



American Legion Auxiliary

2000-2010

American Legion Auxiliary
History: Volume VIII

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PREAMBLE TO THE CONSTITUTION OF THE AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY

For God and Country, we associate ourselves together for the following purposes:

- To uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America;
- to maintain law and order;
- to foster and perpetuate a one hundred percent Americanism;
- to preserve the memories and incidents of our associations during the Great Wars;
- to inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and nation;
- to combat the autocracy of both the classes and the masses;
- to make right the master of might;
- to promote peace and goodwill on earth;
- to safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom and democracy;
- to participate in and contribute to the accomplishment of the aims and purposes of The American Legion;
- to consecrate and sanctify our association by our devotion to mutual helpfulness.

Preface

*“During the conflict that was placed before them, they not only gained the gratitude of many in their own generation but they proved, for the first time on a global scale, the enormous value of a woman’s contribution, paving the way for future generations of women to do the same.” — Kathryn J. Atwood, author, *Women Heroes of World War I**

Every day, hundreds of thousands of members contribute another chapter to the rich history of the American Legion Auxiliary. Each of these dedicated individuals has a story to tell.

Collectively, those stories date back to 1919, when the American Legion Auxiliary (ALA) was formed as the official affiliate of The American Legion, a veterans service organization that had just been created to boost troop morale.

Women responded immediately and enthusiastically to the opportunity to serve veterans. Within a year, ALA membership swelled as women from all walks of life launched 1,342 local units in 45 states.

At the time, this type of patriotic commitment was not unusual.

In the wake of World War I, women had been stepping up in droves to support America’s military efforts — even though it was unfamiliar territory for many of them. They left their homes to respond to calls to join recruitment efforts, work in munitions factory jobs and serve in the military as nurses, sometimes in dangerous, life-threatening conditions.

They joined recruitment efforts, passing out pamphlets to encourage men to enlist and worked in factories to fill critical roles that the men had left behind. Many women also enlisted in the military, serving in stateside positions to allow men to serve in combat. And others served as nurses, ambulance drivers, messengers and mechanics.

Women who did stay at home often were suddenly left to manage their households without the assistance of their spouses. In many cases, they sought out meager food rations to make sure they were able to feed their families.

In addition to facing the terrors of a distant war, many of the women were unfamiliar with these new responsibilities. At the time, only 20 percent of women had ever worked outside their homes. They were enthusiastic about demonstrating their patriotism in unprecedented ways.

It was in this climate that women joined the ALA, initiating a legacy of volunteerism that continues more than 100 years later.

Over the years, their numbers continued to grow as ALA members encouraged other women to join them in supporting veterans, military, their families, and their communities in impactful ways.

During the period spanning 2000 through 2010, ALA’s membership had grown from 11,000 women in 1919 to more than 1 million in all 50 states, and in cities around the world.

This historical book captures the major events of the decade, as well as the meaningful impact made by its membership.

We dedicate this edition to the millions of members who served their country through countless hours of volunteerism, advocacy, and community service. No matter the donation or service, whether it was visiting

disabled veterans, advocating on their behalf on Capitol Hill, raising funds for ALA Girls Nation, or distributing poppies, these members of the ALA have left a legacy that won't be soon forgotten.

ALA Timeline 1919 - 2000

1918 - World War I ends.

1919 - Theodore Roosevelt Jr., then a U.S. Army lieutenant colonel, proposed an organization of veterans to help improve troop morale. As a result, The American Legion was formally organized.

1919 - Members of The American Legion created a new women's organization to serve as the official affiliate of the Legion. The Women's Auxiliary to The American Legion was established.

1920 – The American Legion selects the poppy of Flanders Field as its official memorial flower. Members distribute them in exchange for contributions to support active-duty military, veterans, and their families.

1921 – The ALA hosts its first National Convention in Kansas City, Mo., and it also recognizes the poppy as its memorial flower.

1924 - The ALA initiates the Poppy Program to commemorate the sacrifice of men and women who served and died during the war.

1925 – The ALA moves its National Headquarters to the War Memorial Plaza in Indianapolis.

1927 - The ALA officially decides to distribute poppies made only by veterans, as part of its veterans awareness and support campaign.

1934 - The first year the Auxiliary had two membership classes – Senior and Junior.

1937 – The ALA establishes the ALA Girls State program to teach high school students about U.S. government and citizenship.

1937 - The resolution to support youth betterment activities including American Legion Boys State and ALA Girls States was passed. In the ALA, this activity came under the eye of the Americanism Committee. It was not a separate program.

1941 - After Japan attacks Pearl Harbor, America declares war on the country. The ALA creates the Emergency Voluntary Committee to support the war effort. They also donate six mobile blood units to the Red Cross.

1944 – The national president's project: purchase of training cars with dual controls to be placed in U.S. Navy Amputation Centers; donations for research into ways of improving artificial devices; and setting up Battle Fatigue Stations at permanent hospitals (recovering servicemen and veterans could grow plants and flowers).

1947 - The first assembly of ALA Girls Nation is held in Washington, D.C. Annually, two young women from each ALA Girls State program gather to elect an ALA Girls Nation president, meet government officials, and visit the White House. Eighty-two girls from 41 states attended ALA Girls Nation, held Aug. 9-14.

1955 - ALA membership continues to grow, reaching more than 998,000.

1956 - The ALA opens an office in Washington, D.C.

1960s/70s - ALA members participate in global outreach efforts, primarily for children and disaster victims in the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Costa Rico, Malaysia, Panama, Nicaragua, Belize, West Java, Guatemala, Peru, and the Philippines.

1970 - The Auxiliary Emergency Fund is established.

1993 - Recognizing the challenges facing homeless veterans, the ALA invests in programs to assist them, starting with more than 1 million pounds of donated food.

1995 – The ALA celebrates its 75th anniversary.

2000 – The ALA celebrates its 80th anniversary, a new century, and millennium with the theme “Celebrate America 2000.” It also marks the year by raising \$660,000 for the World War II Memorial.

2000: Fears Rise in a Y2K Era

Unlike previous years, the minutes ticking down to the New Year of 2000 were filled with trepidation for many Americans, along with other people across the globe.

In the years leading up to 2000, experts had predicted a digital apocalypse — failing water systems, malfunctioning traffic lights, inoperable ATM machines, and airplanes falling out of the sky. They explained this would be the result of a computer bug that would leave computer systems unable to process how to switch from 1999 to 2000.

Any of those type of disruptions, as simple as electricity failures, could particularly cause problems with national security. For more than a year, the U.S. Department of Defense steadfastly addressed any issues that could cripple critical infrastructure systems.

And, as a U.S. Navy official said during a national conference, it was equally important to take steps to manage public perceptions. Some conspiracy theorists warned that nuclear weapons could be discharged as a result of Y2K.

Headlines in newspapers and magazines reinforced the fears: “Time’s Up” and “The End of the World?: A Guide to Millennium Madness.” The American Red Cross urged people to prepare by stockpiling water, canned food, and withdrawing cash to place in safe place.

Meanwhile, U.S. President Bill Clinton, a 1963 American Legion Boys State and Boys Nation alumnus, urged experts to avert a catastrophe. “We need every state and local government, every business, large and small, to work with us to make sure that [the] Y2K computer bug will be remembered as the last headache of the 20th century, not the first crisis of the 21st,” Clinton said during a press conference.

Yet, 2000 arrived and those fears were laid to rest as more than 1 billion people around the world tuned in on their TVs — as usual — to watch the ball drop amidst a celebration at New York Times Square.

With their nerves calmed, Americans experienced several months that were relatively unchanged with military activity — little that made ripples in media headlines. Earlier in the year, the U.S. Navy was deployed to support evacuation operations from Sierra Leone and Special Forces troops were sent to lead a training mission in Nigeria.

However, as the year drew near to a close, Al-Qaeda launched a suicide attack on the USS Cole in the port of Aden, Yemen, killing 17 U.S. Navy soldiers and injuring 39 others. The Oct. 12 bombing extended a pattern of Al-Qaeda attacks against the United States that had started nearly a decade earlier.

One of the survivors described the chilling atmosphere in the wake of the bombing. “Everything on the ship went dark, and it took a few seconds for the emergency lighting,” recalled Cliff Moser, a former U.S. Navy independent duty corpsman. “I could literally feel cold when the explosion happened. I could literally feel her being raised up out of the water and with two sighs, settling back down.

“There are some wounds that time does not heal,” he said in an interview for *The Journal Gazette* of Fort Wayne, Ind. “The sharpness will go away to a certain extent, but they’ll always be there.”

The year closed out as the nation experienced one of the most contentious presidential elections in history, as George W. Bush, son of the 41st U.S. President George H. W. Bush was declared president after the U.S. Supreme Court called for a halt to a Florida recount, which was in its 36th day.

Al Gore, who was vice president at the time, conceded the race to Bush.

Other news during the administrative year:

- Oct. 11, 2000 - 250 million gallons of coal sludge spill in Martin County, Ky., and is considered to be a greater environmental disaster than the Exxon Valdez oil spill.
- Oct. 31, 2000 – The first crew was launched to the International Space Station from the Baikonour Cosmodrome, taking two days to arrive.
- Nov. 7, 2000 – New York elects Hillary Clinton to the U.S. Senate, the first former first lady to win a public office.
- Nov. 16, 2000 – Bill Clinton becomes the first sitting US President to visit Vietnam.
- Jan. 16, 2001 – U.S. President Bill Clinton honors former President Theodore Roosevelt with a posthumous Medal of Honor for his service in the Spanish-American War.
- Jan. 26, 2001 – Colin Powell is sworn in as Secretary of State, the first African-American to hold the post.
- Feb. 16, 2001 – British and American forces carry out bombing raids attempting to disable Iraq’s air defense network.
- Feb. 19, 2001 – Hundreds gather at the Oklahoma City National Memorial to witness the dedication of the Oklahoma Bombing Museum.
- Feb. 28, 2001 – Americans mark the 10th anniversary of the end of the Gulf War (Aug. 2, 1990, to Feb. 28, 1991).
- June 11, 2001 – Timothy McVeigh is executed for the Oklahoma City bombing which occurred on April 19, 1995.
- Aug. 8, 2001 – NASA launches the Genesis spacecraft.

2000-2001 - American Legion Auxiliary Administrative Year Serving Our Military as “Volunteers in Service”

“I invite you to be a pioneer woman from the days of long ago where nothing could stop the determination of a woman with a mission.” — Kristine West, 80th National President of the American Legion Auxiliary

As in previous years, thousands of American Legion Auxiliary members from units all over the United States, and the world, gathered for their National Convention. The destination for the 1999-2000 gathering was Milwaukee, a stunning lakefront city that’s home to numerous war memorials, including the War Memorial Center that commemorates the dead of World War II and the Korean War.

Newly elected National President Kristine West, from the Department of New Hampshire, addressed an enthusiastic group with a call to continue their dedication to servicemembers.

West, who had just served as national vice president, urged them not to lose sight of the Auxiliary’s purpose when it was first organized in 1919. It’s all about those men and women who dedicated their lives to serving their country, she said. All of the organization’s programs should focus on activities and services for veterans.

“... We need to make every day Veterans Day. We need to volunteer and give service back to them,” said West, in announcing her theme for the year: “Volunteers in Service.”

The theme was fitting for a woman who had dedicated more than 20 years of service to the military as part of the Auxiliary. She joined ALA New London Unit 40 in New Hampshire through the eligibility of her husband, George V. West, U.S. Air Force, Korean Era; and her two brothers, John F. Spindler, U.S. Army, Vietnam Era; and Frederick E. Spindler, U.S. Navy, Vietnam Era.

In 1988, West had been elected Department of New Hampshire president in recognition of her leadership. She continued her service on the national level by chairing more than 10 committees, including Legislative, Education, Constitution & Bylaws, Children & Youth, and Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation. She also served as the Eastern Division national vice president in 1991-1992.

Following West's installation on Sept. 7, 2000, a New Hampshire U.S. senator had this to say: "In a time where civic duties seem to be waning, Kristine exemplifies true civic pride and involvement. Kristine's hard work, determination, and energy are truly commendable. Her deep concern for the common good is admirable. She has truly demonstrated the qualities of strong leadership which will take her far in her new position."

As one of her first initiatives to demonstrate Volunteers in Service, West encouraged the Auxiliary to pledge \$50,000 for the 2000 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NVCAF). The annual event celebrates the works of veterans who use the creative arts to recover from and cope with physical and emotional disabilities at VA health care facilities across the country.

Although this type of therapy had been shown to benefit veterans' rehabilitation, many programs had suffered government budget cuts.

"What better way can we show our love than to make a difference in the rehabilitation of our veterans?" West asked members gathered at the convention.

The Auxiliary's National Executive Committee further showed their commitment to the NVCAF by adopting a resolution to become a national sponsor, a request that had been presented by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

As part of the resolution, the Auxiliary would assist with financial and volunteer support, seek funding from corporate donors, and establish a long-term plan for supporting the NVCAF, in addition to the ALA fundraising efforts as well as setting up a financial portfolio for long-range planning to support the NVCAF. The NEC adopted it.

Other officers elected and installed during the 2000 National Convention:

- National Vice President – Sherry McLaughlin (Department of Iowa, absent due to illness)
- Central Division NVP – Lois Icenogle (Department of Kansas)
- Eastern Division NVP – Imogene Stewart (Department of Washington, D.C.)
- Northwestern Division NVP – Beverly Otterness (Department of Minnesota)
- Southern Division NVP – June Meek (Department of Oklahoma)
- Western Division NVP – Patty Cooper (Department of Oregon)
- National Chaplain – Patricia Jewell (Department of Michigan)
- National Historian – Dianne McClung (Department of West Virginia)

- National Secretary – Peggy Sappenfield (Department of Indiana)
- National Treasurer – Marta Hedding (Department of Indiana)

Service, Membership Growth, and Memorials

American Legion Auxiliary members, embarking on their new administrative year, were resolute to keep servicemembers and veterans at the forefront of all of their service programs. They also set out to encourage other women to join in their efforts as part of a continuing membership campaign.

Membership was of particular concern for the decades-old organization. As changes in society brought in new ways of communicating, the American Legion Auxiliary found it increasingly challenging to get the word out to a younger generation. Membership had steadily declined.

National Treasurer Marta Hedding noted that membership was at a 30-year low. “Not only does a smaller membership impact the good work we can do; it also impacts our finances,” she said. “I encourage each of you to take an active personal role in working membership.”

President West also regularly encouraged members to focus on membership. “I invite you to be a pioneer woman from the days of long ago where nothing could stop the determination of a woman with a mission,” she said. “Ours will be to see an increase of membership from two years ago.”

Just over a month after the ALA National Convention, many members left their homes once again to head to Washington, D.C. They greeted the veterans who were among the finalists for that year’s National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, held from Oct. 15-21. They volunteered for all aspects of the event, as well as contributed \$50,000 to support it.

Actors Ernest Borgnine and Jane Powell were emcees for the event. Academy Award-winning Borgnine, a veteran himself, had served in the U.S. Navy for nearly 10 years, including during World War II. He received many awards for his service. Powell had encouraged war bond drives during WWII, serving as Oregon’s “Victory Girl.”

However, it was more than 120 veterans from across the nation who took the spotlight during the week’s activities, including a grand finale and a gala variety show that highlighted performances like ballroom dancing, Broadway solos, religious vocal groups, magic shows, dramatic readings, and tap and line dancing. An art exhibition featured veterans’ works in needlework, leather carving, woodwork, sculpturing, weaving, glasswork, oil painting, photography, and ceramics.

The veterans were selected from among 2,933 competitors to show off their talents in art, dance, drama, and music categories. Auxiliary members bonded with the veterans during a series of events leading up to the final night, including workshops, rehearsals, an art exhibition of veterans’ works, and sightseeing tours.

Just a few weeks later, National President West joined a host of veterans and other dignitaries at the official groundbreaking ceremony of the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C. It was an event that was filled with anticipation for many Auxiliary members, including West, who had chaired the ALA World War II Memorial Committee.

The Auxiliary was able to contribute \$662,970 to the building of the memorial, which honors the 16 million people who served as part of the United States Armed Forces during WWII. Earlier, during the National

Convention, West had presented a check to U.S. Sen. Bob Dole (R-Kan.), who had served in the U.S. Army during WWII, for the memorial.

Without the contributions from the Auxiliary and other private donors, it was highly unlikely the memorial would have ever been built. Although the federal government contributed \$16 million, Congress had ruled that no additional federal money could be used for the memorial. The ALA gift fulfilled a promise made under the leadership of Virginia Hobbs, who had initiated the fundraising campaign during her presidency from 1998-1999.

The women of the Auxiliary, along with members of The American Legion, were moved by the personal wish of a WWII veteran, who had served under Gen. George S. Patton during the war. Durbin, as his son Pete recalled in an article for FedSmith.com, "... couldn't get over the fact there wasn't a World War II memorial, and he never stopped talking about it."

Durbin, a mail carrier from Berkey, Ohio, had petitioned U.S. Rep. Marcy Kaptur in 1987 to take action on behalf of his dream. Kaptur listened, quickly introducing legislation to build a memorial on the Mall to honor WWII veterans.

Sen. Dole, who was severely wounded in the war, and beloved actor Tom Hanks, joined in as advocates to make a veteran's dream come true. Unfortunately, Durbin wasn't able to see the memorial completed. He passed in 2000 from pancreatic cancer. However, Auxiliary members helped make it possible to carry on his dream, for hundreds of thousands of Americans to memorialize the service of WWII servicemembers.

In April 2001, National President West also represented the American Legion Auxiliary at a Children's Miracle Network "sponsor summit" at a Walt Disney World resort in Orlando, Fla. She joined representatives of more than 80 sponsoring firms attended several days of meetings and an awards gala honoring their contributions to improving children's health and quality of life.

"This event is a great way to exchange ideas with people who really care about our children, just like we do," said West, referring to The American Legion's commitment to the organization since 1997. "It also allows us to tell our story and let the corporate sector know who we are and what The American Legion Family is about."

Making an Impact Across America, Around the World

In addition to getting back to a grassroots membership drive led by National Vice President Sherry McLaughlin, members dedicated the year to volunteerism as a way of making an impact across America, and around the world, on behalf of veterans, their families, and communities.

In the spirit of an organization that makes an impact from a grassroots level, hundreds of thousands of ALA members demonstrated the motto of having a spirit focused on *Service Not Self* in all aspects of their volunteerism.

From a top-level view, the Auxiliary volunteered 4.7 million hours and \$14.4 million in contributions to serve nearly 3 million veterans, children, and other individuals during the 2000-2001 administrative year. As part of their service, members generated \$2.2 million in donations from distributing poppies. They also donated \$149,176 to the Children's Miracle Network and \$28,506 to the Spirit of Youth fund.

While the overall numbers are impressive, the individual stories were worthy of closer attention. For that reason, ALA President West made every effort to meet with many of those women, traveling across the country to visit them one on one, attending meetings, and encouraging members as they carried out the mission and work of the Auxiliary.

On March 11, about 500 ALA members gathered in Washington, D.C., for the Auxiliary's 20th

Annual Awareness Assembly. During the national conference, attendees discussed the organization's programs, projects, and legislative initiatives.

In reports delivered by ALA departments and committees, it was clear to see how members worked diligently to nurture patriotism, encourage volunteerism, honor the service of military, ultimately, impact the lives of millions of veterans, children, and other individuals.

As part of National Executive Committee meetings, held prior to the Awareness Assembly, members heard from National President West.

"... as NECs, you have a great deal of responsibility and duties to perform. ... You are the liaison between the national organization and the department," West said. "It is up to you to be sure the communication lines are open and functioning. ... We can all learn from one another. We can all learn something new every day."

During the meeting, national chairmen also offered progress reports on their various programs. Here are a few highlights:

Members helping members: To support members faced with challenges, the Auxiliary provided \$39,200 in grants through the Auxiliary Emergency Fund. The funds assisted 45 members, a 66% above total grants at the same time the previous year.

Members helping communities: As part of their outreach to the community, members prepared for the annual Children's Miracle Network Walkathon to raise funds and committed to raising \$250,000 for The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation.

Members encouraging patriotism: The Annual ALA Girls State Directors Conference was held earlier in October, for the national ALA Girls State Committee, ALA Girls State directors, key staff members, and other interested individuals. ALA Girls State Chairman Penny Maklary said, "Knowledge of legal issues, awareness of activities in other departments, and preparedness to overcome and handle current issues make this conference a necessity."

Motivating members to embrace leadership: Jan Pulvermacher, national Leadership Committee chairman, said, "Leadership is listening and learning. It is educating yourself and your members about the American Legion Auxiliary. It is assembling a knowledgeable group of officers and chairmen to work for God and country and then delegating and directing those individuals to accomplish the goals of that administrative year. It is energizing your members so that they are willing and enthusiastic workers for the veterans and their families."

Communicating in a new era: Members also discussed increasing challenges facing members in getting the word out about the American Legion Auxiliary, particularly since people have more ways to get their news because of rapidly evolving technology. According to National Public Relations Chairman Jacklyn Skinner, "...more avenues of communication are available than ever before, [including] bulletins, newsletters, newspapers, radio, television, email, web pages, ... [and] videos."

In response to the digital changes, the organization also decided to introduce a new category for its Heart of America Awards — Electronic Media, according to Public Relations Director Mary Ellen Clipp. She also said the committee was exploring camera-ready public service ad slicks to promote ALA membership.

The Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Committee also announced the publication of a free booklet entitled, "The American Legion Guide: Women Veterans." The guide, available from the VA&R Division of The American Legion's Washington, D.C. office, gives women in the military invaluable information about transitioning from

active duty, compensation and pension, childcare, homelessness and housing, employment, education and health issues.

As part of other events during the Auxiliary's Annual Awareness Assembly, West chose to honor actress Jane Powell as the recipient of the Public Service Award, paying tribute to her dedication to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. West, an employee of FedEx, also joined members in honoring FedEx President and Chief Executive Officer Frederick W. Smith with a Showcase Award. Mike Lynch, executive director of Help Hospitalized Veterans, also was given a Showcase Award in recognition of his commitment to veterans and the work the organization achieved.

Other dignitaries recognized included Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony Principi; Paul Morin, President of the National Association of State Veterans Homes; and Elizabeth Mackey, Director of the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (and member of the Department of Minnesota Unit 428).

Members also joined in on a legislative rally with The American Legion. They later scheduled and followed up with meetings with their senators and representatives to advocate on behalf of veterans.

In other developments throughout the administrative year, the NEC, upon the recommendation of the Advisory Committee, approved a resolution that would allow all veterans to be eligible to make poppies under the supervision of the ALA. The resolution addressed a shortage of veteran-made poppies throughout the country as a result of VA medical centers having an inadequate number of patients to keep up with demand. It was forwarded to The American Legion for final consideration and adoption.

Service Not Self: The Life of an Auxiliary Member

"We live each day at the intersection of yesterday and tomorrow, reaping from the past and planting for the future." — ALA National Historian Dianne McClung, citing an unknown author

From September 2000 to August 2001, West traveled throughout the country to visit units and departments, starting with a visit in Columbus, Ohio, and ending with stops in Wichita Falls, Texas; Moscow, Idaho; Waterloo, Iowa; Middleton, Wis.; Chevy Chase, Md.; Indianapolis; and Europe during the months of July and August. In all, she visited nearly 100 locations throughout the United States and abroad.

Those visits allowed West to stay in touch with the grassroots efforts that are being made daily, making the American Legion Auxiliary an organization that continues to make an impact after nearly 100 years.

"Every visit that I make and every VA hospital that I go to and state veterans homes mean so much to me, and it means so much to our veterans," West said during a meeting of the National Executive Committee.

Reports and personal stories that flowed in from units, departments, and divisions painted a vivid picture of the day-to-day lives of Auxiliary members, including many selfless acts and donations that benefit the lives of individuals and encourage others to do the same.

Poppy Committee Chairman Marie Smith recalled a memorable encounter while distributing poppies at a local store in her community. Nothing unusual happened that day until she noticed an 18-wheeler slowing down along the street. To her surprise, the driver stopped. He came over and said, "My mother helped with Poppy Days where I grew up, and I know the story of the poppy and why it is so important."

After making a generous donation, the driver returned to his truck, but this time with poppies displayed on his shirt and his cap.

Numerous national meetings held throughout the administrative year recorded many of the ALA activities to ensure that the Auxiliary maintains its status as a nonprofit organization.

Other major meetings during the 2000-2001 administrative year:

ALA Girls Nation: As part of the 55th ALA Girls Nation gathering in Chevy Chase, Md., in July, NASA astronaut Dr. Janice Voss gave a video presentation on her latest mission taken in February 2000. She updated the senators on NASA research and the education and experience needed to be accepted into the space program.

The 95 student senators of the annual assembly also learned about the role of lobbyists in the political process as part of a presentation by The American Legion Legislative Director Steve Robertson.

And ALA National President West encouraged the students to use what they learned when they go out into the world to make it a better place. She also asked them to remember the veterans and the sacrifices they've made.

Junior Auxiliary: The National Junior Meeting, which was organized as a way to encourage young ALA members to follow a life of patriotism and service, met for their annual meeting in Milwaukee. Among the Honorary National Junior Officers elected for 2000-2001: Lindsey Dunbar of California, president; Heather Hanko of Maryland, historian; and Cheri Rolfes of Iowa, who took on the role of chaplain.

National Information Conferences: ALA leaders joined members of The American Legion for four National Information Conferences held in Nashville, Tenn.; Las Vegas, Nev.; Houston, Texas and Toledo, Ohio, during the fall of 2000. In addition, six were held in spring 2001 in Manchester, N.H.; Indianapolis; Macon, Ga.; Las Vegas; Cherry Hill, N.J.; and Sioux City, Iowa. This three-year trial venture between the organizations focused on Leadership, Membership, Americanism, Education, Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, and Children & Youth.

Gathering for the 2001 National ALA Convention

National ALA President West wrapped up her administrative year with many reflections on all that had been accomplished by dedicated members. West and thousands of members gathered in San Antonio, Texas, Aug. 25-30, 2001, where they conducted business and honored those who demonstrated excellence in serving veterans.

Among those receiving tributes was Veronica Spence, a regular volunteer at the San Francisco VA Medical Center. Spence was honored with the VAVS Volunteer of the Year Award for dedicating more than 18,000 hours of service during her 35 years of service to veterans.

In accepting the award, Spence shared that her father had spent three years in a VA medical center. "I guess it stems from that. Somehow or other, I had to repay what they did for him because they even taught him how to crochet."

Members attending the convention also honored First Lady Laura Bush for her literacy advocacy efforts and initiatives on behalf of the nation's children. They presented her with the ALA Woman of the Year Award during a joint session with The American Legion.

During the convention, ALA members also took the time to mourn the loss of Past National President Dora "Dorey" Seymour, who passed away Jan. 12, 2001, following a brief illness. Seymour, who served as president from 1980-1981, was eligible through her husband, Lyle, a World War II veteran. Seymour was active through the Department of Kansas before moving to Las Vegas, where she continued to serve as a committed ALA member.

As President West and members closing out another productive year of service to servicemembers, veterans and their families and communities, donating more than 3.4 million volunteer hours and \$4.6 million, they encouraged one another to continue the work that for future generations.

Making an Impact

Through ALA programs in 2000-2001, members made many impressions throughout their communities, including:

Americanism – Members helped boost voter turnout in their communities by helping with voter registration, voter reminder phone calls, transportation to the polls, and assistance for those who were unable to leave their homes. They also made sure to welcome new American citizens and raised \$20,647.50 in donations for the Spirit of Youth Fund. — Chairman Patricia Krantzow

Auxiliary Emergency Fund – ALA members were dedicated to helping other members by raising more than \$133,700 in donations for the Auxiliary Emergency Fund during the 2000-2001 administrative year. As a result, more than 59 members received \$48,200 in grants. — Chairman Paula Bradshaw

Children & Youth – Members volunteered more than 924,000 hours and donated more than \$2.1 million to ensure that the lives of 828,854 children were better than they were before. Some of these children were faced with serious life-threatening illnesses and disabilities. Organizations receiving funding included the Special Olympics, the Make A Wish Foundation, Ronald McDonald House and St. Jude's Hospital. — Chairman Katherine Morris

Child Welfare – Through the Child Welfare Foundation, members raised awareness about the needs of children. As a result, they added \$105,328 to the fund and awarded \$323,620 to 14 nonprofit organizations during the 2000-2001 administrative year (a \$10,000 increase from the prior year). This committee was re-established after several years of absence at the request of The American Legion. — Chairman Linda Boone

Community Service – Auxiliary members made an impact throughout their communities by contributing more than 507,000 volunteer hours to the National Make a Difference Day, Habitat for Humanity Inc., and other organizations. Monetary donations were made in the amount of \$227,148 for cancer research and camp tuition for children with cancer; \$88,541 to youth centers; \$19,822 to soup kitchens; \$95,000 to homeless shelters; and \$168,065 to food banks. — Chairman Carol Van Kirk

Education – ALA members, recognizing the importance of educating future generations, volunteered at local schools in their communities, met with school officials to discuss needs, and raised funds for equipment resource materials and books. They also invested time and resources in adult literacy programs, ensuring that no adult feels ashamed about not being able to read. In all, ALA members volunteered more than 9,000 hours to education programs and drove over 13,000 miles. Also, 1,329 members reported that they volunteered 35,434 hours as part of the "America Reads Challenge." — Chairman JoAnn Cronin

Finance – Declining ALA membership continued to cause financial concerns because a significant portion of the organization's revenue is generated by dues. Members sought creative ways to raise funds that support their programs, including greeting cards and return address label campaigns. During the 2000-2001, departments reported receiving more than \$337,000 in revenue, of which \$50,000 was committed to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. Overall, members raised \$129,000 to fund the NVCAF program. — Chairman Anna Gear

ALA Girls State – The goals of the Annual ALA Girls State program to educate young women about government were a success, reaching 15,300 young women from 6,042 high schools. A total of 4,204 ALA units throughout the country invested the time and resources to sponsor ALA Girls State programs. A total of 96 girls were

selected to attend ALA Girls Nation in Washington, D.C. There were also two firsts at this ALA Girls Nation: Senators advanced their state flag during the opening processional and retired it at the conclusion of the session, and all appointed justices wore official black robes for the inauguration ceremony. — Chairman Penny Maklary

Junior Activities - In keeping with their goal to encourage ALA service for many generations to come, the members supported Junior ALA members in numerous programs. Using the theme “2000 and Beyond as Volunteers in Service,” the program focused on four initiatives in 2000-2001: education of Juniors in knowing America and the veteran; training for senior membership; involvement in all Auxiliary programs; recognition of Junior members, who volunteered 22,367 hours of service during the year. — Chairman Rita Navarreté

Leadership – Developing leaders at all levels of the organization was among the top priorities of the Leadership Committee — from Juniors to veteran ALA members, as well as improving the image of the ALA throughout all communities. As Chairman Jan Pulvermacher said, “We are not born leaders. It is a constant process of listening, learning, and developing our skills through study, participation, and engagement with others.” — Chairman Jan Pulvermacher

Legislative – As part of advocating for veterans, the ALA focused on proposed legislation that would ensure access to healthcare, allowing every veteran and their family members to seek treatment at U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs medical facilities using a private health care plan, or, if applicable, Medicare. ALA members also sought to increase VA healthcare funding to \$21.6 billion by 2002, including allocating \$80 million to build much needed state-run veterans’ nursing homes. — Chairman Desirée Stoy

Membership - As part of boosting membership under the Happy Trails Kris-Cross America campaign, the committee focused on ensuring that members kept up with their renewals, recruited Junior members, get the word out to younger families and recruiting at least 10 new senior members in every unit. The ALA also recognized 1,344 units who achieved 100% membership with the 21st Century 100 percent Unit Award. — Chairman Carlene Ashworth

National Security - The committee placed emphasis on programs that focused on the plight of military personnel and their families, including contacting leaders through more than 8,000 letters, phone calls, and personal visits and delivering more than 80,000 cards, letters and packages to servicemembers. — Chairman Patricia Donohue

Past Presidents Parley - Aspiring nurses around the nation were the beneficiaries of nearly \$55,000 in scholarships as a result of efforts by the Past Presidents Parley Committee. The Department of Illinois present 24 applicants with \$1,000 scholarships each, while the Department of Michigan present 28 students with \$500 scholarships each. — Chairman June Stolte.

Poppy - Members focused on raising awareness of the significance of the Poppy through education, promotion, and fundraising. Many departments reported that “Poppy Puppies” were a hit as gifts, awards, decorations and fundraising campaigns. Members also raised awareness through poppy cards and calendars. — Chairman Marie Smith

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation - In analyzing the needs of veterans, members identified a need to recognize and help caregivers since many injured veterans do not remain in hospitals. They also set up programs to recruit, retain, and reward volunteers who donate their time to meet veterans’ needs all year long. Supporting the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival also was a key focus of this committee. During the 2000-2001 administrative year, more than 134,000 volunteers served more than 1.6 million veterans for a total of 2,822,514 volunteer hours. — Chairman Elsie Bailey

2001 - America is Under Attack

On Jan. 20, 2001, about 300,000 people endured the cold, wet, and foggy weather in Washington, D.C., to witness the inauguration of George W. Bush as the 43rd President of the United States. His father, George H.W. Bush, the nation's 41st President, joined other family members, including First Lady Laura Bush, in observing the swearing-in ceremony administered by Chief Justice William Rehnquist.

In addition to this ceremony marking only the second time the son of a former president went on to become president himself, it also represented one of the deepest divides in American political history.

Some supporters of the Democratic nominee, Al Gore, who distrusted the results of a Florida recount that decided the election, showed up to the inauguration with signs that proclaimed "Not My President."

Others had a more optimistic outlook, looking forward to Bush following through on his promises to primarily focus on a domestic agenda.

Unfortunately, Bush would not get the opportunity. On Sept. 11, just several months after Timothy McVeigh was put to death by lethal injection for his part in the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995, an unimaginable terrorist attack was carried out on American soil.

Just after 9 a.m. that day, news reporters led with what appeared to be an accident — a commuter plane had crashed into one of the towers at the World Trade Center in New York.

While Americans tuned in, they watched in horror as live broadcasts captured a Boeing 767 plow directly into the World Trade Center's second tower. More terrifying news unfolded as a third plane hit the Pentagon near Washington, D.C. The passengers and crew members on a fourth hijacked plane, United Airlines Flight 93, heroically sacrificed their lives to overtake hijackers before they could hit another target. They perished when the plane crashed in a field in Pennsylvania.

