Social Hour for these women.

"Our first social was January 1996 with 12 ladies present," said McGivern. "They were so pleased and asked us to keep coming. And the rest is history."

The event always includes the Pledge of Allegiance, a celebration of the month's birthdays, joke time,

at the summer gatherings and occasionally throughout the school year.

In 2025, McGivern was recognized for her dedication and service. She was honored as an Iowa Veterans Home Volunteer of the Year Distinguished Service Award for 33 years of service and dedication to the ALA Ladies' Social.

"Needless to say, I was very surprised to be named IVH Volunteer of the Year in 2025," she said, "and humbled



**VOLUNTEER MINDSET:** Iowa ALA member Lillian McGivern started volunteering at the Iowa Veterans Home in the mid-1990s (pictured at top, second from right) and continues helping others today as a member in her 90s.



bingo, and door prizes. "We celebrate different months and their respective holidays in a special way," she said. "In May, it's a memorial service for our deceased ladies and their family members."

Though Slaba and Kinder have since passed away, the tradition lives on. Today, McGivern's daughter-in-law helps out each month, alongside IVH Volunteer Services Coordinator Laurel Degelau and Iowa ALA Hospital Representative Wendy Riggle. And proving once again that our age doesn't define us, ALA Junior members volunteer

when there are many other volunteers deserving recognition."

Despite being in her 90s, McGivern doesn't miss a Ladies' Social. The only time she has missed a monthly gathering was during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"These ladies at IVH — both veterans and spouses of veterans — have become family to us. We share hugs, family photos, and fun times together," she said. "It has made me more aware of loneliness and recognize the importance of a smile, a listening ear, and the joy of being happy together."



## PREPARING THE NEXT LEADER CRUCIAL FOR MISSION SUCCESS



Cindy Moore was only a few years into her decades-long membership with the American

Legion Auxiliary when she answered her unit’s call for greater involvement among young members.

Moore took on the role of unit vice president. She knew nothing about the position — and found that to get up to speed, she had to do her own research about the role and its requirements.

Determined to help other members avoid this experience as they stepped into new roles in the unit, she set out to establish a single, easily accessible resource that provides background, how-to’s, and forms for various leadership positions.

“If this happened to me, then it’s happened to others,” Moore said. “I don’t understand why you have to reinvent the wheel each time.”

In 2023 when she was president of ALA Unit 216 in Gretna, Neb., she created tabbed notebooks for each elected office. The notebooks contain a variety of information and resources compiled from

Moore’s own research, based on what she thought new members or officers might need to succeed.

Among each notebook’s materials are the Constitution & Bylaws and Standing Rules, a unit calendar, and information about ALA ceremonies and programs. The notebooks also contain forms and details related to volunteering.

After creating the notebooks, Moore led a retreat for officers in her unit to review them and make changes and updates as needed. She developed the notebooks to be living documents whose contents

officers adjust as needed.

Succession planning helps ensure that ALA units are prepared for any unexpected unavailability among officers. Efforts to smooth leadership transitions also encourage members to pursue these roles, confident that they’ll have the tools they need to perform their duties.






“There’s nothing worse than asking somebody to do something, and then they have a bad experience,” Moore said, “so they don’t take another role.”

Additionally, clarifying the responsibilities of each position helps units and leaders align their work with the expectations of the organization.

But making these resources and assistance available is effective only if it happens with each transition to new officers, Moore said. That’s why her unit’s notebooks include a statement encouraging the user to “pass this notebook on to the succeeding officer.”

“It’s vital that the next person knows what his or her responsibilities are,” she said, “so they can be more effective.”

**Cindy Moore of ALA Unit 216 in Gretna, Neb., advocates for clear transition plans for incoming ALA unit leaders. She offered the following tips:**

-  **Encourage ALA training.** ALA Mission Training, ALA 101, and other instruction can help establish a foundation for effective leadership.
-  **Direct members to resources.** The ALA offers a variety of resources at the national level, available through its website ([www.ALAforVeterans.org](http://www.ALAforVeterans.org)) and the MyAuxiliary member portal ([member.legion-aux.org/myauxiliary-member-portal](http://member.legion-aux.org/myauxiliary-member-portal)).
-  **Conduct an officer retreat.** Unit leaders can gather to learn about their roles and receive information about the organization and expectations for their position.
-  **Offer to help.** One to three months of mentorship and assistance is helpful for those settling into new roles.
-  **Create a one-stop shop.** Moore compiled a host of leadership resources in notebooks for elected roles.

ALA members who are interested in creating their own notebooks for elected positions and would like to know more about how Moore created these resources for her unit can contact her at [gretnaala216@gmail.com](mailto:gretnaala216@gmail.com).



### LEADERSHIP FOR THE

**MISSION:** North Dakota member Linda Stone was Unit 166 president for 36 years because members looked to her to help guide the many events and activities the unit has been involved in over the years.

### LEADERSHIP ROOTED IN ALA MISSION GUIDES NORTH DAKOTA UNIT

When Linda Stone joined the American Legion Auxiliary in 1971, she didn't plan to take on a leadership role. But she would go on to become president of Unit 166 in Walcott, N.D.

When she became president, she didn't plan to keep the role long-term. But in 2026 when she stepped down from the position, she had served in the role for 36 consecutive years.

During her tenure, Stone was a driving force behind the group's most significant events — from fundraising activities to active-duty servicemember support.

She said mission work too was not part of any grand plan. It was simply a matter of stepping up when no one else did, and

then doing the job she'd been tasked with doing.

"We tried to carry it through as best we could," Stone said.

Stone

joined the ALA at the urging of her friends who were members, learning all she could about the organization and its work by carefully paying attention to discussions and activities at each meeting. At an officer election in which no one else volunteered to be president of her unit, she was ready. She agreed to the position.

Each year after that, the unit's members looked to Stone to continue as president. She also would go on to hold roles such as district president and chair of the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Field and Home Service Committee.

Along the way, she was strengthening her leadership and presentation skills and earning accolades for her service.

"But I didn't do it for the award," Stone said. "I did it because I enjoyed it. Everything we did was important to me."

Each role represented an opportunity to support veterans and their families, a mission that had become so dear to Stone. She has many family ties to the military, including her husband, an Air Force

veteran. Her daughters joined her in ALA membership shortly after she became part of the organization.

Stone's guidance and behind-the-scenes work helped make activities and events possible that have shaped Unit 166 and the veterans and community it serves.

Among those efforts were Memorial Day programs and dinners, which she planned and then assisted with by coordinating volunteers and providing on-site help. She described the fundraising events as the most meaningful work of her presidency.

Another example of the unit's efforts under Stone's leadership was a campaign to knit helmet caps for servicemembers during Operation Iraqi Freedom. She also has regularly visited local cemeteries to honor ALA members laid to rest there.

So effective was her work that members likely would have selected her to carry on her work beyond 2026, but

she declined, explaining that it was time for new leadership.

In passing the torch, she advised following a path like hers — paying

***"I didn't do it for the award. I did it because I enjoyed it. Everything we did was important to me."***

attention to direction and then following through on responsibilities outlined in that guidance. But she also recommended that future presidents make the role their own.

"Read what you get from the Auxiliary, and do that," she said. "But it's however you want to do it, not just how I did it."



## FUNDRAISE SMARTER FOR YOUR ALA ENTITY WITH SMILEASSOCIATE

If you're an ALA member, you're probably being asked to donate to your unit's initiatives, your department president's project, your department's initiatives, the national president's fundraising focus, National Headquarters' initiatives, American Legion Auxiliary Foundation giving days, and American Legion projects and programs. I would also imagine your mailbox has a few ALA or Legion direct mail solicitations inside, patiently awaiting your reply with a check.

Nonprofit organizations are always looking for innovative ways to fundraise, but donors and supporters are feeling the financial strain just like everyone else. You can't even fill up your gas tank without being asked to round up for a charitable cause. So, what do we do with fatigued constituents? Meet them where they are.

We see you. We know you're stretched thin.

We also know programs can continue only if they're funded. So, what do we do? Fundraise with SmileAssociate.

SmileAssociate is a simple, no-cost fundraising program that turns everyday Amazon shopping into donations for your ALA entity or ALA Girls State program. When supporters shop on Amazon, a portion of eligible purchases is automatically donated, without changing how supporters shop or costing them anything extra.

If the name of the program is ringing a bell, you probably participated in the AmazonSmile program that ended in 2023. The SmileAssociate program is similar to that, but much easier for consumers to use. There is no alternative log-in, the payout for organizations is higher (1.5% vs. 0.5%), and SmileAssociate offers quarterly reporting so you can

reconcile your donations.

And here's the good news: SmileAssociate already built pages for every ALA entity and ALA Girls State program, so supporters can go straight to your link without any extra steps. All you have to do to get started is fill out the ACH form on the ALA's SmileAssociate website at [smileassociate.com/alanational](https://smileassociate.com/alanational) and then filter the list of ALA entities to find yours. Copy the link, share it, and start shopping!

### How funds are generated

When supporters shop on Amazon through your ALA entity's SmileAssociate link, eligible purchases generate a commission from Amazon. On average, SmileAssociate earns approximately 3% back from Amazon purchases, though that percentage can be higher for certain luxury and digital items. SmileAssociate then shares that commission 50/50 with the American Legion Auxiliary. From the Auxiliary's portion, 5% supports the Spirit of Youth Scholarship Fund at ALA National Headquarters, while the remaining 95% is distributed directly to participating ALA entities based on purchases generated through their unique links.