"America is under attack," an aide whispered to President Bush, who was visiting an elementary school in Sarasota, Fla.

The final death toll was 2,996 people, including 343 New York City firefighters who desperately tried to rescue as many people as possible from the Twin Towers before they collapsed.

Any divisions among Americans quickly dissipated in the wake of the 9/11 tragedy. Patriotism reached new heights as people from all backgrounds united to grieve, volunteer, and donate in honor of the men, women, and children who were killed in the terrorist attacks. Americans everywhere demonstrated what it meant to be an American.

"Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America. These acts shatter steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve." — President George W. Bush

The 19 suicide bombers involved in the attacks were identified as supporters of the Islamic extremist group Al-Qaeda, led by Osama bin Laden.

Bush quickly declared a Global War on Terrorism. On Oct. 7, 2001, the United States joined other countries in overthrowing the Al-Qaeda-supported Taliban government in Afghanistan, the start of Operation Enduring Freedom.

In response to the terrorist acts, the U.S. Congress enacted the USA Patriot Act, designed to strengthen national security by expanded law enforcement powers. Bush signed it into law on Oct. 26, 2001.

Americans everywhere knew their lives would never be the same.

Other news during 2001

- Jan. 16, 2001 — U.S. President Bill Clinton honors former President Theodore Roosevelt with a posthumous Medal of Honor for his service in the Spanish-American War.
- Jan. 26, 2001 — At least 20,000 died in a deadly earthquake measuring 7.9 on the Richter scale in India.
- Feb. 12, 2001 — Scientists from China, Japan, the United States, Germany, France and Britain release findings about the human genome sequence.
- Feb. 19, 2001 — Hundreds gather at the Oklahoma City National Memorial to witness the dedication of an Oklahoma City Bombing museum.
- March 7, 2001 — Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon takes office on March 7. Conflicts, including bombings and assassinations, escalate.
- April 28, 2001 — American engineer and millionaire Dennis Tito funds his own flight into space aboard the Soyuz TM-32, the first tourist to do so.
- Sept. 11, 2001 — 19 suicide bombers carry out the deadliest terrorist attack in America in modern history, killing near 3,000 people.
- Sept. 18, 2001 — With nerves already frayed, American media outlets, post offices, and other locations are targeted with deadly anthrax-laced anonymous letters. Five people die, and 17 others are infected.
- Oct. 7, 2001 — The United States invades Afghanistan, beginning the War on Terrorism campaign.
- Oct. 8, 2001 — In the wake of the terrorist attacks, President Bush announces the establishment of the Office of Homeland Security.
- Oct. 25, 2001 — The USA Patriot Act was passed and signed by President Bush the next day.
- Nov. 13, 2001 — President Bush signs an executive order permitting military tribunals against foreigners suspected of having connections to terrorist attacks against the United States.
- Dec. 2, 2001 — Enron files for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection, the largest in American history.
- Dec. 5, 2001 — Unemployment rates hit 5.7%.
- Dec. 13, 2001 — The United States withdraws from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.
- Dec. 22, 2001 — Passengers aboard a Paris to Miami flight overtake a passenger after he tries to set off explosives hidden in his shoes.
- Dec. 27, 2001 — China is granted MFN (most favored nation) status with the United States, allowing it to receive equal trade advantages.
- Jan. 4, 2002 — First U.S. soldier dies due to hostile fire in Afghanistan.
- Jan. 8, 2002 — Bush signs the “No Child Left Behind Act,” an education reform law.
- Jan. 16, 2002 — Space shuttle Columbia takes off on its last mission. It disintegrates 16 days later upon its re-entry, killing all 7 astronauts aboard.
- Jan. 22, 2002 — Kmart files for bankruptcy, making it the largest American retailer to do so.
- Feb. 1, 2002 — Daniel Pearl, a *Wall Street Journal* reporter who had been kidnapped in Pakistan, is murdered.
- March 19, 2002 — Operation Anaconda ends in Afghanistan after 18 days. 500 Taliban and Al-Qaeda are reported dead, as well as 11 allied troops.
- May 12 — Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter visits with Fidel Castro in Cuba, making him the first U.S. President, in or out of office, to visit since 1959.
- June 7, 2002 — President Bush proposes to create a new Department of Homeland Security in response to the 9/11 attacks.

2001-2002 - American Legion Auxiliary Administrative Year

“We Can Build a Better World”

“Through hard work, a little magic and many dreams, our organization can grow and achieve great things for America. If we can dream it, we can achieve it!” — Sherry McLaughlin, 81st National President of the American Legion Auxiliary

While temperatures climbed to a blazing 99 degrees in San Antonio, Texas, things were getting equally heated in the San Antonio Convention Center in August 2001, where thousands of ALA members applauded the enthusiastic message from their newly elected president, Sherry McLaughlin.

McLaughlin encouraged members to dream bigger — and to believe they could truly make a difference in the lives of America’s veterans and military, as well as their families and communities.

McLaughlin, a member of Emil H. Dutler Unit 177, had come to the position after 45 years of service in the Auxiliary, including the 1985-1986 year as department president of Iowa, 17 years as a counselor at ALA Iowa Girls State and the organizer of the first Junior Conference in 1971 and the Iowa Junior Camp in 1986. In honor of her service to ALA, as well as the Iowa Veterans Home and several local schools, McLaughlin was awarded the Iowa Governor’s Volunteer of the Year Award in 1999.

A retired retail pharmacy manager, McLaughlin gained her eligibility through her husband, Arthur, who served in the Korean War. Their family included three children, including her daughter Wendy Riggle, an ALA member. "She taught all of us that volunteerism is very important," Riggle said. "She told us, 'You need to give back to the world; the world has given you so much and you need to give back.'"

In her installation address, McLaughlin said, “When I joined the American Legion Auxiliary some 45 years ago, ... little did I dream that I would be standing before you today ready to embark on the greatest year of my life as your national president.”

McLaughlin chose "There's Magic in America's Dreams" as her theme, stating that, "Through hard work, a little magic and many dreams, our organization can grow and achieve great things for America. If we can dream it, we can achieve it!"

The Spirit of Youth Fund was designated as her special project, as a way to emphasize programs that support America’s youth and Junior members — the nation’s future. She also announced a new awards program — the "Department Junior of the Year" which would recognize outstanding Junior members with an expense paid trip to the National Junior Meeting in Charlotte, N.C. the following August.

McLaughlin also expressed continued support for the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, which provides art therapy to veterans at U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs hospitals throughout the nation. "Serving veterans is the cornerstone of our organization," she said.

In her parting remarks, McLaughlin reminded ALA members of the impact that they can make every day in their communities.

“Work on creating a positive image,” McLaughlin urged. “Let your community know that The American Legion Family is alive and well and willing to work hard to spread the magic of America’s dream. I ask each of you to reach down inside of yourself and give that little extra individual effort to make this the best year possible for the American Legion Auxiliary.”

Many ALA members also were encouraged to hear remarks from President George W. Bush, who welcomed The American Legion family to his home state and pledged support to the military. After announcing the signing of a bill that allocated \$2 billion in supplemental appropriations for military pay and benefits, he declared that he would make national defense a priority.

“I’ve asked Congress to provide the largest increase in military spending since Ronald Reagan was the President and Commander-in-Chief of the United States,” Bush told Legion Family members. “And to meet any dangers, our administration will begin building the military of the future. We are committed to defending America and our allies against ballistic missile attacks, against weapons of mass destruction held by rogue leaders in rogue nations that hate America, hate our values, and hate what we stand for.

“We have a clear eye on foreign policy,” Bush added. “We recognize it's a dangerous world. I know this nation still has enemies, and we cannot expect them to be idle. And that's why security is my first responsibility.”

In other directives, McLaughlin established programs to help units and departments focus on membership growth, focus on more strategic ways to strengthen their communities, and encouraged Junior member participation through the new Department Junior of the Year award. She also announced her national president’s project, Spirit of the Youth Fund, with a goal to raise \$85,000 to support it.

“We can build a better world,” McLaughlin said, encouraging members to believe in a positive future.

During the 2001 National Convention, members also elected new national officers:

- National Vice President - Elsie Bailey (Department of New Jersey)
- Central Division NVP – Kay Mishler (Department of Michigan)
- Eastern Division NVP – Verla Mae Shultz (Department of Pennsylvania)
- Northwestern Division NVP – Lyla Semenko (Department of North Dakota)
- Southern Division NVP – Betsey Lee Hodges (Department of North Carolina)
- Western Division NVP – Carol Dalton (Department of Idaho)
- National Chaplain – Betty Turner (Department of Georgia)
- National Historian – Shirley Olinger (Department of New York)
- National Secretary – Peggy Sappenfield (Department of Indiana)
- National Treasurer – Marta Hedding (Department of Indiana)

Leading by Example in the Wake of 9/11

The words of ALA President McLaughlin and U.S. President Bush would continue to guide members just weeks later as they joined millions of Americans in grieving the tragedies and loss of lives in the September 11 terrorist attacks.

That same day, President McLaughlin had joined American Legion National Commander Richard Santos in Washington, D.C., where he was scheduled to testify before a joint session of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees about legislative priorities. The legislators did not convene as news of the attacks spread across America.

McLaughlin was unable to leave the nation's capital for several days because all flights were canceled. However, she quickly resumed her schedule to meet with and encourage ALA members in Arkansas and Texas as soon as the air travel restrictions were lifted.

Members all over the world, demonstrating the heart of the American Legion Auxiliary to focus on "Service Not Self," were eager to mobilize to help out in any way possible. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, members were constantly asking, "How can we help?" "What can we do?"

As part of her response, specifically for military families, McLaughlin said, "We volunteer to pitch in and help these spouses and children wherever we find them, and whenever we're called upon to supplement the military's own support system."

Some members joined volunteers who went to the Twin Towers crash site to assist rescue workers searching for survivors. Many donated money and services to the hundreds of thousands of people whose lives were personally shattered by the attacks.

In addition to grassroots efforts to help survivors, first responders and their families, the ALA established a "9/11 Donation Fund." From those funds, they awarded numerous grants, including \$10,000 for the Tragedy Assistance program for Survivors Inc. (TAPS). The nonprofit is a network of peers from all service branches who support those who have lost a loved one.

Members also joined in efforts to award more than \$547,000 to 20 nonprofit organizations through The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation.

Staying Resolved in our Mission

In speaking to the nation after the attacks of 9/11, President Bush said, "These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed. Our country is strong. A great people has been moved to defend a great nation."

Like many other Americans, the members of the American Legion Auxiliary remained committed to their mission to support The American Legion and to honor the sacrifice of those who serve by enhancing the lives of our veterans, military, and their families, both at home and abroad.

These dedicated members kept moving forward with their agenda, with ALA President McLaughlin leading the way.

She joined Past National President Virginia Hobbs, National Junior Activities Chairman Penny Maklary, and National Americanism Chairman Desireé Stoy at the ALA Girls State Information Conference in October, and later attended the Mid-Year National Executive Committee Meeting and the 20th Annual ALA Awareness Assembly in Washington, D.C.

During the Assembly gathering's National Executive Committee Meeting in March 2002, the women heard from Joe Cauoette, Americanism Commission chairman of The American Legion. He asked the women to help Legionnaires in their commitment to the children of fallen servicemembers, specifically in raising funds for the Legion's September 11 Memorial Scholarship.

"The larger the trust fund, the greater the number of deserving kids that we can help," he said. "Even in peacetime, over 2,000 servicemen and women are killed on active duty every year. ... Many of them will leave behind children who need our help."

During the meeting, it also was reported that ALA members already had generously donated more than \$90,000 to the organization's 9/11 Fund; \$27,000 to the Spirit of Youth Fund; nearly \$10,000 to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival; and nearly \$61,000 to the Auxiliary Emergency Fund.

Members discussed the advocacy issues The American Legion supported, including generating additional funds for the VA, the opposition of the transfer of Veterans Employment and Training out of the Department of Labor to the Department of Veterans Affairs, and closing the gap between military pay and comparable civilian wages.

And, as part of a new domestic reality in America, members heard from experts on terrorism, including State Department terrorist expert retired Brig. Gen. Francis X. Taylor, who shared that intelligence reports revealed Al-Qaeda terrorist network cells in 58 countries. When asked how the Auxiliary could help support the war on terror, Taylor replied, "Don't be alarmed, but stay alert."

In addition to paying heed to Taylor's advice, the American Legion Auxiliary continued to make an impact for 9/11 efforts through various initiatives to serve and recognize others who serve.

One of the ALA's highest recognitions, the Public Spirit Award, was presented to Peter R. Teahen, an Iowan funeral director, grief counselor, and Red Cross volunteer. Teahan, who spent five weeks helping victims cope with the effects of terrorism following the 9/11 attack, had a history of volunteerism. He had previously helped in 46 disaster relief efforts, including the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, several major airline crashes, and natural disasters.

"The most valuable gift we can give another human being is hope," Teahan said in accepting the award from President McLaughlin. "I am touched and humbled to receive this award on the six-month anniversary of the 9/11 attack on America. I accept it in memory of a 2-year-old child lost on Flight 282, three young children of Oklahoma, and thousands lost in 9/11. We are what we are by what we give to others."

McLaughlin also presented Showcase Awards to Mercy Medical Airlift; Bayonne, N.J. Fire Canteen, which had been organized in 1994 by ALA member Debra Noble, her husband, Jim, and four friends; and The Good Knight Campaign, an educational program run by retired law enforcement officials, whose mission is to prevent violence and exploitation against children.

During other presentations, members heard about the realities of military servicemembers — including those who never returned home and those who faced even more difficulties after serving their country.

Col. David J. Pagano, Commander of the U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory, reported that their recovery efforts for missing servicemen and servicewomen from World War II, Korean War, and Vietnam War continued, with more than 78,000 still missing from WWII, more than 5,500 in North Korea, an estimated 8,000 from Vietnam and 130 from other wars. "The work continues," Pagano told the women.

The updates served as reminders of why ALA members do what they do, including talking to their legislators on Capitol Hill about the legislative issues most important to the organization.

McLaughlin continued to maintain a busy schedule throughout the remainder of the year, attending various departments nationwide, and the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival in Prescott, Ariz., in October. More than 100 first-place winners honored from the 2,886 veterans who competed for a spot from 101 VA facilities across the nation.

"We're proud that our American Legion Auxiliary continues leading the way as a national co-sponsor of this fantastic program," McLaughlin said. "These talented men and women deserve our support because they are veterans and deserve our respect and admiration for their accomplishments in the creative arts."

Festival Director Elizabeth Mackey presented McLaughlin with a service award recognizing the ALA in its role as a national co-sponsor of the festival.

Auxiliary Members Answering the Call for Service

“The American Legion Auxiliary does better and more work for The American Legion than they do for themselves.” — The American Legion National Commander Richard Santos

National President McLaughlin started the new year with a busy travel season, making official visits to departments in Utah, Nevada, Nebraska, Tennessee, Mississippi, Kentucky, Kansas, and California in January and February before attending the Lincoln Day Pilgrimage in Springfield, Mo. She also visited members in Michigan, Maryland, Delaware, and North Carolina, where she toured facilities for the 2002 National Convention.

Also, American Legion Auxiliary members continued to dedicate their time and resources to support The American Legion, improving the lives of veterans, military, and their families and communities.

And in the midst of that work, they received the tragic news that Arthur McLaughlin, husband of National President Sherry McLaughlin and a member of American Legion Post 177, had passed on March 16. After McLaughlin, her family and friends gathered to honor the loss of their loved one, she stayed committed to her responsibilities with the Auxiliary.

Later that month, McLaughlin continued her schedule, joining other ALA members as they continued their work on behalf of veterans. In addition to attending the Children's Miracle Network meeting in Orlando, Fla., she made an official visit to Puerto Rico.

She also attended the annual convention of The American Legion, Department of France, in Germany, along with National Vice President Elsie Bailey.

In July, 96 young women traveled to Chevy Chase, Md., for the 56th ALA Girls Nation where they heard from U.S. President George W. Bush, who challenged them to continue taking an active role in their communities. “I expect you to uphold the responsibilities of leadership,” he told them.

They also heard from ALA President McLaughlin who challenged them “to continue your dream for the future” and guest speaker, Susan Halbert, senior vice president of the National 4-H Council, who said, “You are here, not because you are the leaders of the future, but because you are the leaders of today.”

While they had many opportunities to learn firsthand about U.S. legislative processes, ALA Girls Nation attendees also took a moment to remember the sacrifices made by servicemembers while visiting memorials, including the Vietnam Wall, the Vietnam Women’s Memorial, and the Korean War Memorial. They also visited the Women In Military Service For America Memorial (WIMSA). The tour guide at WIMSA, Deputy Director June Eldridge, told the girls that until June 2002, women veterans could be buried at Arlington, but without full military honors — which included an honor guard, a flag draped coffin and a 21-gun salute. This changed when the family of veteran Irene England took action to get this changed.

McLaughlin also took the time to greet women attending the 2002 ALA National Convention in Charlotte, N.C., in August. During the National Executive Committee meeting prior to the convention, leaders discussed several resolutions to be presented to members, including the creation of an endowment fund, the Century Club, and a proposed study to determine how to address the disparities in division sizes.

During the National Convention gathering, members heard from Elizabeth Mackey, director of the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, who described the importance of art therapy in the healing of veterans.

“Our main goal is for the veterans to take that sense of self confidence, pride, and achievement back home with them and incorporate it into other aspects of their lives,” she said. “Through your involvement, you set the stage for this type of growth to happen.”

In her final remarks as ALA national president, McLaughlin stressed the important work members had done to help a nation recover in the wake of a massive tragedy. When rushing to help victims of the terrorist attacks, members assisted The American Legion and Sons of The American Legion in establishing relief funds, and donated nearly \$95,000 to the ALA 9/11 Fund — monies that were used to help bereaved children who lost loved ones. Recipients of the funds also included the USO chapters in New York City and Washington, D.C.

And ALA members continued to make an impact throughout their communities in 2001-2002, touching the lives of 2.8 million people, including 1.5 million veterans. In all, members volunteered more than 5.1 million hours — of which 2.7 million were designated to serve veterans. They also contributed more than \$13.5 million in donations during the 2001-2002 administrative year, according to official reports.

“I’m happy to report that American Legion Auxiliary members reacted terrifically, as always,” McLaughlin said. “And in doing so, you brought a little magic into the lives of millions.”

Making an Impact

Through ALA programs in 2001-2002, members made a significant impact in their communities:

Americanism - Members helped promote American patriotism throughout the administrative year, donating more than 140,000 flags, volunteering more than 100,000 hours and donating more than \$370,000 — all on behalf of the ALA’s Americanism efforts. They also supported the ALA’s Americanism Youth Conference in March at Valley Forge, Pa., which was attended by 48 high school students from 22 states. — Chairman Desiree Stoy

Auxiliary Emergency Fund - Members once again demonstrated their commitment to support other members, donating \$162,455 for the Auxiliary Emergency Fund. (The Department of Minnesota donated \$18,506 of the \$162,455.) They also had distributed nearly \$46,000 in grants to 53 ALA members by July 2002. — Chairman Midge Farrar

Cavalcade of Memories — The ALA expanded upon its historical collection by adding 12 pictures of Honorary Junior Past National Presidents and the crystal Patriot’s Award of the Fisher House Foundation, which was given in recognition of donations made by the Auxiliary. — Chairman Agnes Kennedy

Children & Youth - As part of their contributions to youth, including through the Ronald McDonald House, TAPS, Toys for Tots, SADD, school bands and choirs, Special Olympics, Muscular Dystrophy, and Jerry’s Kids, members volunteered 708,050 hours and contributed \$1,392,925. In all, they helped 1,341,195 children. — Chairman Sandi Dutton

Child Welfare - The American Legion Child Welfare foundation approved 20 grants totaling almost \$550,000 — the largest amount of grant awards in the history of the foundation. This was the largest amount of grant awards in the 47-year history of the foundation. The ALA sponsored four of the grants, which totaled \$146,000. — Chairman Virginia Hobbs

Community Service - After 9/11, ALA members helped organized blood drives to help meet the demand and to raise overall awareness. They also donated 14,222 volunteer hours and more than \$50,000 to Habitat for Humanity. Through all their efforts to communities, members volunteered more than 438,065 hours and donated more than \$2 million. — Chairman Carlene Ashworth

Education - ALA units across America awarded students with scholarships totaling nearly \$1 million, in addition to scholarships granted at the department and national levels. — Chairman Carol Van Kirk

Finance - The Finance Committee reporting generating nearly \$126,000 from its spring label program and \$192,282 from three direct mail campaigns, important financial initiatives designed to generate funds in the wake of declining membership. — Chairman Phyllis Bachman

ALA Girls State - Members in 49 departments worked hard to ensure that about 19,000 students — from 6,500 high schools — would be able to attend ALA Girls State programs. An additional 85 high schools participated in 2001, compared to the previous year. More than 2,200 members volunteered their time to support ALA Girls State. “For all the bad in the world, I’m heartened that there are people willing to recognize the positive in our youth, and lead them to ever greater levels of accomplishment,” the father of one of the ALA Girls Nation senators said in a thank-you letter. “For that, my profound thanks to the American Legion Auxiliary.” — Chairman Pat Kranzow

Junior Activities - Following in the path of senior members, Juniors showed their dedication to service, volunteering more than 20,000 hours to Community Service projects, 17,000 hours to veterans programs, and 27,000 hours to individual department projects during the administrative year. — Chairman Penny Maklary

Leadership - To encourage leadership at all levels, the ALA hosted eight regional conferences to give members the opportunity to share leadership topics. “Developing leaders at all levels is essential to ensure continued success of our programs for veterans and their families, our youth, our communities, and our Country,” the chairman said. — Chairman Jacklyn Skinner

Legislative - As part of the ALA’s legislative agenda, members sought funding for the Veterans Health Administration for long-term strategic planning and program performance measurement; additional revenue for staff and construction; and increased access to VA healthcare. — Chairman Jan Pulvermacher

Membership - Departments showed initiative in planning extra events to increase membership today and into the future. Many departments reported that their membership levels were ahead of the previous year, with 14 departments at 100% of their goals and five departments at an all-time high. — Chairman Beverly Otterness

National Security - Within a few months of initiating the 9/11 Fund, the American Legion Auxiliary estimated \$35,000 already had been raised to support those impacted by the terrorist attacks. Also, members sent more than 12,000 letters, cards, emails, and packages to active servicemembers. — Chairman JoAnn Cronin

Past Presidents Parley - Members donated \$104,399 to help fund scholarships for 130 student nurses. They also recognized 5,252 female veterans with gifts, cards, visits and other special gestures. — Chairman Kristine West

Poppy - ALA members ordered nearly 6 million poppies and collected \$1,865,443 in donations through poppy programs. Also, the Poppy Committee joined forces with the Public Relations Committee to heighten awareness by encouraging political figures and media personnel to wear a poppy on May 27. — Chairman Kathy Riordan

Public Relations - Public Relations and Poppy programs embarked on a joint activity to bring awareness of the American Legion Auxiliary memorial poppy to all elected officials, politicians, media personalities, prominent citizens, requesting that the poppy be worn on Memorial Day. — Chairman Rita Navarreté

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation – Members ensured that veterans were not forgotten. A total of 112,043 members volunteered more than 2.65 million hours to directly serve veterans, including 22,692 who visited VA facilities to donate a total of 767,543 hours. They also donated \$4,378, 126 to serve veterans, including \$27,700 that was donated to Fisher Houses and more than \$33,000 to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. — Chairman Katherine Morris

Other highlights for the year included an initiative to revive the Blue Star Banner program, which dated back to World Wars I and II. Families during those wars would display a banner in their home or in their window when a loved one was serving in the U.S. Armed Forces.

The National President's Humanitarian Award was awarded to Fred Rogers, television children's show host, and Kathryn Koob, a retired foreign service officer, educator, and Iowan who was named ALA Woman of the Year. She attended ALA Girls State in 1955 and was one of the 44 American hostages taken by Iranian revolutionaries in 1979.

Another speaker at the joint session was Marie Osmond, a cofounder with singer and songwriter John Schneider of the Children's Miracle Network. They introduced "Miracle Child" Sam Wise of Concord, N.C. He was given a second chance at life because of the work performed at the Northeast Children's Medical Center in N.C. Sam's mother, Crystal, is a member of Unit 51 in Concord, N.C., as well as her mother and Sam's aunt.

2002: A Nation in a Flux of Change

With nearly 67 million Americans subscribing to cable news services in 2002, it wasn't unusual for families to hear 24-hour news updates that included terms and phrases like "Al-Qaeda," "Taliban," "extremism," and "radicalism." Others kept close watch on news about the Global War on Terror through the major TV networks.

And, on Jan. 29, 2002, 51.8 million Americans turned on their televisions to hear the U.S. President's State of the Union address. In that speech, George W. Bush warned of more work to come after a series of attacks against Afghanistan's training camps, all in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks that claimed nearly 3,000 lives.

"What we have found in Afghanistan confirms that, far from ending there, our war against terror is only beginning," Bush said as he described an "Axis of Evil," regimes like Iraq, Iran and North Korea that "sponsor terror." Just two days later, U.S. special forces would be deployed for Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines, part of the War on Terrorism.

Weeks later, on March 19, 2003, more than 130,000 American servicemembers were deployed to Iraq as a U.S.-led coalition initiated a war against the country. In a televised address, President Bush announced, "At this hour, American and coalition forces are in the early stages of military operations to disarm Iraq, to free its people and to defend the world from grave danger."

Bush had stood by the war based on the belief that Iraq was building "weapons of mass destruction" under its dictator Saddam Hussein.

Although the ongoing war against terrorism remained in their minds, Americans demonstrated their resiliency by returning to life as they knew it — as much as possible. They cheered on U.S. athletes as the XIX Winter Olympics got underway in Salt Lake City, Utah, in February. And more than 10 million people watched a new Fox network show called *American Idol*, an interactive show in which TV audiences cast their votes for their favorite singers.

While fears lingered about traveling by air, Americans continued to book flights to conduct business, take vacations and visit loved ones. However, preparing for those trips were significantly different. Passengers arrived earlier for their flights, removing their shoes, belts, and accessories to undergo screenings. Every single checked bag was screened as well, keeping with the regulations of the new Aviation and Transportation Security Act. Before 9/11, only 5% of baggage was screened.

There would be no goodbye hugs and kisses from loved ones as they boarded their planes; only ticketed passengers were allowed to get past security.

While Americans went on with their lives, Congress met and quickly approved nearly 50 bills and resolutions related to the 9/11 attacks, including the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act that enforced the sharing of information among departments about visa and immigration data.

And on Sept. 11, 2002, Americans paused to remember those who lost their lives in the worst terrorist attack in their country. In New York, tens of thousands joined the President and First Lady Laura Bush at Ground Zero, the wreckage of the World Trade Center. In Washington, D.C., a group gathered to rededicate the Pentagon, after the building had been repaired from the damage resulting from the terrorist attack.

All over America, people joined together in small farming communities, rural areas, cities, both large and small, to pray, to light candles, and to remember.

In an address to the nation, President Bush, said, "September the 11th, 2001, will always be a fixed point in the life of America. The loss of so many lives left us to examine our own. Each of us was reminded that we are here only for a time. And these counted days should be filled with things that last and matter: love for our families, love for our neighbors and for our country, gratitude for life and to the giver of life.

"We resolved a year ago to honor every last person lost," Bush said. "We owe them remembrance, and we owe them more. We owe them and their children, and our own, the most enduring monument we can build, a world of liberty and security, made possible by the way America leads and by the way Americans lead our lives."

Other events in 2002:

- Sept. 11, 2002 – The Pentagon is rededicated, one year to the day after repairs are completed from the attack on the building.
- Oct. 9, 2002 – The Dow Jones Industrial average drops below 7,200; the dot.com bubble bear market nears the bottom, signaling continued economic woes.
- Oct. 11, 2002 - Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for "for his decades of untiring effort to find peaceful solutions to international conflicts."
- Oct. 16, 2002 – U.S. Congress authorizes the Iraq War Resolution, authorizing the U.S. President to "use any means necessary" against Iraq.
- Nov. 8, 2002 – The United Nations approves a resolution on Iraq, demanding that Saddam Hussein disarm or face "serious consequences."
- Nov. 25, 2002 - President Bush signs the Homeland Security Act into law, establishing the Department of Homeland Security. It is the largest U.S. government reorganization since the Department of Defense was created in 1947.
- Dec. 9, 2002 — United Airlines files for bankruptcy.
- Dec. 23, 2002 – An Iraqi MiG-25 shoots down an MQ-1 Predator, marking the first time an unmanned drone has engaged in combat.
- Jan. 17, 2003 – Jesse N. Edmisten, believed to be the nation's oldest living World War I veteran and member of the Lexington Lanning Post 111 in Lexington, Neb., dies at the age of 109.
- Feb. 4, 2003 – Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is officially renamed Serbia.
- Feb. 15, 2003 – An estimated 6 to 11 million people around the world take to the streets to protest war against Iraq.
- March 19, 2003 – Invasion of Iraq by American and British-led coalition begins without United Nations support and in defiance of world opinion.
- March 20, 2003 – A U.S.-led coalition launches an invasion of Iraq, beginning the Iraq War.
- March 23, 2003 – In Nasiriyah, Iraq, 11 soldiers of the 507th Maintenance Company, as well as U.S. Marines, are killed during the first major conflict of Operation Iraqi Freedom.
- April 7, 2003 – U.S. troops capture Baghdad; Saddam Hussein's regime falls two days later
- May 1, 2003 – U.S. President Bush declares that "major combat operations in Iraq have ended" on board the USS Abraham Lincoln off the coast of California.
- Aug. 19, 2003 – A suicide bomber drives a cement mixer full of explosives in the side of the United Nations compound in Baghdad and blows it up, killing 17 people and wounding at least 100. Among the dead is Sergio Vieira de Mello, the United Nations Secretary General's special representative in Iraq.

2002-2003 - American Legion Auxiliary Administrative Year

"Make every day special for veterans."

“Let them know we care. Show them our appreciation at every opportunity. Make every day special for veterans.” — Elsie Bailey, 82nd National President of the American Legion Auxiliary

As the newly elected national president of the American Legion Auxiliary during the 2002 National Convention, Elsie Bailey encouraged ALA members to remember their role as proponents of patriotism and service to the military.

Now, more than ever, Americans were seeking ways to be unified in the wake of 9/11 attacks and the War on Terrorism. And the Auxiliary was in an ideal position to lead the way, serving as an example of what it meant to be patriotic and serve the military who were on the frontlines.

Announcing her theme as “America, Pure Gold,” Bailey encouraged members to demonstrate their patriotism every day and especially on Sept. 11, 2002, which had been designated as “Patriot Day” by The American Legion. As part of the Legion Family, members were asked to wear a red, white, and blue ribbon as a special patriotic tribute to 9/11 victims and survivors.

Bailey asked members to return to their hometowns with the following objectives: encourage the spirit of patriotism and inspire love of country; honor veterans and military personnel for their service and sacrifices; work toward the goal of making America safer for our children; strengthen the stability of our organization by increasing membership, organizing new units, and preventing charter cancellations; and

create a positive, optimistic outlook.

But, most of all, Bailey said, focus on the core mission of supporting veterans and active military throughout the year. “Let them know we care,” she said in her comments at the National Convention in Charlotte, N.C. “Show them our appreciation at every opportunity. Make every day special for veterans.”

Bailey also announced that the Auxiliary would continue to support important programs, including the Fisher House Foundation, VA medical centers and the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, which the organization only had started supporting a couple of years earlier.

And, with the organization continuing to struggle with declining membership, Bailey prioritized recruiting members with a new initiative: “Country Hearts in Celebration.” She encouraged the women to approach members from The American Legion and the Sons of The American Legion about recruiting new senior members for the Auxiliary. For every three women they recruited to join the ALA, Sons and Legion members would receive a “King Crow” lapel pin. Also, the Unit Development & Revitalization would continue its work in building and revitalizing units and prevent charter cancellations.

For Bailey, a resident of Whiting, N.J., patriotism and service to veterans had been a part of her identity since 1961 when she came a member of ALA Stevenson-D’Alessio Unit 12, through the eligibility of her late husband, John C. Bailey. The mother of two and grandmother of four had served as president of the Department of New Jersey from 1988-1989, and as national vice president during the 2001-2002 administrative year.

A country western music lover, Bailey had retired from the Somerset Medical Center where she had served as the personnel director. She also had demonstrated her passion for volunteerism as a member of the Eight et Forty Petit Salon 265 and the Whiting Rescue Squad Auxiliary. She was a volunteer mentor to a fifth-grade child, and an active parishioner of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church.

In her closing remarks during the National Convention, Bailey also announced that her special project would be a “Veterans Pot of Gold.”

"I ask the entire American Legion Family to 'Stand by Me' as we go our way together, hand in hand and heart to heart, with 'America, Pure Gold' in our hearts and on our minds," she said.

Other national officers elected at the 2002 National Convention:

- National Vice President – Katherine Morris (Department of Texas)
- Central Division NVP – Karen Lowe (Department of Indiana)
- Eastern Division NVP – Laurel Matthews (Department of New Jersey)
- Northwestern Division NVP – Barbara Monroe (Department of Montana)
- Southern Division NVP – Cora "Corky" Bradshaw (Department of Arkansas)
- Western Division NVP – Janet Easley (Department of Washington)
- National Chaplain – Emma Peoples (Department of Washington)
- National Historian – Janis A. Jelinek (Department of Wyoming)
- National Secretary – Peggy Sappenfield (Department of Indiana)
- National Treasurer – Marta Hedding (Department of Indiana)

Advocating for Veterans Every Day

One of the first stops on National ALA President Bailey's schedule was Washington, D.C., where she joined American Legion National Commander Ron Conley as he testified before a joint session of the Senate and House Veterans Affairs committees.

The American Legion's legislative priorities included adequate funding for the Veterans Health Administration and allowing veterans to choose their healthcare providers, especially since many veterans are Medicare eligible. Conley, a U.S. Air Force Vietnam era veteran from Pittsburgh, also noted that the VA could not bill Medicare directly for health care provided to veterans.

"Today's servicemembers have once again answered that call, and we, as a grateful nation, must not deny this new generation of American veterans the care they have earned through their honorable service to this country," said Conley in reminding legislators of the nation's obligation to its veterans.

As members of the American Legion Auxiliary set out to fulfill their mission for the administrative year, they also heard from the Veterans Administration about the challenges facing veterans in recent years.

One of the most disturbing trends, was the increasing number of veterans facing homelessness. In 2001, estimates gathered by the VA revealed that 345,000 veterans did not have a place to call home — up 34% since a previous report in 1998. Also, statistics revealed that 40% of veterans suffer from mental illness and 80% are fighting drug or alcohol dependency. The number of homeless single women veterans with children also had increased, according to the VA.

ALA President Bailey, who set up the "Veterans Pot of Gold" campaign to fund veteran needs, said members must be relentless in addressing homelessness.

“The focus should be on preventing homelessness instead of trying to pick up the pieces,” said Bailey, who visited many departments across the United States to deliver her message. “In my travels, I can report that we are tackling big issues. Without fanfare, motivated by a spirit of service, Auxiliary members are assisting veterans who became homeless. The work we are doing is too important to America for us to flinch. We can’t do that, and we won’t.”

Later in the fall, Bailey joined members during the Presidents & Secretaries Conference conducted in Indianapolis, the location of ALA’s National Headquarters. In all, representatives from 31 departments attended the conference, the first major meeting of the new administrative year.

In her comments, Bailey stressed the importance of having a stable membership base in order to work the programs. “Without the numbers, not only will our organization lose, but so do the millions of veterans and their families who are at the heart of everything we do in the American Legion Auxiliary,” she said.

In addition to the reports members provided on the activities in their committees, Kristine West, Past Presidents Parley chairman, announced the plans for the new Women Veteran of the Year program. Also, National Security Chairman Carlene Ashworth reported that The American Legion Family Support Network was officially established to help Legion Family members who suffer loss because of natural disasters as well as to assist families of active duty, Reserve, and National Guard personnel deployed overseas.

“Our lives are not the same as they were before 9/11,” Ashworth said. “We must not live complacently thinking someone else will take care of us, or our families.”

In October, ALA members, including President Bailey, joined other volunteers at the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NVCAF) in Minneapolis to support and help recognize the first-place winning veterans from arts competitions at 101 VA facilities nationwide. The Auxiliary continues to follow through on its commitment to support the NVCAF, which provides opportunities for veterans to explore art as a form of therapy.

As NVCAF Director Elizabeth Mackey said, the program is designed to raise the spirits of veterans as well as their self-confidence. “Through artistic expression comes release of pain and suffering and the positive recognition that the veterans receive as a result and reinforces their commitment to continue to deal with their problems in a way in which society accepts and encourages,” she said.

The following March, Bailey attended the Mid-Year National Executive Meeting in Washington, D.C. As part of business, members proposed and adopted a resolution to eliminate any references to the Century Club as an “endowment fund” as it would limit the members’ ability to use the funds as intended.

Elaine Walmsley, chairman of the Auxiliary Emergency Fund Committee, announced that \$50,785.93 had been donated to the fund as of Jan. 31. The fund was set up to allow members to help members in need. Walmsley reported that 35 grants, totaling \$22,150, had been distributed to ALA members who were struggling with the loss of a spouse, a natural disaster, or other financial difficulties.

During the ALA’s 21st Awareness Assembly in Washington, D.C., members also had the opportunity to hear an inspiring message from a soldier who lost both of his legs as a result of a parachuting accident in 1994.

U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class (Ret.) Dana Bowman, a member of the Golden Knights, became the first double amputee to re-enlist in the Army nine months after the accident. He stressed the commitment he made to serve his country.

“It’s not the disability; it’s the ability,” Bowman told the women. “Tragedy can help us become stronger. If we don’t have obstacles or barriers, we don’t know what we can accomplish.”

Other speakers included Carol Colman, Director Emergency Food and Shelter Program, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Army Sgt. Maj. Jack Tilley, and Andrew Erdmann, Policy Planning Staff U.S. Department of State.

Erdmann discussed a pending United Nations resolution to give Iraq more time to surrender any weapons of mass destruction it may have been harboring. "This is not the second resolution, but the 18th in regards to Iraq," he said. "Iraq was supposed to disarm in 1991."

During awards presentations, the Auxiliary presented Hollywood and Armed Forces Network personality Chris Noel with their Showcase Award for her work in starting the Vetsville Cease Fire Houses to help homeless veterans. Randy Fogle and John Unger were presented with the ALA's 2003 America's Hope Award. They represented all of the rescued miners who were trapped for 77 hours, 240 feet underground in a mine that was filling up with water. Also, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell was honored with the Auxiliary Public Spirit Award; however, he was unable to attend.

Later in March, when U.S. troops invaded Iraq, ALA members were among those praying for their safe return. ALA President Bailey asked members to support the troops overseas, as well as the families they left behind.

"We must lift our voices in prayer, each in our own way," she said. "We must pray and then stand together, proud and strong, in encouragement and support for the President of these United States, for our troops and for our 'America, Pure Gold!'"

They continued to raise funds and initiate other programs to demonstrate their support. For example, the Department of Indiana American Legion Family raised \$75,000 for a 9/11 Scholarship Fund through a "Support the Troops" yard sign campaign. Other ALA members raised funds to purchase treats and toiletry items for troops, while others greeted them at airports with banners, candy, coffee, and donuts.

Throughout the year, Bailey continued to visit departments across the United States and attended meetings, including the National Leadership and Information Conferences with TAL; the National Chairmen's Workshop; the Pre-Convention National Executive Committee Meeting, and the 2003 ALA National Convention in St. Louis. For the Auxiliary, St. Louis is a special place; it is where a group of veterans organized The American Legion in 1919.

One of the top NEC agenda items included a report from the Restructuring Study Committee, which was designated to review the size of divisions and procedures for electing national division vice presidents. According to Jeanne Brandt, chairman of the committee, department surveys indicated a need for equalization for the numbers of departments in all divisions.

The committee recommended having six divisions to be named Northeastern, North Central, Northwestern, Southeastern, South Central, and Southwestern. Further study would continue, and more information would be shared at the Presidents & Secretaries Conference.

During the 2003 ALA National Convention, members heard from the national commanders of The American Legion and Sons of The American Legion, who encouraged them to continue to do their part to build a stronger American Legion Family.

Sons National Commander Steve Laws told them to return home with a renewed spirit and attitude, knowing "...that you are going to do something to make a difference in someone's life." American Legion Commander Ronald Conley reminded them that the VA health care is in a crisis, but it is a system that's worth saving. He further stated that up to 300,000 veterans will wait up to two years before seeing a primary care physician at a VA facility. He pointed out that if The American Legion Family does not stand up for veterans, "...no one will."

"It is important that The American Legion Family takes an active, aggressive role in making sure that we have VA health care," Conley said in urging ALA members to continue to pressure Congress to address those needs.

Representatives of various organizations supported by Auxiliary members also expressed thanks for their donations and service.

John Hanson, senior vice president for Marketing and Communications, United Service Organization, said it provides entertainment and other day-to-day activities for troops overseas with about 120 centers around the world. "The USO is a lifeline," he said. "It's a shelter from the storm. It's a refuge. It's a place you can go to get away from your job for a couple of hours, to eat American food, read American magazines, talk to American people, and forget for a moment that you are a long way from home."

Mick Shannon, founder and CEO of Children's Miracle Network, told members "...our kids are receiving the best care, again, thanks to you." One of the children served was a 2-month-old baby of an Iraq soldier who was born with complications from a premature birth.

As ALA National President Bailey reflected on the organization's 2002-2003 administrative year, she once again expressed the importance of members' work in the lives of servicemembers and veterans every day. She also announced donations to her special project, Veterans Pot of Gold, already had reached nearly \$50,000. The funds were used to purchase equipment and meet veterans' special needs at VA medical centers, outpatient clinics, domiciliaries, and state veterans homes.

"...you have never wavered," Bailey told members gathered at the 2003 convention. "No one, however, could have predicted that during my term of office, members of the American Legion Auxiliary would be called on once again to stand by our country in a time of war At every level of our organization, we delivered this simple message to military families: 'We are here to help.'"

"Our work ... is a tremendous asset to this nation ...," she said. "The American Legion Auxiliary was a leading force for providing housing and positive environment for veterans to reclaim their lives A small number of caring members can make a difference in their hometowns."

In Memory

Past National President Mary Sue Jarrett, 1973-1974, passed away on May 23, 2003, at the age of 96. She was a member of the Warren F. Hoyle Unit 82, Shelby, N.C., since 1933, gaining her eligibility through her husband, World War I veteran Dr. Buford Martin Jarrett. Mary Sue often said that her right to be a member of the Auxiliary was the finest gift her husband ever gave her. Her son served in World War II. Mary Sue's gift of music was well known, whether it was through her singing or playing her accordion. The Auxiliary Girls Nation chorus was created during her term as national president. She was elected president at the 1973 ALA National Convention.

Making an Impact

Through ALA programs in 2002-2003, members made a significant impact in their communities:

Americanism - Promoted an understanding of the American flag and other forms of Americanism through participation in the Americanism Youth Freedoms Foundation Conference (desire 100% state participation), the National Youth Conference, and the Americanism National Essay Contest. Nearly 16,000 entries were submitted for "What America's Future Holds for Me!" Prizes were awarded totaling \$18,495. Also, \$27,352 was donated to

“Spirit of Youth” fund, and members contributed a total of \$43,957 in funds and 5,010 volunteer hours to the programs of Americanism. — Chairman Jan Pulvermacher

Auxiliary Emergency Fund – Numerous disasters, including tornadoes in Oklahoma, floods in Indiana and Illinois, and fires in California, Arizona, and New Mexico, contributed to some members being in need. The Auxiliary Emergency Fund received \$158,976.30 in contributions from 50 departments. As of July 31, 2003, \$52,700 was distributed to members in 32 departments. — Chairman Elaine Walmsley

Child Welfare Foundation – As part of their goal to raise awareness and involvement in the Child Welfare Foundation (CWF) throughout all levels of the organization, members did their part to help The American Legion Family contribute \$488,953 to the fund. Two ALA members from the Department of Washington, Dee Cauglin and Sue Patterson, planned a walk across America to raise funds for the CWF and for the World War II Memorial. — Chairman Elizabeth Stewart

Children & Youth – Members focused on media events and fundraising activities for Children’s Miracle Network to support Children & Youth initiatives. The prevention of child abuse and internet photography were added to the program this year, as statistics show about 2.9 million children are mistreated or neglected each year. The program also introduced the Youth Hero Award to recognize and honor children and youth under the age of 18 who perform a heroic deed. Eighty Youth Hero Awards were awarded in this first year. In all, more than 1.8 million children benefited from members who volunteered over 913,000 hours and donated \$4,539,444 on their behalf. — Chairman Carol Van Kirk

Community Service – ALA members made a significant impact in their communities through various programs, including National Make a Difference Day, Habitat for Humanity, National Family Week, Random Acts of Kindness, and Youth Service to America, and by serving in blood drives, cancer awareness initiatives, food pantries, homeless centers, domestic violence centers, churches, schools, and hospitals. For example, more than 600 units donated more than \$67,000 and volunteered over 36,000 hours to assist 159 chapters of Habitat for Humanity. In all, more than 180,000 members volunteered more than 2 million hours and donated nearly \$2.5 million to worthwhile projects and activities. — Chairman Penny Maklary

Child Welfare Foundation - In its nearly 50-year history, the foundation has awarded over \$5 million to nonprofit organizations. This year, grants awarded two that were sponsored by the Auxiliary: \$25,000 for Songs of Love, which serves chronically ill children; and \$29,000 for Child Advocate Association, which serves children in need. “Whatever you have done in your units and departments all over this country for a child has made a difference.” — Chairman Elizabeth Stewart

Education - As part of their focus on Education, members volunteered more than 106,000 hours, based on the efforts reported by 40 departments. A total of 3,991 members provided tutoring assistance to 19,788 students, including 1,546 adults. Also, more than \$1 million was awarded in over 2,600 scholarships awarded by units and departments. Members donated more than \$27,000 to The American Legion’s September 11th Memorial Fund and volunteered 3,078 hours and spent more than \$2,000 to help educate the nation’s children on the role and importance of the nation’s veterans. — Chairman Desireé Stoy

Finance – The Century Club’s charter year ended on June 30, 2003, with an initial membership of 250. The committee also authorized a \$1,000 contribution to the Bob Hope Memorial to honor the comedian who did 57 tours for the United Service Organizations to entertain active-duty military servicemembers. The committee also approved the creation of a reserve fund for the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. — Chairman Phyllis Bachman

ALA Girls State – Encouraged former ALA Girls State citizens to promote the program in their communities and challenged departments to recognize past program accomplishments. Also, technology innovations were introduced in the ALA Girls State Directors Conference with computer voting. A highlight of the conference was

a visit by the 2002 ALA Girls Nation President. Those who attended ALA Girls Nation heard Kathryn Koob, a retired Foreign Service officer, and a former ALA Iowa Girls State citizen. She encouraged the young women to take full advantage of the opportunities given them. "Don't be afraid of change. Change is accompanied by fear, but it is that fear which holds us back if we do not face the it head on and unafraid." — Chairman Rita Navarreté

Junior Activities – Emphasis was placed on involving Junior members into every aspect of Auxiliary programs and projects. As part of the administrative year, Juniors contributed more than 74,000 volunteer hours to serving veterans and their communities. In addition, 219 Juniors participated in the Veterans History Project. A new program to Junior Activities this year, it was created by U.S. Congress in fall 2000. The project collects firsthand accounts of U.S. veterans. Other accomplishments: 340 Juniors completed the leadership course; and 1,120 VolunTeens served in hospitals and homes, for more than 25,000 volunteer hours; and a new patch was introduced – the Poppy Patch. — Chairman Sharon Conatser

Leadership – To promote leadership at all levels, departments across the country held workshops. California hosted its first Junior Leadership Workshop, while more than 600 Auxiliary members attended the National Leadership and Information Conferences held in eight cities. — Chairman Pat Kranzow

Legislative – The American Legion asked for ALA members to help them advocate for the Veterans' Health Care Funding Guarantee Act of 2002, one of the legislative priorities presented to U.S. Congress. Members sent more than 21,000 letters to government officials and received 6,661 replies. Units also supported local elections and voter turnout in their communities through "Get Out the Vote" programs, providing transportation, assisting in voter education and wrote letters to newspaper editors. — Chairman Jacklyn Skinner

Membership – ALA units hosted special programs and awards, including Recruiter of the Year, to increase membership. During the administrative year, they recruited 75,743 new members, including 398 new senior members recruited by the Legion and Sons of The American Legion. Twenty-eight new charters were issued along with four reinstatements. However, units also reported 68,085 non-renewals. — Chairman Peggy Thomas

National Security – Using three major areas as a focus, Homeland Security, POW-MIA, and Save the Earth, members encouraged their friends and neighbors to take responsibility in doing their share to make America safe for communities and families. "The impending and eventual war in Iraq heightened the awareness of every American When our homeland security was threatened, Auxiliary members across the nation immediately went into action." They displayed hundreds of yellow ribbons throughout cities and towns; presented Blue Star Banners to more than 10,000 families, and donated more than 14,000 hours to increase public awareness about public safety issues. "Care packages, emails, letters ... anything that would bring comfort were sent to our troops." — Chairman Carlene Ashworth

Past Presidents Parley - Through donations, members awarded \$108,000 to 190 nursing students. They also sent \$1,653 to the Women in Military Service Association. In all, members donated 8,896 volunteer hours and honored 5,000 women veterans with gifts, cards, and flowers. Committee members also set up an initiative to identify members of the Auxiliary and women veterans from WWI, WWII, Korean War, Vietnam, Grenada/Lebanon, and Persian Gulf wars and the Panama Conflict. — Chairman Kristine West

Poppy – Beginning May 2001, as a result of a resolution by The American Legion, all veterans are eligible to make poppies under the supervision or management of the American Legion Auxiliary. The Poppy Committee particularly focused on increasing awareness about the importance of the poppy in honoring servicemembers. "As we continue to wear the flower of remembrance and continue to distribute the poppy, we will forever honor our dead and assist the living victims of war. It is through the tireless efforts of The American Legion Family that the poppy continues to flourish throughout the communities of this great nation." — Chairman Denise Delaney

Public Relations – Spreading the word about the American Legion Auxiliary continues to be a priority among all units and departments. As part of their efforts in the 2002-2003 administrative year, the National President's Gold Award for Excellence was awarded to Diamond Jubilee Unit 75, Department of Nevada — Chairman Beverly Otterness

Unit Development & Revitalization – With declining membership, spreading the word about the importance of the American Legion Auxiliary has taken on even more importance. The UD&R Committee challenged each department to save at least one potential lost charter. This was of particular concern since 146 unit charters cancelled during the 2001-2002 administrative year, but only 87 charters were issued in that period. Goals included revitalizing units and reducing the number of charters canceled each year, organizing units, and providing more members to help implement programs. Efforts were paying off. During the mid-year NEC meeting, it was reported more charters had been issued than canceled, the first time since 1999. — Chairman Flora Jean Craig

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation - As part of both grassroots and national campaigns, more than 93,000 ALA volunteers contributed more than 2.5 million hours of their time to assist veterans. Projects ranged from helping in non-referral nursing homes, geriatric day care centers, foster homes, halfway houses, hospices, soup kitchens, Fishers Houses, and homeless shelters for veterans. Thirty-three ALA departments donated \$620,000 to Holiday Gift Shops in VA centers so that veterans could give Christmas gifts to their family members. The ALA also committed to continuing to support the National Creative Arts Festival and addressing homelessness among veterans. — Chairman Sandi Dutton

2003: Tragedy in the Air, Protests in the Streets

Within the first couple months of 2003, a sense of despair overtook Americans as one of NASA's worst disasters gripped the nation and millions of protesters around the world expressed anti-American sentiments.

As many people started their Saturday morning routines on Feb. 1, whether it was grabbing the newspaper, a cup of coffee, or a hug from a loved one, they started hearing broadcast reports of trouble with Space Shuttle Columbia's scheduled re-entry after a two-week long mission.

That afternoon, President George W. Bush addressed the nation with a grim address: "My fellow Americans, this day has brought terrible news and great sadness to our country. At 9 a.m. this morning, Mission Control in Houston lost contact with our Space Shuttle Columbia. A short time later, debris was seen falling from the skies above Texas. The Columbia is lost; there are no survivors."

The disaster was NASA's second fatal space shuttle accident — more than 15 years after the Challenger explosion of 1986.

As Americans mourned the loss of the seven astronauts aboard the craft, they faced the wrath of people around the world who gathered just two weeks later, on Feb. 15, for anti-war protests.

As many as 14 million people in 800 cities and towns around the globe — in countries and continents ranging from New Zealand, Europe, the Pacific Islands and Asia to Africa, Latin America, Canada, and the United States — took to the streets to protest an impending war in Iraq. According to the Guinness Book of World Records, it was the largest anti-war protest in world history.

In New York, Nobel Peace Prize Winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu joined more than 100,000 protesters in urging President Bush and other world leaders to refrain from war. "Listen to the voice of the people saying, 'Give peace a chance.'"

About 500,000 people showed up for protests in Germany. In London, nearly 1 million protested as part of the Stop the War Coalition.

However, there were also counter-protests, particularly in the United States, where many Americans, still raw from the terrors of 9/11, supported action against Iraq.

These public protests reflected the internal conflicts among members of the United Nations Security Council. Some countries voted against war in Iraq, resisting pressure from the United States and the United Kingdom to move forward with military action.

Other countries wanted to postpone a decision to give official inspectors more time to check Iraq for the "weapons of mass destruction" that the Bush administration claimed that the country was stockpiling. They also wanted to give Iraq time to disarm itself of any weapons.

President Bush, in a statement presented by a White House spokesperson, said war was considered a last resort and respected every individual's rights to protest. "The president is a strong advocate for freedom and democracy," said Jeanie Mamo. "And one of the democratic values that we hold dear is the right of people to peacefully assemble and express their views."

However, less than a month later, the United States and British invaded Iraq — without the support of the United Nations and in spite of protests by millions of people worldwide. The Iraq War started on March 20, with the bombing of the capital city of Baghdad.

"Our nation enters this conflict reluctantly, yet our purpose is sure," President Bush said in an address to the

nation. "The people of the United States and our friends and allies will not live at the mercy of an outlaw regime that threatens the peace with weapons of mass murder.

"We will meet that threat now with our Army, Air Force, Navy, Coast Guard and Marines, so that we do not have to meet it later with armies of firefighters and police and doctors on the streets of our cities," Bush said, referring to continuing fears of terrorists attacks on American soil.

Other events in 2003

- Oct. 26, 2003 – The second largest fire in California's history breaks out near San Diego, destroying 250,000 acres and 2,200 homes, and claiming the lives of 15 people.
- Dec. 13, 2003 – U.S. forces capture former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein during Operation Red Dawn.
- Dec. 22, 2003 – A magnitude 6.6 earthquake hits near San Simeon, Calif.
- Jan. 4, 2004 – Spirit, a NASA Mars Rover, lands successfully on Mars.
- Jan. 17, 2004 – Authorities place the U.S. military death toll in Iraq at 500, including 346 in combat.
- Jan. 20, 2004 – Pres. Bush warns in his State of the Union address that the threat of more terrorist attacks was still very real.
- Jan. 26, 2004 – President Hamid Darzai signs the new constitution of Afghanistan.
- Feb. 4, 2004 – Mark Zuckerberg launches Facebook from his Harvard dormitory room.
- March 1, 2004 – Mohammed Bahr al-Uloum becomes President of Iraq.
- March 2, 2004 – Al-Qaeda carries out the Ashora Maccrae in Iraq, killing 170 and wounding over 500.
- March 11, 2004 – Terrorists explode simultaneous bombs on Madrid's rail network, ripping through a commuter train and rocking three stations, killing 190.
- April 29, 2004 – Vice President Dick Cheney and U.S. President George W. Bush testify before the 9/11 Commission in a closed, unrecorded hearing in the Oval Office.
- May 28, 2004 – Ayad Allawi is chosen by the Iraqi Governing Council to become Prime Minister of Iraq's interim government.
- May 29, 2004 – World War II Memorial is dedicated in Washington, D.C.
- June 5, 2004 – Former Hollywood actor and former U.S. President Ronald Reagan dies. Funeral is held June 11.
- June 28, 2004 – American authorities transfer formal sovereignty of Iraq to its new leaders.
- July 4, 2004 – Cornerstone of the Freedom Tower is laid on the site of the World Trade Center in New York City. Actual construction does not start for several weeks.
- Aug. 3, 2004 – The pedestal of the Statue of Liberty reopens after being closed since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.
- Aug. 13, 2004 – Hurricane Charley strikes Punta Gorda, Fla., and devastates the surrounding area. It is the first of four individual hurricanes to produce winds of at least 75 mph to hit Florida in a single season.

2003-2004 - American Legion Auxiliary Administrative Year

"We Get Things Done!"

"We must draw upon the example of past generations to see us through the current contest." — Katherine Morris, 83rd National President of the American Legion Auxiliary

As Katherine Morris took over the top leadership role of the American Legion Auxiliary, she urged members to stay true to the core mission of the organization founded in 1919. She reminded them why their work in support of veterans continued to be critical so many decades later.

Morris then announced her theme for the 2003-2004 ALA administrative year: "H.E.A.R.T.S. in Service," which represents:

H - Helping Hands

E - Educating Our Youth

A - Achieving Membership Goals

R - Rehabilitation of Our Veterans

T - Total Commitment

S - Success in All Our Endeavors

In explaining the campaign theme during her installation address, Morris said, "To put it simply: We get things done!"

During her installation address, Morris stressed the importance of educating children about what it means to "respect the men and women, those long past and those still with us today, who by their own personal sacrifice guaranteed the country's fragile freedoms.

"Urge children everywhere to study American history so maybe they'll have a better understanding about why these same men and women have answered the call to service for more than 200 years," she said to the women gathered at the 2003 National Convention in St. Louis that August.

Membership goals also remained a top priority as part of Morris's agenda. "Without a steady stream of new members, our Auxiliary's heartbeat will slow to a faint murmur," she said.

With the hard work that faced the organization, Morris said she would not be asking for members to focus on a special project. "I'm asking for your continuing and total commitment to our aims and purposes ...," she said. "We have goals to reach and challenges to overcome."

Morris, who gained her membership through her husband, John, a Korean War-era Army veteran, served for decades as an Auxiliary member in her hometown of Houston, Texas. The couple were proud of their large family, which included eight children, 16 grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren.

A member of Griffith-Zann Unit 594 and a graduate of Massey Business College, Morris had worked 25 years as an administrative assistant for the City of Houston before serving as vice president for South Coast Roofing.

In addition to her membership in the Auxiliary, she also served as a member of Eight and Forty Salon 138, the Women's Federation of Houston, and Catholic Daughters. She also regularly volunteered for the Houston VA Medical Center.

As part of her homecoming celebration, Morris had the unique opportunity to share it with American Legion National Commander John Brieden, who was also from Texas. It marked the first time that the top leaders from the organizations were able to host a joint homecoming.

Other National Officers elected during the 2003 ALA Convention:

- National Vice President – Sandi Dutton (Department of Maryland)
- Central Division NVP – Jeanne Carson (Department of Iowa)
- Eastern Division NVP – Carol Poper (Department of New Hampshire)
- Northwestern Division NVP – Eva Nollette (Department of Nebraska)
- Southern Division NVP – Ruth James (Department of Florida)
- Western Division NVP – Penny Maklary (Department of Arizona)
- National Chaplain – Ann Fournier (Department of Massachusetts)
- National Historian – Bernice Snead (Department of Connecticut)
- National Secretary – Peggy Sappenfield (Department of Indiana)
- National Treasurer – Marta Hedding (Department of Indiana)

Getting Back to the Basics

It didn't take long for ALA National President Morris to follow through on her commitment to get "back to the basics" in meeting the needs of veterans. She immediately set the standard for other ALA members by joining other volunteers at the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NVCAF), which was held in Oklahoma City in October.

As more than 110 veterans exhibited their talents during the annual event, Morris was encouraged to see six students among those volunteering at the festival. A local teacher, Debbie Hamilton, said the experience helped the students better understand the sacrifices that had been made by veterans.

Morris was so impressed with what she saw that she invited some of the winning participants to perform at the upcoming ALA Awareness Assembly. These performances would give even more ALA members the opportunity to appreciate the impact NVCAF continues to have on the lives of veterans. "This program gives our veterans a new self-worth," Morris said.

In addition to attending a conference of Presidents & Secretaries that fall, Morris also joined other members of The American Legion Family in attending a Pentagon briefing and advocating before lawmakers about legislation that supports veterans and servicemembers.

As part of National Commander John Brieden's testimony before the Joint Session of Veterans Affairs Committees, he stressed the importance of increasing funding for veterans healthcare. "Congress decided to open up and allow more veterans to come to the system. But they didn't increase the funding by a corresponding amount," Brieden said as part of his testimony before legislators.

"When you have more than double the amount of veterans involved with the healthcare system and they have increased funding 35%, 40%, you have a problem," Brieden added. "And the problem is waiting lines. The problem is really a rationing of care that comes about because of that lack of funding for the amount of people in the system."

In discussing the meeting, Morris had this to say: "We must persuade lawmakers that funding for VA medical centers, outpatient clinics and other programs remains a fundamental obligation of government. Helping

veterans is not optional; it's essential, and it's a solemn obligation we must remind our lawmakers about every chance we get."

After leaving Washington, D.C., Morris traveled to other destinations to remind ALA members of their mission. She made stops in dozens of states, including Texas, Oklahoma, Nevada, New Hampshire, Oregon, Minnesota, North Carolina, Florida, Mississippi, Hawaii, and Arizona. Her itinerary also included international destinations like Tokyo, Japan; Seoul, Korea; and Manila, the Philippines.

As part of training another generation in patriotism, thousands of ALA members hosted ALA Girls State events in their communities. ALA Girls Nation was held in Chevy Chase, Md., in July 2004.

High school girls attending the events learned about legal issues, communication strategies, and U.S. government processes from firsthand activities.

During the annual ALA Girls Nation, 96 delegates from around the country participated in an immersive patriotic experience that included honoring veterans as part of a wreath-laying ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery, visiting the National World War II Memorial, and holding elections for their program. They also heard inspiring messages from numerous guest speakers, including ALA Girls State Chairman Jan Pulvermacher, Coast Guard SPAR Lorraine Jacyne Dieterle, a WWII veteran, National Commander John Brieden, and Nesse Godin, a Holocaust survivor.

The ALA Girls Nation delegates expressed the impact the experience had on their lives.

Cristin Browne, a delegate from New Jersey, said, "[ALA] Girls Nation was truly the experience of a lifetime. In these uncertain times, it has renewed my confidence in our wonderful system of government and given me hope for the future."

Assessing ALA Membership Growth

Challenges with ALA membership continued to be at the forefront of the organization's concerns in 2003-2004. During the Unit Development & Revitalization Committee National Seminar in Indianapolis, Chairman Flora Jean Craig noted that 23 new units were chartered since the ALA National Convention, but 18 unit charters were scheduled to be cancelled.

She also outlined three goals that needed to be addressed. Those included revitalizing struggling or near exhausted units, mentoring members who share similar membership goals, and organizing new charters in areas where sufficient eligible members exist but have no American Legion Family to join.

Craig said it was essential for members to resolve not to let units give up without a fight. Representatives from the 36 departments attending the conference were urged to establish their own UD&R committees. "Change comes slowly," Craig said. "We can't expect to see a major turnaround in some [departments] within a short span of time."

Leaders also expressed the importance of adapting to meet the unique needs of ALA members in each unit. "It's not a one-size-fits-all proposition," Craig said. "What you want the ALA to be is your responsibility."

Staying Committed to H.E.A.R.T.S. in Service

Throughout her administrative year, ALA National President Morris kept up with a demanding schedule, joining other ALA members at planning meetings, as well as volunteering and engaging in advocacy opportunities across

the country. She also regularly reminded members of the Auxiliary's commitment to support veterans, their families, and their communities as outlined in her H.E.A.R.T.S. in Service campaign.

During the Mid-Year National Executive Committee (NEC) Meeting in Washington, D.C., ALA members heard from Susan Jollie, president of the National Women's History Museum, and a 1986 delegate to Wisconsin ALA Girls State. "We hope we can learn from you ...," Jollie said. "You have played an invaluable role in educating your girls to the fact that they should be community leaders." Jollie said the museum would like to commemorate the legacy of the Auxiliary when it opened by presenting its contributions to the public.

In other NEC business, committees reported that they had collected \$62,227.93 in contributions for the Auxiliary Emergency Fund during a six-month period and were able to award 37 grants totaling \$24,000 to ALA members in need. Also, \$45,000 already had been raised by that time for the Child Welfare Foundation, which was celebrating its golden anniversary.

Rita Navarreté, chairman of the Leadership Committee, noted the overall benefits of initiatives that promote leadership at all levels, including helping members gain a better understanding of ALA programs. With more trained leaders, Navarreté said, the ALA can address some of the challenges with declining membership. She urged members at the NEC to focus on increasing attendance at National Leadership Information Conferences.

As a follow-up to a proposal from the previous administration, the ALA Restructuring Committee proposed increasing ALA divisions from five to six with the following names: New England, Midwest, Great Plains, Atlantic, Gulf States, and Rocky Mountains. The resolution, which passed at the Mid-Year NEC meeting, was presented as an amendment to delegates at the ALA National Convention for a final vote, where it did not pass.

Veterans took the spotlight during the ALA Awareness Assembly in Washington, D.C., in March, with 13 gold medalists from the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NVCAF) performing at the session for the first time. The performances were, in part, a celebration of the growing relationship between the Auxiliary and the NVCAF.

Master of Ceremonies Tom Brown, director of VA's National Wheelchair Games, said the veterans were dedicating their performances to the ALA in tribute for its ongoing sponsorship.

The 23rd annual Awareness Assembly also included topical speakers, including Public Spirit Award recipient Alma Powell. ALA members were commended by Powell, co-chairman of America's Promise/Alliance for Youth and the spouse of Secretary of State and America's Promise co-founder Colin Powell.

"You are role models for those who will inherit our future," said Powell, who accepted the ALA Public Spirit Award during a luncheon. "You are what America's Promise is all about." She noted that the ALA's commitment to children runs parallel to the goals set by America's Promise: Caring Adults; Safe Places; A Healthy Start; Marketable Skills; and Opportunities to Serve. Powell urged the Auxiliary's members to continue their commitment to children, saying, "I urge you all to join this crusade and keep the promise of America to our children."

ALA members also heard from other speakers during the assembly, including JoAnn Schneider, an ALA Arkansas Girls State alumna and spokesperson for the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons; retired Maj. Gen. Patrick Brady, co-chairman of the Citizens Flag Alliance; Victor Bernson of the Department of Defense; and Michael D. Brown, Department of Homeland Security.

Other major events on the schedules of ALA members and ALA National President Morris included the Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge, the Children's Miracle Network's Celebration 2004, the Membership Workshop & UD&R Seminar, and the Children's Miracle Network Walkathon.

In another highlight of her presidency, Morris joined more than 130,000 people, many of them veterans and several ALA Past National Presidents, at the dedication of the National WWII Memorial on the National Mall

over the Memorial Day weekend. The American Legion Family, which contributed \$4.4 million to the memorial construction, had relentlessly launched fundraising campaigns to make it a possibility. Guest speakers at the event included actor Tom Hanks, President George W. Bush, U.S. Sen. Bob Dole, and TV journalist Tom Brokaw.

In his comments, Dole, a wounded WWII combat veteran, spoke of the power of Americans when they set their mind to a cause. "This is ... a memorial to the American people, who, in the crucible of war forged a unity that became our ultimate weapon," Dole said. "Just as we pulled together in the course of a common threat 60 years ago, so today's Americans united to build this memorial. Small children held their grandfather's hand while dropping pennies in a collection box. Entire families contributed in memory of loved ones who could win every battle except the battle against time."

The WWII Memorial, which is located between the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial on the National Mall, is a granite and bronze monument that recognizes more than 16 million U.S. servicemembers who served in the war. It includes fountains, a curved wall of 4,000 gold stars, and an announcement stone that includes a script honoring "Americans who took up the struggle during the Second World War and made the sacrifices to perpetuate the gift our forefathers entrusted to us: A nation conceived in liberty and justice."

ALA Girls Nation brought 96 young women to Washington, D.C. to experience the power of government. Many of them would be entering the voting booth later this year for the first time. They traveled to the newly completed WWII Memorial where they heard Coast Guard SPAR Lorraine Jacyno Dieterle, a WWII veteran, speak about her experiences. They later raised their voices in song at the National Mall. "Where else could I have gotten the opportunity to sing patriotic songs on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in the freezing, pouring rain, all the while, having the time of my life, and growing into the person I want to be for the rest of my life?" said ALA Girls Nation Senator Vanessa Hatfield of Nebraska.