For example, if supporters generate \$10,000 in eligible Amazon purchases during a quarter, the average commission earned would be approximately \$300. SmileAssociate retains \$150, and the remaining \$150 is distributed between ALA National Headquarters and the participating ALA entity. In this example, the entity would receive approximately \$142.50. Payments are made quarterly via ACH and include full summary reporting for transparency.

### Start promoting your link

The key to success is visibility. Make sure people know how to access your ALA entity's SmileAssociate link. Encourage everyday use by reminding members and supporters to start their Amazon shopping through your link, whether for personal or business orders. You can include the link in emails and newsletters, share it on social media, mention it at meetings and events, or add it to your email signature. This is not limited to ALA members — anyone can shop on Amazon using your ALA entities' link, so encourage members to share it with friends and family. The wider your network, the larger the return.

### Download the shopping icon

Here are some simple instructions for downloading the SmileAssociate Platform shopping

icon directly to your phone:

Apple iOS (iPhone and iPad): Safari handles this natively for all iOS devices.

- Open Safari: Navigate to your shopping website.
- Tap share: It is the square icon with an up arrow at the bottom.
- Select add: Scroll down and tap add to home screen.
- Name and confirm: Type a shortcut name and tap add in the top right.

Google Android (Google Pixel, Motorola, etc.): Google Chrome provides a native prompt for modern websites.

- Open Chrome: Navigate to your shopping website.
- Tap menu (the three vertical dots in the top-right corner).
- Select add: Tap add to home screen (or install app if the site has a basic manifest).
- Confirm: Tap add to place

the icon on the home screen.

Samsung Android (Samsung Galaxy devices): Samsung devices often use Samsung Internet as the default browser, which has a distinct shortcut process.

- Open Samsung Internet: Navigate to your shopping website.
- Tap menu (the three horizontal lines in the bottom-right corner).
- Select add: Tap add page to.
- Choose location: Select home screen from the pop-up menu.

This is one of the easiest fundraising tools you'll ever implement.

Every Amazon purchase can now support your ALA entity if you choose to make it happen.

Questions? Contact Development Director Carley Schutz at [development@ALAforVeterans.org](mailto:development@ALAforVeterans.org).

## How It Works: Payout Example

If Unit 123 has \$10,000 in Amazon purchases from January — March:



### SUMMARY

- Eligible Amazon Purchases: \$10,000
- Average Amazon Commission (3%): \$300
- 50% retained by SmileAssociate: \$150
- 50% shared with the Auxiliary: \$150
- To ALA National Headquarters (5%): \$7.50
- To Unit 123 (95%): \$142.50
- Unit 123 Earns: 1.425% of Total Sales



### THE POWER OF CONSISTENCY

The more your members shop through your link, the more your unit earns!

*Every purchase makes a difference.*



## MEET YOUR NATIONAL PARLIAMENTARIAN, JOY FREELAND



The American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters Governance Team supports everything from basic

Constitution & Bylaws inquiries to formal appeals presented to the National Executive Committee — but we do not do this work alone. We rely on three key professional resources, each with a distinct area of expertise.

For legal matters, we partner with The American Legion’s national judge advocate, Mark Seavey. For governance interpretation and complex procedural guidance, we work with Professional Registered Parliamentarian Chris Dickey. We are also pleased to introduce our newest resource, Joy Freeland, who serves as our annually appointed national volunteer parliamentarian. In this role, Freeland is an excellent resource for questions related to general parliamentary procedure

and for assistance using Robert’s Rules of Order at the department and unit levels.

From a young age, Freeland knew she was interested in a career with structure and the ability to learn about and enforce rules. In high school, she was a member of the Independence, Mo., Police Department Explorer Post. After high school, she joined the U.S. Army and served as a military police officer.

After Freeland’s military service, she went back to school and earned her Registered Paralegal credentials and eventually retired as a paralegal. Through her career, she continued to feel the pull toward studying parliamentary procedure. After her sons left home and she had more time to study, it was a natural progression to become a credentialed parliamentarian. Freeland enjoys helping other people understand and follow the rules.

Freeland received her Professional Registered Parliamentarian credentials through the National Association of Parliamentarians (NAP) in 2010. She has served numerous local parliamentary units as president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and historian. She is currently in her fourth term as president of the Missouri State Association of Parliamentarians (MSAP) and has served MSAP in various other positions. Freeland served NAP as a member and later as chair of the Educational Resources Committee. Her passion is introducing youth and adults to parliamentary procedure and helping members advance in their parliamentary studies. She has volunteered hundreds of hours conducting workshops, teaching parliamentary procedure, and facilitating study groups for members.

As a Professional Registered Parliamentarian, Freeland serves local, state, and national clients by serving as a meeting parliamentarian, assisting with bylaws amendments, conducting workshops, and consulting on organizational issues. She also volunteers for various nonprofit and political organizations.

Freeland is a graduate of St. Leo University, and is a retired Registered Paralegal and veteran of the United States Army Military Police Corps. She has been a member of the American Legion Auxiliary for 22 years.



**Do you have a governance question for Professional Registered Parliamentarian Joy Freeland? Emailing [ConstitutionBylaws@ALAforVeterans.org](mailto:ConstitutionBylaws@ALAforVeterans.org) is your first step. While we are fortunate to have access to highly skilled professional resources, these individuals serve as national resources and are engaged through the ALA National Headquarters Governance Team.**



## ALA CHRISTMAS GIFT SHOPS A POSITIVE PARTNERSHIP FOR UNITS, SCHOOLS

It's never too early to prepare for Auxiliary Christmas Gift Shops, often hosted in November or December by units throughout the country.

For New York Unit 904, members have had a gift shop for over three decades. What began as a yearly event at the post home is now in a local school.

"It's important for our Auxiliary to do this for the community," said ALA member Judy Umstead, longtime leader of the gift shop. "Being at the school, we can reach out to more children."

Each year, pre-kindergarten to sixth-grade children make their way through the gift shop area, picking out presents for parents, grandparents, and siblings. Kids aren't charged more than \$1 for the gifts. The older kids (seventh to 12th grade) help younger students navigate the gift shop.

"The more we partner, the more we are able to serve," said Dean Erck, Post 904 member who helps with moving gifts from storage to the school. "Posts that support their schools and are present offering the kids opportunities get support back."

The partnership with the

school has paid off over the years.

Last year, the gift shop had 1,365 gifts available. The unit takes half the proceeds, and the other half goes to the school for its backpack program. The unit's half is put back into the gift shop to jumpstart funds for the next year.

The school sends letters to parents, letting them know about the gift shop and encouraging parents to send \$1 per child to shop.

"We have such a small community and so many people who need help," Umstead said. "It's amazing just to see the smiles on the children's faces."

Umstead has been helping with the gift shop nearly 20 years.

She and her daughter do the majority of shopping, often hitting up the local dollar store. They shop for kids, teens, and adults.

"This outreach is an example for many reasons, but the

modeling to children the value of good citizenship is our job as a Legion Family," Erck said. "As the children grow, they remember all the positive things we have done for them."

The unit is looking forward to this year's gift shop, helping as many area children as they can find gifts for their family ahead of the holiday season.

"It's such a fantastic feeling to be able to help the families," Umstead said.



### ***Tips on getting your Christmas Gift Shop going***

- Find out where to host your gift shop; better to have it at a school if possible to reach out to more children.
- Find out if you have the funds to jumpstart the shop.
- Figure out who is going shopping to purchase all of the items. Main shopping time: February, March, April, but continue browsing for items — especially during sales.
- Shop for multiple versions of items (toys, travel items, games, matchbox cars, socks, etc.).
- Have volunteers available for wrapping gifts.



**SOLID PARTNERSHIP:** North Carolina members check out a veteran room at Veterans Restoration Quarters. The organization had to find temporary housing after hurricane damage in 2024. ALA members have been helping out for years.

## NORTH CAROLINA AUXILIARY UNIT WORKS WITH HOMELESS VETERANS

### REACH OUT TO LOCAL AGENCIES TO SEE HOW YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Words can't describe the devastation to parts of North Carolina after Hurricane Helene ripped through in September 2024.

"My contacts at the VA hospital told me I could not get into the hospital from the exit we were used to driving in on, the bridge had been washed away, and houses were in the creek along the banks that stretch beside the Veterans Restoration Quarters," recalled North Carolina Unit 100 member Jill Puett.

The unit had been working with the Veterans Restoration Quarters as part of the Asheville Buncombe Community Christian Ministry (ABCCM) since approximately 2004 and has since continued its efforts after the hurricane.

"I managed to get to the new quarters," Puett said. "There

were volunteers there helping them get situated and welcomed new clothes, blankets, and food items. Every veteran on the ground level lost everything. It was all under water."

So many organizations were trying to help, but then the facility was overwhelmed with items and nowhere to store them. Unit

***"No veteran should be left without a home; they need kindness and respect."***

100 waited to let things get more organized and then staff was in touch with the ALA about what was most needed.

Veterans Restoration Quarters provides 160 beds of transitional housing, 40 beds for emergency shelter, and 50 units of permanent supportive housing, for a total of 250 beds.

There are homeless veterans who come from all over the state.

"You can't imagine how heartwarming it is to see the [ABCCM] folks and the volunteers who work with our veterans to help them have a better life and carry the mission of The American Legion Family," she said. "Everyone takes pride in helping each and every veteran."

Puett encourages Legion Family members to get involved with their area homeless veterans and make a difference in their lives.