Another first was a visit to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, an experience where the senators not only explored history through the eyes of those who did not survive, but also heard the voice of a survivor, guest speaker Nesse Godin. The girls learned that although the experience was horrific, kindness could be found within the barbed wire fence, "and love still found its way into Mrs. Godin's life." For Cristin Browne of New Jersey, "ALA Girls Nation was truly the experience of a lifetime. In these uncertain times, it has renewed my confidence in our wonderful system of government and given me hope for the future."

As ALA President Morris neared the end of her term, she presided over the Pre-Convention NEC Meeting and 2004 ALA National Convention in Nashville, Tenn. ALA members attending the annual meetings heard from numerous speakers, including retired U.S. Army Gen. Patrick Brady, chairman of the Board of the Citizens Flag Alliance.

In his comments to convention attendees, Brady noted that his daughter followed him in military service by joining the Army. "I gained a new appreciation for all that you have been through, those who are left behind who have husbands or family members in combat," said Brady, noting that his daughter served in Iraq. He then urged all Auxiliary members to continue writing their legislators in support of the Flag Amendment.

Elizabeth Mackey, director of the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, thanked all Auxiliary members for supporting festivals at the local and national level. "Your support and successful fundraising efforts have a widespread and direct positive influence on veterans who truly need your involvement and who can't always seek out assistance on their own for reasons beyond their control," Mackey said in announcing that 3,000 veterans had participated in recent competitions.

In an expression of gratitude, Air Force veteran and gold medal winner Warren Weldon had donated his weaving to the Auxiliary to promote the festival through fundraising. ALA members had raised \$38,895.56 to support the NVCAF during the administrative year.

Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security and American Legion member Tom Ridge thanked ALA members who joined other volunteers in providing support to victims in Florida hit by four hurricanes during a six-week period. He reminded the Auxiliary's convention delegates that it had been three years since 9/11, making clear "... that our nation's protection is a responsibility we must all shoulder together." Ridge continued by telling attendees that that day, Sept. 1, 2004, was the first day of the first National Preparedness Month, recognizing The American Legion Family's commitment to spreading the message. "Your contribution, the reach you provide through your members in the communities where you serve, adds extraordinary value to this very important effort," he said.

During a joint session of the Legion and Auxiliary, U.S. President George W. Bush thanked members for volunteering in the wake of the Florida hurricanes as well as on a day-to-day basis on behalf of veterans, youth, and communities.

He also reaffirmed his support for a constitutional amendment to protect the U.S. flag from desecration and a 40 percent increase in overall funding for veterans.

In other business, members approved resolutions that allowed members to be eligible for grants under the Auxiliary Emergency Fund after three consecutive years of membership instead of five, and increasing the maximum amount awarded to \$2,400. ALA members also heard an update from The American Legion, which noted that the Auxiliary's recruiting form had been placed on their website to help support membership growth efforts.

In her final ALA national president report, Morris told members to use the theme H.E.A.R.T.S. in Service as a reminder that veterans should be at the very heart of everything members do. And, with the United States involved in conflicts, the need is greater than ever, Morris said. "Casualties from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan are making renewed calls on our compassion and understanding."

In Memory

Auxiliary members paused to honor the memory and service of Past National President Viola Moltzen, who passed away Jan. 16, 2004. Moltzen, who served under the Department of North Dakota, gained her eligibility through her husband, Alvin, a U.S. Army lieutenant and WWII veteran. Moltzen, who joined Repsdorf Unit 91 in New Salem, N.D., served as national president during the 1977-1978 administrative year.

Making an Impact

Through ALA programs in 2003-2004, members made a significant impact in their communities:

Americanism – As part of ALA grassroots programs supporting Americanism, high school students learned about the importance of registering to vote and voting. More than 42,000 students submitted entries for the ALA Americanism Essay Contest, "Every Heart Beats True for the Red, White, and Blue, Old Glory" and 79,753 flags were donated to schools and other organizations. In all, members volunteered 23,000 hours to Flag Education efforts and donated more than \$27,000 to support the Spirit of Youth fund. — Chairman Sharon Conatser

Auxiliary Emergency Fund – ALA members continued to learn the importance of the Auxiliary Emergency Fund, which was created to support other members facing financial challenges as a result of a natural disaster, the death of a spouse, or other hardships. As of July 31, 2004, the fund had received nearly \$146,000 and distributed 76 grants totaling more than \$53,000. — Chairman Denise Delaney

Child Welfare Foundation - In recognition of the 50th anniversary of The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation, The American Legion Family contributed \$676,678 to support it — an increase of more than \$187,000 over the previous year. Auxiliary members increased their donations by nearly \$30,000. Grants from the fund supported ALA-sponsored organizations, including Every Child Inc., which received \$40,000, and the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, which received a \$35,000 research grant. — Chairman Pearl Behrend

Children & Youth – During the 2003-2004 ALA administrative year, the Auxiliary presented 54 Youth Hero Awards to extraordinary youth throughout the nation; donated more than \$1.7 million in direct aid to children; raised more than \$238,000 for the Children’s Miracle Network, and \$3 million to other children’s groups. As a result of this effort, more than 135,000 children were helped. — Chairman JoAnn Cronin

Community Service – In addition to making an impact on a daily basis throughout their communities, nearly 11,000 senior and Junior ALA members joined each other to volunteer about 152,000 hours during “Make a Difference Day” on Oct. 26. Projects included cleaning a veterans park and providing meals for the homeless. Also, members donated more than 341,000 hours to the “Random Acts of Kindness” campaign and received more than \$60,000 in donations for this program. Members gave more than 16,000 pints of blood to the American Red Cross. In all, ALA members volunteered nearly 3 million hours and donated more than \$2.2 million to various community service projects. — Chairman Elaine Walmsley

Education – As part of Education Committee initiatives, Chairman Carlene Ashworth encouraged members to “broaden their horizons by reaching out and going beyond just providing scholarships.” She asked them to become personally involved in the local schools and show up to “touch the lives our schoolchildren.”

Throughout the year, members did just that, donating more than 22,000 in volunteer hours as part of the National Education Association’s “Read Across America” project. They also provided students with 2,754 scholarships totaling more than \$1.4 million; spent over 49,000 hours tutoring 25,716 children and 1,796 adults; and supported The American Legion’s project “Veterans in the Classroom” by arranging for students to hear the stories of nearly 2,500 veterans. — Chairman Carlene Ashworth

Finance – Because of membership decline, the committee had to find new ways to fund ALA programs and counter rising costs, said Chairman Anna Gear. Some of those innovative ideas included the formation of the Century Club which would begin in 2005. The funds would reduce each department’s assessment for sending two senators to ALA Girls Nation. She also noted that ALA members are continuing to donate \$20,000 to The American Legion’s Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation; \$20,000 to the Legion’s Children & Youth Committee; \$10,000 to the Citizens Flag Alliance; and \$10,000 to the Child Welfare Foundation — Chairman Anna Gear

ALA Girls State – Nearly 3,100 ALA units sponsored 8,916 girls to ALA Girls State programs, with only 25 departments reporting. According to those reports, many advances had been made to improve ALA Girls State programs, including online registration, acceptance of home-schooled students, and computerized voting. Also, 96 senators attended ALA Girls Nation 2004 in Maryland. — Chairman Jan Pulvermacher

Junior Activities - The focus for the administrative year included involving Juniors in the Auxiliary programs through the Patch Program; volunteerism to veterans and communities; leadership skills; and interesting, educational, and fun activities. Juniors earned more than 1,000 patches as part of the year’s activities, while more than 450 Juniors enrolled in leadership courses. Naomi Farace of Florida, who was elected Honorary National Junior President, showed her appreciation for what the Auxiliary taught her in this message: “I am only one, but still I am one. I can’t do everything, but still I can do something. And just because I can’t do everything, I won’t refuse to do the something that I can do.” — Chairman Mary Harper

Leadership – An effort to enhance leadership of Auxiliary members at all levels of the organization was placed because “recognizing trained leadership is essential for growth and success of the American Legion Auxiliary.” The Leadership Committee focused on a mentorship program, the Guide for Department Chairmen, promoting

the National Leadership Courses, and encouraging attendance at the National Leadership Information Conferences, which were held throughout the United States in many locations. — Chairman Rita Navarreté

Legislative – The American Legion Family raised concerns about President Bush’s budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs for 2005 — only a \$200 million increase in discretionary funding. As a result, the VA would be tasked with collecting \$700 million more in third-party reimbursements, which could result in cuts in benefits and beds.

The American Legion strongly recommends allowing the VA to bill and collect from Medicare and Medicaid services for the treatment of Medicare-eligible veterans and changing VA medical care funding from discretionary to mandatory appropriations.

The Legislative Council also met its goal to increase the number of its members; nearly 100 additional members were added to the organization. — Chairman Peggy Thomas

Membership – In an effort to boost ALA membership, the organization held a workshop in Indianapolis, where members focused on developing recruitment and retention strategies and sharing information on unit programs that are working. Also, a direct mail solicitation program was successful in bringing in several thousand more members than in past years. In all, the Auxiliary recruited 62,708 new members with 52 new unit charters and two charter reinstatements. Legionnaires and Sons of The American Legion members also helped, recruiting nearly 1,200 new members on behalf of the ALA. Sixteen departments reached 100 percent or more of their recruitment goals. — Chairman Ruth Proctor

National Security – As part of their focus on National Security, Auxiliary members volunteered 23,469 hours and donated \$32,721 toward civil preparedness activities; distributed more than 19,000 Blue Star Banners to military families; sent more than 13 million coupons to commissaries around the world; and donated nearly 22,000 slippers for Operation Toasty Toes. In all, members donated more than 453,000 volunteer hours to programs that focused on military support, civil preparedness, and awareness. — Chairman Desireé Stoy

Past Presidents Parley – ALA members recognized six women in the military, acknowledging that it has taken nearly 70 years for women to receive the same status as men in America’s military. Those honored as Outstanding Woman Veterans included Ramona Henricks (WWII); Caroline Jane Lake (Korean War); Barbara L. Shultz (Vietnam); Rhonda Ruth Akers (Grenada/Lebanon); Michelle Frey (Panama); and Lynn C. Zehr (Persian Gulf). All the women veterans honored also were ALA members. — Chairman Elsie Bailey

Poppy – Members increased awareness about the Poppy Program by asking state government officials to wear the symbolic poppy on Memorial Day, ordering more than 5.4 million poppies to be distributed during the holiday, and raising more than \$2.2 million through the program. U.S. Rep. John Shadegg of Arizona supported those efforts by sponsoring a resolution urging Americans to wear poppies in memory of the brave men and women who have died fighting for freedom in Afghanistan and Iraq. — Chairman Beverly Otterness

Public Relations – As part of their efforts to get the word out about the American Legion Auxiliary, members set a goal to have each ALA unit generate at least one article or form of local media coverage during the administrative year. Many ALA units were successful, reaching out to media officials to get coverage of their activities. The final estimates of articles and photos published would fill 395 issues of ALA’s *National News*. — Chairman Patricia Kranzow

Unit Development & Revitalization – Major initiatives of the UD&R Program included revitalizing units and reducing the number of charters canceled each year. However, there has been an increasing concern that some ALA members are reaching a point where it becomes more difficult to maintain a unit. “We realize this ‘aging out’ will continue to be a problem area for our organization,” said Chairman Flora Jean Craig. Members attending a membership seminar were challenged to charter one unit for each charter canceled. — Chairman Flora Jean Craig

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation – To support veterans at VA medical centers and those served by Fisher House, ALA members not only donated funds, they took the time to make lap robes, bedspreads, shawls, and afghans to ensure veterans knew they weren't forgotten. Members also cooked meals, baked cookies and cakes, and made fruit baskets and decorations for numerous veterans' parties.

Auxiliary units also contributed \$783,875 to host Gift Shops, events that allowed veterans to present their family members with gifts during holidays. Members also donated nearly \$49,000 to Fisher House.

In all, more than 69,000 volunteers donated over 2 million hours and over \$3 million in funds to serve 1,633,747 veterans. Chairman Carol Van Kirk said the donations and volunteerism were very encouraging, and recognized that there will be a need to expand those efforts. "With an increase of injured and ill veterans returning from the war, there will be an even greater need for our assistance," she said.

As a result, The American Legion Family leadership is partnering with the Department of Veterans Affairs to better prepare to meet veterans' needs in the future. New ideas being formulated for promoting and educating the membership and general public about the need of volunteers to assist the veterans.

Outstanding VAVS Volunteer of the Year, Mary Ann Davis, who serves at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center, said veterans often just want someone to talk to them. "Anyone can volunteer at a VA medical center," she said. "It's the most rewarding thing you can do." — Chairman Carol Van Kirk

2004: Freedom Will Always Prevail

As terrorist attacks continued to cause havoc and fear around the globe in 2004, many people around the world found solace in the ideals represented by the Statue of Liberty, which once again started welcoming visitors that summer — for the first time since 9/11.

The iconic statue had been closed for a three-year period to undergo security improvements. However, visitors to the New York icon were only able to gain access to the observation deck on her pedestal; not to her crown.

In another symbolic act of America's healing, hundreds gathered for an Independence Day ceremony at the World Trade Center in New York — the site of 9/11 terrorist attacks. Many of the attendees, including 100 family members of those killed in the attacks, watched as the cornerstone of the Freedom Tower was laid. An inscription on the cornerstone for the skyscraper read: "To honor and remember those who lost their lives on September 11th, 2001, and as a tribute to the enduring spirit of freedom — July Fourth, 2004."

During the ceremony, New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg talked of Americans' resilience. "As we lay this cornerstone, we remember that the liberties, which are the bedrock of our nation, can never be shaken by violence or hate," he said. "'By laying this magnificent cornerstone of hope, we are sending a message to the people around the world that freedom will always prevail."

More than 150,000 patriotic men, women, and children also gathered to remember the heroes of another war, as part of a dedication of the National World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C. on May 29. Many of those among the crowd were aging WWII veterans, some of them making their way through the crowd with the aid of wheelchairs and walking canes. And a large number wore the pens and hats showing their membership in The American Legion Family.

It was a fitting tribute to the millions of veterans who served their country as part of WWII, some of whom didn't live to see the dedication.

Presidents George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George H.W. Bush were among the dignitaries at the new memorial, which was funded, in part, by donations from American Legion Auxiliary members. Former Sen. Bob Dole, a U.S. Army veteran who was wounded in WWII, was among those who helped efforts to build the memorial.

In his remarks during the 90-minute ceremony, Dole said, "What we dedicate today is not a memorial to war. Rather, it is a tribute to the physical and moral courage that makes heroes out of farm and city boys and that inspired Americans in every generation to lay down their lives for people they will never meet, for ideals that make life itself worth living."

As the year drew to a close, it was clear that Americans, and people from around the world, remained deeply divided about the Iraq War. President Bush was the target of heightening criticisms as the toll of the war continued to claim the lives of military servicemembers.

Some criticized Bush for declaring that the war had ended a year earlier when he gave a speech under a banner reading "Mission Accomplished." At the time, Bush had said, "Major combat operations in Iraq have ended. In the battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed."

Bush defended his position, indicating that significant steps had been taken to diminish terrorism with the removal of Saddam Hussein.

It was clear that the dissensions about the war would keep Americans divided when the death toll of American servicemembers officially surpassed 1,000 on Sept. 7.

Other Events in 2004

- Sept. 7, 2004 – American military deaths in Iraq operations surpass the 1,000 mark.
- Sept. 16, 2004 – Hurricane Ivan (Category 3) makes landfall in Gulf Shores, Ala., and northwestern Florida with 120 mph winds. The weather event causes 120 deaths.
- Oct. 29 – An Arabic news network broadcasts an excerpt from a video of Osama bin Laden in which he admits direct responsibility for the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.
- Nov. 7 – More than 10,000 U.S. troops and a small number of Iraqi army units participate in a siege on the insurgent stronghold of Fallujah.
- Nov. 11 – Yasser Arafat’s death is confirmed by Palestine Liberation organization.
- Dec. 26 - A 9.1 magnitude earthquake in the Indian Ocean unleashes a tsunami in Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia. More than 230,000 people, including many American tourists, die within a matter of hours.
- Jan. 10, 2005 – A mudslide occurs in LaConchita, Calif., killing 10 people.
- Jan. 19, 2005 – Cancer replaces heart disease as the No. 1 cause of death for people ages 85 and under.
- Jan. 26, 2005 – Condoleezza Rice is sworn in as U.S. Secretary of State, the first African American woman to hold the post.
- Feb. 8, 2005 – Leaders of Palestine and Israel declare a truce.
- Feb. 15, 2005 – YouTube, a video sharing website, is launched in the United States.
- Feb. 28, 2005 – A suicide bombing at a police recruiting center in Al Hillah, Iraq, kills 127.
- March 4, 2005 – United Nations warns that about 90 million Africans could be infected by HIV in the future without further action against the spread of the disease.
- May 10, 2005 – A hand grenade lands about 65 feet from U.S. President George W. Bush while he was giving a speech in Tbilisi, Georgia; it malfunctions and does not detonate.
- July 7, 2005 – Coordinated terrorist bomb blasts strike London’s public transport system during the morning rush hour, killing 52 and injuring 700.
- July 10, 2005 – Hurricane Dennis slams into the Florida Panhandle and causes billions of dollars in damage.
- July 21, 2005 – Four terrorist bombers target London’s public transportation system. All four bombs fail to detonate, leading to the capture of all bombers.
- July 26, 2005 – NASA launches Discovery, the first scheduled flight mission after the Columbia disaster in 2003.
- Aug. 12, 2005 – An F2 tornado strikes the coal mining town of Wright, Wyo., destroying nearly 100 homes and killing two people.
- Aug. 23, 2005 – Hurricane Katrina makes landfall as a Category 3 hurricane, devastating much of the U.S. Gulf Coast from Louisiana to the Florida Panhandle. The hurricane kills more than 1,000 and causes over \$115 billion in damage.

2004-2005 - American Legion Auxiliary Administrative Year Shooting for the 1-Million Member Mark

“We don’t want to be nearly a million members. We want to be over a million members.” — Sandi Dutton, 84th National President of the American Legion Auxiliary

While it had been many years since the American Legion Auxiliary's membership hovered at 1 million, newly elected ALA President Sandi Dutton reminded members that they still had everything it takes to once again reach that level of engagement. The path to that milestone requires members working closely with each other, Dutton said as she addressed the women attending the 2004 ALA National Convention in Nashville, Tenn.

They also would need to enact strategic public relations campaigns in their communities across the country, highlighting the great work being done through the many programs supported by the organization. While the ALA has an incredible impact through their programs, members don't talk about them enough, she said.

"Every single year, we should get better and better," said Dutton, an ALA member from the Department of Maryland. "We also need to continue to forge a strong family relationship with The American Legion and Sons of The American Legion. If somebody needs something done, we have to find a way to make that happen."

Dutton also discussed the need to be flexible, not always relying on the old ways of doing things. "You need to remember," she said. "It's a whole new ball game."

By continuing to work collaboratively, members can achieve their goal to increase ALA membership and keep the organization viable in fulfilling its mission to support veterans for many generations to come, Dutton said.

"We don't want to be *nearly* a million members," she said enthusiastically. "We want to be *over* a million members."

Having already served as an ALA member for nearly 35 years, Dutton had firsthand knowledge of what it meant to be committed to the women's patriotic organization. She gained eligibility through her father, Cal Willoughby, who served in the U.S. Army during World War II, and joined the Auxiliary as a Junior member.

She displayed leadership early, serving as president of her Junior Auxiliary group before taking on more leadership positions, including Honorary Department Junior Vice President, director of ALA Girls Nation in 1997, and numerous roles as a senior Auxiliary member, including national vice president. She also was a charter member of Eight & Forty Salon 796 and a member of La Societe de Femme Caban Locale 265.

In her spare time, Dutton and her husband, Dick, spend time as a family with their son and daughter-in-law. She also works as a senior account executive with Summit Marketing.

Other National Officers elected during the 2004 ALA Convention:

- National Vice President – Carol Van Kirk (Department of Nebraska)
- Central Division NVP – René Reese (Department of Ohio)
- Eastern Division NVP – Josie Crossan (Department of Delaware)
- Northwestern Division NVP – Genene Quick (Department of Wyoming)
- Southern Division NVP – Margarita Cruz-Torres (Department of Puerto Rico)
- Western Division NVP – Jean Clayton (Department of Alaska)
- National Chaplain – Conney Bell (Department of South Carolina)
- National Historian – Loretta Shellman (Department Of Wisconsin)
- National Secretary – Peggy Sappenfield (Department of Indiana)

- National Treasurer – Marta Hedding (Department of Indiana)

Catch the Wave in the ALA

Members inspiring other members to action was the motivational message behind ALA National President Dutton's theme for the year — "Catch the Wave." As she traveled across the country, personally meeting members one by one, Dutton encouraged them to work on rejuvenating each other.

Dutton asked those in leadership positions to own initiatives to promote their activities, inspire members to action, and increase membership. "You're selling the American Legion Auxiliary, so chairmen at every level should work together and be open-minded," she said. "If you give people ownership in a project, they're going to go out there and sell that idea."

Dutton offered numerous strategies to help members gain more results in less time, including combining programs at events and having departments transfer at least 50 percent of members acquired through the Direct Membership Solicitation program to a local unit. Dutton also suggested that members consider creative ways of giving back to veterans, such as donating their bonus air miles so that family members could visit the veterans.

Among the first major meetings Dutton attended during her administrative year was the Post-Convention NEC Meeting and the Presidents & Secretaries Conference, which were held shortly after the 2004 ALA National Convention.

During the Presidents & Secretaries Conference in Indianapolis, Dutton and other officials discussed numerous topics, including tips for retaining members who joined as a result of the Direct Membership Solicitation campaign, best practices for financial controls, and ways to integrate public relations initiatives in all Auxiliary programs.

As part of a workshop, two staff members from The American Legion's public relations team and Auxiliary National Headquarters PR Manager Lucia Anderson gave ALA officials a list of do's and don'ts in building a strong media relations campaign.

"The Auxiliary has a great story to tell, so tell it!" said American Legion Deputy Director Lee Harris. He told the attendees to inform the public about all the great things the Auxiliary does for veterans, children, and the local community.

ALA leaders also heard from several guest speakers, including Steve Edenbo from the Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge, Pa., who gave living history lessons at the Americanism Youth Conference, and Olympian Reuben Gonzalez, who was a member of the U.S. luge team.

"You don't have to be a big shot to succeed," Gonzalez told the women in an inspirational talk. "Just be a little shot who keeps on shooting!"

In keeping with a recent tradition of ALA national presidents supporting the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NVCAF), Dutton joined other ALA members at the annual event, which was held in Salt Lake City, Utah, in October. The 2004 NVCAF celebrated the accomplishments of veteran artists and performers who had won local competitions in 52 VA Medical Centers across the country. The programs encouraged therapy for veterans through the arts.

The Auxiliary had donated more than \$75,000 to make the celebratory event a reality. Funds were used to cover veterans' travel and room and board. Auxiliary members also were on hand to volunteer in numerous ways,

including ironing costumes, making alterations, stocking hospitality rooms with refreshments, and simply providing hugs and words of encouragement to veteran participants.

Highlights of the event included performances and art displays from veterans, a speech from sculptor Gary Lee Price, a trip to the Mormon Tabernacle which featured a performance by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and Orchestra, and a message from Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs Gordon H. Mansfield.

Mansfield, a veteran, commended the ALA for their work on behalf of veterans. "You have been partners with VA for 85 years," he said in his remarks. "For more than 30 years, your volunteers have recognized that healing requires special care, not only for the body but also for the mind and soul."

Actress Jane Powell, who served as mistress of ceremonies for the fifth time, said, "I am inspired each year by these veterans' spirit of determination to become better at [their] art, as they reach and fulfill higher goals for themselves." Actress Bo Derek also helped with the event, serving as national honorary chairperson for the Festival.

Impressed by the Auxiliary's commitment to the NVCAF, American Legion Past National Commander John P. "Jake" Comer recommended that fellow Legionnaires donate \$10,000 to the Auxiliary's Festival fund.

Generating a Wave for Future Generations

ALA members also invested in a series of efforts to ensure that younger women understood what the Auxiliary was all about.

One involved a partnership between the American Legion Auxiliary and Butler University in Indianapolis. As Lucia Anderson, ALA National Headquarters' public relations manager, reported, the project involved four female students studying public relations. They were assigned the task of improving the image of ALA among Americans, using a public relations campaign titled, "American Legion Auxiliary: Empowering Women, Inspiring Communities."

As part of the project, a focus group was organized of women between the ages of 18 and 24, who also were eligible for ALA membership but had not signed up. The students found that many younger people viewed the Auxiliary solely as an older women's organization — a misconception that needed to be addressed in future campaigns.

They recommended that the ALA take the following actions to increase membership among younger women:

- Emphasize the camaraderie of members and commitment of service to community
- Offer benefits more suited to younger members
- Develop a means of corresponding with women currently in the military
- Establish college units
- Develop a penpal campaign, regularly communicating to those in military service

In other developments focused on younger girls, the ALA again supported ALA Girls State and ALA Girls Nation as some of the key programs designed to teach high school girls the importance of patriotism, the legislative process, and advocacy.

To that end, 62 ALA members representing 25 departments gathered in Indianapolis for the ALA Girls State Directors Conference, which gave them time to talk about ways to strengthen the program. Agenda items

included developing public relations campaigns for ALA Girls State programs, launching ALA Girls State websites, setting up alumnae associations and planning ALA Girls State curriculum.

Two former ALA Girls Nation participants, Kimberly Shrack and Sarah Hughes, both from Indiana, shared the impact the experiences had on them. "You have shaped, molded, and touched thousands of young women," Hughes told ALA members.

During the summer, another group of high school students gathered for the 2005 ALA Girls Nation. Out of all the ALA Girls State programs hosted across America, 96 senators were selected to attend this event in Chevy Chase, Md., about six miles from the White House.

The ALA Girls Nation gathering represented the 59th session of the immersive experience, which gave girls the rare opportunity to tour the White House, State Department, and other memorable destinations in Washington, D.C. As part of this year's events, the ALA Girls Nation senators also visited the Women in Military Service for America Memorial, the Holocaust Museum, the Fort Myer Officers Club, and Greenbelt, Md., Legion Post 136.

They also heard from ALA National President Dutton, ALA National Vice President Carol Van Kirk, and American Legion National Commander Tom Cadmus, who encouraged them to follow their dreams while serving their country through patriotism and service.

ALA members also sponsored 64 students to attend a Freedoms Foundation seminar, which is designed to encourage a sense of citizenship, leadership, and civic duty among youth. Attendees included several Junior Auxiliary members, and participants from ALA Girls State, ALA Girls Nation, and American Legion Boys State.

The students participated in engaging sessions, including working together to debate, amend, and pass a Patriot Act. They also heard from several guest speakers, including Bruce Murphy, Fred Morgan Kirby, professor of Civil Rights at Lafayette College, and Graham Lee, professor of Political Science at St. Joseph's University. They visited Valley Forge, Independence Hall, and the Liberty Bell.

Advocating for America's Security

With the War on Terror continuing to impact the lives of military servicemembers, as well as their families, ALA members were constantly aware of the importance of their patriotic volunteerism.

Throughout the year, several organizations immediately thought of The American Legion Family as a group of people they could depend upon to help keep Americans secure.

Members of the Auxiliary, Legion, and Sons were approached by representatives of the Citizen Corps, a nationwide grassroots movement created to give people the knowledge and skills needed to help themselves and their families during an emergency. They asked The American Legion Family to help by sponsoring and organizing training sessions in first aid and in CERT; supporting local fire and police departments; and reinvigorating local neighborhood watch groups.

In other developments, Legionnaires approved Resolution 169, which addressed national security. It called for all members of The American Legion Family to rally in support of the Department of Homeland Security, which was created to coordinate America's efforts to keep the country secure.

The resolution also urged Congress to "arm the Department of Homeland Security with the legal powers and fiduciary tools to harmonize the many agencies and offices with Homeland Security responsibilities into a viable and credible deterrent to those who seek to inflict violence on the U.S. and the American people."

On May 21, the Legion Family called upon members to join in a special celebration — The American Legion Blue Star Salute, which gives communities an opportunity to use Armed Forces Day to boost morale during the ongoing War on Terror. Members were given a 32-page promotion guide for the event, with details on the salute’s objectives along with tips for hosting a successful event at the grassroots level.

Growing as an Organization

Throughout her tenure, Dutton continued to deliver her message for members to encourage and inspire each other as they push to grow the ALA organization. She spoke to members in groups and one on one during visits to their home states and at numerous meetings, including the Mid-Year NEC Meeting, the Awareness Assembly, and, later, the National Leadership and Information Conferences, and the 2005 ALA National Convention.

ALA leaders joined her in seeking ways to strengthen the organization. During the Mid-Year NEC Meeting in Washington, D.C., they voted to contribute \$10,000 to The American Legion to support Children & Youth programs, ensuring that the contribution be considered each year during the annual budgeting process. They also approved a resolution allowing for individual volunteer hours of members within their community be included in the reporting process.

The Unit Development & Revitalization Program released a brochure that detailed revisions on how to organize a unit. It provided easy-to-follow step-by-step instructions, including sample letters, charter applications, and charter roll.

During the Awareness Assembly held in Washington, D.C., members were entertained by veterans who participated in the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival and heard from former Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, who accepted the Auxiliary’s 2005 Public Spirit Award. Albright and her family escaped from Czechoslovakia following the Nazi takeover in 1939 and told attendees “... we should never take freedom for granted.” In her remarks, Albright said, “The American Legion Auxiliary is a model of what a volunteer organization should be.” She was the first woman to serve as Secretary of State.

Other guest speakers included South Dakota Rep. Stephanie Herseth, a member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee. Herseth, an alumna of ALA South Dakota Girls State, talked to members about proposed legislation she co-sponsored, the Assured Funding for Veterans Health Care Act of 2005. “The nation made a commitment, a moral promise, to care for veterans while they are in service, and when they come home,” Herseth said of the Act, which called for mandated funding.

Another guest speaker was Ken Abraham, co-author of *Let’s Roll*, a biography of Todd Beamer, one of the passengers who died fighting terrorists who hijacked United Airlines Flight 93, which later crashed in Shanksville, Pa., on Sept. 11, 2001. He co-authored the book with Beamer’s widow, Lisa Beamer.

ALA National President Dutton also highlighted a partnership between ALA member Barbara Mallak and Sonja Brown, Albuquerque, N.M., VA’s Chief of Voluntary Service and Public Affairs. Dutton said their work was an ideal example of the impact the Auxiliary can have in the lives of veterans.

As part of the program at the Albuquerque VA Medical Center, more than 750 volunteers regularly serve the needs of veterans served at the facility. ALA members contributed 137,767 volunteer hours and \$270,000 in donations during the 2004-2005 administrative year.

Mallak also shared about the “Grant a Last Wish” program for terminally ill patients. She said volunteers arranged anniversary parties, trips home for the veterans, meals, and a wedding as part of fulfilling veterans’ last wishes. The program has been such a success that the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare cited it as a program that serves as a best practice among all VA facilities.

During National Leadership and Information Conferences held in Macon, Ga., Hartford, Conn., and Omaha, Neb., members decided to change the name of the annual gathering to the National Information Conference. The name change reflected the desire of the Auxiliary to open up attendance to grassroots members — not just the leadership within departments. The meeting also marked the first time the ALA conducted its own national leadership conferences, since The American Legion had voted to end its participation in 2004. Attendees from locations all over the United States gathered to learn more about how to work the Auxiliary’s programs, develop leadership strategies, become more skilled in veterans’ advocacy, and motivate and encourage one another.

A premier program of the American Legion Auxiliary, the 59th session of ALA Girls Nation brought 96 young women from around the country to Washington, DC in July. Although the weather didn’t always cooperate, the attendees made new friends and learned about the democratic process. They passed a resolution encouraging both ALA Girls Nation and American Legion Boys Nation senators to be political ambassadors upon returning home.

There were a couple sobering moments during the week when the girls were reminded of the horrors of war. They learned at Arlington National Cemetery that at least 170 men and women who were killed in Iraq and Afghanistan have been laid to rest there, a rate of two or three funerals a week. And the premiere exhibit at the Women in Military Service for America Memorial was “Faces of the Fallen,” a paint and pencil artwork stretching nearly 100 meters across the interior of the gallery. The “faces” were portraits done to honor servicemembers fallen during the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts.

On the lighter side, Holocaust survivor Nesse Godin gave the senators advice when choosing a man. Godin told them not to be fussy about looks, their mother should be the one to pick him out, and most importantly, “Chubby can get skinny and skinny can get chubby.”

Gathering for Annual National Convention

ALA members once again gathered for their annual convention, meeting in Honolulu, Hawaii. They encouraged one another, reviewed proposals and motions to keep the Auxiliary moving in the right direction, and heard from leaders about the critical issues and needs facing veterans and military.

One of the most important agenda items leaders considered at the Pre-Convention National Executive Committee (NEC) Meeting was a motion to adopt new branding — a suggestion made by Butler University students who analyzed the Auxiliary’s public image.

The NEC voted to approve a new emblem that more prominently displayed the word “Auxiliary;” not just the words “American Legion.” Otherwise, people see the words “American Legion” and don’t go any further. The newly designed emblem, along with a new tagline -- “Empowering Women, Inspiring Communities” -- would increase the name recognition of the women’s organization.

During the NEC meeting, members also recognized the Department of North Carolina, which presented a check in the amount of \$6,074.16 to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, bringing their total to \$10,000. As a result, ALA National President Dutton said the contribution brought the total of the Auxiliary’s national donation to \$140,343.17.

In other business, ALA members were encouraged to contact their legislators to support the Flag Amendment before Dec. 31. They also adopted numerous resolutions:

- Add a field service patch to the Junior Activities Patch Program.
- Increase participation in the Patch Program through three different levels, including kindergarten to fifth grade, sixth grade to eighth grade and ninth grade to 12th grade.

- Expand the guidelines for use of Poppy Funds to include use for active-duty military personnel and their families.
- Include a prayer page to be included in the rules for the senior histories.
- Create an American Legion Auxiliary chaplains manual and maintain it on the chaplain site with publications, prayers, and other information useful to the Auxiliary chaplains.
- Amend the Constitution & Bylaws by adding the words “step-relatives are eligible,” with the provision that the amendment shall only become effective upon acceptance by The American Legion. At a later NEC meeting, The American Legion voted to not pass the resolution.