"I would say to any organization, Legion Family, to not miss an opportunity to help our veterans," she said. "Do not let them feel less important, and ask how they can help give them a hand up. No veteran should be left without a home; they need kindness and respect. At the Veterans Restoration Quarters, they have leaders who come in and help them learn a new trade, and help to educate them."

### Veterans Restoration Quarters' Steps to Success:

1. **Stabilization** with all the basic necessities provided.
2. **Life skills training** with over 60 volunteer courses to choose from.
3. **Education and professional training certifications** that lead to living wage jobs.
4. **Reintegration** that leads to permanent housing.

*\*8 out of 10 leave with a living wage job and permanent housing.*



# Mark those calendars 2026-2027 ALA Mission Training dates



- Nov. 14: Northwestern Division\*
- Jan. 30: Albany, N.Y.\*
- Jan. 30: Springfield, Ill.
- Feb. 6: Atlanta, Ga.
- Feb. 6: Las Vegas, Nev.\*

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

Scan here to learn more:

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# 5 Ways to Donate to the ALA

**STEP 1:**

Donate Online

**STEP 2:**

Give by Mail

**STEP 3:**

Text "ALA" to 1-844-940-3450

**STEP 4:**

Donate Monthly

**STEP 5:**

Make a planned gift

To learn more about ways to donate to the ALA or make a gift online, visit [www.ALAforVeterans.org](http://www.ALAforVeterans.org) and click on "Give."

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**GETTING THE WORD OUT:** Minnesota American Legion Auxiliary Unit 357 members are active in their community, hosting annual events, such as Wheels, Tracks, and Wings — a Month of the Military Child event in April — and Turkey Bingo in November. Unit 357 hosts annual events throughout the year to build awareness and consistency for the public.

## ONCE NEARLY CANCELLING ITS CHARTER, MINNESOTA ALA UNIT NOW HOSTS EVENTS YEAR-ROUND

Ashby, Minn., American Legion Auxiliary Unit 357 had a tough decision on their hands: Fold the unit or change their structure to continue.

Though they still had the love and drive to serve their local veterans and military families, and their community, they were struggling with membership and their identity.

Sheri Anderson, unit president at the time the decision was made, called a meeting to discuss what could be done.

To help fix the situation, the unit decided to change its structure to focus more on the mission outreach side of

the ALA by forming groups focused on Youth, Community Service, National Security, and

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation activities. The unit refers to these groups as pillars. Members commit to one instead of spreading themselves thin and trying to do everything.

Along with committing unit members to a singular focus to become more productive with members' time, the unit cut down from meeting monthly to quarterly.

To maintain the overall focus, the unit has an executive committee made up of chairs/co-chairs of each outreach



mission. There are also executive positions, such as unit president/executive lead.

“We were in a situation that we either needed to change our structure or fold,” Anderson said. “Our intent was to circulate through — have members hold a three-year term in a pillar just to kind of spread that out.”

Currently, the unit is in the process of changing for the community.

“We really tried to reinvent ourselves,” Anderson said. “I’m not sure we’re totally there because our executive committee a couple years ago said, ‘If we went away, who would miss us?’ I think that’s kind of a sobering question to ask of our unit.”

With that serious question motivating them, the unit now hosts free, public events throughout the year.

Turkey Bingo and Wheels, Tracks, and Wings are two examples of events that fall under the unit’s youth mission outreach events that attract a large attendance. Wheels, Tracks, and Wings — a Month of the Military Child event that youth can learn



about airplanes and military vehicles — brings in around 600 attendees.

The annual events have helped the community and surrounding areas build a relationship with the unit.

“People are starting to recognize it and expect it. I think that part of the evolution of the identity is, if they think of Wheels, Tracks, and Wings ... then there’s that connection to our Auxiliary unit,” Anderson said. “When you create that awareness and excitement for that event, that’s where you really grow it.”

Melissa Johnson, unit president/executive lead, is a newer member to the unit who joined when the pillar structure was started.

“Being able to split into pillars meant that you were not a volunteer who was expected to volunteer for everything,” Johnson said.

Joyce Lacey, unit chaplain, has been a member of the ALA for over 45 years. When the conversation came up of the unit submitting its charter for cancellation, Lacey was



determined to keep the Auxiliary going, not only because of her dedication to service but also to the ALA’s legacy — one that Anderson also feels. Both Auxiliary members have strong family ties in The American Legion Family. Anderson hopes the legacy of the ALA continues with her granddaughter.

As the Ashby unit forges a new path, they’re maintaining ALA traditions while welcoming new ideas. They hope to continue

serving their community.

“We’ve been very fortunate to have very dedicated, committed members who support this and are willing to do whatever to keep things going,” Lacey said.

For other ALA units facing similar issues or hoping to host annual events, the unit has advice: Follow through.

“It’s a vision, and a lot of hard work to put it together, and a lot of hard work to keep it going,” Anderson said.



# ALA sponsors first Lone Eagle Honor Flight

**Female veterans recognized for their service, sacrifice**

**By Hannah Amos**

The American Legion Auxiliary is dedicated to honoring and recognizing veterans, a trait shared by Honor Flight Network Inc.

Together, the ALA sponsored an unforgettable and history-making Lone Eagle Honor Flight to honor female veterans who served during the Korean and Vietnam wars.

Veterans experienced a day of honor that provided a long-awaited acknowledgement of their service and sacrifice as both a veteran and a woman.

Lasting memories and connections were made. Following are a few veterans who shared their story and the trip's impact with us:

## **Patricia Hooks-Bass, U.S. Navy, Washington**

Patricia Hooks-Bass knew from the age of 13 that she was going to be in the U.S. Navy, inspired by her father's World War II service and love of John Wayne movies.

Hooks-Bass served for 24 years in the military as a journalist at various bases in the United States, Puerto Rico, and internationally in Italy.

Throughout her time in the military, her experiences ranged from DJing, working for and leading award-winning Navy news outlets, and being a female officer in male-dominated spaces.

All of the memories she made stayed with her, but she couldn't always share them.

The ALA-sponsored Lone Eagle Honor Flight provided Hooks-Bass that opportunity to share and connect.

"After I got back home is when it really hit me," she said. "It was such a rare opportunity for me to be around other women veterans — older ones and the same age — because as women, we don't go around wearing ball caps with our squadron insignias."

It was not only a time of connection, but a

moment of pride and validation.

“I was always proud of what I did,” Hooks-Bass said. “My brothers and sisters and mom and dad are always very proud of it, but because I’m out here with a group of new friends who have no connection to the military whatsoever, my past was kind of forgotten. Being around these other women who felt the same way — it made me feel kind of validated again.”

Many lasting memories were made on the trip — from the people she met to the memorials she visited — but her highlight was the ending. Local American Legion Family members surprised the veterans with a welcome-home at the hotel.

“Having those [Legion Family members] from the local area be there at 8 o’clock at night to greet us as we came off the bus: That really sticks with me,” she said. “To have that getting off the bus there in Baltimore at the hotel — that meant a lot to me ... to have that appreciation for my time in the service recognized.”

Being part of the ALA-sponsored trip is something Hooks-Bass said she’ll treasure for the rest of her life. It’s an experience she hopes other veterans will have too.

### **Doris Jones, U.S. Army Nurse Corps, New York**

Legionnaire Doris Jones served in West Germany and served a year tour in the Vietnam War in the Army Nurse Corps.

Jones’ military career brings complicated emotions.

“We saved a lot. A lot of them died, and then when you come home to a country that hated you, that was traumatic too. A lot of us were told not to wear your uniform,” Jones said. “They said, ‘Ditch your uniforms and consider civilian clothes because you’re going to be harassed at the airport,’ which we were.”

Like many other veterans who served, Jones didn’t speak much of her military experience afterward.

“For a long time, I never told anyone that I was over there,” Jones said about her time in Vietnam.

After her service, Jones took on different hobbies to give her an outlet — like skydiving and competitive pistol shooting.

“These different hobbies kept me away from post-traumatic stress,” she said. “A lot of people turned to drinking and drugs, but I never got in that type of situation with these different hobbies.”

The Lone Eagle Honor Flight was about remembrance for her and others. She not only wanted to be recognized, but she wanted to be there for fellow veterans, calling this a special trip because it was all women veterans.

“To know you weren’t the only one who was



**REMEMBRANCE DUE** (opposite page): veteran Marie Anderson holds the flag at the Military Women’s Memorial with fellow veterans. This page, from left: Arlington National Cemetery wreath laying; a veteran at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial; veteran arrivals at the airport; veteran Doris Jones (right) with her guardian; veteran Patricia Hooks-Bass arrives at the airport; Maryland Legion Family members welcome home veterans; veteran Irene Wilson does an etching at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (photos by Alexa Freeman and Hannah Amos/ALANHQ).

involved in it — we were volunteers. Guys got drafted, but us women — we volunteered for this,” Jones said. “I just wanted to join the group today and let them tell their story.”

At the end of the day, Jones “just wanted to show up,” and be there for the other veterans and for herself.

### **Marie Anderson, U.S. Marine Corps, Indiana**

Korean War U.S. Marine Corps veteran and Legionnaire Marie Anderson always wanted to be on an Honor Flight.

“My daughter, Debbie — who’s my guardian — got a notification,” Anderson said. “She asked me if I wanted to be on it ... because this is something I always wanted to do but never thought it was possible that I would be on a flight like this. I can’t tell you how awesome it’s been. At the end of my life to be here, it’s awesome.”

Anderson’s experience with her daughter helped her relive and remember her time in the service. She got to share her stories with her daughter and the other attendees on the trip — memories of being a Marine like her three brothers, her time stationed in Washington D.C., and so much more.

“It’s actually everything I thought it would possibly be,” she said. “I’m just tickled to death I’m here. That’s all I can say, and it’s made me extremely emotional.”

### **Cynthia Gatlin, U.S. Air Force, California**

Cynthia Gatlin served in the Air Force from 1968 to 1972. During her time, she served in Thailand as a medic to help aid the Vietnam War effort.

At the age of 19, the decision to join the Air Force was easy. When she graduated high school, she knew she wasn’t going to do what was expected of women at the time: marriage or be a teacher or nurse.

“I decided to join the Air Force to get out of the situation I was in — to travel, but most importantly, the military offered the opportunity for me to get a college education, which I did,” she said.

Her time in the military gave her the means to move from Washington, D.C. to California, where she attended college with the G.I. Bill and set up residency.

Gatlin’s time on the Lone Eagle Honor Flight not only gave her the chance to connect with other veterans, but also with youth visiting the same sites. She had many discussions with younger generations, sharing her experiences.

“I was stunned to see the younger generation

understanding what we went through as women because it’s different,” Gatlin said. “Now women are more equal. I remember not being able to get a credit card. So, the younger generation seems very much in tune to what’s going on.”

The experience was impactful and fulfilling for Gatlin. Being surrounded by other women with similar experiences was a highlight.

“My cup runneth over. This is one of the most wonderful experiences of meeting other veterans [of] the Vietnam War where female veterans weren’t treated very well,” Gatlin said. “We’re all together, and we all love each other. It’s unbelievable. I have no words for the feeling, but it’s wonderful.”

### **Dianna Dopp, U.S. Navy, Mississippi**

Legionnaire Dianna Dopp had a unique start with her Navy career. When her marriage collapsed in her 30s, she needed financial stability to provide for her children.

“In that era, women couldn’t open a bank account, they couldn’t buy a car, and they had to have a male cosign for everything. If you had a marriage that collapsed, you had no credit history; you had nothing. Even if you worked, you had nothing,” Dopp said. “I had to find a way to rebuild and start over pretty much. The Navy did it for me.”

Dopp had an interest in learning and working with computers, so she believed the Navy to be the best option for her. Initially under the impression she would serve four years in the Navy Reserve, she instead served 20 years active duty.

During her military career, she had the opportunity to travel to 59 countries, along with pursuing her passion in computers.

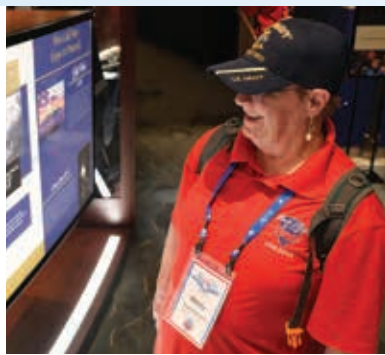
For her, the Lone Eagle Honor Flight provided a time of recognition. While in Washington, D.C., Dopp and many of the veterans had opportunities to connect with various age groups. Organic, educational moments happened during the trip where various generations learned these women’s stories.

She’s thankful to the ALA for providing this opportunity. ★



## **We have a branded bus in Washington, D.C.!**

To complement the ALA’s sponsorship with Honor Flight, a bus wrap was created to highlight the Auxiliary and Honor Flight collaboration. The bus transported veterans during their tour of the memorials around Washington, D.C. It will remain on the road for 365 days, being used for Honor Flights in Washington, D.C., as well as available for other events, which may include transporting senators and staff who attend ALA Girls Nation in July.



**VETERAN RESPECT** (from left): Veterans from the U.S. Armed Forces Retirement Home; veteran Stacey Byington at the U.S. Navy Memorial; a welcome group at the National Mall; group photo of the veterans at the Military Women's Memorial; female veterans at the U.S. Marine Corps War Memorial; veterans connect with National Guard members; Dianna Dopp arrives; and veterans Queen Amos (seated) and Roxanne Pack are all smiles with guardian Brandon Pack (photos by Alexa Freeman/ALANHQ).

# Louisville Kentucky

## National Convention to celebrate members' 2025-2026 mission moments

By Travis Perkins

American Legion Auxiliary members from across the country will gather in August in Louisville, Ky., to celebrate the administrative year and the difference that — together — the ALA has made for our nation's veterans, military, and their families.

Each year, about 9,000 members of The American Legion Family attend National Convention, which includes conventions for The American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, and Sons of The American Legion, as well as The American Legion Riders Legacy Run.

A few highlights of the week will include color guard and band contests, the Legacy Run arrival, ALA national governing board meetings, a patriotic

memorial service, our opening convention session, and the installation of our 2026-2027 national officers. ALA general sessions will begin Monday, Aug. 31,

and continue through Wednesday, Sept. 2. The national offices of president, vice president, national division vice presidents, chaplain, and historian will be elected by National Convention delegates on Wednesday and installed thereafter.

This year will also include extra celebrations for the United States' 250th birthday.

### Here's what happens at convention

At the ALA's largest national event, we elect officers, receive reports, and conduct the business of the organization as required by the ALA National Constitution, Bylaws, and Standing Rules. Part of that business is conducted by the National Executive Committee (NEC) — our national governing board — with fiduciary, policy, and strategic responsibility for the organization. The 2025-2026 NEC will meet in Louisville on Saturday, Aug. 29, and the 2026-2027 NEC will be convened by the newly elected national president on Thursday, Sept. 3.

During the ALA's National Convention week, attendees will also have an opportunity to honor a veteran or military personnel by donating to the Wall of Heroes. All funds received will benefit the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation's Mission Endowment Fund to ensure the ALA's mission of service endures for future generations. Those who cannot attend in person can still donate online in honor of their hero by visiting <https://donate.legion-aux.org/Hero>.

### ALA awards presented at National Convention

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

- **Salute to Servicemembers** recognizes military members from each branch of service.
- **Unit Members of the Year** recognizes those serving at the unit level who exemplify the values and



ideals of the Auxiliary and whose accomplishments significantly impact the program work in their units.

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

- **National President's Award for Excellence** recognizes the work accomplished by units while working at least three of the mission outreach programs, with a maximum of five unit winners; departments can win by working up to four of the mission outreach programs, with one department winner.

- **Department Merit Medallion Award** began during the 2024-2025 administrative year and has continued into this administrative year. The Department Merit Medallion Award focuses on recognizing and celebrating departments that strive for and achieve business management excellence. These elite departments understand that focusing on department business excellence not only drives volunteer engagement and allegiance, but it also cultivates respect in the ranks and validates the legitimacy of the ALA for both members and non-members.

## Stay connected online via our livestream and social media

Unable to attend National Convention in person? Our livestream is available for general sessions starting Monday, Aug. 31, as well as installation of national officers.

Viewers of the livestream can post comments during each session, and archived video recordings from each session will be available following convention so you can watch at your convenience. In addition, 2025-2026 National President Pam

Ray will share stories from her travels and visits to departments in an end-of-year report shown as a video presentation during convention.

**How to register, agenda details, and more:**  
[www.ALAforVeterans.org/meetings/national-convention](http://www.ALAforVeterans.org/meetings/national-convention).

**Stay connected through social media:** Follow us @ALAforVeterans and use #AuxCon26.

## Louisville, Ky. offers several significant veteran-related attractions

- **Jeffersontown Veterans Memorial Park:** A 25-acre park dedicated to veterans featuring a Walk of Veterans (6,000+ bricks), military artifacts, including a Huey helicopter and M-60A tank, and the Veterans Memorial Plaza/Freedom Wall.

- **Cave Hill National Cemetery:** A historic site where the oldest Civil War monument — the 32nd Indiana Infantry Monument — was originally located; it still houses many military graves.

- **Frazier History Museum:** Houses the 32nd Indiana Infantry Monument in its permanent collection, providing a unique look at Civil War history.

- **Veterans Memorial Park of Kentucky (Oldham County):** Located just outside Louisville, this park offers a “timeline of military history” via various monuments.

- **Fort Knox:** Located roughly 35 miles south, this base is central to the region's military history and home to the Patton Museum (open to the public). ★

*Photos provided by Louisville Tourism.*

## Exclusive savings, events available for attendees

**American Legion National Convention at Slugger Field:** Join us for an exhilarating day of baseball as the Louisville Bats take on the Gwinnett Stripers at the Louisville Slugger Field. Mark your calendars for Sunday, Aug. 30, at 1:05 p.m. to witness this exciting matchup. Since it is a Sunday, kids eat free and will get the opportunity to run around the bases after the game. Whether you're a diehard baseball fan or looking for a fun day out with the family, this game is not to be missed.

Visit [www.gofevo.com/event/AmericanLegionBATS](http://www.gofevo.com/event/AmericanLegionBATS) to get discounted tickets, courtesy of The American Legion. Any additional inquiries for add-ons or different ticketing packages can be purchased from Tony Bertuca ([tbertuca@batsbaseball.com](mailto:tbertuca@batsbaseball.com)).

**Louisville Slugger Museum and Factory tour discount:** Connect with a genuine global icon on its hometown turf. Louisville Slugger Museum & Factory celebrates the extraordinary role Louisville Slugger baseball bats have played in the sport's past, present, and future. Receive \$6 off admission when you use promo code ALC26 at checkout. Offer valid Aug. 27 - Sept. 4. Visit [www.sluggermuseum.com](http://www.sluggermuseum.com) to learn more.