As other events for the annual convention got underway, ALA President Dutton had the opportunity to address members of The American Legion Family during opening remarks. She shared what it had meant to serve the Auxiliary in the top leadership role during the 2004-2005 administrative year.

“Serving as the national president has been truly the year of my life,” she said. “The absolute best part is to go around the world and meet all of you, our friends, our veterans who have served this country. The American Legion Family enjoys a reputation that is unequaled by any organization in the world.

“As we traveled the world, we went to places, and doors were opened that never would have been opened to another organization,” she said. “You don’t go to foreign countries and meet with the president of the country, or go and meet with our American ambassadors. It’s just not done. But because we are The American Legion Family, it happens for us and that’s because of all of you. I thank you for that. I thank you for giving us this most wonderful year. I thank you for allowing us to share in your dreams this year.”

Dutton also expressed her gratitude to members of the Maryland delegation. “You don’t get to this point without those people in your department,” she said. “I’ve got the best department in the world. You also don’t get to a position like this without helping hands.”

Making an Impact

Through ALA programs in 2004-2005, members made a significant impact in their communities:

Americanism - Members set a goal for every department to become involved in the American Legion Auxiliary Freedom & Leadership Youth Conference. They also identified flag projects as another priority, including the Promoting the Pocket Flag Project, designed to get as many pocket flags to military personnel as possible, and promoting pride and respect for the U.S. flag. Nearly 700,000 pocket flags were distributed nationwide, with units spending more than \$9,400 and working nearly 5,000 hours to get the word out. One of the flag recipients wrote a thank-you note to the Auxiliary. He said it reminded him why they (servicemembers) are doing this and that there were millions of folks like those in the Auxiliary who supported them 100 percent. — Chairman Ruth Proctor

Auxiliary Emergency Fund – American Legion Family members stepped up to help other members after a series of hurricanes hit Florida in 2004, causing 85 percent of one Legion post’s members to lose their homes or have them severely damaged. Many Legion post members in Florida also worked to transform their buildings into emergency operations centers. Together, they generated more than \$155,000 to provide relief supplies to those victimized by the natural disaster. — Chairman Linda Caudell

Children & Youth Committee – Using the theme “Grand Slam Home Run” to guide them in children and youth-focused activities, members donated \$1.17 million in direct aid to various programs and organizations, including the Children’s Miracle Network, the Family Support Network, and the Child Welfare Foundation. They also

awarded 34 students with Youth Hero Awards and donated Josh the Dog books to 335 children. In all, ALA members donated 419,346 volunteer hours to help 390,091 children. Total expenditures for Children & Youth were \$3.7 million. — Chairman Jan Pulvermacher

Liaison to Child Welfare Foundation – Every ALA unit was encouraged to contribute to the Child Welfare Foundation to support the organization’s commitment. During the administrative year, Legion Family members awarded 19 of 71 grant requests, for a total of \$585,272 in funding — an increase of \$246,575 over the previous year. Some of the grant awardees included the Children’s Organ Transplant Association in the amount of \$40,000, and the Immune Deficiency Foundation in the amount of \$42,500. In all, Auxiliary contributions totaled nearly \$113,000 in 2004-2005. The American Legion Family contributed \$660,939.62. — Chairman Pearl Behrend

Community Service Committee – ALA members focused on several areas of community service, including health and safety issues, encouraging community participation, and environmental conservation. The Auxiliary partnered with numerous organizations to reach their objectives, including the National Safety Council, the National Blood Program, the National Organ Donor Registration Program, the American Cancer Society, Red Cross, “Make a Difference Day,” and Habitat for Humanity. They also supported blood drives and organ and tissue donor registration. In all, members volunteered more than 1.15 million hours and donated more than \$2.6 million. Members agreed that while sending a check to an organization is the easiest way to donate, it pales in comparison to the experience of doing. — Chairman Desireé Stoy

Education Committee – To support their commitment to Education, members made a special effort to connect directly with schools to find out how they could help. They also introduced a new brochure to get the word out about the organization. “The American Legion Auxiliary Supports Scholarships and Educational Opportunities for Our Youth” was designed to give members the opportunity to start conversations with counselors and other staff members about the opportunities the Auxiliary offers youth. In all, members donated more than 50,000 hours to serve more 43,700 people as part of their Education initiatives and awarded nearly \$1.9 million in scholarships. — Chairman Terry Porter

Finance Committee – Members made a decision to engage with an independent investment consultant to monitor the organization’s portfolio on a monthly basis, compile quarterly reports and develop investment policy statements for the committee’s review and adoption. ALA’s national president, national vice president, national secretary, and national Finance chairman also attended the International Conference on Fundraising Workshops, which gave insights on capital campaigns, grant programs, request presentation, planned giving, online fundraising, partnering with community foundations, grassroots fundraising, and other similar topics. While departments reported \$357,746.77 from the distribution of fundraiser proceeds and the Century Club continuing to attract members, the Finance Committee continued to have concerns about overall declining membership. — Chairman Phyllis Bachman

ALA Girls State – Increasing a commitment to patriotism and civic engagement were among the top goals of ALA Girls State, which attracted more than 18,000 high school students during the 2004-2005 administrative year. In all, ALA units hosted 49 ALA Girls State sessions and sent 96 senators to ALA Girls Nation. As ALA Girls Nation President Blair Knowles said, “There was not a single day that I woke up that I didn’t face a challenge and that I didn’t learn something new You taught me that I am a strong, independent woman, and that I can continue in the face of hardships. And not only did you give me that gift, you gave that gift to 18,000 girls across the nation.” — Chairman Mary Harper

Junior Activities – ALA Junior members volunteered nearly 77,000 hours to efforts to encourage Junior Auxiliary members, including forming 69 new Junior units. Three hundred Juniors took the leadership course. More than 2,500 patches were sent to deserving Junior members. During the 22nd National Junior Meeting, 2004-2005 Honorary National Junior President Naomi Farace told delegates, “It’s not who you are underneath. It is what you do which makes who you are.” — Chairman Nancy Brown-Park

Leadership – With leadership at top of the Auxiliary’s objectives, the committee stressed the importance of setting SMART goals that are Smart, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Trackable. Chairman Penny Maklary said, “Effective leadership began with a vision of where we wanted the Auxiliary to be in the future. We, as leaders, are to inspire members to serve ... and become involved. The members we inspire today will inspire the next generation of leaders.” As part of their activities, the Leadership Committee provided department Leadership chairmen with information designed to keep them informed and motivated, encouraged the use of a special leadership guide, and hosted leadership training sessions. — Chairman Penny Maklary

Legislative Committee – Developing deeper communications with legislators was among the primary objectives of The Legion Family for the 109th Congress. They also set priorities for legislative issues, including guaranteed full funding for the VA health care system, funding for a strong national defense, veterans employment and training services, survivors benefits programs, and a flag amendment prohibiting desecration of the flag. “It was quickly evident that changes taking place in Washington would be of grave concern to our veterans,” said Chairman Carlene Ashworth. In all, ALA members sent more than 11,000 letters to U.S. senators, more than 10,500 letters to U.S. representatives, and 3,900 letters to state officials. — Chairman Carlene Ashworth

Membership – Throughout the 2004-2005 administrative year, the Auxiliary focused on several membership recruitment and renewal efforts, ensuring that they were moving forward with the organization — securing its mission for future generations. They recognized 1,481 Legionnaires and Sons of The American Legion with recruiting pins for signing up three or more new American Legion Auxiliary senior members, and 59 ALA members with Silver Brigade awards for signing up 25 or more new senior members. During the year, 79 new units were chartered, and four were reinstated. As part of another initiative, girls who wanted to join the Auxiliary for the Junior program encouraged their fathers to join the Legion. They also were encouraged to ask their mothers and sisters to join as well. — Chairman Barbara Koricanek

National Security – Using the theme “Help Solve the National Security Puzzle: Add Your Piece” to guide them, ALA members volunteered 93,550 hours toward efforts related to National Security. Members sent supplies to troops so that they could distribute them to children in Iraq, donated bulletproof vests, sent 12,500 pairs of slippers to troops, and gave Blue Star Banners to 15,000 families. They also logged 6,887 hours in fire safety training and support. — Chairman Pat Kranzow

Past Presidents Parley - As part of their initiatives for the year, Past Presidents Parley focused on organizing new parleys, distributing nursing scholarships, and honored six women veterans -- one woman from each branch of service. The honorees, all members of the Auxiliary, were Helen Hawthorne Williams, U.S. Navy Waves, WWII; Ann Marie Pina-Brown, U.S. Navy Nurse Corps, Korean War; Sonja Covert, U.S. Air Force, Vietnam War; Fae Casper, U.S. Army WAC, Grenada/Lebanon; Tracy Stoddard, U.S. Army, Panama; and Martha Krabill, U.S. Army, Persian Gulf — Chairman Katherine Morris

Poppy Committee – ALA units ordered nearly 5 million poppies to distribute as part of Poppy Day events and generated more than \$2.4 million in donations. They also took steps to raise awareness about the history and the meaning of the poppy through other events, including the Poppy Poster Contest, a Miss Poppy program, public relations campaigns, and grassroots efforts like letters and telephone calls. — Chairman Peggy Thomas

Public Relations – Members realized that reaching their membership goal of more than 1 million, they would need a robust public relations campaign that raised awareness about the organization, especially among younger generations. As part of that effort, the Public Relations Committee focused on exploring new and varied external and internal public relations campaigns, set up new ALA department websites, produced press release packets to be distributed by units, and rebranding. In all, members were successful in generating nearly 5,800 public service announcements, 5,475 program announcements, and 4,868 programs, interviews, or events coverage. — Chairman Priscilla Imburgia

Unit Development & Revitalization – UD&R Revitalize focused on helping the Auxiliary meet its membership goals by focusing on struggling units and reducing the number of charters cancelled each year. Programs were implemented to provide mentorship for all new and struggling units, host membership workshops, and encourage joint sessions among units. “The unit is the heart of our organization and it is our responsibility to provide help to those that request it,” said Chairman Flora Jean Craig. “We realize it will take time for some of these departments to really get things turned around, but that’s OK because that is what UD&R is all about: trying to strengthen and improve the units and, thus, the department.”— Chairman Flora Jean Craig

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation – As part of their focus on the mission of serving veterans, ALA members showed their commitment by serving nearly 1.8 million veterans throughout the administrative year. In all, 78,000 members donated nearly 3.2 million hours by serving at VA facilities, and in Field and Home Service programs. More Junior ALA members also joined in on those efforts. Also, the Auxiliary nearly doubled its goal to raise \$75,000 for the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. Every department contributed to the organization, raising \$140,343.17. — Chairman JoAnn Cronin

2005: Hurricane of Disaster, Chaos, and Destruction

“Help Us, Please.” “Katrina: The Storm We Always Feared.”

On the morning of Sept. 2, 2005, New Orleans’ hometown newspaper was published with those banner headlines. That newspaper would never touch the doorsteps of thousands of its subscribers in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, which hit Louisiana, Florida, and Texas just a week earlier. The storm had demolished entire neighborhoods, endangering those who remained, and leaving others homeless.

New Orleans particularly was hit hard, with Hurricane Katrina peaking at Category 5 in a city with levees designed to resist winds at a Category 3. By some reports, 80 percent of the historic city was flooded — by as much as 20 feet in some neighborhoods.

Devastating images of people clinging to debris, trees, and rooftops and searching for loved ones poured in as devastation continued from Hurricane Katrina. When the final toll of the storm was calculated, more than 1,800 had lost their lives and damages amounted to \$115 billion. Hundreds of thousands of families were left without their homes and livelihoods — forcing them to start all over again in unfamiliar towns and cities.

As resident Windi Sebren said, “My life in New Orleans is over for the time being. I have to start over completely.”

Mitch Handrich, a registered nurse manager at the scene, said, “It’s like being in a Third World country. We’re trying to work without power. Everyone knows we’re all in this together. We’re just trying to stay alive.”

In the wake of the storm, chaos continued as government officials and responders struggled to provide the help that was needed to help the hundreds of thousands of people impacted by the hurricane. Few seemed prepared for a catastrophe of that magnitude.

Former Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff said response to the hurricane was inadequate. “That ‘perfect storm’ of catastrophes exceeded the foresight of the planners and maybe anyone’s foresight,” he said.

Global news also captured headlines in 2005. In Sudan, warring factions signed a peace agreement to end a 20-year civil war that claimed the lives of 2 million people. The Syrian military withdrew from Lebanon after 29 years.

But terrorist attacks continued to claim lives throughout the world. London commuters were terrorized during morning rush hour on July 7 when four radical Islamic terrorists launched a series of bombings that killed 52 and injured about 700 people. The attacks, which came to be known as 7/7, were carried out on three trains and a bus, making it the worst attack in that country since World War II.

The world marveled at the British who helped one another and moved forward with their daily activities immediately in the wake of the bombing.

Two days later, *The Times*, a British newspaper, ran an editorial with these words: “Terrorism will not defeat a way of life. Britain is at its best when it demonstrates, in its daily routine and lives, the values of humor, moderation, reasonableness, and imperturbability.”

Other events in 2005

- Jan. 19 - Cancer replaces heart disease as the No. 1 cause of death for people ages 85 and under.
- Jan. 20 - George W. Bush, winning a second term as U.S. President, is sworn into office.
- Jan. 26 - Condoleezza Rice is sworn in as U.S. Secretary of State, becoming the first African American woman to hold the post.
- Feb. 14 - Former Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri is assassinated, triggering protests.
- Feb. 15 - YouTube, a video-sharing website, is launched in the United States.
- March 4 - The United Nations warns that about 90 million Africans could be infected by HIV without further action against the spread of the disease.
- April 24 - Benedict XVI becomes the next pope, replacing Pope John Paul II, who died April 2.
- May 10 - A hand grenade lands about 65 feet from U.S. President Bush while he was giving a speech in Tbilisi, Georgia. The grenade malfunctions and does not detonate.
- June 24 - Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who wins Iran's presidential election, causes global alarm as he starts building upon Iran's nuclear weapons.
- July 1 - Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor announces her retirement.
- Aug. 2 - President Bush signs the Central American Free Trade Agreement, which removes trade barriers between the United States, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua.
- Sept. 3, 2005 – Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist dies of cancer, after serving on the Supreme Court for 33 years.
- Oct. 8, 2005 – An earthquake of with a magnitude of 7.6 shakes the Kashmir region, a disputed territory between Pakistan and India. More than 80,000 people die and about 4 million are left homeless.
- Oct. 10, 2005 – Angela Merkel becomes Germany's first female chancellor.
- Oct. 19, 2005 – Former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein is put on trial for killing 143 people in Iraq.
- Oct. 25, 2005 – The number of deaths of U.S. soldiers in Iraq reaches 2,000.
- Oct. 28, 2005 – Lewis Libby, advisor to Vice President Dick Cheney, is charged with obstruction of justice and perjury in connection with a White House leak investigation.
- Dec. 7, 2005 – Rigoberto Alpizar, a passenger on American Airlines Flight 924 who allegedly claimed to have a bomb, is shot and killed by a team of U.S. federal air marshals at Miami International Airport.
- Jan. 5, 2006 – Twelve miners are reported dead after 41 hours of being trapped in the Sago Mine in West Virginia.
- Feb. 8, 2006 – An eight-year federal study finds that a low-fat diet does not decrease the risk of heart disease, cancer, or stroke. Medical experts say the results are stunning.
- Feb. 12, 2006 – A winter storm cripples the northeastern United States with up to 2 feet of snow. New York City receives a record 26.9 inches.
- March 9, 2006 – President Bush signs a law renewing the Patriot Act.
- March 16, 2006 – The United Nations General Assembly votes to establish the U.N. Human Rights Council.
- April 2, 2006 – More than 60 tornadoes hit the United States, including Tennessee, where 29 people are killed.
- April 10, 2006 – Hundreds of thousands of protesters nationwide demand legal status for undocumented immigrants. Congress fails to pass immigration reform, but President Bush signs legislation for a 700-mile fence along the U.S./Mexico border.
- May 25, 2006 – Enron executives are found guilty of conspiracy and fraud for misleading investors.
- June 7, 2006 – Al-Qaeda leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi is killed after a bomb attack by a U.S. Air Force F-16 on a safe house in Iraq.
- July 5, 2006 – An emergency United Nations Security Council meeting is held at the U.N. in New York City because of North Korean missile tests that day.

- July 19, 2006 – For the first time, President Bush uses his veto power, rejecting legislation to expand embryonic research using federal financing.
- July 31, 2006 – Fidel Castro temporarily hands over power of Cuba to his brother Raul Castro.
- Aug. 10, 2006 – Scotland Yard disrupts a major terrorist plot to destroy aircraft travelling from the United Kingdom to the United States. All toiletries are banned from commercial aircraft.

2005-2006 - American Legion Auxiliary Administrative Year Celebrate Freedom

“Freedom cannot be taken for granted.” — Carol Van Kirk, 85th National President of the American Legion Auxiliary

As Carol Van Kirk championed the mission of the American Legion Auxiliary in her new role as national president, she often encouraged members to do more to tell the human stories behind the war in Iraq — even if the media wasn’t willing to do so.

During a visit to National Headquarters in Indianapolis, Van Kirk, an entrepreneur and dedicated volunteer, told members it was time to change the narrative about the war in Iraq.

“I’m sick and tired of negative news reports about how the war is going in Iraq,” Van Kirk said. “We need to do more than simply support the troops. We need to be telling the story of how Iraqi girls are going to school and how our troops are helping children and families — not only in Iraq, but everywhere they find themselves fighting the war on terror.”

She emphasized that one of the biggest challenges facing Americans is understanding that the war in Iraq wasn’t just in that country. Instead, it was a war against terrorism all around the world.

Van Kirk, a resident of Sutton, Neb., had personally experienced the fear and threats caused by violence. She had been in Washington, D.C., for Auxiliary-related business on Sept. 11, 2001, when she heard an airplane crash into the Pentagon. She later witnessed the smoke coming from the building.

Along with that experience and her strong beliefs about America’s ideals, Van Kirk was motivated to choose a simple yet powerful theme for her administrative year: “Celebrate Freedom.”

As she addressed members after her installation as their new president during the 2005 American Legion Auxiliary National Convention in Honolulu, Hawaii, she said, “Freedom cannot be taken for granted.”

She also encouraged women to continue to embrace any opportunities to volunteer or help grow membership. “The role of women is changing,” Van Kirk said. “I think we need to make the American Legion Auxiliary the organization that women want to join. “We believe the American Legion Auxiliary is an excellent outlet for that deep-rooted volunteer spirit,” she added. “Through this organization, we strive to empower women to inspire communities with just such a spirit.”

In announcing her special project as ALA national president, Van Kirk asked members to help seriously wounded veterans by donating funds to purchase custom-made bedside computer carts. These computer carts would be helpful veterans undergoing treatment at VA medical centers.

Van Kirk also prioritized building up the Auxiliary Emergency Fund, which needed to be replenished in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and other natural disasters. “We certainly are paying out much more than we are taking in. It is critical that our members keep the fund viable through their donations,” she said.

Van Kirk, who gained her eligibility through her late husband, Jack, worked as the co-owner of a sand, gravel, and heavy equipment business in their hometown. In addition to working in the family business, she also served diligently as a member of ALA Argonne Unit 61 in Sutton.

Other national officers elected during the 2005 National Convention:

- National Vice President – JoAnn Cronin (Department of Missouri)
- Central Division NVP – Mary Harper (Department of Missouri)
- Eastern Division NVP – Linda Caudell (Department of Maryland)
- Northwestern Division NVP – Kathryn Young (Department of SD)
- Southern Division NVP – Ann Blalock (Department of Alabama)
- Western Division NVP – Ruby Kapsalis (Department of California)
- National Chaplain – Rosey Newman (Department of Indiana)
- National Historian – Flora Jean Craig (Department of North Carolina)
- National Secretary – Peggy Sappenfield (Department of Indiana)
- National Treasurer – Marta Hedding (Department of Indiana)

Reinvigorating the Auxiliary

As did her predecessors, Van Kirk undertook a rigorous schedule as ALA national president during the 2005-2006 administrative year, traveling throughout the country and internationally, meeting other ALA members and military and government officials, and conducting important business to reinvigorate the Auxiliary for another year.

One of the first meetings on her agenda was the Post-Convention NEC Meeting on Aug. 25, 2005, where members discussed adding more professional training and workshops to ensure that those serving at the national and department levels were prepared to take on the challenges of their roles.

ALA leaders also heard about a decision to re-open the Washington, D.C. office in January 2006, which had been temporarily closed.

They also set numerous goals to keep the Auxiliary moving forward, including boosting organizational resources by attracting and retaining professional staff and leadership; encouraging more engagement among members; diversifying the income stream to support the ALA's mission; proactively promoting a positive image of the ALA; and continually fostering a positive relationship within The American Legion Family.

Also, as part of their ongoing concerns about declining membership in a rapidly changing society, Van Kirk and other members met with an external consultant who led them through an analysis of the organization. The professional consultation was designed to help members identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats — an exercise that many business corporations use to identify ways to grow.

Van Kirk joined National Headquarters' Public Relations Manager Lucia Anderson in efforts to continually remind ALA members of the need to replenish the funds for the Auxiliary Emergency Fund, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. In September 2005, the organization set up a new group section on its newly redesigned website to keep Auxiliary members up to date on what other units and departments had been doing to help victims of Hurricane Katrina.

"The web group is not only a great information tool," Anderson said. "It also encourages our members to locate other Auxiliary units or individuals eligible for assistance through the Auxiliary Emergency Fund."

Van Kirk also was on hand to continue the Auxiliary's commitment to support the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. She joined other ALA members who traveled to Denver, Colo., in October to assist the more than 120 veterans who emerged as final winners from a pool of nearly 3,000 participants nationwide.

For the first time, the Festival featured a category in creative writing, adding to the previous categories of music, dance, drama, and arts.

"We believe that participants at every level of the competition are winners because they have experienced healing and recovery through creative expression," Van Kirk said in her remarks as participants celebrated the artistic abilities of the veterans. "We applaud the tremendous talent, courage, and determination it takes to become a gold medal winner."

Festival attendees also heard from the Honorable R. James Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

"The Department of Veterans Affairs is committed to healing beyond just physical rehabilitation," Nicholson said. "The National Veterans Creative Arts Festival provides an artistic channel for our nation's heroes to recover physically, mentally, and emotionally."

Later in the year, Van Kirk joined Nicholson in making an announcement about televising the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival on public television in 2006.

As the new year of 2006 started, the American Legion Auxiliary welcomed a new national secretary, Pamela S. Gilley. Formerly the executive assistant to the national secretary, Gilley took over the role from Peggy Sappenfield, who officially retired at the end of January.

Gilley, a veteran of the U.S. Army, had been working as part of the National Headquarters staff since January 2004. She also served in volunteerism as a member of American Legion Robert E. Kennington Post 34 and ALA Unit 34, both in Indianapolis.

ALA members, along with other members of The American Legion Family, received affirmation of the impact of their volunteerism and advocacy during a personal address from President George W. Bush.

"Members of The American Legion are showing the heart of the Legion every single day, not just when catastrophe hits," said Bush, who had been invited to The American Legion meeting in Washington, D.C., where members were discussing ways to maintain peace and protect Americans.

"Our nation is grateful for your service on and off the battlefield," Bush added. "As you serve your fellow Americans in need, you're also strongly supporting the American flag. It was a Legion that helped draft our nation's first flag code back in 1923. And Legionnaires have been working ever since to make sure the flag is cherished and protected. I appreciate your leadership of the Citizens Flag Alliance, and like you, I support a constitutional amendment to protect the American flag."

Meeting new challenges in a new era

The Auxiliary continued to respond and adjust to the way Americans were increasingly interacting with each other through digital channels, including the internet and social media platforms. As a result, they chartered their first eUnit — an electronic-based membership unit that was established in East Palo Alto, Calif.

The idea for ALA eUnit 472 had been first proposed by ALA Girls State citizens. Members were unable to devote the time and effort that had been required at a local unit but wanted to do more for the ALA Girls State program, as well as become more involved with other ALA programs. As a result, the Auxiliary launched this flexible organization option to meet their needs.

The ALA also announced that members would now be able to make online donations as part of the technological advances they were embracing. As a result, members could easily and quickly contribute to the Auxiliary Emergency Fund and other programs through a secure platform on the organization's website. Members also were informed that they could start ordering supplies online, including ALA paraphernalia and brochures.

As part of other changes in the organization's communication channels, ALA National Headquarters announced in April that it was now able to give members updates through new weekly electronic newsletters. Up until then, nearly all members were receiving newsletters through traditional mail, a process that was more costly because of printing and postage costs.

In other developments, Van Kirk joined in efforts to implement a strategic plan designed to strengthen the Auxiliary through membership growth and retention. She met twice with strategic plan committee members.

After a series of meetings with ALA members throughout the United States, including those in their hometowns, Van Kirk traveled to Washington, D.C., to attend the Mid-Year NEC Meeting in February. She informed Auxiliary members that they had a special request from The American Legion to support their efforts to enact remedial legislation that would shut down a judicial practice allowing misuse of taxpayers' money.

Members also voted to accept the listing of charters to be cancelled for 84 ALA units — a disheartening trend that had the Auxiliary concerned for a number of years.

During the 2006 ALA Awareness Assembly in Washington, D.C., more than 300 members gathered to hear about issues related to their mission to support veterans and military servicemembers. In addition to discussing finances, leadership, and membership goals, they heard from various speakers, including Dr. Alfonso R. Batres, head of the VA's Readjustment Counseling Services; National Guard Sgt. Leigh Ann Hester, a Silver Star recipient who served with the 617th Military Police Company in Richmond, Ky., and former Army Nurse Leslie Lightfoot, and founder of Veteran Hospice Homestead Inc.

One of the topics focused on the VA's readjustment counseling work on behalf of returning Iraq and Afghanistan theater veterans.

They also presented the Public Spirit Award to Department of Veterans Affairs employees, in recognition of their extraordinary efforts as responders to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The award was accepted by the Honorable James Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs on behalf of the VA.

As part of their activities during the 2005-2006 administrative year, Auxiliary members also supported various youth programs and conferences to fulfill their mission to train future generations in volunteerism and patriotism. They donated funds to send 54 students, including participants in ALA Girls State, American Legion Boys State, and Junior ALA programs, to the Americanism Youth Conference at Freedom Foundation in Valley Forge, Pa., in March.

In April, ALA leadership officials traveled to Orlando, Fla., for the Children's Miracle Network celebration. Members have consistently supported the organization for years.

During that summer, 96 high school students gathered in Chevy Chase, Md., for ALA Girls Nation. In addition to gaining firsthand practice at the government process by electing their leaders, they visited Arlington National Cemetery to honor those who sacrificed their lives for the country. They also toured the Pentagon, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the White House, and Capitol Hill.

In a touching moment, the ALA Girls Nation attendees also heard from guest speaker and Holocaust survivor Nesse Godin. "I'm not a speaker. I'm not a teacher. I'm not a lecturer. What I am is a survivor," she told the girls.

The high school students also had the opportunity to meet the former Miss America Debbye Turner, who encouraged them to go after their dreams. "Every worthwhile success requires sacrifice," she said.

Continuing the ALA Legacy

In other highlights of her administrative year, Van Kirk met with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in Washington, D.C., whom she later presented with the 2006 ALA Woman of the Year Award during the ALA National Convention. Rice, who had recently been in the Middle East to discuss a peace plan between Israel and Lebanon, also had been named as one of the World's Most Influential People by *Time* magazine.

Van Kirk also joined other national ALA leaders on a trip to Sparks, Nev., where they participated in the 60th anniversary celebrations of the VAVS program. She helped present ALA Military Academy Awards to Cadet Michelle K. Mallette of Elmira Heights, N.Y., who had recently graduated from West Point; Cadet First Class Nicole Graham of Blue Springs, Mo., a graduate of the Air Force Academy; and Midshipman 1st Class Amanda Minikus of Raleigh, N.C., a graduate of the Naval Academy.

During the year, ALA members, along with other members of The American Legion Family, had anxiously awaited a vote by Congress on an amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The proposed amendment, which would make it a crime to desecrate the U.S. flag, represented an effort that they had pursued for more than a decade as part of their "Countdown to Victory" campaign. Although it was approved by the U.S. House of Representatives in 2005, it failed by one vote in the U.S. Senate in June 2006.

The Auxiliary continued to explore ways to support troops, advocate for veterans, and promote patriotism as the administrative year wound down. During August, they gathered in Salt Lake City, Utah, for the 86th ALA National Convention at the Salt Palace Convention Center.

At the National Executive Committee Meeting held prior to the convention, Van Kirk presented the Unsung Hero Award to the U.S. Coast Guard, recognizing its work in rescuing more than 22,000 survivors and contributing to hurricane relief efforts. Coast Guard Admiral Thad Allen accepted the award on behalf of responders.

During the ALA National Convention, ALA members from all over the nation, and the world, gathered to celebrate milestones, encourage one another, and hear motivational speeches about their mission.

American Legion National Commander Thomas Bock presented awards to ALA National President Van Kirk and Past National President Anna Gear "for their unwavering work with The American Legion and the Citizens Flag Alliance in our efforts to secure a flag amendment."

Members also were recognized by James R. Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, who told them that they were making a significant difference through their advocacy and contributions.

"My department considers itself blessed to be the recipient of your support," said Nicholson, after noting that its budget for 2007 was increased to \$80 billion — up from \$70 billion the previous year. He said it was the largest discretionary budget increase ever requested and granted by the VA.

Auxiliary members also heard about an initiative to support and honor 9/11 victims, and veterans and the American flag. The ALA joined in an affiliation with Healing Field, an organization established to remember the lives lost on Sept. 11, 2001. The alliance was designed to further the mission of both organizations, including respectfully honoring and recognizing the sacrifice that our American servicemen and women and their families make.

National Convention attendees were encouraged to purchase a flag to represent a lost American Legion Family member. Flags were placed in one of two Healing Field displays during the convention, one at the Reflecting Pond at Temple Square and the other located in the Convention Exhibit Hall.

Van Kirk also announced that the Auxiliary had been working with the U.S. Coast Guard to establish an annual award from the ALA, similar to those that the ALA presents to other military branches. However, the Coast Guard Academy asked that the ALA consider sponsoring their new chapter of the American Association of University Women instead. The goal of the chapter is to promote equity for all women and girls, lifelong education and positive societal change, and opening it up for cadet membership.

Van Kirk also presented Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice with the ALA Woman of the Year during the conference. "The American Legion Auxiliary has an important role to play in this global war on terror for our nation, and I am so proud and so honored that you have honored me," Rice told ALA members in accepting the award.

She went on to thank the women for the impact they continue to make. "When we think about the power of women, the American Legion Auxiliary exhibits just what can be accomplished when like-minded women work together. Only a group of strong, public-spirited women could step in to fill the gap for the thousands of families whose loved ones are bravely serving overseas and to create the Family Support Network as a hotline that families can call for help," she said. "Only a group of strong, public-spirited women would say we are going to continue to fight to protect America's flag, because desecrating our nation's symbol, desecrating our nation's symbol of freedom and democracy, should be against the law.

"And only a group of strong, public-spirited women would finish taking care of their own families and still find the time to volunteer at the local veterans hospitals and even assist homeless veterans in getting the help they need," Rice added. "This organization has a record of service that speaks to your commitment to veterans and your love and concern for our country."

In business conducted during the 2006 ALA National Convention, members approved a resolution that would allow for AEF grants to help with educational training for ALA members who need to become their family's main income providers. They also approved an amendment to replace the word "daughter" with "direct descendants" in language that would determine who was eligible to receive the National Presidents' Scholarship.

In her final days as ALA national president, Van Kirk expressed gratitude for the work that had been accomplished by members, including impacting the day-to-day lives of veterans, their families, and their communities. She also reflected on the challenges that faced their country, including several natural disasters, and how they came together to provide assistance.

"When times are tough, we should be able to count on our family," she said.

In Memory

Auxiliary members paused to honor the memory and service of Past National President Opal Glynn Hanes, who passed away Dec. 28, 2005. Hanes, who served under the Department of Iowa, served for 61 continuous years

as a member of the Auxiliary. She was ALA national president during the 1965-1966 administrative year. She was a member of Unit 60 in West Des Moines, Iowa, and promoted a renewed call to service.