## WHY STRATEGIC PLANNING MATTERS TO EVERY MEMBER, UNIT, AND DEPARTMENT

*By Linda Boone, National Long-Range Strategic Planning Committee Chair, and Ben Hendricks, ALA National Headquarters' Executive Director*

Strategic planning is a process that helps an organization strengthen mission delivery. It sets goals and priorities for how an organization uses its resources. For the Auxiliary, the National Executive Committee (NEC) is responsible for overseeing this process. The NEC reviews, modifies, and approves the goals and priorities recommended by the Long-Range Strategic Planning Committee.

A formal strategic planning process gives us clear and focused direction so we are not simply reacting to short-term needs or distracted from our mission. The plan helps align our work with our mission, and regular review keeps it on track. The strategic plan also creates accountability by setting measurable goals and tracking results. When communicated clearly, it also helps the organization adapt to

changing risks and challenges so we remain resilient, relevant, and focused.

As an ALA member, you invest your time, money, and voice in our mission. Strategic planning, NEC oversight, and regular reporting help ensure that investment is managed responsibly. At each DEC meeting, your department NEC should provide an update so members can understand the status of strategic planning priorities, milestones, and progress.

In recent years, our organization has recognized the need for a more consistent strategic planning process. This was acknowledged by the 2025 National Convention delegates who approved establishing a Long-Range Strategic Planning Committee. The committee is comprised of five members serving staggered five-year terms, plus a Past National President from the national Finance Committee and ALA National Headquarters' executive director and deputy executive director.

At the 2026 National Convention, delegates will hear a report from the committee outlining the revised mission and vision statements and the strategic priorities approved by the NEC. Delegates then will be asked to endorse the plan.

### *How will a national strategic plan positively impact your unit?*

National leadership has identified support for units as a key priority for the Long-Range Strategic Planning Committee. Units are the foundation of the Auxiliary and the place where our mission is carried out every day. The strategic plan should help guide the development of resources, tools, and support that make it easier for units to serve veterans, military, their families, and communities.

*Comments or questions? Contact [strategicplanning@ALAforVeterans.org](mailto:strategicplanning@ALAforVeterans.org).*



## MEMBERSHIP: MENTORING AT ALL LEVELS A BIG PRIORITY

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

The emphasis on happy 250th birthday, America and National President Pam Ray’s Mission Driven, Family Focused priorities created excitement and dedication for membership across the nation.

This year kicked off with a survey to department presidents and membership chairs on how we could better mentor and serve our grassroots members. We wanted to engage and equip you with the understanding and tools you need to help grow and expand membership to continue the mission for the future of our organization.

Mentoring did not end with just a survey. Facebook allowed a platform to continue to mentor and engage ALL members across the board with #alamembershipmondays — allowing a space for encouragement, teaching moments, and highlights for our members to communicate and

engage with each other.

Membership Wednesday was filled with tips/tricks/ideas on ALAMIS (the ALA’s management information system/member database), recruiting, and rejoining. How-tos were sent via emails to each department, allowing for easy understanding on how to audit your membership, ensuring that what each unit sent matched ALAMIS. Forms were attached to emails that made it easier to fill out and know your why.

Recently, we sent another round of questions to department chairs asking if they felt encouraged and supported so we could understand if we were hitting our mark on supporting each of the chairs with their role in membership. Thank you to everyone who responded — your encouragement to us and honesty continued to provide a valuable tool and how we were doing on our goal of mentoring.

On a quarterly call, Northwestern Division Membership Chair Tamara Martin said it best when she reminded everyone: “No matter how big, how small — celebrate each win!” You may not hit your goal, and that is OK. What matters is your journey, your experience, and what you provided to others as you work together to grow and expand our organization for the advocacy and betterment of our veterans, military, and their families.

Remember to take one bite at a time, set little goals, try, and try again. Even if you fail the first time, use what you learned and try again. Our team has faith in you and we’re proud of the work you have completed to grow and expand our organization!



**Tracy Kinnick** is an 11-year member from Unit 424 in the Department of Kansas.

## FINANCE: REVIEW YOUR COMMITTEE’S RESPONSIBILITY OF REPORTING TO IRS

A Finance Committee’s roles and responsibilities do not end once the annual budget is approved by your department or individual unit. Let us focus on the tasks needed to wrap up the fiscal year, which is fast approaching. Even at this point in the year, pay attention to the biggest revenue and expense items and events: Is it time to distribute scholarship funds? Account for department convention expenses? Compare poppy donations to represent our heroes during the next year to come? Prepare for National Convention attendance?

One particularly important obligation is the reporting of our finances to the Internal Revenue

Service, better known as the IRS. No one wants to have their unit or department misrepresented in the eyes of the government. To remain tax-exempt, let us review what to file by the 15th day of the fifth month following the close of the fiscal year, not calendar year.

1. Obtain the relevant form on the IRS website at [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov):

- Form 990-N (gross receipts < \$50,000)
- Form 990-EZ or Form 990 (gross receipts < \$200,000 and total assets < \$500,000)
- Form 990 (gross receipts > \$200,000 or total assets > \$500,000)

2. Have the unit treasurer obtain the key data.

3. Have Finance Committee

and unit officers finalize the form.

4. If there is a Risk & Compliance Committee: Review, approve, and forward the form to unit membership. If you do not have a Risk & Compliance Committee, then the Finance Committee can approve and forward it. If there is an outside auditing firm, get approval.

5. Have unit members vote on the adoption of the appropriate form.

6. Mark your calendar to submit the form by the deadline.



**Nicole Clapp** is a 50-year member of Unit 127 in Gladbrook, Iowa, and is a Past National President.

## LEADERSHIP: MENTORS ARE ALL AROUND US

 [www.Facebook.com/groups/ALALeadership](http://www.Facebook.com/groups/ALALeadership)

During registration for a leadership webinar, members had the opportunity to ask questions they would like to see addressed. Many of those questions came through as: How do I encourage members to step up? How do I encourage more members to attend our monthly meetings? How do I skillfully tell members they are not doing their job? How do I lead when I lack age and experience in my unit? These were just some of the questions members were eager to find the answers to.

The questions were so varied that one webinar was not going to address every issue, but we could give you the tools to start the process of finding the

answers for yourself to help tackle these important questions.

Leadership resources are available in many forms. Written documents that provide members with a chance to sharpen their skills and work the ALA's mission are available on the ALA website at [www.ALAforVeterans.org](http://www.ALAforVeterans.org). Webinars and ALA Academy courses are also available on the website.

Most importantly, mentors are all around us; we just have to stop and listen to each other and determine if the right person is available to answer questions. Most of the time, we will discover that person does exist and is willing to help.

It doesn't always have to be the mentee searching for a

mentor to help develop them into leadership. Sometimes a mentor needs to recognize the potential in others and step up to share their knowledge and experience with them — provide guidance and support while getting to know them better.

Leadership is not easy, and it is harder to define, but it can be said that leadership ability exists in each of us. We can discover it through our own choice of learning, along with compassion, courage, and a willingness to guide others.



Donna Dillard is a member of Unit 265 in the Department of Texas.

 AMERICAN  
LEGION  
AUXILIARY

# Are You Using Old Branding?

Make sure your website, socials, stationery, etc., are up to date with the ALA word mark. Remember: The blue star emblem has not gone away.

Check out our resources at [www.ALAforVeterans.org](http://www.ALAforVeterans.org).



## SAVE SPACE IN YOUR CALENDAR FOR ALA MISSION TRAINING

*Service Not Self* is more than just three words. It's more than a motto.

*Service Not Self* is a commitment. It's empowerment. It's a promise — one that each and every ALA member strives to follow, but no one can do it alone.

ALA national Mission Training offers a collaborative and supportive environment for members to engage with our mission, but also, how to learn and better the organization's support of our communities, veterans, military, and their families.

Gain a deeper insight of the ALA's programs and how your unit, district, and department can implement them with the greatest impact.

These one-day Mission Training events provide helpful tips on working many of the Auxiliary's mission outreach programs.

In previous trainings, members grew their knowledge in Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, how American Legion Auxiliary Foundation grants can aid ALA entities in their mission, ways Poppy Funds can be used, and so much more!

While learning and sharing

your passion for service, grow your ALA network with national leadership and members outside of your local area.

Mission Training is not only a perfect time for you to learn, but it provides a natural, organic moment for you to share your ALA experience.

For Mission Training to be as accessible as possible, a meeting is held in each ALA division with dates in the fall and winter months.

### National Junior Meetings

Mission Training offers a perfect opportunity to strengthen the cornerstone of the ALA: Juniors.

Alongside Mission Training, the national Junior meetings take place, creating a fun and productive environment for Junior members and young Sons of The American Legion to interact with the ALA mission.

While making lasting friendships with other Legion Family members, these youth will make an impact and change by working together on a service project.

In addition to a service project, attendees will learn how to make poppies.

Poppy making is a perfect opportunity for Juniors and young SAL to not only learn and follow The American Legion Family mission and significance of the poppy, but to also engage in a creative outlet.

Juniors and young SAL can

## 2026-2027 ALA Mission Training and national Junior meeting dates:

**Nov. 14: Northwestern Division\***

**Jan. 30: Albany, N.Y.\***

**Jan. 30: Springfield, Ill.**

**Feb. 6: Atlanta, Ga.**

**Feb. 6: Las Vegas, Nev.\***

\*These events will be held with The American Legion National Regional Information Conference and the Sons of The American Legion Regional Meeting. Learn more about ALA Mission Training and national Junior meetings: [www.ALAforVeterans/Meetings/Mission-Training](http://www.ALAforVeterans/Meetings/Mission-Training).

take their new poppy-making skills back to their communities and share their experience with others, making it an activity that keeps on giving.