Making an Impact

Through ALA programs in 2005-2006, members made a significant impact in their communities:

Americanism – Members encouraged students from all over the country to consider “What Freedom Means to Me” as part of the annual Americanism Essay Contest. Nearly 23,000 students from grades three through 12 entered the contest during the year. In all, more than 12,000 units reported volunteering nearly 13,000 hours and donating \$56,000 while working with The American Legion on its Junior Shooting, Oratorical, and baseball programs. They also spent \$535,000 and donated nearly 170,000 volunteer hours promoting the Americanism program. – Chairman Karen Lowe

Auxiliary Emergency Fund – Natural disasters, including Hurricane Katrina, took a toll on many members, some of whom lost their homes. During the months of September and October 2005 alone, the ALA had received 449 applications for help and distributed more than \$409,000 for disaster relief. By the end of the administrative year, the AEF had provided grants totaling nearly \$735,000 to 714 members. Understanding the great need, the AEF had launched a “Call to Action” to urge members to donate. ALA members answered the call — donating an unprecedented amount of \$309,481 to help fellow members. – Chairman Janet Jefford

Children & Youth – ALA members focused on three areas in supporting youth and children programs: family support, the Youth Hero Award, and traditional programs previously supported by the Auxiliary. During the administrative year, members donated nearly 349,000 volunteer hours to assist children. The impact resulted in more than 2.5 million children being served and \$3.6 million in donations. They also supported “Project Reach Out for Kids,” which was designed to support children of activated or deployed service personnel. – Chairman Desireé Stoy

Community Service – As part of “Make a Difference Day,” 15,000 members worked more than 250,000 hours to improve veterans’ communities. They sent care packages and greeting cards to veterans, supported homeless programs and adopted a special project, “Operation Welcome Troops Home.” They also donated \$355,467 to cancer research and another \$255,127 to assist patients with transportation, bills and other needs. — Chairman Ruth Proctor

Education – Members showed their commitment to Education programs by investing more than 23,107 volunteer hours and donating \$28,861 to promote literacy alone. Their volunteerism with literacy impacted more than 19,000 children and 11,521 adults who needed assistance with reading skills. Departments also contributed more than \$209,000 to award scholarships with students seeking a post-secondary education. Units contributed more than \$805,000 to fund scholarships for students. They also donated over \$16,500 to the Spirit of Youth Scholarship Fund, \$14,314 to The American Legion Legacy Scholarship and nearly \$125,000 to other scholarships offered in their communities. – Chairman K. Lynne Wild

Finance – In business related to finance, committee members considered ways to increase public relations resources for the Auxiliary organization, re-opened a Washington, D.C. office, and added a development director position at National Headquarters. They also reviewed the technology needs of the national organization. — Chairman Linda Boone

ALA Girls State – ALA members supported ALA Girls State programs nationwide, so that more than 25,000 young women could attend the sessions. Objectives also included chartering an ALA Girls State alumnae unit, adding a segment concentrating on veterans, updating programs, and showcasing the American Legion Auxiliary throughout ALA Girls State sessions. — Chairman Kris Nelson

Junior Activities – During the administrative year, ALA Juniors earned more than 2,500 patches and volunteered more than 75,000 hours. Also, 80 Juniors attended the 23rd National Junior Meeting. — Chairman Nancy Brown-Park

Leadership – The Leadership Committee updated the senior and Junior correspondence courses and the *Leadership Guide*. During the administrative year, they also focused on motivating, educating, and inspiring Auxiliary members to expand their leadership abilities. — Chairman Carlene Ashworth

Legislative – One of the leading objectives of the Legislative Committee was to show that one person can make a difference through legislative efforts. Committee members also prioritized advocating for various legislation, including the Flag Protection Amendment; the Veterans Administration Budget, and Medicare Reimbursement. In all, members made 30,000 contacts with members of Congress through letters, emails, phone calls, and personal visits. — Chairman Penny Maklary

Liaison to Child Welfare – The American Legion Family donated \$455,586 to the Child Welfare Foundation, with the Auxiliary donating \$87,147 of that amount. — Chairman Katherine Morris

Membership – American Legion National Commander Tom Bock joined ALA National President Van Kirk in a “Closing the Gap” campaign that was designed to charter a new unit for every post, sending a letter to all posts that do not have a unit. By June 2006, 56 new ALA units had been chartered. — Chairman Terry Porter

National Security — In following the national president’s campaign to “Celebrate Freedom,” members spent more than \$44,306 promoting the Blue Star Banner program, donated more than \$6.3 million in store coupons, and spent \$33,282 to support Crime Prevention and ROTC/JROTC programs. In all, members volunteered 144,893 hours and spent \$550,204 on various projects, including emergency preparedness programs and awareness assemblies. — Chairman Rita Navarreté

Past Presidents Parley – Committee members added a new program, “Honoring Active Duty Service Women and Women Veterans Serving in the Iraq War Era,” and awarded more than 175 scholarships to students. They also honored several women who served in the Iraq War, including U.S. Navy Air Traffic Controller, First Class Theresa Wilson Day; U.S. Air Force Col. and Intelligence Officer Terri Meyer; U.S. Marine Corps Corp. Sandy Vital; and U.S. Army Capt. Alicia Chivers. — **Chairman Anna Gear**

Poppy – In addition to raising more than \$2.3 million in donations from poppy distributions, members sent poppies to troops stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan to let them know they are not forgotten. “It is amazing that a small, red flower, growing wild, on the French and Belgium battlefields so many years ago, would become such an important symbol memorializing veterans,” Chairman Mary Davis said. She also noted that a poppy corsage contest at the ALA Awareness Assembly raised more than \$12,000. — Chairman Mary Davis

Public Relations — To adopt improved ways of communicating what the Auxiliary is all about, the Public Relations Committee helped in efforts to roll out a new national website. New features included the ability to download forms, review e-newsletters, and make online donations. — Chairman Priscilla Imburgia

Unit Development & Revitalization – As part of UD&R updates, 56 new units were chartered, five reinstated, and numerous other units saved as a result of members’ efforts. New UD&R tools were also introduced, including a handbook that includes techniques and best practices for welcoming new members and advice on how to keep members involved. — Chairman Anita Biggs

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation – Efforts to support veterans included American Legion programs like the Disabled Soldier Support System and Troop Support Services, two new programs introduced in 2005. Members also supported the Grant the Last Wish initiative for a terminally ill veteran. In all, members donated \$118,580 to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, \$90,000 to Fisher Houses, and volunteered more than 2.5 million

hours in service to more than 1.6 million veterans. They also spent more than \$5.6 million on a variety of programs and services to veterans. — Chairman Jan Pulvermacher-Ryan

2006: Social Network Takes Off

By 2006, Americans had already grown accustomed to change. They were now communicating through new electronic means, including mobile phones and email. But they were about to embark on even more new discoveries.

That was the year that the International Astronomical Union (IAU) issued an update about our solar system. No longer would elementary schools cite nine planets as part of the solar system. Pluto was downgraded from a planet to a “dwarf planet” after another dwarf planet, Eris, was discovered to have 27 percent more mass than Pluto.

As a result, the IAU redefined what it meant to be a planet — only the gas worlds of the outer planetary system and the rocky ones of the inner solar system met the criteria.

Meanwhile, Americans who had grown increasingly accustomed to sending emails, especially at work, were introduced to yet another new way of communicating on a regular basis.

A young entrepreneur by the name of Mark Zuckerberg had launched a social media site exclusive to students at certain colleges and universities. In September 2006, he opened it to anyone over the age of 13 with a valid email address.

Also, the search engine Google introduced Gmail service in 2006, announcing that it was giving subscribers 1GB of storage — far more than other email providers. Yahoo! quickly responded by announcing that it would provide 100 MB of storage for basic accounts, and 2GB of storage for premium accounts.

Americans also were enjoying a love affair with tech innovations, like the first e-reader by Sony and a new interactive game from Nintendo called Wii. Christmas lists also were likely to include smartphones from brands like Nokia, Blackberry, and Motorola, or laptops, iPods, e-readers by Sony, handheld GPS devices, digital cameras, and TiVo digital recorders.

According to the U.S. Commerce Department, those types of consumer purchases helped boost the economy during the first quarter of 2006, pushing it to grow at its fastest pace in more than two years. Business investments in construction, software, and industrial equipment, and increased government spending on national defense, also contributed to an annual growth rate of 4.8 percent.

While new technology and communications captured Americans’ imaginations, the realities of error continued to be a threat to people all over the world.

On Aug. 10, British and Pakistani authorities thwarted another attack by apprehending terrorists who were planning to mix a sports drink with a gel substance containing explosives and placing them on as many as 10 British planes headed to the United States. The plot led to canceled flights and new travel regulations for liquids.

That same month, Iran defied a deadline set by the United Nations to halt its nuclear activities. U.S. President George W. Bush called for global sanctions against Iran until it “gives up its nuclear ambitions.”

On Oct. 9, North Korea reported that the country had successfully performed underground nuclear tests — an announcement that led the United Nations Security Council to quickly impose sanctions on the country. The United States government declared the tests as “provocative.”

The year closed out with more news related to the “Axis of Evil,” as President Bush often called nations that he accused of encouraging terrorism and building weapons of mass destruction.

Weeks before many families gathered to celebrate the Thanksgiving holiday, the grim news was delivered that Saddam Hussein, the President of Iraq, was found guilty of “crimes against humanity,” including the torture and murder of men, women, and children, and received a death sentence by hanging. The execution was carried out on Dec. 30.

“Bringing Saddam Hussein to justice will not end the violence in Iraq, but it is an important milestone on Iraq’s course to becoming a democracy that can govern, sustain, and defend itself,” Bush said in reaction to the news.

Other events in 2006

- Oct. 9, 2006 – North Korea allegedly tests its first nuclear device.
- Nov. 7, 2006 – Democrats take control of both the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate for the first time in a dozen years after the 2006 U.S. midterm elections.
- Dec. 30 - Saddam Hussein is hanged just before dawn at an execution chamber in Baghdad during the morning call to prayer.
- Dec. 31, 2006 – The total of American military deaths in Iraq reaches at least 3,000 since the March 2003 invasion.
- Jan. 4, 2007 - The 110th United States Congress convenes, electing Nancy Pelosi as the first female Speaker of the House in U.S. history.
- Jan. 9, 2007 - Apple Inc. CEO Steve Jobs announces the iPhone.
- Feb. 3, 2007 – A Baghdad market bombing kills at least 135 people and injures 339.
- March 1, 2007 – Tornadoes swarm across the southern United States, killing at least 20; eight of the deaths were at a high school in Enterprise, Ala.
- March 9, 2007 – The U.S. Justice Department releases an internal audit that finds the Federal Bureau of Investigation had acted illegally in its use of the USA Patriot Act to secretly obtain personal information about U.S. citizens.
- April 16, 2007 – The Virginia Tech massacre is the deadliest mass shooting in modern American history. The gunman, Seung-Hui Cho, kills 32 people and injures 23 others before committing suicide.
- May 4, 2007 – A tornado hits Greensburg, Kan., nearly destroying it.
- May 17, 2007 – Trains from North and South Korea cross the 38th Parallel in a test run agreed by both governments. This is the first time trains have crossed the Demilitarized Zone since 1953.
- Aug. 1, 2007 – The I-35W Mississippi River Bridge spanning the Mississippi River in Minneapolis collapses during the evening rush hour.
- Aug. 8, 2007 – An EF2 tornado touches down in Kings County and Richmond County, New York State, the most powerful tornado in New York to date and the first in Brooklyn since 1889.
- Aug. 14, 2007 – Coordinated bombings in Yazidi communities in Iraq kill at least 500 people, the second-deadliest terror attack of all time.
- Aug. 23, 2007 – The hashtag is invented and first used in a tweet by U.S. product designer Chris Messina.
- Aug. 29, 2007 – Radical Shiite cleric Moktada al-Sadr announces he will suspend for six months his Mahdi Army militia’s operations, including attacks on American troops.

2006-2007 - American Legion Auxiliary Administrative Year “We Can Do It!”

“People around the world are thankful for the men and women serving our country. And we, the men and women of The American Legion Family, are the ones who can take care of them. We say, ‘How can we help?’” — JoAnn Cronin, 86th National President of the American Legion Auxiliary

With America continuing to wage its War on Terror, newly elected American Legion Auxiliary National President JoAnn Cronin urged members to keep their focus on the needs of veterans, including injured servicemembers returning home, and the troops deployed to war-torn Iraq and Afghanistan.

Adopting the theme “We Can Do It!,” Cronin said she wanted ALA members to spend the year reminding each other that “we can do it for our veterans” — whether they were volunteering by distributing poppies, visiting veterans in VA facilities, serving military spouses and children, or strengthening the communities where veterans live.

As part of that initiative, Cronin encouraged each unit to find programs within the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Auxiliary that they could back as a show of support for troops.

Cronin chose the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival as her special president’s project, one that had increasingly become one of the Auxiliary’s most beloved partnerships in service to veterans. By the end of her administrative year, ALA members had overwhelmingly supported her project by contributing more than \$100,000 for the annual event.

Shortly after her installation, Cronin asked National Vice President Jan Pulvermacher-Ryan to lead a new initiative that would help chart a future-oriented comprehensive strategic plan. It would involve taking a broader look at the challenges facing the organization, including ways to raise awareness, combat declining membership, and ensure that it continued to thrive to support future generations of veterans. A committee was appointed to set the blueprint for future strategic planning and annual reviews.

Cronin also encouraged members to adapt to the technology revolution in their midst. She announced that the organization would not be hosting National Information Conferences that year. Instead, they would invest time in determining better ways to help members develop. “With all the new technology and changes,” she said, “I feel it is time to look at what we’re doing and how to best provide that training to our membership.”

A member of the Auxiliary for more than 54 years, Cronin had come to the organization as a result of her eligibility through her late father, Jack Cronin, who served as a Marine during World War II. In addition to her volunteerism as a member of ALA Rock Memorial Unit 283, Cronin worked at the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency.

Other officials elected during the 2006 ALA National Convention:

- National Vice President – Jan Pulvermacher-Ryan (Department of Wisconsin)
- Central Division NVP – Irene Weber (Department of West Virginia)
- Eastern Division NVP – Charlotte Craven (Department of New York)
- Northwestern Division NVP – Roberta Morrow (Department of Colorado)
- Southern Division NVP – Tillie Davis (Department of Georgia)
- Western Division NVP – Judy Daybell (Department of Utah)
- National Chaplain – Caroline Koveleski (Department of New Jersey)

- National Historian – Patricia Kranzow (Department of Illinois)
- National Secretary – Pamela Gilley (Department of Indiana)
- National Treasurer – Marta Hedding (Department of Indiana)

Working the Mission

In the months following the ALA National Convention and the Post-Convention National Executive Meeting, Cronin traveled throughout the country like many of her predecessors, meeting members in their home states. She made stops in states ranging from Nebraska, South Dakota, and Florida to Missouri, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. Cronin attended various events held by organizations the ALA supported. Her travels also included international destinations, such as Germany, where she visited the U.S. military hospital in Landstuhl with American Legion Commander Paul Morin.

As part of one of the first major events in support of veterans, Cronin joined other ALA volunteers at the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NVCAF) in Rapid City, S.D. In a show of support for the 130 veterans who won competitions in states nationwide, ALA members helped them prepare for their performances, set up their artwork, and hosted workshops. The Festival, which was held at the Rushmore Plaza Civic Center Fine Arts Theater, was the culmination of competitions at VA facilities across the nation. These programs use creative arts therapy as ways to help veterans overcome disabilities, crises, and other challenges. That year, 2,849 veterans from 104 VA facilities entered the competition.

Also, members were encouraged to hear that more people were starting to learn about the NVCAF. Excerpts from the competition were televised on PBS stations around the country, allowing households to enjoy the impressive performances and artwork of talented veterans.

In other activities throughout 2006, the Auxiliary continued to demonstrate that veterans and military servicemembers were in their hearts and minds. Many of them joined a crowd of about 30,000 people at the Field of Honor Celebration at the U.S. Air Force Memorial at the Pentagon, an event the Auxiliary co-hosted with the Colonial Flag Foundation. As part of their volunteerism, ALA members set up 600 flags around the grounds and at the Pentagon. They also helped staff with a booth as part of an open house and greeted attendees by handing out flags and Legion Family membership information.

The organization also expanded its impact nationally by supporting the Heroes to Hometown program. The American Legion had signed a memorandum of agreement with the U.S. Department of Defense in support of the program, which connects a servicemember with a local American Legion post. Each post assigned a member would commit to helping serve the needs of that servicemember. Cronin said the Auxiliary, in a show of support for veterans and the Legion, would commit to helping where help was needed.

The Auxiliary also joined the nationally recognized project Connect with the Troops. As part of the initiative launched in 2006, ALA members would be among those helping to promote an effort to create the World's Largest and Greatest Scrapbook.

In addition to embracing new events as part of their outreach, Auxiliary officials gathered for their annual meetings, including the Presidents & Secretaries Conference, where they heard from American Legion National Commander Morin and guest speaker Sabrina Clark, learning consultant for the VA Learning University.

Morin, in speaking to the group, encouraged members of ALA and the Sons of The American Legion to work hard at increasing membership — ensuring that each reached 100 percent membership by July 2007. He also gave a

light-hearted threat to any group that didn't reach that goal. They would be subject to a dunking during National Convention activities, he joked.

To ensure the organization was continuing to evolve, members reviewed new formats for strengthening their mission statements, goals, tactics, and branding under Plans of Work. They attended workshops focused on membership recruitment strategies and leadership techniques.

ALA leaders also gathered for the Mid-Year National Executive Committee Meeting in Washington, D.C., where they reviewed their progress on the organization's strategic plan. Those plans included attracting and retaining professional staff and leadership to support the mission, developing web-based program portals that would allow members to discuss projects and activities, opening the Washington, D.C. office to encourage better partnerships with Legion programs centered in the nation's capital, and improving the image of the Auxiliary and its members.

They approved a resolution to assist the Indiana-Ohio Center for Traumatic Amputation Rehabilitation Research. The research program, a partnership between the Indiana University Purdue University-Indianapolis and The Ohio State University, focused on creating awareness and helping to build a database of Vietnam War amputees, many who were injured from landmines and booby traps.

As part of awareness strategies, members discussed changes to the Auxiliary's national magazine's mission to make it more accessible to external audiences. The goal to "inspire engaged and non-engaged members, as well as those not already members" would help the organization better use the magazine as a public relations tool.

ALA officials also heard about recommendations to implement an Audit Committee, and developing initiatives to attract and retain a membership base of women from a variety of communities and eligibility groups. Members were told that 56 ALA units were cancelled, 39 new unit charters were granted, and three were reinstated.

During the ALA Awareness Assembly in Washington, D.C., more than 200 ALA members gathered to gain inspiration through a series of workshops, presentations, and motivational speeches. The theme for the event was "Mission Ready: Knowing Our Military, Leading the Auxiliary."

Speakers talked about stories to help members understand the day-to-day realities of servicemembers in Iraq. They included U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Randy Manner, who gave a presentation on "A Day in the Life of an Army Soldier in Iraq," and ALA National Vice President Jan Pulvermacher-Ryan, who led a panel discussion on Taking Care of Our Wounded Soldiers.

Manner informed members that the profile of the average troop in Iraq is a 22-year-old who is married with two children. He also said there were 158,000 troops training Iraqis, improving the infrastructure, providing running water, and improving school buildings.

Susan Dakak, a native of Iraq and an American citizen, told the members she was deeply inspired by the servicemembers who were supporting the people in her home country. As a result, she left the United States to use her civil engineering skills to help solve wastewater problems in Baghdad and advocate for women's rights in the formation of the new constitution and government.

In a joint gathering of The American Legion Family, Cronin shared Dakak's story. She said it demonstrates the impact servicemembers are having in the lives of people around the world. Before Saddam Hussein's tyrannical dictatorship, Dakak had said, Iraq was a fine place to live. In the wake of America's war on terrorism, troops took the time to restore order and engage with Iraqi children, encouraging them to return to school.

"They're not simply American soldiers," Cronin said. "They're American angels. We hear of these stories but never heard one like Susan tells. People around the world are thankful for the men and women serving our

country. And we, the men and women of The American Legion Family, are the ones who can take care of them. We say, 'How can we help?'"

In another presentation, ALA members honored artist Kaziah Hancock with the Public Spirit Award for founding Project Compassion Soldier Fund Inc., an organization that sets out to make sure the faces of fallen military heroes are never forgotten.

Celebrating the Service of ALA

ALA members once again traveled from all over the United States, and, in some cases, international destinations, to gather for their 87th National Convention, which was held in Reno, Nev., in August 2007.

During the National Executive Committee meeting held prior to the convention, members received an update that 9,787 ALA units were active, after cancellations and the granting of new charters. They also discussed establishing an endowment as a 501(c)(3) so that the organization could grow through various fundraising efforts and distribute more funds for scholarships. A motion also was made to move the National Headquarters offices to a more suitable location. The current building was cited as needing extensive repairs.

As part of a series of joint convention activities, Legion Family members actually followed up on their commitment to go down in a dunk tank. Since none of the three organizations reached 100 percent of their membership goals, all of them were subject to the dunk tank.

National President Cronin and Membership Vice Chairman Mary Davis donned old-fashioned bathing suits and took turns getting dunked in a tank to the delight of the members gathered. As a result, they raised \$919, which was divided between the Legacy Fund, National Emergency Fund, Child Welfare Foundation, and the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival.

Following other festivities, workshops, events, and presentations, members gathered for a special luncheon to honor Gale S. Pollock, U.S. Army Deputy Surgeon General for Force Management.

Cronin, in presenting the ALA Woman of the Year Award and a beautiful green vase to Pollock, said she had been impressed by the general's service, including in her previous role as the chief of the Army Nurse Corps.

After accepting the award, Pollock said, "To feel valued by people who are so committed to our nation, who have lived with men who have served our country, who have grown families that are now serving, who truly understand the benefits of freedom and democracy, and who are totally committed to that safety and security of our country was just awesome," Pollock said. "I will always find a way to help take care of the men and women in uniform."

In a joint session of The American Legion Family, President George W. Bush addressed members, thanking them for their continued dedication in supporting military servicemembers.

"This family represents the best of the American spirit — a spirit that shows we have the grit and the will to defend the American people," he said. "One day years from now, another president will be in a room like this. ... Some in that audience will include people who won the fight against fascism and Nazism and communism. You'll be joined by younger veterans who have fought in places like Kandahar and Ramadi. And just like you, the new generation of veterans will be able to say proudly they held fast against determined and ruthless enemies, helped salvage an entire region from tyranny and terror, and made a safer world for the American people.

"To those future members of The American Legion, and to all of you, I offer the gratitude of our nation, and offer my prayers for a future of peace," Bush said. "Thank you. And may God bless America."

As part of a presentation about missing servicemembers, Deputy Commander Johnnie Webb, joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, told members there were about 78,000 soldiers from World War II unaccounted for, 8,000 Americans from the Korean War, 120 Americans unaccounted from the Cold War, and 1,773 from the Vietnam War. However, continuing work had resulted in 17 individuals being identified from the Vietnam War, 15 from the Korean War, and 18 from WWII.

In wrapping up business for the administrative year, members adopted numerous resolutions. They included urging U.S. Congress to support legislation that would designate the second Sunday of April as National Child's Day; adopting a patch for National Security under the Junior Activities Patch Program; including the word "veterans" in all public relations and/or promotional materials of the American Legion Auxiliary; and adding the national vice president as a salaried officer, designating \$6,000 to help defray personal expenses.

In Memory

As part of a memorial, Auxiliary members honored the memory and service of Past National President Agnes Kennedy, who passed away Sept. 2, 2006. Kennedy, whose membership came under the Department of New York, served the ALA for more than seven decades. She had joined Bill Brown Unit 507 at the age of 12 through the eligibility of her father, Mark J. Masadrie, a World War I Navy veteran. Kennedy also was a teacher and administrator. She served as the ALA national president during the 1979-1980 administrative year.

Making an Impact

Through ALA programs in 2006-2007, members made a significant impact in their communities:

Americanism - Recognizing the theme "Freedom is Not Free," 59 students from 42 ALA departments attended the Americanism Youth Conference. Members also set out to increase flag awareness and promote patriotism through the Americanism Essay Contest. As an organization, members committed to sponsoring a special healing field on the National Mall during Veterans Day to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Vietnam Memorial — Chairman Janet Jefford

Auxiliary Emergency Fund – The program set a goal to raise the Auxiliary Emergency Fund balance to continue to meet the needs of members. During the administrative year, the AEF was used to provide 129 financial hardship grants totaling \$136,432, 19 disaster grants in the amount of \$23,100, and two educational grants totaling \$1,000. — Chairman Krisann Owens

Children & Youth – Through collaborative program efforts, members supported military and veteran families, children, and the Child Welfare Foundation. In all, members contributed \$3 million to serve more than 252,000 children. They granted awards to numerous organizations, including the National Meningitis Association, \$40,000; Our Military Kids Inc., \$56,500; and Women of Substance Ministries Inc., \$12,000. They also presented 80 Youth Hero Awards to children and youth. — Chairman Rita Navarreté.

Community Service – ALA members volunteered more than 1.5 million hours and donated more than \$2.5 million to improve the quality of life in the communities of veterans and military servicemembers. As part of those efforts, they also welcomed troops home, addressed health issues, and supported other organizations that shared the Auxiliary's mission. — Chairman Mary Harper

Education – As part of their mission to invest in education, ALA members mentored 28,666 children in 809 schools, promoted literacy among children and adults, and hosted an oratorical contest. ALA departments also awarded \$534,855 in student scholarships. The Auxiliary awarded \$52,500 through the three national

scholarship programs: National Presidents' Scholarship, Spirit of Youth for Junior members, and the Non-Traditional Student scholarship. — Chairman Kris Nelson

Finance – The Auxiliary's National Headquarters added a Development Division with the intent of distributing new, educational, and training resources to members. An annual training plan for the committee also was introduced. At the Pre-Convention NEC meeting, a motion was approved to establish an endowment for the National Presidents' Scholarship Fund, with a lead gift of \$200,000, and a matching gift fund of \$75,000 in fiscal year 2008 from the reserve funds. — Chairman Linda Boone

ALA Girls State – In reviewing ALA Girls State activities, Chairman Karen Lowe said, “[ALA] Girls State and [ALA] Girls Nation programs are gifts from the American Legion Auxiliary to the nation and to our young people, the citizens of the future.” Goals for the year included growing ALA Girls State participation and increase public awareness about the program. During the 61st ALA Girls Nation, 98 senators toured the White House, met President Bush, and honored servicemembers during a visit to Arlington National Cemetery. — Chairman Karen Lowe

Junior Activities – Members promoted Americanism, the Patch Program, and the Veterans History Project. They also organized 36 new Junior groups and reorganized 30 Junior groups. A total of 188 Junior members attended the Junior Correspondence Course, and 1,808 patches were earned and distributed. They also spent 1,800 hours folding flags that were sent to troops overseas. — Chairman Carlene Ashworth

Leadership – ALA members emphasized leadership training through a series of three workshops during the Awareness Assembly. They also worked on educating and motivating members to take on more leadership responsibilities. New reporting guidelines also were developed. — Chairman Terry Porter

Legislative – Committee members set goals for Legislative Council training, raising awareness and supporting The American Legion's legislative priorities, including the Flag Protection Amendment; Global War on Terrorism; Public Expression of Religion Act; Veterans Employment and Training Services Budget; Total Force GI Bill; Total Repeal of the Disabled Veterans Tax; and the FY '07 Defense Supplement. — Chairman Elaine Walmsley; Priscilla Imburgia (appointed in February 2007)

Liaison to Child Welfare Foundation – Auxiliary members joined other members of The American Legion Family in contributing \$622,292 – an increase of \$67,000 over donations from the previous year. They also awarded 16 grants totaling \$416,369. — Chairman Katherine Morris

Membership – With ALA membership continuing to be a top concern, the committee set national and departmental goals, and implemented incentives to encourage membership drives. National membership was at 96.42 percent of the goal set, with the Auxiliary adding 61,206 members. — Chairman Sharon Conatser

National Security – As part of National Security programs, members supported the CERT (Certified Emergency Response Team) and America Supports You. — Chairman Peggy Thomas

Past Presidents Parley – The Auxiliary's Past Presidents Parley honored five servicemembers by presenting Women Veterans Awards to U.S. Army Command Sgt. Major Geralyn Chyle; U.S. Navy Yeoman 1st Class Elizabeth Wells; U.S. Marine Corps Maj. Wendy Goyette; U.S. Air Force Technical Sgt. Terri Dearborn; and U.S. Coast Guard Cadet Kirsten K. Laning. The women all served during the Iraq War. Departments also distributed \$20,350 for nurse scholarships. — Chairman Virginia Hobbs

Poppy – Members increased awareness about the significance of the poppy through educational programs and annual poppy distribution efforts to support servicemembers and veterans. — Chairman Diane Kelly Ambler

Public Relations – As part of efforts to increase awareness about the American Legion Auxiliary, members invested in updating the organization's communications and public relations plans; expanding electronic

communications through e-newsletters, podcasting, and websites; and increasing the use of the Auxiliary's eBrand identity and media kits. — Chairman Nancy Brown-Park

Unit Development & Revitalization - As part of efforts to strengthen ALA units, 16 workshops were held nationwide for members to learn more about how to run their organizations. In all, 1,251 ALA members attended the workshops. Also, 66 new ALA units were chartered, and 542 ALA units were revitalized. — Chairman Miriam Junge

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation - ALA members supported veterans by making home visits, addressing homelessness among veterans, and recruiting volunteers from local schools. In all, 92,735 volunteers donated nearly 3 million volunteer hours and donated \$7.8 million. — Chairman Desireé Stoy

2007: A Broken System of Veteran Care

One by one, several veterans and a spouse of a veteran testified before Congress, sharing the pains of dealing with a veteran care system that failed them, often ignoring their pleas for help or sending them on a spiraling course of bureaucratic red tape.

Their voices were finally being heard, as the Congressional hearing got underway in the wake of a shocking exposé of the neglect of soldiers treated at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. The hearing was held after *The Washington Post* published a series of articles in 2007 titled “The Other Walter Reed.”

Staff Sgt. John Shannon told legislators that he suffered a gunshot wound to the head while in Iraq, which caused a traumatic brain injury and the loss of his left eye. After he was discharged days later, he was sent away to find an outpatient facility on his own. “I was extremely disoriented,” he recalled.

“The system can’t be trusted,” Shannon testified during the March 2007 hearing. “And soldiers get less than they deserve from a system seemingly designed and run to cut the costs associated with fighting this war. The truly sad thing is that surviving veterans from every war we’ve ever fought can tell the same basic story, a story about neglect, lack of advocacy, and frustration with the military bureaucracy.”

In other testimony, the spouse of a disabled veteran shared that she was driven to tears after being told that he didn’t qualify for full disability.

“My life was ripped apart the day my husband was injured,” said Annette McCleod. “But then, having lived through the mess that I lived through at Walter Reed has been worse than anything I ever sacrificed in my life. I worked the chain. I worked anybody that would listen. And it took the aid of another soldier who actually heard me cry one day. He said, this is a number. Make a call.”

“All I’m trying to do is have my life — the life that I had and that I know,” McCleod told legislators.

The American Legion Family had been among those advocating on behalf of veterans and their families, seeking answers and demanding change for decades.

“We’ve been doing battle for adequate funding for VA health care, adequate money for construction, and upkeep of VA facilities for a number of years,” 2006-2007 American Legion National Commander Paul Morin told NPR. He also said they would recommend increasing spending to \$38.4 billion to address the concerns.

In an address to a gathering of American Legion Family members, President George W. Bush announced that he would appoint a bipartisan team to lead the White House probe into the conditions at veteran facilities.

“We have a moral obligation to provide the best possible care and treatment to the men and women who served our country,” Bush said. “They deserve it, and they’re going to get it.”

Sen. Carl Levin, chairman of the Armed Services Committee, also promised that veterans would receive better care. “The war in Iraq has divided our nation but the cause of supporting our troops unites us,” Levin said. “We will do everything we can possibly do — not as Democrats or Republicans, but as grateful Americans to care for those who have served our nation with such honor and distinction.”

At about the same time that Congress was addressing the challenges facing injured servicemembers returning home from war, the United States had started sending in a surge of 30,000 additional troops to Iraq. President Bush, who also appointed a new commander, Gen. David Petraeus, said it was part of a new strategy to quell violence and stabilize the country.

In other events of 2007, economists and financial analysts observed with increasing alarm signs of an economic downfall. In April, New Century Financial declared Chapter 11 bankruptcy. The company specialized in subprime mortgages, which allowed more people to purchase homes, even if they had poor credit scores. Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corp. announced it had stopped purchasing these subprime mortgages, determining that they were too risky.

In August, the Federal Reserve added \$24 billion in liquidity to the bank system as a response to the subprime mortgage crisis.

However, things started looking up to the general public. On Oct. 9, the U.S. stock market climbed to an all-time high, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average at 14,164 points. The U.S. unemployment rate stood 5 percent as the year closed out. While economists still had concerns, most Americans were felt confident about the U.S. economy.

Other 2007 events:

- Sept. 5, 2007 - Three terrorists are arrested in Germany after allegedly planning attacks on both the Frankfurt International Airport and U.S. military installations.
- Sept. 11, 2007 - Russia tests the largest conventional weapon ever.
- Dec. 3, 2007 - The National Intelligence Estimate issues a report, declaring "with high confidence" that Iran froze its nuclear weapons program in 2003. It contradicts a report written in 2005 that states Iran was determined to continue developing such weapons.
Dec. 19, 2007 - President Bush signs an energy bill requiring passenger vehicles sold in the U.S. to have fuel economy standards of 35 mpg by 2020, a 40 percent increase over the current standard.
- Jan. 4, 2008 – A levee breaks in Fernley, Nev., flooding the area.
- Feb. 5-6, 2008 – A major tornado outbreak across the southern United States and lower Ohio Valley leaves at least 58 dead, the most since the May 31, 1985, outbreak that killed 88.
- Feb. 10 - Robbers steal four pieces of artwork, a Cezanne, a Degas, a Van Gogh, and a Monet worth a total of \$163 million, from the Zurich Museum. It was one of the largest art robberies in history.
- Feb. 14, 2008 – A gunman opens fire in a lecture hall of Northern Illinois University, resulting in 24 casualties.
- Feb. 24, 2008 – Fidel Castro retires as president of Cuba due to ill health, after nearly 50 years in power.
- March 23, 2008 – The number of servicemembers and Defense Department civilians to die in the Iraq war reaches 4,000. Many were killed by improvised explosive devices.
- June 10, 2008 – The Gora Prai airstrike by the United States reportedly kills 11 Pakistani paramilitary troops.
- June 30, 2008 – U.S. President Bush signs the new GI Bill.
- Aug. 27, 2008 – Barack Obama becomes the first African American to be nominated by a major political party for President of the United States.

2007-2008 - American Legion Auxiliary Administrative Year Caring for Veterans and Their Children

"A veteran is a veteran is a veteran. It doesn't matter whether you've been wounded in combat or not. When you have a need, the government should be there for you. They made a promise and they need to live up to it."
— Jan Pulvermacher-Ryan, 87th National President of the American Legion Auxiliary

As veterans continued to share their personal stories about inadequate care at VA facilities like the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, members of The American Legion family were once again galvanized in their advocacy and volunteerism efforts to serve the military, including active servicemembers and veterans.

Newly elected American Legion Auxiliary National President Jan Pulvermacher-Ryan was on the frontlines, reminding members that their sacrifice on behalf of veterans, their families, and communities was making a difference. She also reaffirmed the Auxiliary's commitment to support Legion members as they worked on behalf of veterans.

"Our organization always supports you and your programs," she said in remarks during a meeting of National Executive Committee Legion officials. "We stand ready to help you in any way that we can. I know I speak for all of the members of our organization when I say that's our task to help you. We certainly have our own programs, but they really go hand in hand with those that you have."

Pulvermacher-Ryan shared her concerns about the failures of the government in meeting the needs of veterans, and her hopes that legislation for increased funding would be approved. "I'm hoping that we can push forward that budget this year so that veterans all over get what they need," she said. "A veteran is a veteran is a veteran. It doesn't matter whether you've been wounded in combat or not. When you have a need, the government should be there for you. They made a promise and they need to live up to it."

As part of her installation address to ALA members, Pulvermacher-Ryan also announced that her special project would be focused on children, especially the children of veterans and military servicemembers, and those who have been victims of domestic violence.

Her top initiatives included setting up an endowment fund for the children of the military, with a goal of raising \$1.2 million from both internal and external sources to fund it. The Endowment, which was named "Educating Children of Warriors," represented the 1.2 million children whose parents served in the military.