In previous Junior meetings, attendees have learned how to sign the Pledge of Allegiance in American Sign Language, listened to local VA speakers, played games related to the ALA mission, and so many other fun and engaging activities.

## Are you ready to serve on an ALA national committee?

If you're interested in making an impact on veterans, servicemembers, and their families at the ALA's national level, consider being part of an ALA national committee. All members are eligible to apply. To research the best committee for you, go to [www.ALAforVeterans.org](http://www.ALAforVeterans.org). To stay informed on all things ALA — and the to-be-announced application window — go to our social media @ALAforVeterans.

Scan to follow our social media channels for updates:



Provided by Nancy Magginnis, National Chaplain 2025-2026 | [www.Facebook.com/groups/ALAchaplains](http://www.Facebook.com/groups/ALAchaplains)

## AUGUST

Have you ever been in a dark corner of life? Wondering where God is? Sometimes in life, it seems like God is far away — that He doesn't know anything about us. Sometimes there are those who constantly want to put you down — if you say black, they say white. They just constantly belittle you. Where is God in these moments? Please rest assured, God is always there in those quiet moments when we're hurting or can't seem to find our way.

In the song *Who Am I?* by Casting Crowns, God reminds us He is there and does care. We simply need to remember it's not who we are, but who He is.

“Who am I, that the Lord of all the earth would care to know my name?

Would care to feel my hurt?

Who am I, that the bright and morning star would choose to light the way

For my ever wandering heart?

Not because of who I am  
But because of what You've done  
Not because of what I've done  
But because of who You are

Still You hear me when I'm calling

Lord, You catch me when I'm falling”

*In the spirit of your faith, please join me: Dear God, There are times I need You — that you seem so far away, but you quickly remind me, I am Yours. You hear my pleas to You; You catch me when I'm falling. Help me not to doubt Your presence because You know my name. Thank You, Father, for Your unending love. And God's people said: Amen.*

## SEPTEMBER

Recently, I was given a special gift — it's a ceramic tile with a compass and the following phrase: “The Lord

says, ‘I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you.’” My faith has always told me that God is with me and yet to be reminded that He will guide me along the best path — that He advises me and watches over me. Wow! That makes me want to sing His praises.

In the words by Jonathan Smith and Phil Wickham in the song *House of the Lord*, it states it best:

“We worship the God who was  
We worship the God who is  
We worship the God whoever  
more will be

He opened the prison doors  
He parted the raging sea  
My God, He holds the victory

There's joy in the house of the Lord

There's joy in the house of the Lord today

And we won't be quiet  
We shout out Your praise

We sing to the God who heals  
We sing to the God who saves  
We sing to the God who always  
makes a way”

It's awesome that we can sing His praises because no matter where we wander, He is always with us.

*Please pray with me in the spirit of your faith: Yes, God, I want to shout Your praises no matter where I am or what I'm going through. In God, we are royalty. We know, God, You are healing those who have physical and mental wounds. We know You always make a way in our lives, the lives of veterans and their families. Yes, we continue to shout Your praise! Amen.*

## OCTOBER

As I write my last *Auxiliary* magazine article, I confess: It is with sadness because when you read this, there will soon be another ALA national chaplain and I will be a

“past.” However, the year has been a special journey, and I thank you for electing me as the 2025-2026 ALA national chaplain. Thank YOU for the awesome opportunity. As I close, I remember a song made famous by Michael W. Smith and Amy Grant: *Friends Are Friends Forever*.

“Packing up the dreams God planted

In the fertile soil of you  
I can't believe the hopes He's granted

Means a chapter of your life is through

But we'll keep you close as always

It won't even seem you've gone  
‘Cause our hearts in big and small ways

Will keep the love that keeps us strong

And friends are friends forever  
If the Lord's the Lord of them  
And a friend will not say never  
‘Cause the welcome will not end

Though it's hard to let you go  
In the Father's hands we know  
That a lifetime's not too long  
To live as friends”

*Thank You, God, for the many friendships You have given to each of us through the American Legion Auxiliary. Throughout the year, we will cross paths and we are thankful for that. We know, God, You will be with our friends through our special bond. Until we meet again, be with us, surround us with Your love, and help us to continue to be the difference in the lives of veterans and their families as we are Mission Driven and Family Focused. And all God's children said: Amen.*



Nancy Magginnis is a member of Unit 86 in the Department of Indiana.



## UTILIZE THE EDUCATION, EXPERTISE OF YOUR UNIT MEMBERS



For decades, Teresa Lugo-Nunez has combined her commitment to helping others, knack for solving problems, and expertise in subjects

like nursing and psychology to assist those in need.

The American Legion Auxiliary and the veterans it serves are among those benefiting from Lugo-Nunez's interests and talents. Since she was a teenager, Lugo-Nunez has been an advocate for people battling homelessness, and her ALA unit has joined her efforts to assist local veterans facing this challenge.

Lugo-Nunez's contributions to ALA Unit 628 in Alhambra, Calif., show the value members can bring to the organization's work when they draw on their own unique set of abilities.

"Everybody has talent," said Lugo-Nunez, ALA's national Community Service Committee Western Division chair, "and there's always a way to help."

Lugo-Nunez was just 14 when she began helping those in her California community who didn't have homes. Throughout her education and career, she has dedicated the knowledge and skills she developed to helping those in need.

She holds advanced degrees

in nursing, sociology, business administration, and psychology. Lugo-Nunez's clinical psychology doctoral dissertation focused on post-traumatic stress disorder. She taught nursing at Platt College and worked in behavioral health services.

Additionally, she speaks multiple languages.

Lugo-Nunez was already volunteering to help in whatever way she could at her local American Legion post — not as part of The American Legion Family, but simply to work with others to serve the community — when an ALA member noted that the unit needed a parliamentarian.

Now, more than 15 years later, she's held a variety of ALA leadership roles at the

unit, district, department, and divisional levels. At each step in her ALA journey, she's learned what the group needs to advance its mission of enhancing veterans' lives. Then she has applied her knowledge and skills accordingly.

"I can't not help," Lugo-Nunez said. "I don't know how to do that."

In assisting veterans and their families who are homeless, Lugo-Nunez draws on her mental health background to suggest questions members can ask to determine how to help. She relies on her expertise in psychology and nursing, as well as knowledge gained through years of work in the community to recommend mental and physical health care resources for veterans.

Lugo-Nunez, who has earned local and national honors for her longtime commitment to volunteerism,

encourages every ALA member to use their expertise and abilities to serve others.

In her ALA unit, for example, members put their talents to work through activities such as reading to children who are homeless and offering drawing lessons.

"You find what the need is," she said, "and try your best to plug into that need."

***"I can't not help. I don't know how to do that."***

**Teresa Lugo-Nunez, ALA's national Community Service Committee Western Division chair, offers tips to help Auxiliary units and their members make the most of their talents in support of the organization's mission:**

- 1. Get creative.** Think about what your unit and your community need. Then consider how members' knowledge and abilities could be helpful in addressing those concerns.
- 2. Reach out.** But don't force the issue. Instead, members can ask for a hand with a task they're already working on or add a service component to an existing event.
- 3. Bring friends.** Working in teams, with everyone contributing their own talents to the effort, lightens the load for individual members and maximizes the impact of the work.



**LIFE-CHANGING EVENT:** Former ALA Michigan Girls State participant Ashley Cetnarowski (front row, second from left) was positively influenced by the weeklong event. Bottom right: Cetnarowski with an ALA Michigan Girls State participant.

## FROM ANXIOUS PARTICIPANT TO ALA MICHIGAN GIRLS STATE BOARD MEMBER

Ashley Cetnarowski attended ALA Michigan Girls State in 2016. Since then, she has earned her bachelor's degree, founded a nonprofit, and joined the board of ALA Michigan Girls State. She credits her success with lessons she learned at ALA Girls State.

In May 2026, Cetnarowski graduated summa cum laude, earning her bachelor's degree from Saginaw Valley State University. While in school, she launched Second Chance Scholars, a nonprofit dedicated to creating equitable access to education. She noticed a gap in representation and resources for non-traditional students.

"Everyone deserves the chance to achieve their goals, but assistance is not always equitable," she said. "Second Chance Scholars fills this gap and was the inspiration behind my nonprofit."

Cetnarowski served as a counselor at ALA Michigan Girls State and is now a board member of the program. As a former participant, she relates

to the attendees.

Reflecting on her first day as an attendee, she remembers feeling anxious and overwhelmed. Her dad told her she could return home if she wanted to, but offered a crucial piece of advice.

"He implored me to consider what I would gain if I stayed. I ended up taking his advice and seeing through my commitment to the week," she said. "At lunch, I met a group of girls in my city who made me feel extremely welcomed and changed my perspective."

Still anxious, she decided to run for a city position. Though defeated, she viewed it as an opportunity to practice public speaking.

"I felt nervous, yet oddly comfortable in front of a crowd. My voice truly emerged by the second day, when I was running for every position that I could," Cetnarowski said. "I ended up losing every single election I ran for; however, I learned the importance of perseverance."

Today, Cetnarowski sees the same growth in the young women who participate in the program.

"I tell parents that the girl they drop off on Sunday may look like the same girl they pick up on Saturday, but she stands a little taller, speaks with more conviction, and leads with more confidence," she said. "My favorite moment is after the state government has been selected and government staff steps back from a leading role to more of an advising one. The girls run their own government and problem solve independently. It is incredible to see how capable they are at successfully running a government."