"They sacrifice far more than any of us can ever imagine," Pulvermacher-Ryan said in announcing the endowment. "The sacrifices of our military personnel are great, but their children's shouldn't be. The American Legion Auxiliary has identified a tremendous need to create an endowment fund to ensure that children of warriors have a more level playing field in higher educational opportunities."

She also said that the needs of abused children also would be a leading focus during the administrative year.

"It's so important that we recognize that there are so many children who are missing and abused, sometimes by parents and friends, which is really unfortunate," she said. "As parents, no one really sets us up to go to school to learn how to be a good parent. I think, as an organization, we can try to help."

Pulvermacher-Ryan was elected ALA national president after serving in the organization for 48 years as part of the Department of Wisconsin. She attended the 1954 ALA Girls State in Wisconsin and later joined the ALA William Lansing Unit 360 in 1960 through the eligibility of her late husband, Sylvester C. Pulvermacher, who had served in the Korean War.

Later, she met her husband, Connie Ryan, a funeral home director and Marine, while she was working at a local bank. Their family also included son, Scott, and daughter, Tami, and six grandchildren.

In an interview with a local publication, Pulvermacher-Ryan said, "I feel passionately about the Auxiliary's mission to support veterans, the military, and the children and communities of military members. By volunteering locally, and, later, nationally, I felt I could make a contribution to that work. It is critical, especially now with the war in Iraq, to continue to fulfill that mission."

Other officials elected during the 2007 ALA National Convention:

- National Vice President – Desireé Stoy (Department of Ohio)
- Central Division NVP – Shirley Jones (Department of Illinois)
- Eastern Division NVP – Karen Thompson (Department of Connecticut)
- Northwestern Division NVP – Carol Holmgren (Department of Minnesota)
- Southern Division NVP – Peggy Monroe, (Department of Tennessee)
- Western Division NVP – Patricia Salmen (Department of Nevada)
- National Chaplain – Jeri Brooks Greenwell (Department of Maine)
- National Historian – Virginia Nelsen (Department of Nebraska)
- National Secretary – Pamela Gilley (Department of Indiana)
- National Treasurer – Marta Hedding (Department of Indiana)

“Forward Thinking: A Ripple Today, a Wave Tomorrow”

Using her theme “Forward Thinking: A Ripple Today, A Wave Tomorrow” to guide the Auxiliary, Pulvermacher-Ryan encouraged members to understand how the small acts of volunteerism and advocacy they take each day impact future generations.

“Always look forward to build a better tomorrow,” said Pulvermacher-Ryan, outlining how members and officials could make improvements by working on department issues and concerns, taking strategic steps to build up membership, and supporting programs focused on children.

Pulvermacher-Ryan traveled throughout the country to see firsthand the work of ALA members in their home states, as well as to attend annual meetings of elected officials and other ALA members. She visited members in Oregon, Maine, Illinois, North Dakota, New Mexico, Ohio, and Missouri. She also traveled internationally, making stops in Japan, Korea, and the Philippines as part of an Asian tour. While in Japan, she joined other American Legion Family members in serving Thanksgiving dinner to the troops. She also visited Europe, including Normandy, where she honored those who lost their lives during World War II.

As part of the ALA’s membership growth initiative, Pulvermacher-Ryan asked the Advisory Committee to look at three groups as potential programs of the Auxiliary — the husbands of women veterans, wives of the Sons of The American Legion members, and husbands of Auxiliary members who cannot belong to The American Legion.

During the Post-Convention National Executive Committee Meeting in August 2007, Pulvermacher-Ryan asked officials to ratify the appointment of a Strategic Planning Oversight Committee. Officials also approved a motion to establish a reserve fund of \$100,000 to support the continuation of the strategic planning process adopted in 2006.

The following month, 50 volunteers and staff members gathered in Indianapolis for the ALA’s Strategic Planning Retreat. During the two half-day gatherings, members worked on a document that outlined “long-term guidance and clear direction to the entire organization.”

The plan, which was scheduled to be reviewed at the National Executive Meeting in March 2008, would be implemented in April 2008, if approved.

During one of the ALA's first meetings of the administrative year, the Presidents & Secretaries Conference, 150 members gathered to engage in breakout sessions on topics ranging from effective leadership, communicating with impact, governance issues, developing facilitation skills, and working with National Headquarters staff.

They also continued to expand their communications efforts by exploring new avenues to increase awareness and connect with the public. Some ALA members participated in a special session of Army Wife Talk Radio, which featured a live interactive broadcast designed to help ALA members understand what military families need and how the organization can help.

Also, to increase the visibility of the Auxiliary, the organization updated the Auxiliary's *National News* magazine with new content and a new name. The magazine, now called *Homefront*, was designed to reach potential new members and better serve ALA unit members. With the changes, the magazine was made available online so that members could easily share its contents.

ALA members, who had frequently sent mail to troops through the post office, started participating in the program "Voices from America," which allowed well-wishers to send voicemail messages to the Armed Forces during the holiday season.

In October 2007, ALA members stepped up to help the organizers of the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival host more than 110 veterans, the winners from 2,800 entries from VA facilities across the United States. They helped host workshops, set up veterans' artwork, and assisted in helping veterans prepare for their performances at a gala.

Pulvermacher-Ryan, who joined the festivities in St. Louis, expressed the organization's continued commitment to the NVCAF. "The National Veterans Creative Arts Festival is one of the highlights of our year," Pulvermacher-Ryan said. "We are privileged to share and support this wonderful event both locally and nationally. We are well aware of the positive outcomes of the veterans' participation, both in the performing and the visual arts."

Before the end of 2007, members gathered in Indianapolis for the ALA Girls State Directors Conference where they talked about increasing ALA Girls State participation and sponsored a Healing Field at the base of the Washington Monument where they placed 1,000 flags as a salute to Vietnam Veterans.

As the new year got underway, officials gathered for the Mid-Year NEC Meeting to approve a new Department Secretary's Advisory Committee. The appointment was for a term of two years and consisted of five department secretaries. Their role was to advise and recommend to the national secretary ideas for improving processes impacting departments, and implementing new procedures to increase efficiency throughout the organization; to make contact with and represent the views of those department secretaries who fall under their assignment; and to participate in meetings and conference calls on behalf of those departments that fell under their assignment. They also were notified of 86 ALA unit charter cancellations and approved a new mission statement for the American Legion Auxiliary: "To serve veterans, their families, and their communities."

During the ALA Awareness Assembly in Washington, D.C., in early spring 2008, members gathered to discuss a strategic vision for ALA work and to honor Public Spirit Award recipients Elizabeth Johnston, president/founder, Mothers of Military Support; Karen Degner, coordinator for Military Families Connect; Marian Chirichella, founder, Angels of Mercy; and Karen Grimord, president/founder, the Landstuhl Hospital Care Project. It marked the first time the organization recognized its own members with the special recognition.

In keeping with Pulvermacher-Ryan's commitment to support children, members learned firsthand about the Army Family Covenant, a five-point covenant developed by the U.S. Army to bring awareness about the challenges facing military children. The session featured a panel of military teenagers who talked about the

issues a military child faces. Members later viewed a video presented by the Sesame Street Foundation, designed to help children cope with a “different” parent who returns home from war.

Meanwhile, in Indianapolis, staff members at the ALA’s National Headquarters packed their offices for a long-awaited move to a new, leased office location at 8945 N. Meridian St. on the north side of Indianapolis. The previous building in downtown Indianapolis was in extensive disrepair and had been a concern for many years.

As the end of the administrative year drew near, the Auxiliary accomplished a few more significant milestones, including joining AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars in co-sponsoring the 4th National Summit on Women Veterans Issues on June 20 in Washington, D.C. The event, which was held to recognize the unique challenges of the nation’s 1.7 million women veterans, focused on services for health care, counseling, post-traumatic stress disorder and homelessness. Briefings were held, along with exhibits and breakout sessions, including a viewing of the new documentary *Lioness* and a town hall meeting with the VA’s Advisory Committee for Women Veterans.

Lioness, a winner of a number of awards, was a documentary following the journey of five female support soldiers who served together for a year in Iraq and became the first women in U.S. history to be sent on direct ground combat missions. They assisted with house-to-house searches and community relations to help defuse the tensions of local civilians.

“Women who served this country in uniform, whether veterans of World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, the current Global War on Terror, or peacetime service, have earned our respect and thanks,” said Dr. James B. Peake, Secretary of Veterans Affairs in remarks to ALA members. “They have also earned the full range of VA programs offered by a grateful nation.”

The women’s national summit was designed to encourage discussion about how to improve women veterans issues, as well as increase awareness about benefits and programs specifically designed for women veterans. By law, he said, women veterans receive the same benefits and medical care as men serving in the military, including disability compensation, employment and counseling services, health care, education assistance, and work-study allowance. Yet, they face special challenges in larger numbers than their male counterparts, including sexual harassment.

Moving the Auxiliary Forward

In August, ALA members once again left their hometowns to meet with one another for their largest annual event. Pulvermacher-Ryan was among those who traveled to Phoenix for the 88th Annual American Legion Auxiliary National Convention.

During the conference, ALA members conducted ALA business, listened to motivational speakers, heard updates about the impact of their volunteerism, and honored those who excelled in their support of America, including veterans and the military.

Pulvermacher-Ryan joined members in recognizing Tara Crooks, military lifestyle writer and talk radio host, with the ALA’s Woman of the Year award for her work in support of servicemembers. Crooks was producer of *Army Wife Talk Radio*, the original internet talk radio program for military wives. At the time, the show had a weekly audience of nearly 2,000 listeners. It offered tips, interviews, and resources in an effort to make the wives’ lives easier. “The women of the American Legion Auxiliary are amazing forces of volunteerism, education, and community,” Crooks said. “They function in the spirit of pride, duty, and honor of serving their nation. I am blessed to be a part of this great organization and honored to receive this award.”

It was also announced that the Auxiliary had formed a collaboration with the Corporation for National and Community Service, a U.S. federal government agency that engages more than 5 million Americans in service through AmeriCorps, VISTA, Learn and Serve America, Senior Corps, and other national service initiatives.

The national president's desire to help children moved many ALA members to act. During updates, it was reported that members distributed 18 grants totaling \$530,700, including funds for The American Legion Children's Home in Oklahoma, Big Brothers and Big Sisters of McHenry County, Mercy Medical Air Lift, the National Indian Child Welfare Association, Military Kids, and Zero to Three.

Auxiliary members later heard from presidential candidate Sen. John McCain during a joint session with members of The American Legion and Sons of The American Legion. In his comments, McCain expressed his appreciation for The American Legion Family and its role in supporting veterans and the military.

"America's veterans have faced different enemies, but they have always found the same friend and ally in the Legion, the VFW, and other veterans service organizations. All of us returned from war with a few experiences we'd gladly forget, but the friendships and camaraderie we brought home are forever," he said. "For keeping us all together, and helping those most in need, we're all in the debt of The American Legion.

"The men and women of the Legion believe in their country's cause in the world, and you have served and sacrificed for it," he added. "You know that when our leaders speak of this nation's history and purposes in the affairs of the world, they should do so with confidence, gratitude, and above all with moral clarity."

In Memory

As part of a memorial, Auxiliary members honored the service of Past National Presidents Maxine Bigalow and Norma Brown, who both passed away during the administrative year of 2007-2008.

Bigalow, who passed away Nov. 8, 2007, in Medford, Ore., was national president from 1978-1979. She gained her eligibility through her husband, Earl, a U.S. Army veteran during World War II. She joined ALA Medford Unit 15 in Oregon in 1949. Her son, Vaughan, served in Vietnam. During her tenure, she partnered with The American Legion to support the Special Olympics. While she was attending a meeting about the National Convention, Bigalow's husband passed away unexpectedly.

Members also mourned the loss of Brown, who passed away March 1, 2008. Brown, who served as national president from 1976-1977, was the ALA's first national president from the Department of Idaho. Her eligibility came through her husband, Paul, who served in the U.S. Navy during WWII. Brown, a schoolteacher, was a member of Filer Unit 47 for more than 30 years. She announced at her installation that there would be no fund drives during her administration because the ALA needed a respite to concentrate more on the local activities of the unit.

Making an Impact

Through ALA programs in 2007-2008, members made a significant impact in their communities:

Americanism - Students from across the nation gathered in Valley Forge, Pa., for the Americanism Youth Conference at the Freedoms Foundation. During the weekend, the students engaged in workshops and sessions designed to enhance their commitment to civic responsibility, gain new insights about constitutional law, and strengthening their leadership skills. They each wrote an essay on "America: Land of the Free Because of the Brave." — Chairman Kris Nelson

Auxiliary Emergency Fund - To continue to help support other ALA members in need, members donated \$148,600 to the Auxiliary Emergency Fund. In all, 135 grants were awarded in the amount of \$139,265. — Chairman Vickie Koutz

Children & Youth - The Auxiliary worked on numerous programs to help support children and youth, including the Youth Hero Award. In all, the honor was given to 82 recipients who were recognized for being good citizens with high morals and great integrity. — Chairman Carlene Ashworth

Community Service - As part of their community volunteer efforts throughout the administrative year, members volunteered at senior citizen homes, cleaned city parks and homeless shelters, and supported programs like Welcome Troops Home, Habitat for Humanity, American Heart Association, Cancer Relay for Life and Special Olympics. — Chairman Priscilla Imburgia

Education Committee - Members mentored children and adults as part of literacy efforts throughout their communities and distributed scholarships. In all, they contributed more than \$1.5 million to education efforts. — Chairman Coral May Grout

Finance Committee - As part of the finance updates submitted for the year, it was announced that the National Presidents' Scholarship Endowment Fund was approved by the NEC and that staff members in Indianapolis had finalized the relocation of National Headquarters. — Chairman Linda Boone

ALA Girls State - More than 16,000 high school students attended ALA Girls State programs throughout the nation. Of those, 96 girls were selected to attend ALA Girls Nation. In addition to the thousands of volunteer hours invested in the programs, ALA members donated \$3.3 million to support the programs. — Chairman Terry Porter

Junior Activities - In recognition of the National Presidents' Endowment Scholarship Fund, a new patch for Juniors was introduced. Also, 66 Juniors attended the National Junior Meeting. As part of a communications update, Juniors launched their own Facebook page. — Chairman Krisann Owens

Leadership Committee - The committee undertook efforts to establish a comprehensive leadership program that would offer training options for members at every level. — Chairman Peggy Thomas

Legislative Committee - The American Legion Family advocated for the elimination of the Survivor Benefits Plan and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation offset, which they considered an unfair practice because it deducted VA survivor benefits from military Survivor Benefit Plan annuities. Also, the Auxiliary introduced a new Legislative newsletter called the *Spirit of America* and made the Legislative Advocacy Guide available online. — Chairman Diane Duscheck

Liaison to the Child Welfare Foundation - Auxiliary members joined other members of The American Legion Family in rewarding 18 grants out of 222 grant requests. — Chairman Pearl Behrend

Membership Committee - As part of efforts to drive membership numbers up, a National Membership Workshop was held in Indianapolis. Members also were given recommendations about how to contact non-renewals and attract new memberships. — Chairman Mary Davis

National Security Committee - In recognition of women who served their countries in the military, the American Legion Auxiliary presented its Salute to Servicewoman of the Year awards to U.S. Air Force Col. Gloria Twilley, U.S. Navy Capt. Donna Joyal, U.S. Army Capt. Michele Smith, and U.S. Marines Corps Staff Sgt. Rochelle Griffin. — Chairman Nancy Brown-Park

Past Presidents Parley - As part of their volunteer efforts, past presidents donated more than \$40,000 in scholarships to students pursuing medical careers. — Chairman JoAnn Cronin

Poppy Committee - Members sponsored a poppy corsage contest at Awareness Assembly, which brought in an additional \$15,098 in funding for the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. — Chairman Kathy Dungan

Public Relations Committee - More units and departments turned to the internet, emails, and bulletins to keep in touch with members. Fifteen departments and 254 units reported having websites. The national magazine – *Home Front* – got a new look as *National News* became an insert within the publication, featuring “best practice” articles and inspiring stories about members. -- Chairman Janet Jefford

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation - Chairman Rita Navarreté pointed out that recruitment of VAVS must continue in order to meet ongoing demands and stop the decline in service hours. “This year, 2,772 units participated at VA medical centers with \$3,160,417 in donations,” she said. Over \$80,000 was donated by departments to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival.

2008: A Great Recession, A New U.S. President

For many Americans, 2008 seemed to be off to a good start — by all measures. The U.S. Federal Reserve had just dropped short-term interest rates to a low of 3 percent — the fourth time they had been dropped since the previous year, when they were 5.25 percent.

And President George W. Bush had signed the Economic Stimulus Act of 2008 — a \$158 billion stimulus package that gave individual taxpayers at least \$300 per person or \$600 for married joint filers. Those with children received more, as much as \$1,000. Businesses also received tax breaks.

But those incentives did nothing to avert the financial crisis that turned out to be the worst in America's modern history — since the Great Depression of 1929.

In March, news broke that the brokerage firm Bear Stearns had collapsed. J.P. Morgan Chase purchased it for \$2 per share — down from \$30 per share just days earlier. The sale caused panic on Wall Street and led to the tumbling of stock markets worldwide.

Financial institutions once considered invincible fell, one after the other. Lehman Brothers, which also had bet on subprime lending, filed for bankruptcy in September, citing \$639 billion in assets and \$619 billion in debt. The bankruptcy by Lehman, the fourth largest U.S. bank, made it the largest in history — surpassing those of Enron and WorldCom.

Following the Lehman Brothers bankruptcy, the Dow Jones dropped by 504 points — the worst decline in seven years. On the same day, Bank of America purchased Merrill Lynch.

Other financial institutions, including Freddie Mac, Fannie Mae, and AIG, also were on the brink of bankruptcy.

Housing prices fell by nearly 32 percent. Americans who had worked for decades lost their retirement funds. Many, in a sense of panic, chose to withdraw their savings instead of watching their funds entirely disappear.

Meanwhile, companies started cutting costs by laying off employees or freezing their hiring. As a result, unemployment rates started rising. By the end of the year, millions of Americans were unemployed, which only exacerbated the problem. Many homeowners defaulted on their mortgages, causing millions of them to lose their homes to foreclosures. Those who kept up their payments often found that they owed more than what they were now worth.

In the midst of it all, the U.S. government took measures to minimize the crisis. The U.S. Treasury took over the management of Freddie Mac and the Federal National Mortgage Association, and Congress enacted the Housing and Economic Recovery Act and the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP). Taxpayer dollars covered the costs of these programs, including \$700 billion alone for TARP, which were used to purchase mortgage-back securities from the troubled financial institutions.

The end of the recession seemed nowhere in sight, as the value of stocks continued to plunge. During the week of Oct. 6, the Dow suffered its largest weekly loss — 1,874 points.

The government continued to bail out companies, including Citigroup, and automobile companies General Motors and Chrysler in an effort to bring some stability to the economy.

The year closed out with the Federal Reserve dropping interest rates to 0 percent, the first time it had done so in American history.

Although the economic crisis dominated the news in 2008, other developments were underway that would shape the global landscape. Earlier in the year, Cuban President Fidel Castro ended his 49 years of reign by handing over power to his younger brother, Raul Castro.

And Americans made history by electing the nation's first African American president, Barack Obama. The Democratic senator from Chicago had defeated Sen. John McCain in the November 2008 election.

In his acceptance speech, Obama acknowledged the many challenges that faced America, including two wars and the worst financial crisis in a century.

"Even as we stand here tonight, we know there are brave Americans waking up in the deserts of Iraq and the mountains of Afghanistan to risk their lives for us," Obama told a crowd in Chicago. "There are mothers and fathers who will lie awake after the children fall asleep and wonder how they'll make the mortgage or pay their doctors' bills or save enough for their child's college education.

"There's new energy to harness, new jobs to be created, new schools to build, and threats to meet, alliances to repair," he added. "The road ahead will be long. Our climb will be steep. We may not get there in one year or even in one term. But, America, I have never been more hopeful than I am tonight that we will get there."

Other events in 2008

- Sept. 1, 2008 – American commanders formally return responsibility for keeping order in Anbar Province to the Iraqi Army and police.
- Sept. 7, 2008 – U.S. government takes control of the two largest mortgage financing companies in the country: Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.
- Sept. 13, 2008 – Hurricane Ike makes landfall on the Texas gulf coast of the United States, causing heavy damage to Galveston Island, Houston, and surrounding areas.
- Sept. 23, 2008 – U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announces it will provide \$36.7 million in grants to 35 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico to support homeless veterans. The grants assist community groups to create 1,526 beds for homeless veterans.
- Oct. 3, 2008 - President Bush signs the \$700 billion bailout bill for the U.S. financial system.
- Oct. 24, 2008 - "Bloody Friday" marks some of the worst declines in the world's stock exchanges experienced in history.
- Nov. 4, 2008 – Barack Obama becomes the first African American to be elected President of the United States.
- Nov. 14, 2008 – U.S. Army Gen. Ann E. Dunwoody is sworn in as the first four-star female general.
- Dec. 14, 2008 – President Bush makes his fourth and final trip to Iraq as U.S. President and is almost struck by two shoes thrown at him by Iraqi journalist Muntadhar al-Zaidi during a farewell conference in Baghdad.
- Jan. 15, 2009 – Chesley Sullenberger lands US Airways Flight 1549 on the Hudson River shortly after takeoff from LaGuardia Airport in New York City. All passengers and crew members survived in what becomes known as the "Miracle on the Hudson."
- Feb. 17, 2009 – President Obama signs a \$787 billion stimulus package into law. The package is designed to create 3.5 million jobs over a two-year period.
- March 12, 2009 – Bernard Madoff pleads guilty to a Ponzi scheme that defrauded his clients out of billions of dollars over a 20-year period.
- April 4, 2009 – NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) observes its 60th anniversary at its 21st Summit, co-hosted by France and Germany.
- April 30, 2009 – Chrysler Motors files for Chapter 11 bankruptcy.

- June 1, 2009 – General Motors files for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. It is the fourth largest United States bankruptcy in history.
- July 4, 2009 – The Statue of Liberty’s crown reopens to the public after eight years of closure due to security reasons following the World Trade Center attacks.
- Aug. 6, 2009 – U.S. Senate approves the nomination of Sonia Sotomayor to the U.S. Supreme Court, making her the first Hispanic Supreme Court justice and the third woman to serve on the court.
- Aug. 19, 2009 – A series of bombings in Baghdad kills 101 and injures 565 others.
- Aug. 25, 2009 – Sen. Edward “Ted” Kennedy, who served in the U.S. Senate for 46 years, dies of brain cancer at the age of 77.

2008-2009 - American Legion Auxiliary Administrative Year “H.O.P.E.: Honoring Our Promise Every Day”

“When the dust settles on the year of 2008-2009, my legacy I hope, will be one of hope. Hope for an even better tomorrow where the best is yet to come.” — Desireé Stoy, 88th National President of the American Legion Auxiliary

As the newly elected national president of the American Legion Auxiliary, Desireé Stoy had an immediate request of the members who volunteered through the organization. During her installation remarks during the 2008 ALA Convention, she asked them to think back to the moment that they first joined the organization, whether just a few years had passed since that time or many, many decades.

Stoy then asked each woman to reflect on why they joined the Auxiliary, and, in doing so, renew their commitment to the mission of the organization. She assured them that she would be doing the same throughout her administrative year.

In outlining her theme around one word, “HOPE,” Stoy asked ALA members to commit to four specific goals and objectives:

Goal 1 - Operation Hope: A grassroots campaign to target military families by addressing their needs, while at the same time not forgetting veterans in U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs facilities.

Goal 2 - Strategic Planning Phase II: Leveraging technology to improve operations and communication, developing unit and department operational standards and training; becoming a clearinghouse for information, programs, and services.

Goal 3 – Development: Continuing a financial commitment to honor the promise to support scholarship funds, the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, and the Auxiliary Emergency Fund.

Goal 4 – Finance: Continuing commitment to achieve transparency, accountability, explore new diversified income streams, and find partners who share our visions.

In other remarks, Stoy said, “When the dust settles on the year of 2008-2009, my legacy I hope, will be one of hope. Hope for an even better tomorrow where the best is yet to come.”

Stoy, a native of Bellville, Ohio, gained her eligibility for the Auxiliary through the military service of her late father Jack Miller, a Korean War veteran. As part of her volunteerism for the organization, Stoy served as chairman of the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Committee of the American Legion Auxiliary.

Other national officers elected at the 2008 National Convention:

- National Vice President – Rita Navarreté (Department of New Mexico)
- Central Division NVP – Virginia Kodl (Department of Wisconsin.)
- Eastern Division NVP – Mary Ann Ventulett (Department of Massachusetts)
- Northwestern Division NVP – Thelma Fueller (Department of North Dakota)
- Southern Division NVP – Nancy Jordan (Department of South Carolina)
- Western Division NVP – Josephine Keanu (Department of Hawaii)
- National Chaplain – Cherita Potter (Department of Oregon)
- National Historian – Marian “Pic” Webster (Department of Michigan)
- National Secretary – Pamela Gilley (Department of Indiana)
- National Treasurer – Marta Hedding (Department of Indiana)

Traveling Across America as ALA Ambassador

As part of her service to the American Legion Auxiliary, National President Desireé Stoy made a goal to meet face to face with veterans, their families, and other ALA members in communities in every state.

Stoy told a news reporter in Bangor, Maine, one of the many stops she made while traveling across the country, that she considered herself an ambassador — representing the Auxiliary as well as raising awareness about its role in supporting veterans and their families.

“As president and ambassador of this organization, I make it a point to travel to each state for an official visit,” said Stoy, who had just returned from a trip to Fairbanks, Alaska.

While in Maine, she met with officials at the Togus VA Medical Center, a nearly 150-year-old facility located in Augusta. She also was introduced to the Maine Troop Greeters at the Bangor International Airport, a nonprofit group that meets every troop flight when they land. “It’s such a wonderful thing that they do,” Stoy said.

She also led a special candlelight ceremony to initiate 38 new ALA members who had traveled from cities throughout Maine to meet with her. The four candles used in the gathering signified justice, freedom, democracy, and loyalty. The new members pledged to “uphold the constitution of the United States and foster 100 percent Americanism.”

In her parting remarks with the Maine ALA members, Stoy asked them to “honor our promise every day to support American children, veterans, and their families.”

Within the first several months of her term, Stoy also had joined American Legion National Commander David K. Rehbein in Washington, D.C., where he testified before Congress about the legislative agenda advocated by the organization.

She also traveled to other states, including Iowa, Idaho, New Jersey, and Oregon before the holidays. During those visits, she took the opportunity to see firsthand how members were serving veterans. And she also volunteered alongside them at VA hospitals, nursing homes, and homeless shelters.

For example, during a tour of the Portland VA Hospital, Stoy signed up to be an occasional volunteer. While there, she acquired six volunteer hours, including helping out during the open house for the Christmas Gift Shop.

She also joined other ALA members who traveled to Riverside, Calif., in October to help support more than 120 veterans who arrived to participate in the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. Some of the participants were veterans of recent operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In addition to showcasing their talents in the arts, including stage performances, visual arts, and creative writing, the veterans shared their experiences in using the arts to help them overcome disabilities and conditions, including PTSD. More than 3,000 veterans had competed in local competitions across the country to become one of the finalists of the national event.

The American Legion Auxiliary continued to co-sponsor the event, which had been called vital to veterans' recovery by numerous leaders, including Veterans Affairs Secretary James B. Peake.

"Creative expression is an important component of healthy living," said Peake, describing the NVCAF as an extension of VA's rehabilitative care. "This annual Festival shows that real healing goes well beyond our patients' physical needs. Creative arts therapy has a key role at VA in rehabilitation and recovery."

Stoy continued to travel across the country to meet ALA members and veterans, making stops in Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, and other states. She also attended several important meetings, including the Presidents & Secretaries Conference in Indianapolis, where members participated in effective leadership training and heard from a special speaker, Ruth Purcell Jones, about sharpening meeting facilitation skills.

As part of an update on Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW), an American Legion Family program, Stoy joined National Commander Rehbein and Sons of The American Legion National Commander Tommie Cisna as they gathered for an update on the progress of the program.

"We asked the Legion Family to donate \$50,000 so we could purchase comfort items by the holidays for our wounded heroes recovering at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, and the many other U.S. military hospitals around the globe," Rehbein said. "With Christmas three weeks away, this challenge was no small feat. The American Legion Family and friends responded in a big way. By Christmas, you raised more than \$80,000. By New Year's Day, \$100,000 had come in – double our goal.

I am proud of our American Legion Family, but the war goes on. More than \$115,000 has been raised for Operation Comfort Warriors."

Rehbein said the donations helped purchase items such as hooded sweatshirts and sweatpants, which are especially needed by amputees and other wounded heroes. They also were able to buy DVDs, puzzles, and portable electronics for wounded warriors facing long hospital stays. He also noted that the comfort items like these are not included in government budgets.

The funds also helped with the purchase of a biofeedback system that benefits troops with post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injuries, and other war-related injuries at the Madigan Army Hospital in Fort Lewis, Wash.

"As national commander, I frequently visit hospitalized troops," Rehbein said. "While some people enter these wards intending to lift the spirits of the patients, I find the opposite happening for me. They actually inspire me. It is not uncommon to hear troops express the desire to rejoin their units in combat, even after they've lost limbs. Their thoughts are not about their own disabilities but about the safety of their buddies, and whether or not they'll be able to accomplish their mission."

In other business following the 2008 ALA National Convention, officials discussed a new budget for the administrative year as well as technology improvements to help members communicate more effectively through national, department, and unit websites.

After Pamela Gilley resigned from her position as ALA national secretary, Past National Secretary Miriam Junge accepted serving as interim executive director. National Headquarters also announced the hiring of Robert Reeg as the interim director of the ALA's Washington, D.C. office.

During the Mid-Year National Executive Meeting, which was held in Washington D.C., from Feb. 28-March 1, 2019, members nominated and elected Mary "Dubbie" Buckler as ALA national secretary. They also discussed the organization's financial status, and approved a motion to establish an Audit Committee. Past National President Virginia Hobbs was confirmed as its first chairman.

Officials also talked about the need for \$4 dues increase, which would be presented as a resolution during the 2009 ALA Convention.

Building the Auxiliary to Secure its Future

Driven by their commitment to support veterans, Auxiliary members continued to visit and support veterans at VA facilities, nursing homes, and homeless shelters in their neighborhoods and joined efforts with other organizations with similar missions.

Many ALA members gathered in Washington, D.C., for the 28th annual Awareness Assembly in March 2009 to better understand the challenges facing veterans, and updates about America's national security. As part of their activities, they saw a screening of "Medal of Honor," a film that tells the personal stories behind the highest U.S. award for valor in combat.

Members also heard from Medal of Honor recipient Brian Thacker, a Vietnam War veteran, who served in the U.S. Army as a first lieutenant with the 92nd Artillery when his unit was attacked in 1971 in the Kon Tum Province.

During the assembly, they presented Public Spirit Awards to Michele Cuppy, president of Sew Much Comfort, and Morrill Worcester of Wreaths Across America. Sew Much Comfort is a group of volunteers with sewing talent across America making and designing articles of clothing to fit the wounded bodies of men and women veterans, including those with prosthetics. The organization's mission is to provide the clothing free of charge to injured servicemembers, making recovery more comfortable both physically and emotionally. Although the clothing appears to be normal, it is designed to allow for easy access to an injury or wound.

Wreaths Across America is a family-owned tree farm that donates pine wreaths with big red bows to be placed at the gravesites in Arlington National Cemetery and other national cemeteries. It is an idea grown from seeing an overage of 5,000+ fresh wreaths go to waste as the winter season comes to an end. In 2008, the wreath-laying ceremonies had grown to include over 350 locations nationwide and 100,000 wreaths placed. Founder Morrill Worcester said, "... especially to those who made the ultimate sacrifice, we owe unwavering support and a profound debt of gratitude for preserving the way of life we all enjoy here in the United States."

In other activities throughout the year, the ALA formed a collaboration with MyVetwork, an online social networking community that brings together veterans, their families, and their supporters. Founded by John R. Campbell, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran of Vietnam, the network was developed to help military members and their families connect with each other and find the services and resources they need in one place.

Campbell's wife, Susan W. Bird, described it as the first online social network designed specifically to help the military and their families shape their own community. "For the Auxiliary, it's a great communication tool. The Auxiliary has some impressive projects that deserve more attention."

As part of its international profile and influence, the Auxiliary also was invited to participate in national service initiatives. The Corporation for National and Community Service invited the ALA to be a partner in the implementation of the recently enacted Edward Kennedy Serve America Act and the development of a 5-year strategic plan.

In fall 2008, 20 Volunteers In Service To America were assigned to the ALA Call to Service Corps. VISTA members placed at the National Headquarters developed training, technical assistance, tools, and resources for use by Auxiliary departments and units for volunteer recruitment, retention, engagement, management, and program development. The ALA Call to Service Corps was one of only five national, multi-site projects slated to receive American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds through the AmeriCorps VISTA program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), a federal agency responsible for promoting national and community service throughout the country. The remaining volunteers worked at field sites to alleviate poverty among veterans and their families.

The organization was invited to testify at the House Veterans Affairs about the topic "The Growing Needs of Women Veterans: Is the VA Ready?" Past National President Linda Boone represented the ALA at the May 2009 meeting.

Throughout her administrative year, Stoy continued to make important trips in her ambassador role to destinations throughout the United States and the world. She traveled to Asia, Australia, and Europe, where she met with U.S. and international officials, and visited U.S. troops and veterans, including those recovering in local hospitals.

In other ALA developments, members started preparing for the 2009 Auxiliary National Convention, which was scheduled for August in Louisville, Ky. During the Pre-Convention NEC Meeting, officials heard that 94 unit charters had been cancelled since March 2009 and that donations were down by 20 percent — a reflection of the economic challenges the nation was facing. In all, the Auxiliary reported 9,672 active ALA charters — down from 9,766 active chapters earlier in the year.

Once again, ALA members traveled from their hometowns to encourage each other, attend educational sessions, and provide updates about the volunteer work they had accomplished throughout the administrative year. Workshop training covered topics on budgeting and spending in tough economic times, strategic planning, understanding resolutions and bylaws, and membership growth.

At the Pre-convention NEC meeting, a resolution was passed to allow the national organization to take action in making the Department of Philippines a foreign unit effective with the 2010-2011 administrative year. Issues cited were failure to report and send in dues to National Headquarters.

ALA members also welcomed various dignitaries who addressed their assembly, including U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano, who paid them an unexpected visit after speaking at the 2009 National Convention.

"The security of the United States is a shared responsibility Focus on making sure you know how to take care of yourselves, your families, so that the government can focus on those who have special needs and that we need to get to first."

Napolitano, a 1974 ALA Girls State participant, having been elected the 1974 lieutenant governor of ALA New Mexico Girls State, commended ALA members for their work in encouraging young women to become leaders. She made it clear that her experience got her started "thinking in a new direction, which really helped get me to

where I am today," she said. Napolitano expressed her hope that the Auxiliary keeps this important program going. "These young girls out there need to know that the future is theirs, and you can help them get started too."

Members also heard from Miss America 2009 Katie Stam, who ran on a platform of "Passion for Service: Promoting Community Service and Involvement." Stam, who became an Auxiliary member during Memorial Day events, thanked the Auxiliary for its commitment to serving veterans and their families. "Nearly 400,000 veterans experience homelessness over the course of a year, and another half million veterans are at risk of homelessness, because rent consumes more than half their income," said. She continued by thanking the Auxiliary for becoming a part of the Call to Service Corps.

Members, upon ALA National President Stoy's recommendation, presented their ALA Woman of the Year Award to Lori Stevens, a certified dog trainer and founder of Patriot PAWS. The organization, which began in February 2005 at the request of disabled veterans from the Dallas VA Hospital trains and provides service dogs at no cost to disabled American veterans and others with mobile disabilities and post-traumatic stress disorder.

In a more sobering address to the Auxiliary, Mike Alerding, managing partner of Alerding & Company, LLC, said a recent audit he performed for the organization revealed that they needed to make changes immediately. If not, he said, the organization may not be around to celebrate its 100th anniversary. Because of the Enron scandal in 2001, the Internal Revenue Service was requiring "that not-for-profit organizations be accountable, be transparent, and be governed effectively." Alerding informed convention attendees that the Senate Finance Committee in Washington, D.C., had started hearings because it was "believed that one-third of the non-for-profit organizations in this country were abusive," and that they were getting rid of them. These organization were abusing their privilege to be tax exempt, as they were not serving a charitable purpose, the committee said.

Alerding told members the new concepts ordered by the IRS applied to every ALA unit and department. He made several recommendations, including that the NEC approve a 990 Review Committee, and that they elect a board of directors from its constituency to govern the ALA, with a rotation of directors. He further recommended an Audit Committee to report directly to the board and the NEC. Its job would be to make sure that risks to the organization are mitigated.

ALA National Secretary Dubbie Buckler also presented a financial update as part of her platform remarks. She said the Auxiliary was facing a revenue shortfall of nearly 15 percent but was trying to do more with less to maintain its commitment to veterans. A result of members' mission outreach during the administrative year: They were able to contribute more than \$6 million to benefit veterans and donated nearly 2 million in volunteer hours. They also awarded \$1 million in scholarships to students and \$1 million to Operation Military kids.

Buckler also announced that The American Legion and Black Horse Productions had partnered in the production of the documentary video "The History of The American Legion." The film highlighted the entire American Legion Family.

In other developments, a resolution submitted by the national president and the Past National Presidents Club, was approved to bestow ALA member Miriam Junge with the title "Honorary Past National President," with all privileges and rights pertaining to the office. Junge had been on track to become national president, but had stepped in to serve the organization as national secretary after the retirement of Doris Anderson. Junge held the role for 15 years and then re-assumed it until a new national secretary was hired in 2008. As part of the recognition, Junge received a Past National President's pin and ribbon, as well as the colors.

"Never in a million years did I ever, ever, ever think anything like this would ever, ever happen, and I am so grateful," Junge said.

She recalled when she and her siblings were young, marching with their father in parades. She accompanied him to all American Legion and Auxiliary activities. Junge thanked the Department of Ohio for understanding when she made the decision to become national secretary instead of staying on the track to become national president. "I thank you from the bottom of my heart," she said.

Other resolutions and amendments approved at National Convention included adding the Audit Committee as an administrative committee.

In Memory

As part of a memorial, Auxiliary members honored the service of Past National President Ione Kubby who served the organization in that role from 1974-1975, the first national president from the Department of Texas. Her theme was "Achieve the Impossible." The Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge was the benefactor of her president's project – an outdoor theatre commemorating the nation's bicentennial, with the stage surrounded by four pillars and a Proscenium Arch, bearing a plaque from the American Legion Auxiliary with her name on it. Kubby, who was a life member of ALA El Paso Unit 36, passed on Nov. 25, 2008. She was eligible through her husband, Maurice Kubby, who served during the Great War.

Kubby was recognized for her contributions by the *El Paso Herald Post*, which named her one of El Paso's outstanding women. The Texas House of Representatives also recognized her as an Outstanding Woman of Texas in 1962. She worked at the Mt. Bell Telephone Company for 27 years as a supervisor in the Accounting Department. She was preceded in death by her husband, and survived by two daughters, Norma J. Wager and Nancye K. Britner.

Making an Impact

Through ALA programs in 2008-2009, members made a significant impact in their communities:

Americanism - ALA members contributed nearly \$1.4 million and donated 865,363 volunteer hours to Americanism programs. They also held fundraisers to rebuild a Healing Field that was destroyed by a tornado. In other Americanism efforts, 31 ALA departments sent students to the Americanism Youth Conference, along with Operation Military Kids, for a total of 67 students. — Chairman Coral May Grout

Auxiliary Emergency Fund - Members donated an additional \$181,000 to the Auxiliary Emergency Fund, and awarded 232 grants totaling nearly \$219,000 to ALA members facing financial troubles. — Chairman Martha Corriher

Cavalcade of Memories - The ALA Department of Ohio donated \$2,000 in honor of National President Stoy to purchase the preservation of and new display case for Past National President Edith Hobart's gown, which had been on display in the national Cavalcade of Memories museum at National Headquarters. — Chairman Katherine Morris

Children & Youth - ALA members presented 32 Youth Hero Awards and 61 Good Deed Awards to outstanding youth in their communities. They also donated more than \$1 million worth of goods to children and contributed \$4 million to Children & Youth programs to serve nearly 600,000 children. — Chairman Kris Nelson

Community Service - Members donated more than \$1.2 million to provide community support for troops, including as part of "Make a Difference Day." They served veterans through nursing homes, homeless shelters, food banks, and pantries — Chairman Sharon Conatser

Education - ALA members continued to meet the challenge of helping students by helping to fund their postsecondary higher education goals. As a result, 1,750 students received more than \$1.2 million scholarships. They also volunteered more than 84,000 hours to nearly 5,000 schools across the country. — Chairman Janet Jefford

Finance - In spite of significant financial losses throughout the administrative year, the Auxiliary was able to experience some recovery. Members focused on strategic planning, IRS Form 990 compliance, income diversity, and developing relationships with new committees. — Chairman Linda Boone

ALA Girls State - More than 9,800 girls from 4,700 schools participated in ALA Girls State programs across the country. Of those, 98 were selected to participate as senators of ALA Girls Nation near Washington, D.C. — Chairman Mary Davis

Junior Activities - ALA members, including seniors and Juniors, contributed more than 100,000 volunteer hours as part of Junior Activities for the administrative year. They also reported that 285 Juniors participated in a special Leadership Course. Juniors earned about 2,100 patches, including two new patches: the Education Patch and the National Security Patch. — Chairman Kathy Dungan

Leadership - Nearly 1,200 ALA members completed the Leadership Course. Also, the organization offered officer training. — Chairman Diane Duscheck

Legislative - ALA members joined other members of The American Legion Family in advocating for legislation related to educational opportunities for military children, PTSD, and traumatic brain injuries, military sexual trauma, absentee voting for servicemembers and their families, and the Homes for Heroes Act. — Chairman Denise Delaney-Wrolen

Liaison to the Child Welfare Foundation – Just one simple message in the report to American Legion Auxiliary members: Go home and get your members to donate. — Chairman Pearl Behrend

Membership - Recognizing that the success of membership depends upon each person, ALA departments were given the opportunity to take part in deciding their own department goals. Thirty-one departments chartered 60 new ALA units. — Chairman Rene Reese

National Security - Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) was introduced to several ALA Girls State programs. — Chairman Krisann Owens

Past Presidents Parley - PNPs honored four women veterans who also served as ALA members: U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Lisa Woods, Department of Ga.; Hollie Boley Rinachler, U.S. Navy, Department of Iowa; U.S. Navy Air Force Staff Sgt. Kristine LaGuardia, Department of Arizona; and National Guard Master Sgt. Roberta Moline-Lueck. — Chairman Sherry McLaughlin

Poppy Committee - Members generated more than \$1.7 million in contributions from poppy distributions. — Chairman Vickie Koutz

VA&R - More than 78,000 volunteers donated nearly 2 million hours in service and \$6 million in contributions to VA programs. As a result, more than 930,000 veterans were served. At the beginning of the administrative year, committee members had set a goal to increased volunteerism in VA facilities by 20 percent or by 834 new volunteers. At the end of the year, they had added 1,151 volunteers — 317 over the original goal. — Chairman Carlene Ashworth

2009: Economy Continues a Downward Spiral

Americans, battered by a series of bad economic challenges in 2008, didn't find much relief as a new year dawned, signaling the start of 2009. Experts were increasingly describing the downturn as the worst economic disaster since the Great Depression.

In the United States, homeowners were dismayed by plummeting property values. For the first time, many of them experienced what it meant for homes to be upside down in value; they owed a significant amount more than the depreciated value of their homes. Meanwhile, the stock market continued to plummet, with nearly \$8 trillion in value completely wiped out between late 2007 and 2009.

Unemployment rates also continued to climb, and retirement accounts took a beating, leading to further anxieties.

The impact was not just felt in the United States; stock markets plunged around the world. In efforts to avoid another repeat of the disastrous Great Depression, governments, including in the United States, intervened by bailing out major companies. By the end of the year, markets were starting to reveal slow signs of recovery.

The world also was united by other developments that captured global attention. In the area of space travel, NASA launched a space shuttle mission so that a seven-person crew could finalize repairs on the Hubble Telescope, the last trip as part of that mission.

Meanwhile, people became increasingly wary as the deadly "swine flu" infected millions of people around the world, hospitalizing an alarming number of youth and adults. The World Health Organization soon declared that the swine flu, the H1N1 influenza strain, had become a global pandemic.

And people around the world were glued to news reports about an attempted hijacking of the Maersk Alabama Cargo Ship in the Indian Ocean near Somalia. The incident, which happened in April, led to a standoff between the pirates holding Captain Richard Phillips on a lifeboat and the USS Bainbridge and the USS Halyburton. Days later, U.S. Navy SEAL marksmen rescued Phillips after killing several hostage takers.

It was in this climate of unease and uncertainty that many Americans took hope in the words of their newly elected U.S. President, Barack Obama, after he was sworn into office Jan. 20 in Washington, D.C.

Obama, in an address to about 1.8 million who gathered on Washington, D.C.'s National Mall in sub-zero temperatures, said it was time for a "new era of responsibility."

"That we are in the midst of crisis is now well understood," said Obama. "Our nation is at war against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred. Our economy is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some, but also our collective failure to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new age. Homes have been lost, jobs shed, businesses shuttered. Our health care is too costly; our schools fail too many — and each day brings further evidence that the ways we use energy strengthen our adversaries and threaten our planet.

"Today I say to you that the challenges we face are real. They are serious, and they are many. They will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this, America: They will be met," Obama said. "... And so, to all the other peoples and governments who are watching today, from the grandest capitals to the small village where my father was born, know that America is a friend of each nation, and every man, woman, and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity. And we are ready to lead once more."

Other events in 2009

- Aug. 31, 2009 – President Obama declares an end to combat operations in Iraq.
- October 2009 – The U.S. unemployment rate reaches 10 percent.
- Oct. 1, 2009 – President Obama signs an executive order banning federal workers from texting while driving.
- Nov. 5, 2009 – U.S. Army Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan kills 13 and wounds 43 at Fort Hood, Texas, in the largest mass shooting ever at a U.S. military installation.
- Dec. 1 - President Obama announces that the U.S. military will be sending an additional 30,000 troops to Afghanistan, which will bring the total number of American troops in Afghanistan to 100,000.
- Dec. 8 - Bombings in Baghdad kill 127 and injure 448.
- Jan. 4, 2010 – The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention remove HIV from its list of communicable diseases of public health significance.
- Feb. 18, 2010 – President Barack Obama issues Executive Order 13531, establishing the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform.
- Feb. 23, 2010 – The U.S. Navy officially announces it will end its ban of women in submarines.
- March 23, 2010 – President Obama signs the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act into law. Several states sue the federal government over it.
- Apr. 20, 2010 – The Deepwater Horizon drilling rig explodes, killing 11 and causing the rig to sink, resulting in a massive oil discharge into the Gulf of Mexico and an environmental disaster.
- Apr. 23, 2010 – Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer signs the Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act, which is the broadest and strictest anti-illegal immigration measure in decades.
- May 1, 2010 – A car bomb fails to go off in Times Square, New York City.
- Aug. 19, 2010 – Operation Iraqi Freedom ends, with the last of the United States brigade combat teams crossing the border to Kuwait.
- Aug. 31, 2010 – U.S. President Obama declares an end to combat operations in Iraq.

2009-2010 - American Legion Auxiliary Administrative Year

A New ALA President in Ruby Red Shoes

“Looking back at our past struggles and successes can light the path of the future for the American Legion Auxiliary.” — Rita Navarreté, 89th National President of the American Legion Auxiliary

Just as Barack Obama made history as the first African American President of the United States, Rita Navarreté was making history as the first Hispanic woman elected to the highest volunteer office of the American Legion Auxiliary in 2009.

And she wore sparkling ruby red slippers to mark the occasion. “You know, I believe I can fly today, and I’ve got Dorothy’s adult shoes to make all those wishes come true,” Navarreté said with a laugh.

In her remarks to the ALA members gathered to celebrate the organization’s 90th anniversary and their new president, Navarreté encouraged them to look back as a way of looking forward. Using the theme “Reconnecting with Our Heritage to Strengthen Our Future,” Navarreté asked members to research and collect all the history they could find about the women who went before them as part of their ALA membership at the unit, Department and national levels.

“Stories are powerful tools for connecting and inspiring. I want us to showcase our heritage and history,” said Navarreté, as she called on historians to capture the many stories behind the American Legion Auxiliary. “We need to look back and share those stories in our communities and among each other.”

In describing the focus on history, Navarreté talked about her early days as an ALA member and the inspiration she gained from her mother, also an ALA member. “Yes, the strength beneath my wings started at an early age. My mother, my mentor, my role model influenced who I am today. The young girl who sat with her mom at unit meetings listening and not moving unless told to – how I remember those days even though many, many years ago,” she said. “At a young age, I knew, and I believed I could be that person leading the group. I knew my love for God and country was real, and I wanted to work and serve for those reasons.

“This year, the American Legion Auxiliary celebrates its 90th anniversary, and you can make your mark to be a part of it. This is a critical time to reconnect with our heritage to strengthen our future with our members, veterans, and communities in our support for veterans in supporting this 90-year milestone,” Navarreté said.

“The early years of the American Legion Auxiliary were occupied with developing a program to meet the urgent needs of World War I veterans, their families, widows, and orphans of the dead,” she noted. “Members supported The American Legion in its fight to secure adjusted compensation of World War I veterans. Caring and support for hospitalized and disabled veterans became a top priority along with their rehabilitation. The years went by, and the mission of the organization remained constant in serving and caring for all veterans.”

However, Navarreté said, the Auxiliary is faced with the real possibility that those ideals could be compromised without intervention.

“Today, we face a dilemma: Our organization is not growing at a healthy pace,” Navarreté stressed. “I want to be a part of a team that will move forward with new ideas and ways to retain our current members and reach out to individuals in our communities who are eligible and who want to join. You see, I believe promoting our programs and activities in our communities will bring growth to the organization. Singing to the choir is no longer an effective tool. We each have a responsibility to tell our stories and let people know who we are, what we do, and how we can make a difference in our communities.

“Stories and connecting with one another go hand in hand,” Navarreté said. “Looking back at our past struggles and successes can light the path of the future for the American Legion Auxiliary.”

Navarreté gained her eligibility to the organization as the wife of Tony Navarreté, a U.S. Army veteran of the Vietnam War era. Tony and the couple’s sons, Joseph and Steven, joined her as part of her installation ceremony.

As part of her service with the ALA, Navarreté regularly volunteered at the Raymond G. Murphy Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Albuquerque, N.M., before being elected by her peers as their national president at the close of the organization’s 89th National Convention of the American Legion Auxiliary in Louisville, Ky.

A lifetime member of Otero-Garcia-Navarreté Unit 72 in New Mexico, Navarreté had served in numerous volunteer roles for the Auxiliary at local, state, and national levels, including ALA national division vice president representing western states, before assuming the organization’s highest volunteer leadership role. She also was national chairman of several committees: Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, Children & Youth, Community Service, and Membership. She engaged with the Auxiliary as a participant in ALA New Mexico Girls State.

Navarreté had retired in 2003 as administrative officer under the Department of Agriculture, Rural Development Agency, completing 37 years as a federal public servant.

Her experiences as an ALA member inspired her membership theme, “Membership Begins With Me.” During her installation address, Navarreté encouraged ALA members to embrace the impact they could make as individuals. With each person taking ownership for helping to increase membership, Navarreté said, the organization could make significant strides in reaching their goal to exceed 1 million members.

She also inspired members through several other initiatives to strengthen the largest women's organization dedicated to veteran support. The new ALA national president asked members to "Believe" in the possibilities the future could hold by continuing the mission established by their founders, and reconnecting with other ALA members, veterans, and their communities.

In addition to activities to celebrate the Auxiliary's 90th anniversary, Navarreté announced at the Post-Convention National Executive Meeting her plans to enhance department training, conducting effective meetings, developing listening skills, and building dynamic teams to get results.

During the annual convention in 2009, members also addressed the financial challenges that faced the organization — a direct consequence of the economic woes being experienced throughout the United States and around the world. As a result, as Finance Committee Chairman Linda Boone reported, the Auxiliary set a goal to lower expenses by 8 to 10 percent, which would require giving up some previous ALA traditions. "It's one of those things where, when times are tight, you have to cut out some things and then when times get a little bit better, you can add some things back in or you cut someplace else and add something back in."

Other national officers elected at the 2009 National Convention:

- National Vice President – Carlene Ashworth (Department of Texas)
- Central Division NVP – Norma Swanson (Department of Kansas)
- Eastern Division NVP – Barbara Golde (Department of Rhode Island)
- Northwestern Division NVP – Joyce Babcock (Department of Montana)
- Southern Division NVP – Lynda Horton-Turk (Department of Texas)
- Western Division NVP – Peggy Brown (Department of New Mexico)
- National Chaplain – Beverly Wolff (Department of North Dakota)
- National Historian – Joyce Arent (Department of Arizona)
- National Secretary – Mary "Dubbie" Buckler (Department of Indiana)
- National Treasurer – Marta Hedding (Department of Indiana)

New Partnerships, New Direction

While inspired Auxiliary members continued the work of those who came before them, they also took on new partnerships that allowed them to expand their reach. One of those programs, AmeriCorps VISTA, offered the organization the rare opportunity to be a part of a national service program designed to alleviate poverty. The program was conceived by former President John F. Kennedy.

ALA's National Secretary Mary "Dubbie" Buckler said the primary benefits of the new partnership with VISTA were twofold. It would allow the organization more opportunities to serve veterans in need while providing them the capacity to build membership.

As part of the partnership, the Auxiliary also was given the opportunity to receive a grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service, said Buckler, noting that it is a separate contract in her remarks to members at the convention.

The grant, if approved, would award the Auxiliary 20 VISTA members. Training costs and living expenses for the VISTA members working on behalf of the Auxiliary would be covered by the federal government.

"It is tantamount to the Peace Corps, except it is a domestic program. The VISTA members will make a one-year commitment to the organization," Buckler said. "That equates to \$500,000 in human resources being received by the American Legion Auxiliary. This is indeed a significant incentive, and we are very, very fortunate that we have been selected to be the veterans service organization of choice."

As part of another significant partnership the Auxiliary had started several years earlier, ALA members joined their National President Navarreté at the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival in San Antonio, Texas.

Once again, ALA members rolled up their sleeves and got to work, helping about 140 veteran winners set up their artwork for displays and prepare for gala performances. They also joined other volunteers in hosting workshops and sessions for the veterans who were selected as winners from nearly 3,500 participants of a year-long fine arts competition.

VA medical facilities incorporate creative arts into their recreation therapy programs. The National Veterans Creative Arts Festival recognizes the progress and recovery made through art therapy, and increases the visibility of veterans' creative achievements.

"It is truly an honor for the American Legion Auxiliary to support the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival," Navarreté said of the organization's partnership. "This phenomenal event affords our veterans a unique outlet for their creative expression and is incredibly inspiring for everyone who is privileged to attend.

"I am amazed by the breathtaking artwork these veterans create," she added. "The true beauty of this event is witnessing the ability of our veterans who have experienced so much and yet still create such objects and expressions of beauty."

As part of the 2009-2010 administrative year, the Auxiliary also announced another partnership to support veterans. By supporting Ride 2 Recovery (R2R), Auxiliary members helped the disabled veterans participate in fundraising rides across the country. They also helped raise funds needed for Spinning® Recovery Labs and outdoor cycling programs at Military and VA locations around the United States. These cycling programs were proven to help in the rehabilitation of injured veterans.

Navarreté said she was incredibly inspired by the wounded warriors participating in R2R, including U.S. Army Sgt. Nathan Hunt, a double amputee, who cycled for more than 350 miles as part of R2R.

As the winter holidays approached, Auxiliary members made every effort to ensure that veterans knew they were not forgotten. They joined The American Legion Family in renewing their commitment to Operation Comfort Warriors. Through this fundraising effort, members were able to purchase comfort items for troops recovering in U.S. military hospitals and warrior transition units around the world.

"The government does a good job of providing the necessities," said American Legion National Commander Clarence E. Hill. "Through Operation Comfort Warriors, we have been able to provide items that usually don't appear in the budget, such as sweatsuits, iPods, DVDs, calling cards, and other comfort items. I am grateful that American Legion Auxiliary National President Rita Navarreté and Sons of The American Legion National Commander Mark Arneson have given their complete support to this effort."

Hill, who had asked members to contribute a total of \$100,000 for the Operation Comfort Warriors project, also noted that all of the funds raised would go to veterans. "Some people think that expecting \$100,000 during an

economic recession is too lofty a goal. I don't," Hill said. "Americans are generous, and what better way is there to show your holiday spirit than to remember those who have served and are still serving?"

Envisioning the Auxiliary of Tomorrow

As ALA members celebrated another New Year at the start of 2010, they also quickly engaged in strategic planning focused on preserving the future of their organization. Numerous ALA leaders gathered Jan. 6 for a leadership retreat in Indianapolis. One of the most important agenda items involved the questions, "What will ALA look like in five years?" "In 10 years?" Members weighed in on numerous concerns, including the impact of technology, maintaining the ALA mission, and inclusiveness.

Many of those topics were further discussed at the Mid-Year National Executive Meeting and Awareness Assembly, both held in Washington, D.C., the following February and March.

Members at the NEC meeting heard from Mike Alerding of Alerding & Company, who talked about the responsibilities of the NEC, including following guidelines on financial statements, and monitoring membership income and expenses. He noted that contributions from membership dues had been dropping since 2005, and that 89 cents of every dollar ALA collects from dues, contributions, and investment income goes to the people served by the organization.

To offset declining dues and contributions, the leaders discussed proposing a \$5 national dues increase, plus a raise of 50 cents every three years.

In other developments, the organization added a "Gateway to Services" feature on the national website, allowing veterans and military servicemembers to easily find the help the information they need for numerous services, from scholarships for military spouses to lawn care. Auxiliary members, a VISTA volunteer, and National Headquarters staff worked together to make this happen.

During the Awareness Assembly, members gathered for 90th anniversary recognitions at the Renaissance Hotel, where they presented the Public Spirit Award to Ride 2 Recovery. They also were entertained as part of a special dance performance by Maléné Asi Bailey, a U.S. Air Force veteran and a 2009 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival participant.

Bailey, who had performed a selection called "Free" as part of her competition, said, "Free is how I feel when I dance, and I want to share my story of triumph over homelessness and beginning anew."

Members also heard from guest speaker Tammy Duckworth, Assistant Secretary of the VA and a U.S. Army veteran who lost both legs in 2004 after enemy fire took down the Blackhawk helicopter she was piloting during the Iraq War.

Other sessions and speeches during the Awareness Assembly included topics ranging from national security to current veteran affairs, veteran homelessness, and the future of the Auxiliary.

Members continued those discussions at the National Chairmen's Meeting and the ALA Long-Range Strategic Planning Committee, both held in Indianapolis during April. They worked on ways to successfully implement the strategic plan of the ALA, including communicating the goals and objectives at the unit and department levels. The strategic plan was designed to help address imminent problems within the organization, including declining membership.

Summer came and so did the new membership database, the American Legion Auxiliary Management Information System, known as ALAMIS, with the launching of the first phase. National Headquarters staff, along with members who were part of the technology team, were quite excited at the possibilities ALAMIS would

mean for staff, departments, and units. It would organize 1.8 million member records and 18 million activity records, all requiring a large amount of storage space and processing power. Because of its “real time” capability and being entirely web based, department and authorized unit users could enter information into the database, making it readily available to others to see. Because of the system’s capabilities, the future was looking quite bright in the area of membership records.

As part of their focus on developing the future of the Auxiliary, members also joined National President Navarreté in supporting attendees of the 64th ALA Girls Nation in Washington, D.C., in July. They heard from several guest speakers, including Holocaust survivor Nesse Godin, and Mary McNaught-Yonkman, chief of staff at Civic Enterprises, a public policy firm in Washington, D.C., the wife of a Navy aviator, and a former ALA Girls Nation senator from Indiana.

Attendees toured the White House, met President Obama, paid respects to those buried at Arlington National Cemetery, and participated in numerous activities to better understand the legislative process.

One of the ALA Girls Nation senators, Rose C. Porter of Delaware, expressed the impact that the experience had made.

“If someone had told me that this summer I was going to meet the president, make over 100 new best friends I truly love, learn new ideas and values that some of these girls hold so dear to them, and have doors of opportunity open up as wide as they did this past week, I would not believe a word,” Porter said.

“Throughout my experience here at [ALA] Girls Nation, I have learned something so life changing to me and hopefully to others. I learned that if you surround yourself by greatness, it will rub off onto you and you will grow into a greater person,” she added. “I learned that an African American girl all the way from Delaware could become best friends with a southern blonde from Florida in a matter of days. I learned how to truly respect the soldiers working hard each day to protect my nation. I learned about how many people work tirelessly behind the scenes to provide citizens like myself the little things.”

Rose also thanked the ALA staff and ALA President Navarreté for her 64 years of service with the organization.

The week was topped off with commencement and the Circle of Light service of songs and inspirational readings. The graduation ceremony featured Pentagon Foundation Chief Operating Officer Kate Kohler, a U.S. Army veteran and ALA Girls Nation alumna.

ALA members gathered in Milwaukee for the 2010 National Convention to celebrate “90 Years of Service Not Self.” The annual gathering featured a special video presentation that recounted events throughout the Auxiliary’s history.

Breakout sessions for the event covered topics about mission outreach, member engagement, governance, training, and acknowledging past and future leaders.

As part of her final presentations as ALA National President, Navarreté announced that contributions for NVCAF had exceeded \$116,000 as of July 30 and the ALA expected another \$10,000. She also shared that ALA was invited to submit an application to continue the Call to Service AmeriCorps VISTA Project. As part of their initial experience with the program, 19 volunteers worked with the ALA. Of those, six were veterans, 12 relatives of veterans or servicemembers, and six were members of The American Legion Family. They served in Arkansas, California, Florida, Michigan, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oregon, and Wisconsin, and their accomplishments were many. Funds were raised to purchase vans in which to transport veterans in need from rural parts of Arkansas to VA medical centers. There were blood drives, hygiene kits assembled for homeless veterans and homeless youth, as well as collaborations with domestic violence service providers to develop support for military families experiencing intimate partner violence. A community resource guide was prepared to direct military servicemembers, veterans, and their families to public and private sources of assistance. Warrior

Assistance Funds were developed to provide cash assistance to military families, linked soldiers to local Auxiliary units and posts to assist them in their transition within their communities, and implemented statewide series of veteran and family member job fairs. The impact was felt nationwide.

Members heard from several guest speakers at National Convention, including U.S. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, who reminded the audience that the previous week was the 90th anniversary of women attaining the right to vote in this country. “You all stand on strong shoulders, and others will stand on yours.” She also spoke about bipartisan legislative efforts on behalf of veterans and her hope for the nation’s unemployment problems. With the new 9/11 GI Bill of Rights, education for veterans is transferable to other family members should the veteran not take advantage of it. Under the former GI Bill, if the soldier died in combat, the education benefit went away. Now there is education counseling, mental health services, respite care to families of veterans, and enhanced health services for 1.8 million women veterans, including care for newborns, a first in this nation’s history.

“You can never make up for lost birthdays, anniversaries, events in the lives of children, but we can do what we can to make life easier for them, and that means when they come home that their parent will have a job.”

American Legion National Commander Clarence Hill gave an update to ALA members about the overall growth of the Legion – an increase of 54,000 members over the previous year. Bob Caudell, executive director of the Child Welfare Foundation board brought tidings, and so did Elizabeth Mackey, director, National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. Mackey had earlier asked VA staff who assist veterans entering the Creative Arts competition for feedback on the involvement and support to their local program by the Auxiliary. The responses were very positive. “Your support has a widespread and direct positive influence on veterans who truly need your involvement and who cannot always see out your help on their own for reasons beyond their control.”

ALA National President Navarreté presented the organization’s Woman of the Year Award to the Honorable Tammy L. Duckworth. An Iraq War veteran and Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Duckworth had followed in the footsteps of her father, U.S. Army veteran Franklin Duckworth, who served in World War II.

In other updates, ALA members responded to Navarreté’s call to research the histories of their units and departments. ALA National Historian Joyce Arent noted that 761 ALA history reports and 43 ALA Junior history reports had been submitted for competition on all levels. Also, 426 ALA senior members and 96 ALA Junior members participated in the Veterans History Project.

As Navarreté had said during her tenure, “The rich history and traditions of the American Legion Auxiliary will continue to be the foundation that will not only support our mission but will enrich the quality of lives of those that we serve.”

Making an Impact

Through ALA programs in 2009-2010, members made a significant impact in their communities:

Americanism — Fifty-five students attended the Americanism Youth Conference, and more than 14,000 essays were submitted for the ALA Americanism Essay Contest. Also, 156 entries were submitted for the Girl Scout Achievement Award. Members volunteered 234,945 hours and spent \$758,548 for Americanism programs. — Chairman Krisann Owens

Auxiliary Emergency Fund — Members recognized the 40th anniversary of the AEF by providing 140 grants totaling \$140,511. They also donated \$190,858 to the fund during the administrative year. — Chairman Kathy Dungan

Children & Youth — Members generated \$3,521,952 to assist 455,112 children and youth through various programs. — Chairman Peggy Thomas

Community Service — The primary objective for the year was to reach out and support veterans, active military, and their families. Programs involved welcoming troops home, helping military families find jobs, housing, and counseling, and supporting veterans at VA hospitals. — Chairman Denise Delaney-Wrolen

Constitution & Bylaws — Members developed a Constitution & Bylaws PowerPoint presentation that was made accessible to ALA departments and units — Chairman Coral May Grout

Education — Members volunteered more than 200,000 hours to classroom reading programs for both children and adults. They also promoted patriotism through Veterans in the Classroom programs. ALA units also donated nearly \$110,000 worth of merchandise to classrooms for supplies. — Chairman Mary Davis

Finance — As a result of the economic crisis that started in 2008, ALA's savings were depleted by several million dollars. The organization already had experienced a 16-year decline in revenue from dues. As a result, the organization counteracted the loss by decreasing expenses by 21 percent in 2009 and by 9 percent in 2010. — Chairman Linda Boone

ALA Girls State — More 20,000 young women participated in ALA Girls State, and 98 young women attended ALA Girls Nation. During the ALA Girls Nation program, attendees met with President Obama. Since it was implemented, more than 1.2 million women had participated in ALA Girls State, and 6,000 attended ALA Girls Nation. — Chairman Janet Jefford

Junior Activities — ALA welcomed 1,967 new Junior members and distributed 1,536 patches. During the ALA National Junior Meeting, members learned they had an opportunity to earn a Membership patch or a National President Scholarship patch. — Chairman Martha Corriher

Leadership — Members focused on officer training and program education as part of leadership initiatives. — Chairman Sharon Conatser

Legislative — As part of The American Legion's legislative agenda, members advocated for the Wounded Warrior Act, women veterans issues, processing VA claims in a timely manner, proving combat-related health issues, PTSD, homelessness, and education benefits for veterans. — Chairman Vickie Koutz

Liaison to Child Welfare Foundation — American Legion Family members donated \$771,499 in funds for grants and distributed 19 grants totaling \$636,869 to fund projects that improve the quality of children's lives. — Chairman Katherine Morris

Membership — As part of its membership goals, the ALA set out to maintain 95 percent of its current membership while adding 38,000 new members. They were able to reach the goal for new members, while nearly achieving its retention goal of 95 percent. — Chairman Krisann Owens

National Security — Members focused on numerous initiatives, from caring for servicemembers and their families to preparing for natural and manmade disasters. — Chairman Diane Duscheck

Past Presidents Parley — For the first time, the Auxiliary's PPP Committee set a goal to honor special ALA unit members who had gone above and beyond expectations and who had not served in an office higher than unit president. They also honored several women as part of the Salute to Servicewomen Award: U.S. Army Col. Mauhee Wells-Edmonson, medic; U.S. Navy Petty Chief Officer Michelle-Ann Christy Hastings; and U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Heather Alexander. — Chairman Elsie Bailey-Comer

Poppy — *Ladies Home Journal* did a media spotlight to support and salute soldiers for Memorial Day in their May issue. — Chairman Diane Spencer

Public Relations — Since ALA's national magazine underwent changes, it has evolved into a more useful communication tool for members. The organization's website also provides a timely way for current and prospective members to learn about the Auxiliary. — Chairman Gloria Johnson

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation — ALA members served more than 927,000 veterans by volunteering nearly 196,000 hours and donating nearly \$3.5 million. They also supported six national rides by the American Legion Riders, Dollars Making a Difference Campaign, Cycle Fests, and the Spinning Nation Campaign, and donated \$100,000 to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. Several of the ALA Service Corps VISTA Project field sites implemented activities to support indigent veterans. — Chairman Kris Nelson