If she could go back 10 years, Cetnarowski knows what advice she would give her younger self.

"I would tell her that she does not know it yet, but this week will prepare her for more than just being an involved citizen. Yes, she will gain knowledge on how her government works, but just as importantly, she will figure out that her voice holds the power to shape that government and the world surrounding it," she said. "This program is truly the backbone of why I have been able to achieve the things that I have."

ALA Girls State also inspired Cetnarowski to become an ALA member. She is eligible for membership through her father, James, a veteran of the United States Marine Corps.





**CHILDREN OF WARRIORS NATIONAL PRESIDENTS’ SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT STARTS HER PROFESSIONAL JOURNEY TO BE A PILOT**

*The ALA offers 15 \$5,000 Children of Warriors National Presidents’ Scholarships that aid the children of our servicemembers and veterans with financial support to pursue higher education. To learn more, go to [www.ALAforVeterans.org/scholarships](http://www.ALAforVeterans.org/scholarships).*

Rachel Anderson from Alaska received a 2026 Children of Warriors National Presidents’ Scholarship to help her pursue a bachelor’s degree in aviation science at Southern Utah University (SUU). Eligible through her parents — both U.S. Air Force veterans — the scholarship will assist Anderson’s career goal of being an emergency helicopter pilot. SUU’s program will provide Anderson the means and support to obtain her helicopter license and the specialty training required for her to enter the workforce.

***“I want to say ‘Thank you’ for awarding this scholarship to me. I am grateful and will do my best to make the most of what I was given.”***

**How does this scholarship benefit you?**

This scholarship will help me cover my college costs so that I have more flexibility in how I want to use my aid. This is especially the case since flight fees for my degree are expensive.

**What advice do you have for others in the transitional phase from high school to college — especially military children?**

Research your options. I didn’t realize just how many scholarship opportunities are available to military dependents. I’d also recommend starting early — when you’re a sophomore or junior — researching the different schools you might be interested in, what they require for applications, deadlines, things like that. It really helped to practice essay writing for scholarship

applications too. Over the last year, I’ve done courses on financial management to prepare for real-world things, like loans and managing my assets. In my senior year, I’ve been working to set short-term and long-term goals for the steps to being a college student to prepare for my freshman year. It is important, though, to make sure to still live in the moment, even while you’re preparing for the future.

**What would you like ALA members to know about this scholarship’s impact?**

This is a generously sized scholarship that is flexible in how I can use it to cover my college expenses. The application process was straightforward, and the scholarship committee was very responsive and easy to get a hold of.



**Is there anything else you’d like to share?**

I want to say “Thank you” for awarding this scholarship to me. I am grateful and will do my best to make the most of what I was given.

**LEGIONNAIRE FINDS COMMUNITY, PURPOSE, AND MOMENTUM THROUGH USA 250 CHALLENGE**



For Michelle Heaton, The American Legion Family’s USA 250 Challenge was never just about reaching the

finish line. It became the start of a broader personal commitment to fitness, mental wellness, and service — one she hopes to carry forward for years to come.

“I was really excited when I first read about the USA 250 Challenge because I’m always looking for motivation and accountability buddies,” Heaton said.

She brought the idea to the Women Legionnaires Committee at Ronald Reagan Pacific Palisades Post 283 in California, where fellow members quickly agreed to join in one or more categories.

Before that turning point, Heaton said her weight had kept her from taking part in activities she once might have enjoyed. The health challenges tied to it also affected her social life, contributing to mental health struggles and a tendency to pull back from others.

In response, she committed fully, signing up for all three categories — physical fitness, mental wellness, and community service. The combination gave her structure and a reason to reconnect, mindfulness refreshed her spirit, mental health support helped her feel grounded, and the fitness component pushed her toward new experiences she

might once have avoided.

It was one of the busiest years of her life. She threw herself into American Legion activities — from distributing school supplies and helping homeless veterans find housing to staffing membership booths at local car shows, Fleet Week events, and IndyCar races.

Her work on mental wellness unfolded in quieter but equally important ways. She became more open with family and friends, connected with peers through online gaming communities. She also returned to mental health care providers at her local VA, practiced mindfulness and meditation, and used guided sleep audio to improve her bedtime routine.

Fitness, she said, took longer to build. Fast food and slow days were easier than developing new habits, but having fellow Legionnaires on the same path gave her accountability and made the

**AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY**

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

**Let’s show our appreciation to military spouses**

Twenty-something years ago, a coworker named Michelle told me, “Thank you for your service. Military spouses need to hear this too.” I didn’t think much of it at the time, and it took me years to realize it, but she was right. Military spouses serve too.

Deployments, drills, and annual trainings — or any of those hard times when your spouse is gone for a while — you learn to grow into your superpowers.

*Read more online!*

“Excellent!”  
— Carmen

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

“Thank you!”  
— Julie

**Knowing your leadership style benefits your unit and our mission**

Behind every effective mission and product, there’s an organized group. To have an organized group, you need a dynamic, genuine leader.

From national to the unit level, the Auxiliary’s legacy of *Service Not Self* is carried out not only by our hardworking members, but by our dedicated, passionate leadership.

*Read more online!*

Check out these blog posts and more at [www.ALAforVeterans.org/blog](http://www.ALAforVeterans.org/blog).



process feel less like work and more like momentum.

That momentum carried her into a long list of activities: deep-sea fishing, sunrise hikes, pickleball, indoor rock climbing, mountain biking, bowling, and laser tag, among others. Along the way, she not only improved her physical well-being but also rediscovered purpose, built friendships, and opened herself to experiences she never imagined she would embrace.

For Heaton, that is part of what made the challenge so meaningful. She credits The American Legion with creating a framework that not only encouraged healthier living, but also strengthened community ties, sparked honest conversations, and reminded participants that difficult changes are often easier when they are not faced alone.

She does not dwell on the numbers. For Heaton, the transformation speaks for itself, and the biggest changes reach far beyond the physical.

She sees it in the way she carries herself around other people, in the joy she now recognizes in her face, and in the fact that she no longer feels the same urge to disappear into the background of group photos. Just as important are the memories she has created doing things she once could not have pictured herself trying.

Taken together, Heaton said, the blend of community service, mental wellness, and physical fitness proved just how powerful those three areas can be when they work in tandem. The experience renewed something in her, reinforcing the belief that she matters and can make a difference one connection at a time.

## FREE APPS ADDRESS HEALTH CHALLENGES OF WOMEN VETERANS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has designed two apps for women veterans that meet their specific needs. The apps are free and secure, and no personal information is required or shared with the VA. And women veterans do not need to be enrolled in the VA to use the apps.

### WellWithin Coach

- Tracks comprehensive health like mental wellness, pregnancy, postpartum health, menopause, and relationships all in one place.
- Tackles some common struggles women veterans face such as post-traumatic stress, depression, anxiety, insomnia, and caregiving.
- Features over 60 interactive mental health tools.



- Provides immediate access to mental health hotlines and emergency resources.

Learn more at [mobile.va.gov/app/wellwithin-coach](https://mobile.va.gov/app/wellwithin-coach).

### Beyond MST

- Offers over 30 specialized tools to help MST survivors cope with challenges and manage symptoms that often follow trauma.
  - Delivers education about MST and common concerns in a format that is supportive and non-judgmental to meet veterans exactly where they are in their recovery.
    - Includes brief assessments to better understand symptoms, beliefs, and recovery progress.
    - Enables goal setting and progress tracking toward personal recovery objectives.
    - Protects privacy — no account needed.
- Learn more at [mobile.va.gov/app/beyond-mst](https://mobile.va.gov/app/beyond-mst).

## SONS MEMBERS CAN APPLY FOR NATIONAL EMERGENCY FUND GRANTS

Members of the Sons of The American Legion are now eligible to receive grants from The American Legion's National Emergency Fund (NEF).

The NEF Trust Committee met during Spring Meetings in Indianapolis to amend the trust to allow SAL members to apply for NEF grants.

Similar to individual Legionnaires, SAL members may qualify for an NEF grant of up to \$3,000 if:

- They have been displaced from their primary residence due to damage sustained during a declared natural disaster. If emergency/disaster shelters are available and the applicant chooses not to stay at a shelter, their reason must be included in the application.



- The SAL member must be active at the time of the disaster and at the time of application.
- NEF grants are not meant to replace or repair items — only to meet the most immediate needs (i.e., temporary housing, food, water, clothing, diapers, etc.) during the period immediately following the disaster. They also do not cover insurance compensation or monetary losses from a business, structures on your property (barns, tool sheds, etc.), equipment, or vehicles.

For more information, go to [Legion.org/Emergency](https://Legion.org/Emergency).



*American Legion Auxiliary member and Legionnaire of the Department of North Carolina Patricia Harris has quite a few accolades: She served in the military for 22 years, was the first Black woman to hold multiple national leadership roles in veteran spaces, received an ALA Women of the Year Award in 2019, was inducted into the Military Hall of Fame in 2025, and is the founder and director of Women Veterans Support Services Inc.*

**WOMEN FIRST:** North Carolina ALA member and Legionnaire Patricia Harris (left) and below (with hat on) is the proud founder and director of Women Veterans Support Services Inc., a nonprofit.

**Thank you for your service! You were in the military for 22 years. Is there anything you want to share about your military experiences?**

Thank you! My 22 years of military service taught me resilience, leadership, sacrifice, and the importance of teamwork. Serving during the Persian Gulf War and alongside so many dedicated servicemembers reinforced my commitment to continue serving others beyond the military, especially veterans and military families in need.

*“...helping other women veterans is deeply personal to me.”*

**What does The American Legion Family mean to you?**

As a second-generation Legionnaire and Auxiliary member, The American Legion Family means a lifelong commitment to patriotism, service, and community. Watching my parents serve through the Legion taught me values that continue to guide my life today. It showed me that our oath and service do not end when the uniform comes off — they continue through helping others and strengthening our communities.

**What inspired you to create the nonprofit Women Veterans Support Services Inc.?**

I was inspired after seeing the unmet needs of women veterans and military families in crisis. As a veteran, I understood the challenges many faced and wanted to build an organization that provided compassionate, culturally competent support, housing assistance, and hope during difficult times.

**Can you describe the nonprofit?**

Women Veterans Support Services Inc. is a North Carolina-based nonprofit dedicated to supporting women veterans, active-duty women, and military families through crisis assistance, emergency housing, advocacy, peer support, and resource referrals. It is also the first nonprofit dedicated to this purpose and for domestic violence/sexual assault.

**What do you feel is the biggest issue facing women veterans today?**

Access to comprehensive, trauma-informed health care and support services. At Women Veterans Support Services Inc., we also recognize the urgent need to address domestic violence and sexual assault within our military and veteran communities. Like The American Legion, we believe women veterans’ health and safety must remain a national priority

because these issues impact not only individuals, but entire families and communities.

**What does it mean to you to be helping your fellow female veterans in such a personable way?**

As a female veteran and survivor of domestic violence/military sexual trauma, helping other women veterans is deeply personal to me. I understand the importance of safety, health, and healing after trauma. My passion is helping veterans and their families stay together, become empowered through education and support, and move forward toward healing and stability.

**What advice would you give to other American Legion Family members who may be interested in helping their local women veterans?**

My advice is to ensure women veterans feel seen, heard, and respected. Take time to listen, communicate with compassion, and actively invite them to become involved and connected within The American Legion Family and community.





## KENTUCKY MEMBER TURNS SIMPLE VETERANS DAY DISPLAY INTO A LASTING COMMUNITY TRIBUTE

Kentucky ALA Unit 124 member Andria Henderson has always been devoted to veterans and active-duty servicemembers. She and her husband both come from families with a strong tradition of military service. Henderson's mother, father, and uncle served in the Air Force, her brother served in the Navy, and both her grandfather and step-grandfather served in the Army during World War I.

Henderson had long wanted to honor the servicemembers in her family and her husband's. That desire deepened after her mother gave her an old tin photograph of her step-grandfather in his WWI uniform. The photo holds special meaning for Henderson because she was born on his 70th birthday.

Ahead of Veterans Day 2024,

Henderson found a meaningful way to honor servicemembers at The Broken Tee, the restaurant she ran with her husband. She set up a tree with red and white lights and decorated it with photos of veterans from her family. She also invited patrons with military ties to contribute photos to the display.

Expecting about 50 photos through the holiday season, she instead received more than 100 by New Year's. As more customers came to the restaurant and asked to add their own family members, the tribute continued to grow. Henderson asked contributors to include a photo, the person's name, branch of service, and whether they served during wartime.

By Veterans Day 2025, the tree held more than 200 photos and was still growing.

Visitors embraced the tree and often asked how Henderson came up with the idea for a military tribute. Many said they were surprised no one had thought of it previously. Some patrons even brought out-of-town relatives to the restaurant so they could see family photos displayed on the tree. Henderson also created a POW/MIA Table in the restaurant and displayed a military diamond-art piece above it, along with three photos of servicemembers who had been prisoners of war and tributes to seven who lost their lives during the war.

"This project has blessed my heart so much," shared Henderson. "I was just hoping for 50 photos, but the response from our community has been so awesome. It just makes me proud to be an American. I know that sounds cliché, but my heart swells with pride and love for our community and the military."

Henderson and her husband had operated The Broken

Tee Restaurant since 2018. Henderson's husband suffered a stroke while at work earlier this year, and unfortunately, they've had to close the restaurant. A close family friend — who serves as commander of American Legion Post 124 — offered to display the tree at The American Legion as long as Henderson continued maintaining it.

Each September, their local community, Greensburg, hosts a festival known as Cow Days. During the festival, The American Legion and Sons of The American Legion cook fish on Friday and Saturday. Henderson hopes to display digital photos of local servicemembers on a television screen so visitors ordering fish sandwiches can see local community members who served. She also hopes the display will encourage others to contribute photos of their own family members to the military tree display.

Henderson said she plans to continue supporting the Auxiliary in any way she can and to keep serving veterans whenever possible. She also plans to keep the military tree growing — even if it eventually requires a larger tree.





Visit our social media at [www.ALAforVeterans.org/social-media](http://www.ALAforVeterans.org/social-media)



**WHAT'S COMING UP BEFORE THE NEXT MAGAZINE:**

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

**AUGUST 2026:**

- Aug. 4 — U.S. Coast Guard birthday
- Aug. 7 — Purple Heart Day
- Aug. 13-18 — American Legion Baseball World Series
- Aug. 23-27 — American Legion Legacy Run
- Aug. 28-Sept. 3 — ALA National Convention in Louisville, Ky.

**SEPTEMBER 2026:**

- September — National Suicide Prevention and Awareness Month
- Sept. 11 — Patriot Day
- Sept. 16 — American Legion Day
- Sept. 18 — U.S. Air Force birthday

- Sept. 18 — National POW/MIA Recognition Day
- Sept. 27 — Gold Star Mother's Day

**OCTOBER 2026:**

- Oct. 13 — U.S. Navy birthday
- Oct. 26 — National Day of the Deployed

**NOVEMBER 2026:**

- Nov. 9 — American Legion Buddy Check Week
- Nov. 10 — U.S. Marine Corps birthday
- Nov. 10 — American Legion Auxiliary's 107th birthday
- Nov. 11 — Veterans Day



**AMERICAN LEGION 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 Legion Legislative Action Alerts at

[www.votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/home](http://www.votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/home). Being aware of the Legion's legislative priorities prepares ALA members to effectively communicate with legislators concerning impending legislation at all levels of our government.



**STAY CONNECTED THROUGH eNEWS:**

*ALA eNews* is published monthly and focuses on programs, activities, and events in short, quick-read articles. These one-topic eblasts are sent to announce new information about the ALA, resources available, dates, and registration links for ALA Academy Live webinars, valuable member benefits updates, special events or news, and so much more. If you're not already subscribing to *ALA eNews*, go to the About Us tab at [www.ALAforVeterans.org](http://www.ALAforVeterans.org), and under Our Communications go to *ALA eNews*. Click on any issue of *eNews* and find the "join our email list" at the top of the page.



**HASHTAGS HELP MAKE ALA MISSION HAPPEN**

Using hashtags on Facebook and Instagram can be a good strategy to increase visibility and engagement. Hashtags help categorize content, make posts more searchable, and connect with relevant audiences. Utilizing trending hashtags can help your content be seen by a unique audience, which allows ALA members to share our story with individuals who may not be familiar with veteran organizations. However, make sure to also focus on using hashtags that are directly related to your content and target audience. Hashtags can help create a consistent brand voice and message, which ultimately provides more credibility and visibility to your ALA unit/department social media pages.

Below is a list of hashtags we use at National for everyday posts, event posts, holiday posts, Legion Family posts, etc.

**ALA EXAMPLES:**

- #ALAforVeterans
- #ALAFoundation #ALAF
- #ServiceNotSelf #BetheOne
- #MemberBenefits
- #FoundationFriday
- #MembershipMatters #NPD
- #PoppyDay #BuddyChecks
- #LegionFamily

**EVENT EXAMPLES:**

- #ALAGirlsNation
- #ALAGirlsState #ALAGN
- #NationalPoppyDay
- #NVCAF #Arts4Vets
- #CreativeArtsTherapy
- #CreativeArtsFestival
- #ALAMissionTraining #ALAMT
- #WashConf2026 #AuxCon26
- #ALAConvention
- #America250 #WAA

**“The true soldier fights not because he hates what is in front of him, but because he loves what is behind him.”**

— G.K. Chesterton, English writer and journalist



There are military-related holidays throughout the calendar year, ranging from birthday celebrations for each of the Armed Forces to jam-packed recognition in May. To have acknowledgment for our military and their families all year long is so important for the morale of those who serve. Having these tributes each month is our reminder to always remember why we are around and who we support: veterans, military, and their families. Yesterday, today, tomorrow, and always.

*Above: The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Stockdale pulls into its homeport of Naval Base San Diego. Stockdale returned from a seven-month deployment to the 3rd, 5th, and 7th Fleet areas of operations (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Kristine Joy Nool).*

 **AMERICAN  
LEGION**

**AUXILIARY**

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

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

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

Even if you are unable to attend National Convention, you can still participate in one of the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation's most meaningful traditions. The Wall of Heroes offers a special way to honor a veteran, military servicemember, family member, mentor, or anyone who made a lasting impact on your life.

During National Convention, tribute stars bearing the names of these heroes are displayed on the Wall of Heroes installation in recognition of gifts made to support the ALA Foundation's mission.

This year, you can participate from anywhere by scanning the QR code or texting HERO to 1-844-940-3450 to make your tribute gift and add your hero to this powerful display of gratitude and remembrance. Your gift helps fund programs and initiatives that serve veterans, military families, and future generations.

Scan here to  
make a gift:

