

American Legion Auxiliary

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GIVINGTUESDAY

**AMERICAN
LEGION
AUXILIARY
FOUNDATION**

Auxiliary *contents*

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ON THE COVER: Members of The American Legion Family and local ROTC units stand at attention during the Color Guard Contest at National Convention in New Orleans. There are five different classes performing units can compete in at the contest (photo: Travis Perkins/ALANHQ). **ABOVE:** High school juniors from around the country spend a week in Washington, D.C. debating bills, touring historical monuments, and meeting the senators and representatives from their respective states as part of ALA Girls Nation. Read more on page 24 about this premier program (photo: Jennifer Donovan/ALANHQ).

The beauty of Arlington National Cemetery is hard to describe. Looking out across the rolling hills of stone after stone — the names of our nation’s heroes inscribed upon them — creates an aura of peace and heartfelt patriotism.

Sept. 4, 2024 was the day another hero was remembered and memorialized. The family of Army Chaplain 1st Lt. George L. Fox, one of the four chaplains lost on the USAT Dorchester, gathered to pay their respects, receive our nation’s flag so long overdue, and honor the memory of a man who gave his life so others could live.

It was a wonderful opportunity to connect with our American Legion Family as American Legion National Commander James A. LaCoursiere Jr., Sons of The American Legion National Commander Joseph Navarreté, and



PAYING RESPECTS: ALA National President Trish Ward, American Legion National Commander James A. LaCoursiere Jr., and Sons of The American Legion National Commander Joseph Navarreté at the gravesite of Army Chaplain 1st Lt. George L. Fox. Bottom left: Fox received full military honors at an Arlington National Cemetery service in September.

— the Chief of Army Chaplains — presided with strength, conviction, compassion, and awe-inspiring prayerful insight.

Six of the nine grandchildren of Chaplain Fox attended, along with a wide array of friends, extended family, and Legion Family members. It is hard to describe the emotion as Chaplain Green and the soldiers placed our country’s folded flag into the hands of Lisa Hirbour, Chaplain Fox’s youngest grandchild. Finally closure and finally an opportunity to pay respects at our nation’s most revered place for eternal rest and remembrance.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to witness this occasion on behalf of the American Legion Auxiliary and our members. Isadore Fox, the widow of Chaplain Fox, served our Auxiliary as national chaplain during the 1970-1971 administrative year and was a Past Department President of Vermont, along with also being an ordained

minister. I can only imagine the pride she would have felt to see the stone for her beloved George placed in his honor. It was forever her mission to assure the sacrifice of the four chaplains was forever remembered, and that George’s place in that historic moment remains a story to inspire and motivate others to a lifetime of service to mankind. Thanks to her grandchildren and the work of so many others, all who visit that special site can share in knowing that after 81 years, Isadore’s mission is finally complete.

“It was forever her mission to assure the sacrifice of the four chaplains was forever remembered.”

If you would like to see highlights from our day at Arlington, scan the QR code to watch the official video.



Trish Ward

Trish Ward
National President



I came together to support another family whose loss is felt deeply and by so many. Arlington brought its best with a glorious day, warm weather, and clear purpose. Over 100 servicemembers attended, and a full military band was present while Maj. Gen. William “Bill” Green Jr.



Visit page 38 to learn more about 2024-2025 ALA National President Trish Ward and the Auxiliary’s national focus for this administrative year.

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November 2024

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FELLOWSHIP: South Carolina members get together for a quick pic at the 2024 ALA National Convention.

Colgate. Kraft. UPS. Coca-Cola. L.L. Bean. What do these companies have in common? They're among the oldest in America and they're still going strong today. The American Legion Auxiliary fits nicely with these centenarians' badge of honor — on Nov. 10, we'll be celebrating our 105th birthday.

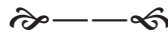
We may not have products for sale, but we do have very important offerings: care for our veterans, ongoing support for current military, and a bottomless love for patriotism.

Our membership organization has seen a lot since 1919 — prohibition, the Great Depression, major wars, tragic events. Yet one thing has remained constant through all those decades: our mission.

In our history, we've never changed our mission of serving veterans, military, and their families. It's pretty amazing for the ALA,

an organization this old, to have kept its same "product lineup" all these years. And you know what? We're darn proud of it. We should be! We'll never stop taking care of our veterans, whether it's through assistance with their well-being or advocating for their rights. We'll never stop supporting those currently in uniform or honoring them and their families for their sacrifices. This commitment was made when we were founded and will remain.

Happy birthday, American Legion Auxiliary!



Give yourself an ALA birthday gift! Again for our members, we'll be offering Mission Training and national Junior meetings in a location near you:

Nashville – Nov. 16

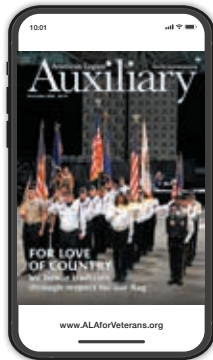
Denver – Nov. 16

Des Moines – Jan. 25

Las Vegas – Feb. 1

Boston – Feb. 1

And ongoing are our ALA Academy Live monthly training webinars. Learn more about these educational opportunities at www.ALAforVeterans.org.





Let your Junior members know you appreciate them

SoLee DuBowik has worked many of our projects along with the senior members of the unit. She became a member at the age of 5 months. DuBowik has attended many department, district, and some division conventions during the past 12 to 13 years.

She has earned 17 badges and has three more on the way for her jacket. She helps the members during Memorial Day in



the placement of flags at seven cemeteries and during Veterans Day activities. She helps with the Pledge and Preamble during meetings.

I simply wanted to share this with all of you with the hopes that if you have Juniors in your unit, let them know they are appreciated, and show them and teach them that the American Legion Auxiliary is a volunteer organization worthy of membership.

— Nancy Cobb, Texas

Seeking information for post home about National Register of Historic Places

I'm writing to you about your May issue. There was an article

in that issue about your Legion building possibly being able to receive a grant? It was talked about briefly at our meeting, but I was unable to get that information, and when I went to look for my issue of your magazine when I got home, my husband had taken it out?! If there's any possible way I could get the info on that grant possibility, I would greatly appreciate it. Our Legion building is over 100 years old and could use any help we can get.

— Judy McCormick, Iowa

Editor's response: We're glad to hear that story resonated with you! You can view the article on page 49 of the digital version of the May magazine at www.ALAforVeterans.org/magazine or go to the National Register of Historic Places at www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/faqs.htm to learn more information.

Unit uses Auxiliary magazine article to challenge Sons to more members

Newly installed Unit 138 leadership really enjoyed the article in the new ALA magazine with *Tips for starting a Juniors group in your unit*. We've taken it a step further



by challenging our own Sons of The American Legion Squadron 138 to get the most new Juniors or young Sons members this year! This is how we are "Securing Our

Foundation to Build a Stronger Future" in Port Tampa City!
— Unit 138, Florida (via Facebook)

Auxiliary magazine inspires volunteerism with Star Spangled Kids

I was moved to volunteer for the Star Spangled Kids program when I saw the article in the ALA magazine. I received a wonderful package of material from Judy Wallace, Americanism chairperson, Department of New York.



On May 1, 2024, I gave a presentation to a fourth-grade class in Maspeth (Queens) N.Y., St. Stanislaus Kostka Academy. My presentation consisted of explaining the symbolism and history of the American flag and talking about the freedoms the United States affords us. I included a talk about the Betsy Ross flag and how our flag changed over time as we added new states to the Union.

Additionally, we discussed the American Legion Auxiliary and its history. The children were very engaged as they are currently studying American history in social studies class. I gave each student small American flags, stickers, and American Legion comic books. It was a delightful experience to promote Americanism and talk about The American Legion Family to the future leaders of the community.

— Diana Lichvarik, New York

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM you

Email: ALAMagazine@ALAforVeterans.org or send letters to: **ALA National Headquarters 3450 Founders Road, Indianapolis, IN 46268**

Story and Photo Submissions: **Visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/Magazine for more details.**



JUNIORS RAISE MONEY FOR ALA'S CHILDREN OF WARRIORS NATIONAL PRESIDENTS' SCHOLARSHIP FUND

New Jersey Unit 12's Junior unit president had an idea of raising money to help the Children of Warriors National Presidents' Scholarship fund. Three Juniors and one Sons of The American Legion member participated in

the fundraiser.

Together, the kids raised \$1,000.

"I created a donation flyer for them, and they used it to ask for donations from friends and family," said Tara Adair, Unit 12 Junior Activities chair.

The only challenge they really faced in this process was wanting to raise even more money.

"We will try again this calendar year to beat that number," Adair said.

The fundraising was gratifying for the youth involved.

"What was rewarding for us was to see the amount we raised and to know we helped another person further their education," Adair said.

For other ALA units wanting to encourage their Junior members to participate in fundraising for this scholarship, Adair offers some advice.

"Create a script letter and a fun way to ask for donations," she said. "And encourage as much unit participation as possible."

INCREASE IN FUNDING FOR SPIRIT OF YOUTH SCHOLARSHIP HELPS MORE STUDENTS

The ALA Spirit of Youth Scholarship Fund got a boost during the 2023-2024 administrative year when then-National President Lisa Williamson raised funds for the ALA's greatest need — Spirit of Youth (SOY) scholarships. The number of scholarships increased to 47 last year at \$1,000 each.

The Spirit of Youth Scholarship Fund is an umbrella that supports three separate scholarship opportunities for participants in American Legion Auxiliary programs: American Legion Auxiliary Junior members, Junior Members of the Year, and participants in the American Legion Auxiliary Girls Nation program.

This year, 37 departments submitted a winner for the SOY scholarships. The national ALA Education Committee selected five winners from those 37, each earning a \$5,000 scholarship, based on a scoring rubric.

Scholarship rules for Spirit of Youth Scholarship for

Junior members:

1. Candidates for this award shall be/shall have been Junior members of the American Legion Auxiliary, have held membership in the American Legion Auxiliary for the past three consecutive years, and must be a paid member for the current membership year. Applicant must continue their membership in the American Legion Auxiliary during the scholarship period.

2. Applicants must be in their senior year of high school.

3. This is a scholarship to attend an accredited institution of higher education. Applicants must be of good character and have grades that meet entrance requirements at the institution of their choice. Applicants must have at least a 3.0 GPA using a 4.0 scale.

4. Completed applications are due on or before March 1, 2025, at 11:59 p.m. Eastern.

5. Judging, at all levels, shall be on the following basis:

- Character/leadership: 30%
- Essay/application: 30%
- Academic achievement: 40%

With your donations, the ALA

helps more students fulfill their educational pursuits in preparation to lead in the future. To donate to the ALA scholarship fund, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/scholarships.

DIVISION JUNIOR MEMBERS OF THE YEAR, NATIONAL JUNIOR MEMBER OF THE YEAR ANNOUNCED

To reward our Junior members who are actively participating in the ALA's mission, we expanded the Junior Member of the Year program. To learn more about the requirements and FAQs on the JMOY program, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/Junior-Member-of-the-Year.

- Central: Addi Pruitt, Indiana
- Eastern: Sadie Mullen, New Hampshire*
- Northwestern: Katherine Whitmore, Colorado
- Southern: Ella Ridgway, Virginia
- Western: Rebeka Avila-Hernandez, California

*Also named the National Junior Member of the Year

2023-2024 AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY NATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS



NATIONAL SPIRIT OF YOUTH (SOY) SCHOLARSHIPS: \$5,000

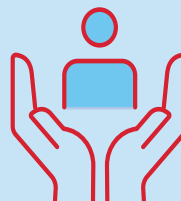
- Central Division:
Danika Jelinek, MO
- Eastern Division:
Delaney McDaniel, MD
- Northwestern Division:
Brenna Martin, ND
- Southern Division:
Angelina Vasquez, GA
- Western Division:
Bailee Haywood, CA



DEPARTMENT SPIRIT OF YOUTH (SOY) SCHOLARSHIPS: \$1,000

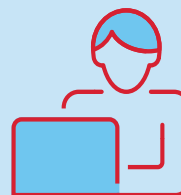
- Addisyn AaronAL
- Phoebe CollinsAK
- Leah CallahanAZ

- Callie CaldwellAR
- Ella KreulCO
- Margaret "Maggie" WernickiCT
- Addison MoodDE
- Caitlin HanechakFL
- Miranda KlapprichID
- Oaklie LaytonIL
- Harlie EadesIN
- Victoria AllardIA
- Victoria WigginsLA
- Brooklyn HoferMN
- Leah AcostaMS
- Rhyanne MacklingNE
- Samantha HookNV
- Madison FreidemanNJ
- Cristina CaputiNY
- Caitlin McCarthyNC
- McKearlee CooperOH
- Kinsley BringardnerOK
- Mykenna WelshPA
- Kathryn PhillipsSC
- Mackenzie KaiserSD
- Madison HarrisTX
- Amanda NoblettUT
- Sarah CollierVT
- Cassandra UrannVA
- Lexie ThompsonWA
- Molly JankeWI
- Tylar StoddardWY



CHILDREN OF WARRIORS NATIONAL PRESIDENTS' SCHOLARSHIPS: \$5,000

- Brandon AbbottIL
- Katherine EdwardsKS
- Owen AtkinsonOH
- Brian GarrabrantNJ
- McKenna VestDE
- Abigail VadellaMD
- Jerome Barbour IVMN
- Abigail PilskalnsMT
- Alyssa EnriquezCO
- Shealyn WeedVA
- Avarie AdamsKY
- Ashlyn Janae RotheTN
- Jace StringerOR
- Madeline AndersonAK
- Lindsay CarstairsCA



NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENT SCHOLARSHIPS: \$2,000

- Leslie KronstedtWI
- Susan LombardMA
- Katherine StierSD
- Pamela SullivanGA
- Daniel CitronAZ



JUNIOR MEMBER LOYALTY SCHOLARSHIPS: \$2,500

- Rachel SampsonWV
- Madeline KiehneMO
- MacKenzie McDanielsNY
- Kendahl ParsonsMD
- Shanna ClydeSD
- Malerie DukeTX
- Mackenzie TooneVA
- Gracia EllisWA
- Ashley SandersonNM

Not all states submitted entries for these scholarships.



Registration open for 2024-2025 national Junior meetings

If your ALA Junior member is 8 years old or older, encourage them to attend a national Junior meeting, where they can meet new friends, participate in a service project, and have lots of fun! The events are on a Saturday, one in each ALA division, and

held at the same time as Mission Training. We can't wait to see you Junior there!

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

Scan here to register today:



“...if I can help bring a smile to a hardened face or let them feel honored, I’ve been part of the solution — and you can too.”

TANYA JONES



guardians. She said the process was easy, and Honor Flight has great resources to find information and print applications.

What inspired your unit to send veterans on an Honor Flight?

We know time is limited, and with so many veterans feeling they didn’t get recognized for their service, it’s just very important to help veterans get the recognition they deserve. By going and feeling the care and love they so deserved, maybe this one, long day will help resolve a few ill feelings and put a bad book on the shelf for good.

What did your Honor Flight experience entail?

After a happy send-off at the Legion, we went to the airport to board and saw the plane was decorated in patriotic colors. When we landed in Baltimore, we were met with a water salute and greeters at the airport. What a great feeling to be a part of this! We boarded four buses and headed to D.C. with a motorcycle motorcade. We viewed many memorials. While at the Vietnam Wall Memorial, I found the name of my uncle, which was emotional. On the flight home, the plane had so much energy it probably glowed! The veterans seemed to open up and started

telling stories and sharing military experiences.

What was a memorable moment for you or the veterans during this Honor Flight?

There were many memorable moments, but I think mail call on the plane home was unforgettable. Every veteran received an envelope that looked tattered and torn with their name on it — they lit up when they saw these. Inside were personalized letters and cards from family members, politicians, and children thanking them for their service — so many tears were shed of remembrance and joy to be appreciated. Many said this is how they should have been welcomed home.

Why do you believe it’s important for our veterans to have opportunities like Honor Flight?

Our veterans fought to keep us safe and for our freedom. No matter if drafted or enlisted, they did the job at hand and deserve to be honored for it.

Describe the welcoming you received in Florida after that unforgettable day.

Once we arrived back in Florida, what a homecoming we received! So many people were waving flags, saying “thank you,” taking pictures, and crying. Every veteran was smiling from ear to ear with stories of the day’s adventures that would be told for many days to come.

Anything else you’d like to share about this experience?

Get out there and help these men and women be honored. At the end of the day, if I can help bring a smile to a hardened face or let them feel honored, I’ve been part of the solution — and you can too.

HELPING VETERANS: Florida ALA Unit 113 member Tanya Jones and Vietnam War veteran Donald R. Plotner, U.S. Navy, board the Southwest Florida Honor Flight; Guardian Tina Brown and veteran Marsha Church visit the Military Women’s Memorial; Honor Flight guardian Eric Stefanik, Plotner, Jones, and Army veteran Mike Kenjorski visit war memorials in Washington, D.C.

In 2021, the American Legion Auxiliary entered an official collaboration with Honor Flight Inc. to support its mission to celebrate America’s veterans by inviting them to share in a day of honor at our nation’s memorials in Washington, D.C. The ALA signed a memorandum of understanding with Honor Flight that allows ALA units and departments to directly donate funds generated from the distribution of our poppy.

Tanya Jones, Florida ALA Unit 113 member, was a guardian on an Honor Flight with five veterans from her community and two other



To read about the experience in their own words from veterans who attended this Honor Flight, check out an extended version of this article on the ALA blog at www.ALAforVeterans.org/blog.

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“This nation will remain the land of the free only so long as it is the home of the brave.”

— Elmer Davis, reporter and author



Veterans Day — a day set aside to honor and celebrate our nation’s veterans and observed annually on Nov. 11. Since our founding in 1919, the American Legion Auxiliary has helped place an extra emphasis on that day for all those who have worn the uniform. This Nov. 11, thank the veteran who made you eligible for the ALA, and thank the veteran you see at a grocery store, in a restaurant, or at a sporting event. Their pledge to our flag and their sacrifice to our country should never go unnoticed. Let’s celebrate our veterans together!

Above: A veteran watches participants walk by in the 2023 Veterans Day parade in New York City (TheNews2/Cover Images via AP Images).

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before
the Dec. 15
deadline.



What does your unit do to support veterans and their families during the holidays?



"Maryland Unit 96 holds a holiday bazaar. Gift cards are purchased from the proceeds for servicemembers' children at Fort Detrick. We purchase clothing and gifts for veterans in a nursing home. We send care packages to troops overseas. We also purchase food delivery gift cards for veterans at low-income senior apartments." — Andrea Anderson, Maryland



"Unit 77 in Hendersonville, North Carolina, has an annual children's Christmas party for children and grandchildren of veterans. They are presented a \$25 gift, along with crafts and food." — Beth Whitaker, North Carolina



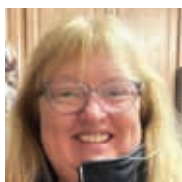
"Dupont-Holmes Unit 82 in Gorham, New Hampshire, adopts a servicemember from the area and sends holiday wishes to all the members in their unit (including the service dogs). The unit also gives filled Christmas stockings to veterans in nursing homes who are homebound. Those who are homebound also receive a lap robe or lap quilt." — Linda Dupont, New Hampshire



"American Legion Family 327 in Norfolk, Virginia, fills their angel tree at Christmas with names of the children of the veterans who are homeless in the HUD/VASH program." — Thelma Anne Starke, Virginia



"American Legion Auxiliary Unit 50 in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, gathers donated items for the gift bags to give to the Jack C. Montgomery Veterans Medical Center. The bags include items such as sweatpants, hats, gloves, and scarves. We also have a member who makes lap quilts for them year-round." — Marsha Gross, Oklahoma



"We host a holiday party at the veterans home with food and gifts." — Arlene Baum, New Jersey



"We do gift bags for our veterans at the nursing home, as well as deliver food boxes to families (military or not) in our area. We do a holiday meal at our post for veterans and families, complete with Santa and Mrs. Claus, and treat bags for each child." — LuAnn McDonald, Indiana



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in an upcoming issue of *Auxiliary*.

VETERANS DAY

BEYOND THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE

To honor your service, we are continuing our commitment to go beyond “thank you” and make a difference for the veteran community.

Together, through **Face the Fight**[®], we are making progress to reduce the rate of veteran suicide through outreach and support.

There’s still so much to do. Let’s keep fighting together.

Find out more at
usaa.com/VeteransDay



Face the Fight[®] brings together like-minded organizations to help reduce veteran suicide through charitable giving, public education and awareness.

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GIVING TO OUR VETERANS: Veterans Outreach of Pennsylvania Board Chair and Co-Founder Tom Zimmerman receives check from members of ALA Unit 998.

PENNSYLVANIA UNIT PROVIDES SUPPORT TO HARRISBURG TINY HOME VILLAGE FOR HOMELESS VETERANS

Pennsylvania Unit 998 is actively donating funds and providing support to the Veterans Outreach of Pennsylvania (VOPA) and their mission to combat homelessness among veterans. The organization provides support and services needed to promote an empowered life filled with strength and purpose.

According to the VOPA website, the nonprofit organization has built a village of 15 tiny homes in south Harrisburg for veterans experiencing homelessness. The Veterans Grove community is specifically designed to meet the unique needs of each veteran through a therapeutic community model that builds camaraderie, personal responsibility, and healing, while recreating the stable support network offered to them before they left the service. A separate 6,500-square-foot community center anchors the village with a large kitchen, a dining room where the veteran participants are served daily meals in a group setting, laundry facilities, counseling and therapeutic rooms, and administrative offices.

Each of the 210-square-foot homes features a bedroom, full bathroom, countertop, closet,

storage beneath the bed, microwave, small stove, coffeemaker, drawers, nightstand, and thermostat. The entire community is ADA compliant. Participants also receive a laptop and are taught basic computer skills.

According to VOPA, veterans do not own the homes, nor do they pay rent to live there. Instead, the homes are designed to be a temporary sanctuary until veterans are ready to return to independence.

The tiny homes provide stability and a starting point for veterans to address the underlying causes of homelessness.

In a May 2024 interview with PennLive.com, VOPA Co-Founder Tom Zimmerman and Executive Director Bill Habacivch said the first five participants arrived around June 10, followed by the next five people about 60 days later, and five more residents about two months after that. The average stay at similar



communities around the country is six to eight months, Zimmerman said.

2023-2024 Unit 998 President Kaitlyn Debow said their unit originally collaborated with their Legion Riders family to make monetary donations when the project was still in the beginning phases, and the support has continued over the last couple of years with donations from the entire American Legion Family. Debow shared their Auxiliary unit has donated about \$3,500 to date, and that their Legion Family as a whole has donated more than \$15,000.

“It is very satisfying to know we have a program like this in our community,” said Debow. “Being that we are a veterans organization too, we now have a place that we have in mind if we come into a situation where someone needs help. We also have many people who want to volunteer and get involved. This ultimately is bringing our community together, and it

feels great knowing we are doing something good for our community and the people who live in it.”

Debow said the Auxiliary unit’s 2024-2025 president has plans to partner with VOPA on upcoming fundraising activities, and the local Legion Family will continue to help in any way they are able.

More information on the Veterans Outreach of Pennsylvania can be found on their website at www.veteransoutreachofpa.org.



BRINGING COMFORT: The North Dakota American Legion Family works together to give stuffed animals to hospitals, clinics, and any children in need of some support in times of fear or uncertainty.

NORTH DAKOTA LEGION FAMILY PROVIDES COMFORT BEARS TO CHILDREN

For kids who are sick or hurt and have to go to the emergency room or hospital, it can be scary and overwhelming. The American Legion Family in North Dakota uses comfort teddy bears to help make the hospital stays a little less daunting.

In the 1990s, Children's Miracle Network was a recipient of Child Welfare Foundation funds through the national American Legion. At that time, the Children's Miracle Network had a teddy bear program. Since then, a similar bear program was revitalized occasionally over the years at the state level. In 2021, a teddy bear program began again in North Dakota and continues to thrive throughout the state with the help of Legion Family members.

"Although started by The American Legion Children & Youth Committee, it quickly became an American Legion Family program at one of our North Dakota conferences when we had members sign up to be sponsors for each of the 45 hospitals across the state," said North Dakota ALA Unit 135 member Judy Twete. "They would contact the hospitals in the communities they selected and

explain the program to them, and have bears available as needed."

Last year, the North Dakota Family supplied approximately 1,500 bears. Recently, 2,000 more bears and 450 puppies were ordered.

"Years ago, it was difficult to get money for our C&Y programs," Twete said. "Since this program started, the monetary donations from the many posts and units in the department are great."

American Legion Auxiliary members serve as the contact persons for 70% of the hospitals, and they place support animals at the facilities.

The stuffed bears are also utilized in other ways to help communities throughout North Dakota.

"The original goal was for the Legion to have these available to the hospitals, but we have no problem with some of the posts or units on their own expanding the program in their communities where they are sharing bears and puppies with their local ambulance, fire, and sheriff departments to distribute in stressful situations where children are involved," Twete said.

Volunteers always bring back

positive stories of children's reactions from receiving the teddy bear.

"Their stories from the hospital contacts are great, and those thank-you cards and letters from the children and parents are so thankful for the bears and puppies," she said.

Like the kids, the response from the hospitals is overwhelmingly positive.

"The volunteers have been encouraged to have a good relationship with the hospital contact and to check on the usage and need for more bears," Twete said. "Some communities have very small hospitals and don't go through many bears but are still very appreciative and are more than glad to participate. We are so appreciative with their cooperation with this program, as not only are we thankful with the fact that they are the ones using their discretion as to who should get the bears, but also doing the presentation. This working together has helped make this a successful program."

North Dakota also partnered with another department in this endeavor — members came across an article that explained Wisconsin's similar program, which uses a puppy instead of a teddy bear.

"They give out a beautiful stuffed puppy to children of Reserves who are getting deployed," Twete said. "Rather than reinventing the wheel, they agreed to supply us with puppies as needed, and they are very popular. The puppies have all logos of the Legion Family on their T-shirts."

The program is a great way to help children in communities throughout North Dakota and for the Family to come together. Other departments could implement similar programs at the state level, giving comfort to children in their time of need.

"As with other Legion Family youth programs," Twete said, "this is just great public relations for The American Legion Family."



Do you have a comfort bear program through your department or unit? We would love to hear about it! Email ALAMagazine@ALAforVeterans.org to share your story.

KEEPING UP APPEARANCES: HOW TO PRESENT YOURSELF IN VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Since virtual meetings are so common today, you may feel more relaxed in them ... but just make sure you're not *too* relaxed. It's a good idea to prepare for online meetings similar to how you would for in-person meetings. You want to appear as if you care and are interested in the subject matter. By following a few best practices, you can put your best face forward on the screen.

Ditch the pajamas. Wear a nice shirt or sweater. Better yet, wear ALA branded attire. You can still wear your pajama bottoms — just make sure you're Zoom ready from the waist up.

What's in your background?

Check your surroundings — is there a pile of laundry behind you, a ceiling fan going full blast, or anything else that's distracting? Use the blur background option or a virtual background to keep things distraction free. Did you know you can download ALA branded virtual meeting backgrounds at www.ALAforVeterans.org?

Don't be in the dark. Lighting matters! Make sure you don't have a window directly behind you, and turn the lights on in the room. If you want to take an extra step to ensure you have good lighting, use a ring light.

Watch for rogue people and pets. Inform others in your household that you will be on a call. You don't want a loved one to be caught off guard if they are walking behind you not fully dressed. It can be embarrassing for everyone. Even though pets are fun to see, they can also be a distraction. If you have a pet that gets the zoomies or likes to be seen on camera, consider keeping them in another room during your meeting.

Take a test drive. A few minutes before your meeting begins, test out the platform hosting the event

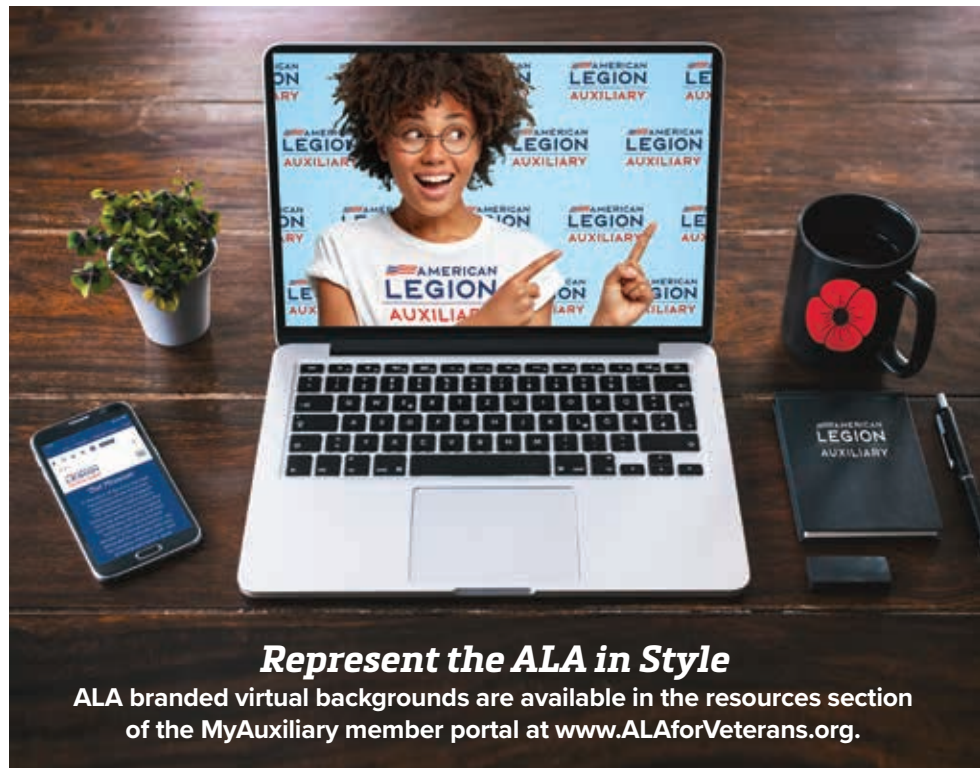
(aka Zoom, Microsoft Teams, etc.). Locate the mute and camera buttons. Check your camera angle and lighting. Logging on early will also allow you to set up a blurred or virtual background.

Avoid lounging. Everyone wants to be comfortable, but it's not always flattering. It's best to sit at a desk or table with your camera at eye level. Or if you want to sit in your recliner or on your couch, use something like a TV tray to hold your device. Avoid having your device in your lap because it gives

posture. You can accomplish this by sitting on the edge of your chair, as it forces you to sit upright.

Save your dinner and wine for after the meeting. Don't eat, drink alcohol, or smoke on camera. If you must eat, it's best to turn your camera off and mute your microphone. Water and other beverages are appropriate to have on hand because everyone should stay hydrated, but save the snacks and imbibing for later.

Be prepared for that cough or sneeze. You never know when a sneeze or a coughing fit will hit.



Represent the ALA in Style

ALA branded virtual backgrounds are available in the resources section of the MyAuxiliary member portal at www.ALAforVeterans.org.

others a view of your stomach, chest, and may add extra chins. Also, don't be in your bed. It gives the impression that the meeting is not important enough for you to stay up past your bedtime. And just like lounging in a recliner, it's not flattering.

Be mindful of swivel and rocking chairs. You may not even realize you're doing it, but you could be moving back and forth or side to side during your meeting. This is distracting to other participants.

If you will be speaking during the meeting, try to have good

Always have a glass of water and tissue nearby.

What's that look for? Be mindful of your facial expressions. When you are on a virtual call, you never know who may be staring at you. Avoid eye rolls or a look of frustration. You don't want someone to misinterpret your look or body language.

Now you're a pro! Even if virtual meetings have become an old habit for you, it never hurts to make sure you're following these tips. The next time you're in a virtual meeting, you'll be the best talking head on the screen.

2024 NATIONAL CONVENTION AMENDMENTS
HERE'S A SUMMARY OF WHAT WAS DISCUSSED AND VOTED ON

At the 103rd ALA National Convention, delegates met to debate and vote on nine amendments to the national Constitution & Bylaws. Here's a review of the votes on each amendment and the impacts on the organization at all levels (national, department, unit):

Amendment 1 proposed a change to the ALA national constitution to make national chairs delegates-at-large. In this instance, delegates-at-large means that by virtue of their national position/title, they are automatic delegates to the National Convention without being chosen by their department. It also means that a national chair's delegate seat would be in addition to the total number of delegates awarded to a department based on the delegate strength calculation. Result: Adopted.

Amendment 2 identified a change to the bylaws necessary to ensure foreign units that are not attached to departments are given the same experience and opportunities as all of our units. By amending the bylaws, we were able to attach the National Executive Committee to all foreign units not attached to departments, thereby giving these units stability, guidance, assistance, and, if necessary, a means for enacting rehabilitative or punitive measures. Result: Adopted.

Amendment 3 was a "clean-up" amendment. Nothing substantive was changed — some redundant wording was deleted that was in both the bylaws and the standing rules. Result: Adopted.

Amendment 4 attempted to amend the national standing rules and establish a national Past Presidents Parley Committee. This committee was officially dissolved by delegates of the 2019 National Convention; however, the submitters of this proposed amendment felt there was a renewed interest in this committee. The intent was to keep recent leadership engaged, active, and relevant. Delegates said it's an ongoing organization-wide goal to keep all members active, engaged, and relevant. Note: Do you have a Past Presidents Parley? This vote does not remove the department or unit authority to have a Past Presidents Parley. Result: Defeated.

Amendment 5 championed to amend the national standing rules and increase the number of members on the national Constitution & Bylaws Committee. Delegates to the 2019 National Convention voted to decrease the committee size from five members to two; however, renewed interest and an increased understanding of organizational governance created the opportunity for more committee members. 2024 National Convention delegates voted to increase the national C&B Committee to five members total: a chair, vice chair, and three committee members. Result: Adopted. *Note: Your C&B Committee composition does not have to mirror the national composition.*

Amendment 6 put forth updated language for the national Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Committee's purpose statement. The new wording more closely aligns with The American Legion's program values while also seeking to capture the many ways the ALA can enhance the lives of not only our veterans, but their care teams (including non-familial

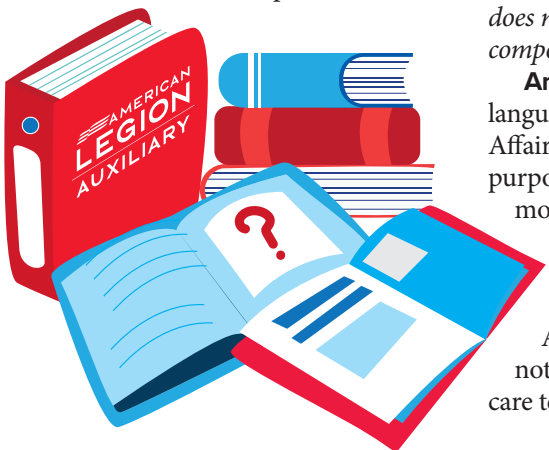
caregivers) and those left behind when our veterans pass. Result: Adopted.

Amendment 7 proposed to take away a unit's ability to expel a member — meaning the highest level of discipline would be the suspension of a member. This amendment was met with a lively debate both in the Constitution & Bylaws Pre-Convention Committee Meeting and on the convention floor. The pre-convention committee on Constitution & Bylaws voted to not recommend the adoption of this amendment. Result: Defeated.

Amendments 8 and 9 were both crafted by the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation board. Their first amendment proposed additions to the national Risk & Compliance Committee's purpose statement to include the responsibilities of reviewing (and in some cases, approving) the ALA Foundation's financial statements, annual financial audit, IRS Form 990, internal controls, and compliance requirements.

The ALA Foundation's second proposed amendment was also to the standing rules, but the focus was on responsibilities added to the purpose statement of the national Ethical Conduct Committee. In this proposal, the ALA Foundation board members asked that the national Ethical Conduct Committee not only carry out the ALA Code of Ethical Conduct, but that they also implement the ALA Foundation's separate Code of Ethics, specifically giving the ALA's national Ethical Conduct Committee control to review all alleged violations to the Foundation's code and present recommendations to the ALA Foundation board.

Convention delegates believed the Foundation's proposed amendments would assist in National's continuous pursuit of systematic checks and balances to ensure a professional level of transparency to our stakeholders and adopted both amendments to the standing rules. Result: Adopted.



DELAWARE UNIT PROMOTES BIG PATRIOTISM WITH TINY FLAGS

Throughout the country, American Legion Auxiliary members are dedicated to promoting patriotism and educating youth on the importance of the American flag.

For over 20 years, Delaware ALA Unit 17 has displayed its unwavering loyalty to our nation with a continuous flag program that helps educate local children on the significance of the American flag.

“This project is important because it’s teaching kids about the American flag, respect for the flag, and respect for our military,” said Pam Missimer, ALA Unit 17 member.

Within the last year, Auxiliary members of Unit 17 have visited several elementary schools, Girl Scouts meetings, and Boy Scouts meetings to teach youth about patriotism and the sacrifices made for our American flag to fly. While at the schools/meetings, the children listen to an educational session taught by an ALA member, and then the unit performs a 13-fold flag demonstration on the proper way to fold it. Unit 17 members encourage children to ask questions throughout the session to keep them interested and involved in the process.

“The kids are very engaged — besides learning about the flag, it’s very hands-on,” said Missimer.

After the flag folding demonstration, the children break up into groups with Unit 17 members, and they help the students fold the small flags. Once the small flags are folded, Unit 17 has the kids write notes for the servicemembers/veterans, thanking them for their service, and the notes go into each of the tiny flags as an extra token of appreciation.

“Writing the notes for the soldiers to actually have and keep in their pocket, I think, is really

important, and it’s important for the kids to recognize their sacrifice and thank them for their service,” said Missimer.

Last year, Unit 17 went to five elementary schools to present their program. They attended two deployments to give soldiers — those either coming back from deployment or being deployed — small flags with the special appreciation notes. The unit also gifts them to veterans on Veterans Day and Memorial Day.



“Advice I would give another unit that wants to do a similar project is to absolutely engage the youth of America because they like getting involved, and it’s a really good lesson for them,” said Missimer.

Prepare your tiny foldable flag program



1. ORGANIZE THE EVENT: Reach out to local elementary schools and/or youth clubs like Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, the Boys & Girls Club, etc. Ask if you can teach some of their children an educational session about the American flag. You can put your ALA Children & Youth or Education chairs on this task of organizing.



2. ORDER SMALL FLAGS: You can order these tiny flags from American Legion Flag & Emblem Sales at www.emblem.legion.org. Choose between 4”x6” or 8”x12” sizes.



3. PUT TOGETHER A PRESENTATION: Ask your Americanism chair or an ALA member to speak about the importance of the American flag. Demonstrate the proper way to fold a regular-sized American flag. Explain the meaning behind the 13 folds and the significance of what these tiny flags mean to our nation’s heroes and our country. Divide your ALA volunteers and break into groups to help the kids

fold the small flags. Involve these youth throughout the process and encourage them to ask any questions about the military or American flag.



4. ADD A SPECIAL THANK-YOU: After the presentation, have the children spend time writing thank-you notes for the servicemembers or veterans to include with the tiny foldable flags.



5. DELIVER THE FLAGS: Arrange when and where you will distribute the flags. Look into deployment send-offs near you or homecomings for servicemembers. You could also distribute them to servicemembers or veterans on holidays like Memorial Day, Veterans Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, or Flag Day. Another option is to reach out to a nearby U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs medical center and gift the small flags to veterans there. You could also distribute them to veterans at your local American Legion post home.

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READY TO READ: ALA members of New Jersey Unit 57, staff at the Paramus New Jersey Veterans Home, and community members celebrate all the new books with veterans.

NEW JERSEY UNIT HELPS VETERANS FACILITY LIBRARY WITH A BOOK MAKEOVER

Brenda Calandrillo and New Jersey Unit 57 have always been involved in the Paramus New Jersey Veterans Home through bingo and donating to the home's welfare fund for barbecues and other activities.

But soon, they turned their focus to a new project in the home — the library. Unit 57 knew it needed to help the veterans who are served by this library, which had books stacked on the floor because it was running out of space.

After getting approval from the veterans home, unit members got to work.

"We cleaned it out in one day — many books were 50 years old, water stained, no book jackets," Calandrillo said. "Many appeared to be cleanout books from people's houses and not useful for veterans in the home — cookbooks, backpacking in Utah. We left the newest ones we could."

To help refill the library, the unit mailed about 90 letters to American Legion posts and units, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Elks, and other organizations all over the county that also usually do fundraisers or activities at the veterans home.

"It was really a nice thing, and everyone saw the value of it," Calandrillo said.

After, the unit reached out to Barnes & Noble to participate in their institutional purchase agreement which gave them 35% off

the purchase price of the books. Then, they started raising money.

"It was slow in the beginning with about \$1,200," Calandrillo recalled. "Then I got a call from the veterans home of the biggest donation they had ever seen. American Legion Post 117 in Bogota was shutting down because they didn't have many members. That \$20,000 donation for the library put us over the top. They became our benefactor."

As of press time, the unit has raised \$26,000 for the library.

To get the project going, members worked with Barnes & Noble on a \$10,000 purchase order.

"It took the sales rep a month to select the books," she said. "We got 504 books. We wanted to see how many books it would fill — the library is full now. The veterans

home is undergoing a renovation. I keep saying to enlarge the library so we can get more books."

Working with Barnes & Noble was an easy process for the unit. Books shipped directly to the veterans home, and the unit received a call when they were in.

The difficult part of the project was unpacking all of the boxes in one day and then alphabetizing the books on shelves. Members could all be heard reciting the ABCs to ensure books were in the right order with nonfiction, fiction, and audiobooks.

In addition to the books, there are now three new computers in the room on wheelchair-height floating desks, making it a true library/media room.

"The residents love it," Calandrillo said. "We have a traffic jam of wheelchairs in the library. The wheelchairs can pull right up under the desks."

The entire process from the idea to donate the books to the re-opening ceremony for the library was about five months.

This project was truly rewarding for the unit and the community, Calandrillo said.

"It was really a good feeling for everyone to see something that you are doing bring a lot of joy to the veterans," she said. "It's a lasting project."

The unit still has about \$15,000 for the library project, so if the space expands, they will be able to add more book titles.

How to update the library in your local veterans home:

- **Get the recreation department at the veterans home on board. You can also get a letter of approval with them to share with potential donors that confirms/verifies your project is legitimate and needed.**
- **Mail letters to potential donors explaining the project.**
- **Get on Barnes & Noble's institutional purchasing plan to secure books at a discount, and use your unit's tax-exempt status for the project.**
- **Have a team of volunteers clean out and restock the library.**
- **Host a rededication of the space.**





THE POWER OF PHILANTHROPY: Wisconsin American Legion Riders raised \$57,000 by organizing a charity ride, Stu's Cruise. Your unit can inspire generosity by diversifying your fundraising efforts too.

THE IMPACT OF GIVING DAYS ON FUNDRAISING SUCCESS

For those who make philanthropy a priority in their budget, it's helpful to know the time of year when those dollars make the biggest mission impact and when they're needed most. And, most importantly, when that money is going to come out of your bank account. That's why it's good to

have giving days like the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation's Veterans Day of Giving on Nov. 11 and the Celebrating Women of Service Day on March 8.

A giving day is a 24-hour marathon of charitable giving. Nonprofits dedicate one day to their organization's mission to generate

awareness, tell impactful stories, and engage board members and donors to raise the most money in the shortest amount of time. Some nonprofits use the widely known GivingTuesday as their annual giving day, while others create their own — like the ALA Foundation does with its two giving days. The purpose of giving days, very simply, is to inspire people to give to causes doing vital work in their communities.

However, giving days aren't just for large organizations like the American Legion Auxiliary. ALA entities can easily take advantage of this fundraising platform that not only generates financial support for units, districts, or departments, but also builds community (possibly resulting in a boost in Auxiliary membership!) and long-term donor relationships. Executing a successful giving day involves thorough planning and promotion but can be done on a budget with a few dedicated fundraisers.

Here's a five-step guide to help you organize an effective giving day:

STEP 1: PICK A DAY
Choosing the date you'd like to execute your campaign is crucial to the success of your fundraiser. Make sure to consider conflicts like holidays and other competing giving days. Consider a day that resonates with your constituents. For example, when the ALA Foundation decided to host a giving day on March 8 — International Women's Day — they did so with the intention of honoring the women who built the Auxiliary and those who continue to make it an exceptional organization today.

STEP 2: CREATE A FOCUS
Create a focus that resonates with the ALA mission and appeals to your target audience. This could be a specific project, community need, or milestone. Is your ALA entity fundraising for something specific like a wheelchair ramp for veterans or a food pantry at your unit? Does a neighboring transitional housing facility have an urgent need for veteran residents like beds or therapy equipment? Is your ALA entity celebrating its 75th anniversary? There are many reasons to raise funds, and it could just be celebratory!

STEP 3: DESIGN CONTENT
To have a successful giving day, you must let your supporters know you're having one and why. If you wait until the day of your campaign,

it's too late. Prepare and plan social media posts leading up to and on the day of your giving day. Include emails, flyers, and videos in your marketing strategy to alert donors of your upcoming giving day and how they can support you. If you're feeling creative, send a "save the date" to your unit members or make coasters for your unit so all those who socialize there are aware of your giving day.

STEP 4: LAUNCH!
Your giving day is here! Remain engaged on your giving day and stay by your phone or computer. Make sure all social media posts and emails are sent as scheduled, respond to any comments and emails, and answer phone calls from donors.

STEP 5: DON'T FORGET GRATITUDE AND TRANSPARENCY
Thank your donors and community partners as soon as you can. Let your supporters know how much money was raised on your giving day and exactly what you plan to do with those funds. Show them how their gift will make a difference in your community or in the life of someone in need. Be sure to follow IRS guidelines and send tax acknowledgment letters to those who donate \$250 or more to your campaign.



ALA MEMBERS VOLUNTEERING FOR WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA BENEFIT BOTH ORGANIZATIONS' MISSIONS

In August 2023, the American Legion Auxiliary national organization, during then-National President Vickie Koutz's administrative term, joined forces with Wreaths Across America (WAA) to build a stronger awareness of each group's common missions while supporting fundraising efforts nationwide.

Trish Gardner, Department of Florida Unit 55, has volunteered with Wreaths Across America since she placed her first wreath in 2012 at the Florida National Cemetery. Gardner (pictured above, wearing white) is now manager of the WAA Mobile Education Exhibit, traveling the country talking to people about WAA.

How did you get started in WAA?

I was working at my unit's Poppy Day booth at our local farmers market and struck up a conversation with a passerby and they told me about WAA. After I placed that first wreath in 2012, I knew I had to do more. In 2013, I signed my unit up

as a \$5 back sponsorship group. In 2017, I became the volunteer location coordinator for our local cemetery. We placed 168 wreaths in two cemeteries that first year. We now honor approximately 2,000 hometown heroes.

What did you enjoy about participating?

First of all, honoring and remembering and thanking the servicemember. Then there are so many other residuals that come into play — the bringing together of the community, the hug from a family member of a fallen hero, the appreciation in a veteran's eyes, and the history of those servicemembers and the cemeteries.

What does the national ALA's partnership with WAA mean to you?

Everything! I was so proud when outgoing National President Lisa Williamson bestowed the Public Spirit Award upon WAA this year. She said both organizations are so alike in how we honor our veterans

and military and teach future generations. I had both tears and goosebumps as I watched the presentation [at National Convention]! I also like that it will help us reach more members and more units, and help them like it has helped our unit and post.

What motivates you to continue volunteering with WAA?

We all have a WAA why. Mine is Sgt. Sophie Champoux. Sophie is buried at Oak Hill Cemetery in Clermont, Fla.

I also am the daughter of World War II Navy veterans. And then there is the "widow effect" — I will meet someone while placing wreaths and their gratitude and their faith that there will always be someone to remember their veteran and say their name means a lot to those of us who volunteer!

You've probably decorated hundreds of graves over the years. How does that feel?

I feel very proud to be able to place the wreath and thank the veteran for their service.

The days after WAA Day is when we return to the cemeteries and make sure we did not miss anyone, straighten wreaths, and that's when we stand and take a look around. It gives a great feeling of gratitude, peace, and satisfaction that you were able to bring together so many to help honor all your hometown heroes. It's very humbling.

Any advice for others looking to get started in participating?

Do it! Come out on Dec. 14 to your local participating location and place a wreath. Also, you can reach out to our great locations and groups liaison team, and they will set you up to succeed and help you become a sponsorship group and help honor your heroes!



Wreaths Across America Day is Dec. 14. Learn more on how you can get involved as an ALA unit or individual at www.ALAforVeterans.org/Wreaths-Across-America.



A WEEK WITH LASTING IMPACT

By Jennifer Donovan and Alexa Freeman

Anyone who spends a week at ALA Girls Nation witnesses our country's future leaders. Participants in the program brim with hope, care for our country, and the drive to make a difference. Over the course of the week, they gain confidence, leadership skills, and connections that will leave a lasting impact as they go to college and begin their careers.

Those chosen to attend ALA Girls Nation stand out in their ALA Girls State program and are selected to represent their state as a "senator." When they return home to begin their senior year of high school, they have new experiences and friends that will last a lifetime.

Female empowerment and confidence

One of the biggest takeaways from the week at ALA Girls Nation is the growth and empowerment that will

help the senators become tomorrow's leaders. It's a change that's visible every day.

ALA Girls Nation allows participants to be immersed in an environment where they can freely have their voices heard. The young women are with their peers and are empowered to speak their view without judgement — no matter what side of an issue they are on. The senators see a future where they can make a difference.

"As we head into this election year, my time at ALA Girls Nation has made me more confident than ever that the future of our country is bright. Now — more than ever — it's important to encourage girls to pursue their passions and make their voices heard," said Fatimah Naraghi, Iowa. "Because from what I've seen at ALA Girls Nation, the leaders of tomorrow are ready, and they're extraordinary."

Guest speakers inspire senators:

- West Point Superintendent Lt. Gen. Steve Gilland, a 1985 Illinois Boys State alumnus, gave a motivational speech on being positive, doing your best, and being a good teammate. After his speech, senators were able to ask him and other representatives from West Point about attending U.S. military academies.

- Rachel Moyers from the American Red Cross Military and Veteran Caregiver Network (MVCN) talked to senators about her experience as a military spouse and caregiver. Her husband is a post 9/11 Air Force veteran. After her presentation, the senators created 500 comfort bags for caregivers.

- Mike Seifer from American Red Cross International Humanitarian Law (IHL) talked to senators about the IHL Youth Action Campaign. IHL is the body of law that governs armed conflict. Their youth program is for ages 13-24.



Most participants say they step out of their comfort zone, putting themselves and their opinions in front of others. They also travel away from home to spend a week where they know only one other person — it's a new experience for many. When participants arrive, they realize they aren't alone in these feelings.

"This summer, I decided to step beyond my comfort zone in business," said Naraghi. "I attended ALA Iowa Girls State, and it completely changed my perspective. I didn't just join a program; I found a group of amazing young women who were just as passionate about their causes as I was about mine. It was there that I first understood the power of collective advocacy, and I discovered a new passion for public policy."

Some come for the week prepared to run for office — others feel more reserved and aren't sure they want an elected position.

"I came into this program with two primary goals: the biggest being to make new connections, and the second to put myself out of my comfort zone," said ALA Girls Nation President Cameron Mirmelli, Arizona. "The first real day — Sunday — went by, and let's just say I did not speak once: not in the Senate session, not during the speeches, not once. It turns out we had all the other elections beyond president and vice president on Sunday, so as a leap of faith, I just decided to go for it. What was there to lose?" This is a great example of the confidence that builds throughout the week — from not speaking to being elected to the highest office."

Preparation for future careers and political participation

It's no doubt the week will make an impact on the senators' college and career goals. For some, it amplifies their interests. Others discover an entirely new career path.

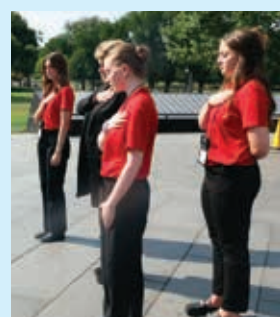
"With my eyes opened to the political process, and my heart inspired by so many gifted guest speakers, I decided to change my college interests into political science because now I know my voice is heard and seen, and I know we women need more representation internationally," said Tayrn Dolka, New Jersey. "ALA Girls Nation has given me the opportunity to gain connections and network country-wide for my future. One day I may work on the Hill, or as an advisor to a senator or representative, and I may even run for some sort of public office, and I'll be ready for it because of ALA Girls Nation."

ALA Girls Nation not only influences career interests — it also impacts political involvement.

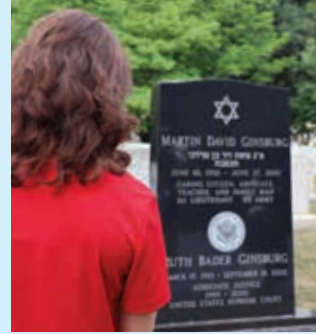
"This program gave me hope again. For a while, I fell into a state of political apathy. The whole situation felt more hateful and divisive than I thought could ever reach a point of return," said Mirmelli. "Yet now, I've seen what politics, or rather human communication, can become, and I know these women — the beautiful, intelligent friends I made — are the future. For that, I see myself involved in politics again."

While on Capitol Hill, senators had an opportunity to meet with their U.S. senators and staffers from their state.

"[Delaware senators] are wonderful people who have made admirable progress in prevalent topics such as mental



MEMORABLE MOMENTS (opposite page): Twilight Tattoo. This page: ALA Girls Nation Supreme Court; poppy ceremony; Washington, D.C. monument tour; 2023-2024 American Legion Auxiliary National President Lisa Williamson and 2023-2024 American Legion National Commander Daniel J. Seehafer; senators in Senate; senators on Capitol Hill; Korean War Memorial wreath laying; Vice President Kamala Harris speaks at a White House event.



LEARNING ON AND OFF CAMPUS (left to right): Federalist party; paying respects at Arlington National Cemetery; Korean War Memorial wreath laying; White House tour; ALA Girls Nation President Cameron Mirmelli, Arizona; party rallies; Twilight Tattoo; Nationalist party; (bottom) ALA Girls Nation and Boys Nation on the White House lawn; ALA Girls Nation and Boys Nation senators participate in the wreath laying at the Tomb of the Unknown at Arlington National Cemetery.

health amongst veterans and working on foreign relations,” said Melinda Gillespie, Delaware. “My experience meeting them caused me to want to know more about the impact our senators are pushing for and work for them through internships.”

Different perspectives

Attendees of ALA Girls Nation come from a variety of backgrounds and bring different perspectives to the program. Some hail from cities, and some are from rural communities, which naturally creates diversity in the program.

“One of my favorite things to do is interact with other people from different areas,” said Gillespie. “From them, I can gain new perspectives and find importance in things I once thought trivial. At ALA Girls Nation, I met senators from places like Alaska and Nevada, which are far from my small state of Delaware. The experiences they graciously shared with me are some of my favorite takeaways.”

Not only do participants come from different types of communities, but they also come from different types and sizes of high schools.

“For me, ALA Girls Nation seemed scary because I was with the best of the best from across the nation. I would sit

next to girls who had graduating classes of more than 1,000, while my class is not much over 100,” said Emma MacMahon, Maine. “The girls I met inspired me to stay true to myself because I had something different to offer, just like every other girl.”

It’s not goodbye, but see you later

As the final evening of ALA Girls Nation came to a close, there were hugs and tears as senators said their goodbyes. The week was full of memorable moments and new friendships that will last a lifetime.



“Every moment that week was something special: the White House visit, the Senate sessions, the Capitol Hill tour, the morning omelets, etc. For that reason, I do not think I could ever pinpoint a time as a favorite or say I was most grateful for one opportunity over another,” said Mirmelli. “However, I will point you to a time when I felt the whole week in one — the time of the most introspection: the last night. I got to say goodbye to everyone — all the friends, all the staff, all the memories. While this moment was probably the hardest of the whole week, it truly showed me what I had gained from the experience. Who knew you could feel so much love for a person, a people, and an organization even after only knowing them for a week? This moment, despite how painful it was, allowed me to see the potential of what our connections could be.”

Despite having to say goodbye, the senators will be able to stay connected through social media, and some may reconnect at college or through future careers.

Debate action on the Senate floor

During ALA Girls Nation, 16 amendments were discussed on the Senate floor. Of those, 10 amendments were passed and six failed. You can read more about each of these bills on our blog at www.ALAforVeterans.org/blog. Here’s a look at two of the bills that passed:

California ALA Girls Nation Bill: Equitable Tribal Acknowledgement Act

California ALA Girls Nation Senators Ana Sofia Gomez Garza and Jalyse Rodgers’ Senate Bill 6 aimed to codify the federal acknowledgement process of Native American tribes. The purpose of the act was to adopt and amend federal regulations regarding tribal acknowledgement, establishing more equitable criteria for the recognition of tribes.

“As someone who lives in California, which is the state with the largest population of non-federally acknowledged tribes, this is an evident problem that has yet to be addressed in our government,” said Gomez Garza. “As someone who is aware of the lack of resources,

aid, and representation given to Indigenous communities, I was passionate about writing the California bill for ALA Girls Nation on this issue. This act is important to me, as it’s the first step toward a more equitable system. While ALA Girls Nation is a mock federal government, I knew it would be a way to spread awareness and attain support to eventually bring this to the real federal government.”

Immediately after a single affirmative statement, the bill was moved to question with no negative debate, and every one of the ALA Girls Nation senators unanimously voted to pass the Equitable Tribal Acknowledgement Act.

“That is a moment I will never forget; it was very moving,” said Rodgers. “It was an amazing feeling to hear that type of support immediately after minimal points of inquiry. I was just so proud to see that everyone else agreed and that my co-senator and I wrote something that could give different communities the recognition they have long deserved.”

Florida ALA Girls Nation Bill: Deceitful Artificial Intelligence (AI) Practices Act

Florida ALA Girls Nation Senators Emily Peake and Lenna Gayhart’s Senate Bill 2 pushed to establish public clarity surrounding artificially generated media. The purpose of the Deceitful AI Practices

Act was to criminalize the deceitful usage of generative AI in publishing any category of media without a written disclaimer to limit misinformation.

“I do believe that every one of us are impacted personally by this issue. Especially in today’s age, technology has vast influence — particularly within the various media forms,” said Peake. “This bill is beyond important to America because Americans are being misinformed daily. We want to encourage technological development as a society; however, we want to do it in a way that protects our citizens and our society.”

The Deceitful AI Practices Act was the first bill to be passed this year at ALA Girls Nation. Peake said it was encouraging to hear fellow senators speak in affirmation of the bill and that they had made fantastic points and questions during debate. ★

2024 ALA Girls Nation scholarships presented

ALA Girls Nation President
Cameron Mirmelli,
Arizona: \$2,000

ALA Girls Nation Vice President
Isabella Windmiller, Missouri: \$2,000

Outstanding Senator
Anneliese Barga,
Nebraska: \$2,000

Outstanding Senator
Sophia Self, Alabama: \$2,000

Outstanding Junior Counselor
Tina Majdinasab, Texas: \$1,000

Legion Family gatherings

This year’s session was an American Legion Family affair. There were more joint events between ALA Girls Nation and American Legion Boys Nation. A highlight for both groups — an invitation to the White House. Senators were able to tour the White House and enjoy activities on the South Lawn alongside NCAA athletes who were being honored. And new this year: Both groups were together at the wreath laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown at Arlington National Cemetery. Two senators each from ALA Girls Nation and American Legion Boys Nation were chosen to take part in the annual tradition. The senators were also together for Twilight Tattoo and Capitol Hill day.

In addition to the joint events, senators learned more about The American Legion Family. 2023-2024 leaders American Legion Auxiliary National President Lisa Williamson, American Legion National Commander Daniel J. Seehafer, and Sons of The American Legion National Commander Donald L. “JR” Hall Jr. each addressed the senators.

Let the Good Times Roll

2023-2024 ALA year closes with celebrating successes, Be the One mission

By Sara Fowler

Red, white, and blue. Poppy flower dresses. Patriotic hats. The hall at the American Legion Auxiliary's 103rd National Convention was full of excitement as members celebrated another administrative year serving veterans, military, and their families.

Convention opened with 2023-2024 American Legion Auxiliary National President Lisa Williamson surprising the crowd when she entered the large session hall from the back of the room, dancing with the New Orleans Jaywalkers Second Line Band, hyping up members for a fun week. Members danced to the music with patriotic attire and Mardi Gras-themed ensembles to commemorate convention taking place in The Big Easy.

"I'm so glad all of you were able to come celebrate with us," Williamson said from the stage as she addressed delegates, alternates, and guests. "It has been such an amazing year for the ALA. From the lives we changed through our Be the One mission to the incredible achievements of our grassroots members, we have so much to celebrate."

And celebrate, we did!

Each morning before sessions began, members mingled among one another, took photos with their department signs, and met new friends and reacquainted with old ones.

After last year's delegates voted to increase the delegate strength for each department, that upped the convention attendees to 897, with an estimated 1,400 ALA members and guests total in New Orleans.

Be the One was the national focus during the administrative year — be the one to save one. To reiterate this message to the convention crowd, Waco

Hoover, American Legion Be the One chair, started off convention discussing this important topic.

He touched on how The American Legion Family was all in this together as the Legion, ALA, and Sons focused on this topic through the year.

"Thanks for supporting, and always remember to Be the One," he said.

The Be the One mission was woven throughout the convention from stage presentations each day to a breakout session on the topic to a Be the One video vignette.

Let's get to business

At its core, National Convention is a business meeting. Each national chair reports on their program in action, celebrating what units and departments did throughout the year, sharing stories and photos of successes. Information shared in the reports gives the audience and those watching from home ideas of what they can do too — ideas to work the mission in different ways.

The convention body voted on nine amendments at this year's meeting. Many members came to the microphone in favor of and in opposition to the presented amendments, taking advantage of the opportunity to ask questions and clarify their understanding prior to casting their votes.

To read about these amendments in depth and the voting outcome of the nine amendments, go to page 18 in this issue of *Auxiliary*.

In addition to voting, convention business and reporting also included merry moments: 13 departments achieved 100% membership goal by the July 4 deadline:

Did you know?

Color Guards have been an important part of American history. To revel this, members of the American Legion Auxiliary can participate in the Color Guard Contest held on the Friday before National Convention each year. Visit www.legion.org to learn more.

(Photo: Jennifer Blohm/The American Legion)



Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Hawaii, Maryland, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Mexico, and Pennsylvania. Ten departments achieved 102% membership goal by the July 27 deadline: Alaska, Arizona, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Hawaii, Maryland, Michigan, New Hampshire, and New Mexico.

Members also had the chance to participate in two different breakout sessions — Be the One training provided by Columbia University, and parliamentary procedure training. Attendees said both were educational and worthwhile to ALA member participants.

A new group of national officers

The Wednesday morning of convention is always an exciting time to vote for the next national leaders of the organization.

Trish Ward of the Department of Kansas was elected the ALA's 2024-2025 national president. The national ALA focus this year is to share a content enablement experience to help departments help their units succeed. During her department visits, Ward will focus on how to build leadership capacity and share knowledge on how to stop the trend of units surrendering their charters.

"I would like to extend deep thanks and gratitude to my unit, Department of Kansas, and the great Central Division for your support," she said during the installation ceremony of officers. "I am forever grateful and humbled."

Read more about Ward on page 38 in this issue of *Auxiliary*.

Other national officers elected to serve during the 2024-2025 administrative year: Pam Ray, national vice president; Rosemarie W. Hauck, Central Division national vice president; Lauren Lloyd, Eastern Division national vice president; Debra Albers, Northwestern Division national vice president; Cheryl Shine, Southern Division national vice president; Beverly Eads, Western Division national vice president; Linda Boone, national secretary; Virginia Hobbs, national treasurer; Monique Batiste, national chaplain; and DaraAnne Oliver, national historian. Learn more about the national officers at www.ALAforVeterans.org/about/national-leadership.

Always working the mission

Outside of National Convention, 2023-2024 was another successful ALA administrative year. With a focus on Be the One to help our veterans who are struggling, members learned it's OK to not be OK. Together, we truly made a difference.

We continued to recruit and retain members, making ALA membership a priority. Along with that, our mission of serving veterans, military, and their families remained front and center as members worked the mission day in and day out. The momentum to 2024-2025 continues with a focus on the future and always moving the mission forward.



CELEBRATION TIME: ALA's Salute to Servicemembers Award recipients honored; Barbara Waldon and Janie Iglehart of Texas ready for a convention session; Wreaths Across America was honored as the Public Spirit Award recipient; 2023-2024 ALA National President Lisa Williamson with National President's Award for Excellence winners; Williamson with Junior Member of the Year Sadie Mullen, New Hampshire; ALA Girls Nation President Cameron Mirmelli, Arizona.

National ALA awards presented to recipients

Public Spirit Award

2023-2024 National President Lisa Williamson chose Wreaths Across America (WAA) to be the recipient of this year's Public Spirit Award.

"The Public Spirit Award is more than just a recognition — it is a tribute to organizations that go above and beyond in their efforts to honor and uplift those who have served our country," Williamson said from the convention stage.

To accept the award on stage on behalf of WAA's Executive Director Karen Worcester, who could not attend the presentation in person, was Jeff Pierce, WAA's director of broadcasting and media partnerships. Worcester expressed gratitude via Zoom greeting.

"I am very humbled to accept this award," she said. "Thank you, thank you, thank you."

In August 2023, the American Legion Auxiliary national organization partnered with Wreaths Across America to build a stronger awareness of each group's common missions while supporting fundraising efforts nationwide.

Wreaths Across America's mission is to remember our fallen U.S. veterans, honor those who serve, and teach our children the value of freedom. WAA's mission closely aligns with the ALA's as they continue to pay homage to our heroes after they have passed from this world.

After participating in Wreaths Across America Day while she was national vice president, Williamson was hooked and wanted to join the entire WAA Day caravan and become more involved, leading to her decision to honor WAA with the Public Spirit Award.

"I couldn't think of a better organization to receive this award," Williamson said during convention.

Unit Member of the Year

Unit Member of the Year recipients were recognized at the American Legion Auxiliary Luncheon at National Convention.

"These outstanding individuals have shown exceptional dedication to our mission," Williamson said at the luncheon. "Through their tireless efforts and generous contributions, they've made a significant impact on others."

Trishia Eubanks from the Department of Nevada was a Unit Member of the Year honored.

After she found out she was nominated, Eubanks said she was shocked.

"You volunteer and do what you can and see a need, and you just want to help and fill that need," she said. "I totally did not expect to be nominated or expect this luncheon."

Eubanks said it was an honor to attend the ALA Luncheon.

"It feels good to be recognized," she said. "But that's not what we do it for. To know that [the Department of Nevada] thinks that highly of me makes me feel good."



Open each day, the Wall of Heroes gave National Convention attendees a chance to honor a hero in their life by donating to the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation. Members lined up, excited to recognize their veteran, and donate to a good cause. Donors wrote the name of their honoree on a paper star and adhered it to the Wall of Heroes display where it remained for the duration of the convention. This year, over \$32,000 was raised to support the Mission Endowment Fund through this meaningful initiative.

ALA departments were proud to honor the 2024 ALA Unit Member of the Year recipients for going above and beyond for our nation's veterans, military, and their families:

Alabama: Mary Westbrook; Arizona: Erica Bailey; Arkansas: Donaice Harris; California: Kathleen Salas; Colorado: Jodi Fisher; Delaware: Margie Abbott; Florida: Yvonne Hargis; Georgia: Nancie Albin; Hawaii: Harlow Thomas; Idaho: Louise Harbaugh; Illinois: Deb Talbert; Iowa: Margaret Kenyon; Kansas: Wanda Gabel; Kentucky: Linda Brewer; Louisiana: Regina Fulmer; Maine: Rita Smith; Maryland: Charlene Hall; Massachusetts: Sande Young; Michigan: Michele Stetts; Minnesota: Molly Magnuson; Mississippi: Cathy Stroud; Missouri: Norma Wengert; Montana: Nancy Linnell; Nebraska: Erica Albers; Nevada: Trishia Eubanks; New Hampshire: Carole Boisclair; New Jersey: Danielle DiBenedetto; New Mexico: Maria Baldwin; New York:

Cathy Simpson; North Carolina: Pansy Harris; North Dakota: Deb Sparrow; Ohio: Brandy Little; Oklahoma: Angie Wagstaff; Pennsylvania: Patricia Hetrick; Rhode Island: Gwen Benoit; South Carolina: Carolyn Wainwright; South Dakota: Marlene Elmers; Tennessee: Michele Osborn; Texas: Janice Titus; Utah: Marva Alexander; Virginia: Loretta Paruti; West Virginia: Sarah Tolstyka; Wisconsin: Terry Giles; Wyoming: Georgie Garland. (Note: Not all American Legion Auxiliary departments submitted names for this award.)

Salute to Servicemembers

Presented annually at the American Legion Auxiliary National Convention, our Salute to Servicemembers Award honors military personnel who are currently



CREATING MEMORIES: Members show off their patriotic attire; Unit Member of the Year recipients are honored at the ALA Luncheon; Paul Woodward, Idaho, attends his first convention as an ALA member; U.S. Coast Guard Chief Petty Officer Caitlin Barker's daughter, Isabelle, holds her mom's award; members of the Department of Missouri; Jayce Chanda, Mississippi, wears patriotic and Mardi Gras gear; and Sons of The American Legion member Byron Krupco, Kansas, attends convention.

...serving our country in the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard, Space Force, and the National Guard/Reserve. This award closely aligns with our mission, supporting our military. Three of the recipients were able to attend National Convention to accept their awards:

- U.S. Air Force: Chief Master Sgt. Dustin D. Troyer (Nominated by the Department of Nebraska)
- U.S. Army: Staff Sgt. Helen Trevino (Nominated by the Department of North Carolina)
- U.S. Coast Guard: Chief Petty Officer Caitlin Barker (Nominated by the Department of Ohio)
- U.S. National Guard: Technical Sgt. Donald Lambert (Nominated by the Department of West Virginia)
- U.S. Navy: Petty Officer Stephanie Auen (Nominated by the Department of Iowa)

**There was no nomination for U.S. Marine Corps or U.S. Space Force.*

To learn more about this year's winners, check out the ALA blog at www.ALAforVeterans.org/blog.

National President's Award for Excellence

National President's Award for Excellence unit winners included Wynnewood Unit 511, Dallas; John Gella Memorial Unit 219, Fruitland Park, Fla.; Burton Woolery Unit 18, Bloomington, Ind.; and Madison Unit 229, Madison, Ala. The department winner of the National President's Award for Excellence was the Department of Ohio.

Williamson, alongside 2023-2024 American Legion National Commander Daniel J. Seehafer and Sons of The American Legion Commander Donald "JR" Hall Jr. presented a new Auxiliary award this year: The National President's Award for Excellence Unity Award recognized a unit's Legion Family efforts toward the Be the One mission. The winner was Garner Unit 91 in Beebe, Ark.

"It doesn't matter the size of the post; it matters the size of your heart," Unit 91 President Carol Westergren said. ★

Missed the 2024 ALA National Convention?



Catch up by watching archived videos of the general session livestream, plus national officer elections and installation, by visiting www.ALAforVeterans.org/convention. Want to attend the ALA's largest national event? The next National Convention will be our 104th, held in Tampa, Fla., in late August 2025. Follow our social media @ALAforVeterans for future convention information.

Thank you to everyone who made the ALA National Convention livestream work! I was planning to attend this year in New Orleans. But I got the diagnosis of cancer. My cancer surgery was done on Aug. 20. So being home and missing out made me very sad. Getting up each morning and being able to see all the reports lifted my spirit, more than you can know. – Sandy Wersal, Minnesota



REMEMBERING THE LEGACY OF PAST NATIONAL PRESIDENT KATHERINE MORRIS

It is with deep sadness and heavy hearts that we announce the passing of 2003-2004 National President Katherine Morris of Texas. Morris' passion for serving veterans and her commitment to the American Legion Auxiliary led her to be an inspirational national president whose focus was on "Hearts in Service" and leading members back to the core values of the ALA's mission. Morris lived a life marked by service, commitment, and love.

Morris, of Houston, passed away peacefully on Aug. 11, 2024, just two months shy of her 90th birthday. She was born on Oct. 7, 1934, to Frank and Rosa LaFaso and

"We need caring members who keep our military families in their hearts all year-round. And our members have plenty of room in their hearts for veterans whose sacrifices taught all Americans that freedom and our way of life are worth the fight."

came from a big, close-knit Italian family that always put family first.

"Mom was the matriarch of the family — always the first one family members called to help with paperwork and important matters," said Morris' daughter and ALA member Donna Dillard. "Any time spent with family members was cherished by her."

Morris' ALA legacy began in 1972 when she joined the Griffith-Zann Unit 594 in Houston.

Further down the road, Unit 594 awarded her with an Honorary Life Membership for her unwavering service. In 2023, she transferred her membership to the Edward H. White II Unit 521 in Pasadena.

Morris was eligible for Auxiliary membership through her husband John Morris, a Korean War-era U.S. Army veteran.

"It was her love and her strength that made her so special," said Dillard. "She had a deep desire to help veterans, military, and their families. She became involved in the ALA in the early '70s and never slowed down."

Morris' election to national president came after years of dedication and hard work at all levels of the organization. She

served in several chairmanships, as well as unit, district, and department president. At the national level, she served as vice president and chair of numerous committees, including ALA Girls Nation, Legislative, Poppy, Education, and Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation. She was exceptionally passionate about ALA Girls State and ALA Girls Nation, and for many years, served as a volunteer on staff of ALA Texas Bluebonnet Girls State. Morris' proven leadership ability and kind heart prepared her to be the Auxiliary's 83rd national president.

"We need caring members who keep our military families in their hearts all year-round. And our members have plenty of room in their hearts for veterans whose sacrifices taught all Americans that freedom and our way of life are worth the fight," said Morris in a 2003 ALA *National News* story.



VETERANS AFFAIRS & REHABILITATION: PARTNERSHIPS HONOR, HELP VETERANS

www.Facebook.com/groups/ALAVAR

The American Legion Auxiliary collaborates with several outstanding veteran-related groups. Please consider donating your time or money to help them recognize veterans.

Wreaths Across America is based in Maine. Each year, hundreds of thousands of wreaths are placed on veterans' graves at Arlington National Cemetery, state veterans cemeteries in all U.S. states, overseas, at sea, and — in case you didn't know — on graves in local cemeteries. The motto of this group is "Remember, Honor, Teach." You can sponsor a wreath for a veteran from your family or someone you don't even know at any of these sites.

You and your unit/department can lead a sponsorship group, coordinate a ceremony location, or volunteer to decorate graves on the specific selected day. It's always in December, but may vary with location. The Wreaths Across America group also wants to teach students about the importance of remembering our deceased veterans.

Please go to www.ALAFORVeterans.org/wreaths-across-america or www.wreathscrossamerica.org where you will find huge amounts of information to use in your communities.

Honor Flight is another organization the ALA supports. Their mission is celebrating

America's veterans by inviting them to share in a special day of honor at our nation's memorials that were built to commemorate their service and sacrifice.

Members, units, and departments also make and sign cards for "mail call," where mail is given to the veterans, and their responses are amazing! Our members also provide a welcoming team for the veterans in Washington, D.C., as well as when they return home.

To learn more, visit www.ALAFORVeterans.org/Poppy-Funds.



Dr. Coral May Grout is a 71-year Paid Up For Life member of Eugene M. Connor Unit 193 in Winchendon, Mass.



Thank You for Reporting!

2023-2024 Impact Report		2023-2024 Impact Report	
ALA 2023-2024 REPORTED Total Volunteer Hours: 7,247,400 Dollars Raised/Spent for Veterans, Military & Their Families: \$14,280,608 Dollars Raised/Spent on Youth, Scholarships, Community: \$12,021,393 Subtotal: \$269,017,427		TOTAL IMPACT NUMBERS ADDITIONAL ASSETS ALA Net Assets: \$33,606,346 ALA Foundation Net Assets with net interest: \$258,852 ALA Foundation Net Assets with net interest: \$2,819,580 Total Impact of Volunteer Service & Contributions: \$316,606,226	
VOLUNTEER HOURS REPORTED Hours Serving Veterans: 3,340,088 Hours Serving Military: 1,241,840 Hours Serving Families: 391,499 Hours Serving All Other: 576,272 Total Volunteer Hours: 7,247,400		SERVICE FOR VETERANS/MILITARY/FAMILIES REPORTED Number of Veterans: 648,756 Number of Military Personnel: 143,626 Number of Youth: 463,844	
DOLLARS RAISED/SPENT ON VETERANS, MILITARY & THEIR FAMILIES REPORTED Veterans: \$8,014,481 Military: \$2,254,338 Families: \$2,798,968 Military: \$1,473,067 Total Dollars Raised/Spent: \$14,280,608		DOLLARS RAISED/SPENT ON YOUTH, SCHOLARSHIPS, COMMUNITY REPORTED Youth Support: \$1,241,091 Scholarships: \$489,498 Community: \$199,292 Total Youth, Scholarships, & Community: \$12,021,393	

Every hour, every dollar ALA members invest in our mission of helping veterans, military, and their families adds up. It not only gives each member a sense of pride in belonging to the organization, but it allows us to demonstrate our effectiveness to the world.

- Total impact of volunteer service and contributions: **\$316,606,226**
- Total volunteer hours: **7,247,400**
- Total dollars raised/spent on veterans, military, and their families: **\$14,280,608**
- Total dollars raised/spent on youth, scholarships, and community: **\$12,021,393**

Download the ALA's 2023-2024 Impact Numbers:
www.ALAFORVeterans.org/About/Annual-Reports.

PUBLIC RELATIONS: ESTABLISHING A PR STRATEGY IS SIGNIFICANT

 www.Facebook.com/groups/ALApublicrelations

Increase membership through public relations? Of course! Retain members through PR? Absolutely! Following are some effective strategies to boost and retain your membership while establishing a positive presence in the community. Having a public relations strategy in place can help your unit achieve many of your goals — whether it's attracting new members or proving value to current ones.

First, you need to **understand your audience**. Knowing your current members' demographics, interests, and goals will allow you to target new audiences effectively. Your audience within your community may include members of your American Legion Family, the Chamber of Commerce, military families, and public service

organizations. Having a clear communication message about your purpose can attract potential members.

Control your messaging — be proactive! You should be the first one to share news about the ALA and what's happening. Include updates on your website, newsletters, and social media. Highlighting the unique stories of current members can draw in new members and demonstrate the value of membership through real-life examples. Showcasing the diverse activities and community support you offer can increase volunteer and member interest.

Create great content for press releases. When creating a release, develop concise, solution-oriented content. Make it interesting and

attention-grabbing! Consider using photos, testimonials, and member quotes to engage prospective members visually. And, always have a call to action.

Honesty is key! Honesty and transparency can build trust. Communicate how membership dues contribute to the mission and how fundraising dollars are used to build trust and show accomplishments.

Be sure to utilize the PR tools available at www.ALAforVeterans.org.

Remember: Effective PR not only attracts new members but also retains existing ones!



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



Benefits of Membership

ALA members have access to exclusive retail and travel discounts, insurance offerings, and disaster and hardship financial assistance up to \$3,000.

Take advantage of these benefits today.

1. Enjoy discounts, rewards, and perks on thousands of brands including Hertz, Sam's Club, Walt Disney World, Toyota, Skechers, and more with BenefitHub! Enter the ALA member referral code **HZE7XG** when creating your account.
2. When you shop at R. Riveter using the ALA's exclusive link (www.riveter.com/?sscid=61k8_mz25p), 15% of your purchase will be

donated back to the ALA. Use code **WELCOMEALA** for 20% off your purchase.

3. Automatically get 20% off of your purchase when you shop the Lands' End Business ALA storefront (business. landsend.com/store/ala/). Discount applied at checkout.
4. Use ShipThrifty to save time and money on shipping costs. Use the exclusive member code **ALA** at sign-up.
5. Find exactly what you're looking for with thousands of Hotels by Wyndham by using the ALA member code **100002807M**.

For a full list of member benefits, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/member-benefits.

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COMMUNITY SERVICE: EVERYONE IS WELCOME

 www.Facebook.com/groups/ALACommunityService

The recently established American Legion Family Day can be a very successful event to invite the community to where we are. This event is observed every year on the last Saturday of April to recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of the Legion Family. Planning for this event should begin early, and it would be best to form a committee that includes members from all four groups of The American Legion Family.

This can be an all-day event where you invite the entire community, civic leaders, mayor, military, and local law enforcement. Be sure to reserve the post home well in

advance to secure the date. This fun day should include information from all of our programs. Promote membership with applications and informational brochures on how to join the Legion Family.

Meeting the community where they are gives us the opportunity to lend a helping hand in projects that are important and builds long-lasting relationships.

The Martin Luther King Jr. National Day of Service is right around the corner. Designated by Congress in 1994, this day should be used to honor Dr. King's legacy by devoting a day to volunteer instead of just a day off from work or

school. This is a great opportunity to plan a project with veterans and the community in mind.

These are just a few of the volunteer opportunities offered and promoted by the American Legion Auxiliary. You can find detailed information on how to plan these and other community service projects at www.ALAForVeterans.org.

Remember: Everyone is welcome as we continue to support our communities through the ALA.



Anita Biggs is a 32-year member of the Auxiliary. She belongs to Jackie Robinson Unit 252 in Los Angeles.

EDUCATION: ALA'S SPIRIT OF YOUTH AND NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENT SCHOLARSHIPS HAVE EXPANDED

 www.Facebook.com/groups/ALAEducation

In May 2025, the American Legion Auxiliary Spirit of Youth (SOY) Scholarship once again will be awarded to one recipient from each ALA department. Each state/department winner will receive a \$1,000 scholarship, offering more opportunities for our members to earn money for higher education opportunities.

Five of those lucky winners will receive a \$5,000 scholarship instead of \$1,000. The \$5,000 Spirit of Youth scholarships are granted one for each division awarded by the ALA national Education Committee, based on a scoring rubric.

Why is it important to have the whole family involved in the American Legion Auxiliary, The American Legion, and Sons of The American Legion? Scholarships for college are just one reason. Applicants must hold a membership for the past three consecutive

years to apply and maintain the membership through the scholarship period.

Another exciting change is with the Non-Traditional Student Scholarship. The question is, "How can we attract more veterans to belong to the Legion Family?" Veterans who have been honorably discharged, the spouses of active-duty military, and spouses of honorably discharged veterans are now eligible to apply for the Non-Traditional Student Scholarship. All Legion Family members who are non-traditional students are also still welcome to apply.

Five \$2,000 Non-Traditional Student Scholarships are awarded annually, one per division.

This scholarship helps support Legion Family members, veterans, and now the spouses of veterans or active-duty military spouses who return to the classroom after

taking time off due to service or life changes. We are never too old to learn something new, and within the American Legion Auxiliary, we want to encourage education no matter your age.

Both scholarship expansions have the potential to increase your ALA unit membership. Explain to your local Legion Family that there is a membership requirement for the SOY scholarship. If they have a daughter or granddaughter entering high school this year, now is the time to join.

Scholarship applications are now live. The deadline is March 1, 2025. To learn more about these two scholarships and the others offered by the ALA, visit www.ALAForVeterans.org/scholarships.



Suzanne Knapp is a 57-year member of the Auxiliary. She belongs to Michigan Unit 4 in Mt. Clemens.

AUXILIARY READER SURVEY COLLECTS VALUABLE FEEDBACK

As a membership magazine, stories in *Auxiliary* are focused on our members and all things ALA-related. Published quarterly (February, May, August, and November), *Auxiliary* features ALA members and units dedicated to fulfilling our mission, highlights national ALA events, provides tips and tools to help you serve veterans, military, and their

families, and so much more.

Every few years, American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters offers an *Auxiliary* reader survey to discover more details about our magazine audience. With the information gathered from each survey, we are better able to shape *Auxiliary* toward what you — our readers — want to learn and read more about.

The reader survey lets your voice be heard. Your feedback helps us

understand your overall satisfaction with the magazine, gain perspective of what topics interest you, and allows us to identify opportunities for improvement.

Member feedback is greatly appreciated, and your opinion matters. Your input is important to help strengthen our mission, and it is being gathered and recognized on a constant basis as National Headquarters plans content for future magazine issues.

2024 *Auxiliary* Magazine Reader Survey Results

Thank you to our readers for making *Auxiliary* magazine a top read among national ALA media!



28%
pass their copy of *Auxiliary* to others

83%
gave a positive assessment of *Auxiliary*

65%
joined the ALA to honor a relative who served

18.3
average membership years in ALA

40
minutes the average reader spends

16%
got involved or volunteered after reading *Auxiliary*

2%
gave *Auxiliary* a low rating

83%
read most, some, or all of *Auxiliary*

22%
spend more than 1 hour reading *Auxiliary*

26%
discuss or share an article after reading *Auxiliary*

77%
topic of interest on what ALA is doing to serve veterans, military, and families

78%
Auxiliary is relevant to me or my ALA unit

22%
have been a member for 1 to 4 years

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

NOVEMBER

Thankfulness

What are you thankful for? We are thankful for so much, but we oftentimes only mention how thankful we are for “things.”

Have you ever thought about how thankful we should be for others who are in our life? That we have family and friends? So many people are alone and by themselves this time of year. And not having anyone around to share holidays and gatherings with makes it that much harder.

While holding that cell phone, call a member you have not seen at a meeting.

Grab a notecard and send a message to a Gold Star Family member.

Give a compliment to the person who goes above and beyond.

Show up for those who need to see you support them.

Run an errand for someone who may not get out as much anymore.

The smallest gestures are the most appreciated.

Take time to visit Auxiliary members, Legion Family members, servicemen and women, and neighbors who may not have any family or friends. You would be surprised how much that visit is appreciated. It does not cost anything to be kind. Your blessings come by being a blessing to others. Remember to give thanks for small things. The more you are thankful, the more you will receive.

Prayer: We are grateful to be able to share with friends and family and those who are alone. Bless us with a heart to show appreciation and thankfulness, and the desire to return kindness to others. May we be reminded that our blessings come from being a blessing and blessing others. Amen.

DECEMBER

Blessed are the givers

We all have some kind of talent or gifts. How do you use yours? Baking is a gift. Crafting is a gift. Singing is a gift. And everyone who has an amazing talent or gift loves to share them with others. A giver of service.

Proverbs 12:25 reads, “The one who blesses others is abundantly blessed; those who help others are helped.” May we learn to give with joyful hearts and know that our gifts are used to bless others.

We make many sacrifices for others. And our blessings are the gifts we receive in return. But know that you will

always be blessed and provided for. Be a giver of gifts and not just a gift wrapped in pretty paper and in a box. Some of us are blessed with many gifts. And during this holiday season, there are many opportunities to share those gifts. If you are blessed with the gift of cooking, prepare a meal and deliver it to a military family or an elderly member who may not be able to prepare for themselves anymore.

Prayer: We are grateful for those who give willingly and generously. May the richest of blessings be poured upon them.

Bless and provide for the faithful, cheerful givers. Remind us of all of the gifts we are blessed with and that we continue to use them for the good of others. Amen.



JANUARY

Renewal and revitalization

5, 4, 3, 2, 1! Happy New Year!

We're excited and hope for new beginnings every year. We make a new list or resolutions each year praying we follow through with it. Sometimes we stick to the plan; most times we don't. Find one

thing you really want to do differently. One new thing. And stick to it! You may say it can't happen because of time, resources, or energy. But you can't have new and better if you don't trust yourself enough to grasp it.

Be the one good thing someone else needs this new year. Make a resolution or a promise to set aside time to listen to or send a note or card to a veteran who just returned from active duty. Or a caregiver of a veteran. Or a mother waiting for her child to return home from a military assignment. Their new year may not have started the way they wanted. And a kind word or nice gesture may be the hope they need to help them through a difficult time.

Lead the way by praying for those who may not be able to pray for themselves. Lead the way by being there to lift each other up in a time of need. Lead the way by being the positive motivation your members and veterans may need.

Be confident enough to do anything, strong enough to face everything, bold enough to say you can — lead the way into the New Year.

Prayer: May the New Year be filled with new blessings, joy, and peace. We pray for strength to leave behind old things that cause bitterness and pain, and that we are renewed so we can receive an abundance of blessings and new beginnings. Amen.



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

Investing Back in You: Our Members

Get to know 2024-2025 ALA National President Trish Ward



She's known as the creative one, the out-of-the-box thinker, the strategic planner. She often uses skills from her previous day job to help the American Legion Auxiliary grow and achieve its goals.

2024-2025 American Legion Auxiliary National President Trish Ward is the third ALA national president from the Department of Kansas and is a Paid Up For Life member of John P. Hand Unit 250.

Ward shared with *Auxiliary* magazine about her family, Auxiliary involvement, the 2024-2025 national focus, and why the ALA is so important to her.

Family first

Ward is eligible for membership through her father, World War II U.S. Army veteran John M. Brusati, and grandfather, WWII U.S. Navy veteran Edmund S. Lindberg.

"I'm really proud to be a daughter of the generation known as the Greatest Generation," she said. "I really feel the responsibility of honoring that generation."

She and her husband, Steve, bring children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren to The American Legion Family.

Born and raised in California, Ward eventually ended up in the Midwest. So why the Sunflower State?

"I met a wonderful man who is from Kansas, and got married," she said. "I left home, left family, left friends — left everything. I loved him. We strategized a future for us in Kansas."

Do you have the correct leadership photo on your wall? Lots of American Legion post homes and ALA offices display their commander and president photos, along with the national-level leaders. You can always find our current national president photo available for download at www.ALAforVeterans.org/National-President. ALA national officers are elected every August, and the new photos are posted on the website directly after.

In her professional career, Ward was employed as a senior lead project manager at Lumen, a global multinational technology and IT company, before retiring to focus on her national president duties. She holds bachelor's degrees from both the University of Southern California and the University of Kansas.

Together, she and Steve carved out a life in the suburbs of Kansas City. They operated a small business, but she still felt lost in a new town and new state. Their realtor was the one who suggested they join The American Legion Family.

Path leads to Auxiliary involvement

Taking her realtor's advice, Ward joined the ALA and became a member of the Department of Kansas.



"I'm looking forward to the member experience and trying to understand and help the grassroots level understand what they face, overcome barriers they perceive are in place, and become more successful to work the mission on behalf of those who serve."

— 2024-2025 National President Trish Ward



Learn more by following the national president's travels via Facebook at www.Facebook.com/ALANationalpresident.

“I am very fortunate that Unit 250 was so welcoming,” Ward recalled of those early ALA days. “They very much embraced a new kid from California. They made me feel valued and welcomed, and that I had something to contribute.”

Having a place to hang out and meet people was the initial reason for joining the American Legion Auxiliary, Ward said.

“I didn’t know about the programs,” she recalled. “Then they became more important than a place to hang out. I became very interested in the programs of the organization.”

As she became more active in her unit, Ward was asked to be unit president, and her involvement and interest in the ALA continued to grow from there.

“Leadership capacity is so needed,” she said. “We need people to step up and give their time, get interested, and do the best they can.”

She started attending district meetings, ran for office, and was elected. Ward really wanted to lead as department president someday.

“I am here as national president today because JoAnn Cronin saw something in me,” she said. “She was national president at the time and came to visit Kansas. I was district president, and she invited me to the first strategic planning experience in 2006. That was my welcome to the national organization. I met a lot of people.”

Ward was also an American Legion Auxiliary Foundation Board of Directors charter member when it was created in 2007, and was its first secretary. She crafted the ALA Foundation’s original minutes and bylaws.

“It gave me a really great foundation about the Foundation itself,” she said.

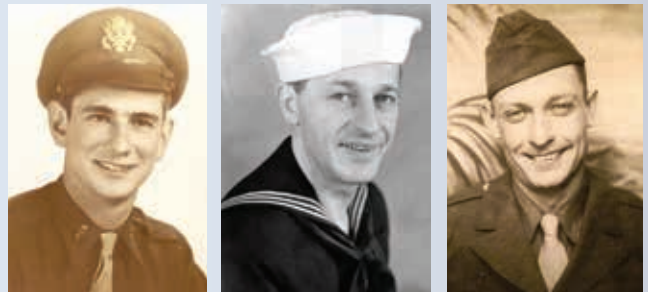
Later, Ward was Department of Kansas president in 2010-2011, National Executive Committee member in 2011, and then was appointed national Membership Committee chair by 2011-2012 National President Kris Nelson.

Ward has served in several unit-, district-, and department-level positions. At the national level, she served as committee chair of Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, Children & Youth, Constitution & Bylaws, Leadership, Legislative, ALA Girls Nation, Public Relations, and Membership; as Central Division National Vice President; National Executive Committee member; American Legion Auxiliary Foundation Board of Directors member; and served on the ALA Centennial Strategic Plan Team.

“I’m grateful to have had the experience to chair those committees,” she said. “Every one of them prepared me for this opportunity.”

Ward said she has always loved language and is keenly interested in words, drawing her to the Constitution & Bylaws Committee. However, National Security is her favorite program.

“I love National Security for the opportunity that activities within the program’s components enable our members to connect and work with active-duty military



OVER THE YEARS (top to bottom, left to right): 2024-2025 ALA National President Trish Ward’s dad, grandfather, and father-in law all served in the military; Ward at her installation as national vice president in 2023; Ward and her husband, Steve, with the award Kansas won for the National President’s Award for Excellence in 2010-2011; Ward as a young girl; Ward and Steve; at installation as department president in 2010; with grandchildren; with National Vice President Pam Ray at the 2024 National Convention.

and their families, support our communities through recognizing and aligning with first responders in support of community preparedness and finally — and probably most importantly — playing a role in remembering our POW/MIA and assuring we will strive to make sure those missing all come home,” she said. “I love the work our Legion Family does to make sure those missing in action are never forgotten. Until all are home, we will continue to advocate on their behalf and support their families.”

A national focus on strengthening membership for 2024-2025

“I believe strongly with all my heart — do not stop what you are doing. Do not stop the great work accomplished by prior administrations,” Ward said.

“Do not stop supporting adaptive sports, do not stop supporting caregivers, don’t stop supporting NVCAF companions, and don’t stop supporting Be the One.”

For the 2024-2025 administrative year, Ward wants to add on to the previous administrative year focus areas the American Legion Auxiliary already does well.

“We want to invest back in you — invest back in our departments and units to be more successful in growing this organization,” she said.

“We must do that. These units are the fabric of America. This administrative year is about investing back.”

To help with this, Ward created the Department Excellence Initiative, which is divided into two parts. The first is that Ward will be visiting departments and delivering content to help units and departments have greater awareness, knowledge, and understanding how they can impact the organization at the grassroots level.

Ward said she is going to focus on four truth statements:

- Small-town rural environments are struggling
- Leadership capacity is dwindling
- Membership is aging and churning
- Infrastructure is weakening

“I’m going to share best practices on how departments and units can head in a more positive trajectory and stop units from surrendering charters,” she said. “Every truth statement will have a resource page with articles, websites, and more. I want to leave them better than I found them.”

The second part of the Department Excellence Initiative is the Department Merit Medallion. There are five established areas of focus that, if achieved, will drive business and operational excellence:

- Achieve 85% membership benchmark goal by March 15, 2025
- Submit department impact report
- Governance excellence (C&B annual review, board responsibilities, disciplinary process, meeting and voting authority)
- Financial policies and process (990 compliance, audit standards)
- Financial donation (ALA Foundation Veteran Projects Fund, Auxiliary Emergency Fund)

“Let’s build on and try to work together to really

shore up the foundation of this organization,” Ward urges members. “It’s investing back in ourselves so we can position for the future to help those we serve.”

At its most basic level, the content delivery is all about members and helping them in any way possible.

“Units need more tools to be successful,” she said. “We are helping them by giving them the resources they need.”

Ward said she hopes the delivered content is successful and helps

departments and units make critical adjustments for the ALA’s future.

“It’s important we get this figured out, or we are going to lose more units,” she said. “Some are very strong and doing well. Everywhere we need people to step up, and we don’t have that. People are afraid of stepping up in leadership roles.”

Moving the mission forward

The national focus ties into Ward’s vision for the 2024-2025 administrative year: “leading the way.” The inspiration comes from the North Star — the brightest in the sky — that often leads the way for travelers.

“There are two things this organization needs at the grassroots level — greater inspiration and aspiration,” she said. “I hope to leave our members renewed and empowered that they have what they need. It is the people in these little units doing big things every day, and we cannot lose them.” ★

By Sara Fowler, Staff Writer

A Paid Up for Life membership demonstrates a lifelong commitment to the American Legion Auxiliary and veterans, military, and their families. Do you want to be a PUFL member like National President Trish? Visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/PUFL to learn more!



Ready to visit departments and units

National President Trish Ward has already been meeting members at the grassroots level as the 2024-2025 administrative year is underway. The goal is to bring content delivery to members to help them better serve the ALA’s mission of supporting veterans, military, and their families. Together, we will be able to make a difference for this organization.



***Veteran Projects
Fund awards
73 grants
totaling
\$345,853***

The Veteran Projects Fund (VPF) was implemented in 2013 to help support projects that directly assist veterans and their families. Since then, the ALA Foundation has awarded 73 grants totaling \$345,853. VPF grants are awarded to American Legion Auxiliary tax-exempt entities for projects that meet a one-time, new need benefitting multiple veterans, military, and their families.

These grants are funded by generous ALA Foundation supporters.

By donating to the VPF, you are not only ensuring veterans receive the care and support they deserve, but you're also supporting the ALA national focus for 2024-2025.

 **AMERICAN
LEGION**

**AUXILIARY
FOUNDATION**

To learn more or to apply for a VPF grant, visit www.ALAFoundation.org/grants.

To donate, scan the QR code, text LEAD to 1-844-940-3450, mail a check to the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation at 3450 Founders Road, Indianapolis, IN 46268, or donate online: <https://donate.legion-aux.org/ward>.



HOW TO ENCOURAGE ELIGIBLE MALE ALA MEMBERS TO JOIN — AND BE ACTIVE

In the five years since the American Legion Auxiliary began welcoming male ALA members into its ranks, the number of male spouses in the organization has reached more than 1,450.

But do those male spouses feel welcomed by their units?

Supporting the husbands

of veterans and servicemembers is critical, not only to serve the Auxiliary's mission, but also to help protect ALA members' well-being. U.S. Department of Defense reports tell the story of the struggles male spouses often face: In 2021, 13% of active-duty military spouses were men, but males accounted for 48% of suicides among servicemembers' spouses.

To find out how all ALA units can provide an environment that welcomes and supports male spouses, the Auxiliary reached out to two

husbands of veterans:

- **John Tester**, member, ALA Unit 36 in Ludlow, Vt., and ALA Department of Vermont president
- **Chris Pape**, founder, Macho Spouse, machospouse.com, which offers resources for male military spouses

The ALA asked Tester and Pape what tips they have for Auxiliary units to encourage men to join the organization — and then to be active in its programs and projects. They offered the following suggestions:

5 Tips to Make Male Spouses Feel Welcome in the Auxiliary



1. ENGAGE IN OUTREACH. Tester, whose wife served in the Marines, said active outreach to husbands is critical. When speaking with couples in which one spouse is a servicemember or veteran, he always makes a special effort to ask the spouse — regardless of gender — if they'd be interested in joining the Auxiliary. Often, he says, male spouses don't realize they're eligible.

"It's so easy for us to ask the wife of a veteran to join the Auxiliary," Tester said. "But we forget sometimes that we need to talk to the male spouses about joining. It's just making that concerted effort to single out the husbands and say, 'Hey, you know what? You can join the Auxiliary too.'"

2. REMEMBER YOUR SHARED GOAL. Auxiliary members — no matter their gender — share a passion for honoring their family members' military service and supporting those in the community, Tester says. Appealing to that common bond can help everyone to feel as though they're a part of a unified group.

"When you have a new male ALA member, invite him to sit at your table," Tester said. "Give him

the opportunity to introduce himself and honor his spouse. And then don't walk away. Invite him to the next fundraising event, for example, or make sure you call him and say, 'Hey, our next meeting is going to be on this date, and I really want you to be there.'"

3. USE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE. Pape, whose wife served in the Air Force, recalled many times in which language in materials and presentations at activities for military spouses was directed to women, but not men. At a 2014 event when Pape received a military spouse of the year award, in fact, the featured speaker began his remarks with, "Hello, ladies."

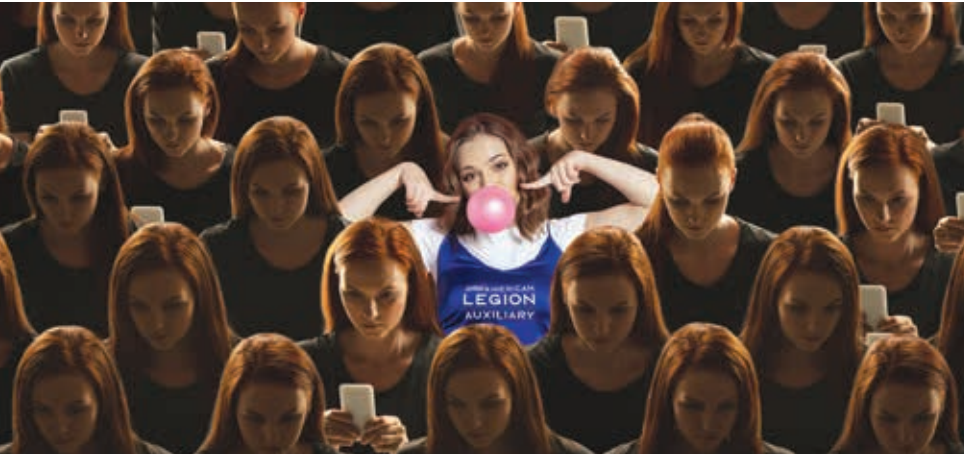
"When you talk about spouses, is it always 'wife?'" Pape said. "Slowly integrate the male perspective into everything you do. It starts with that language."

4. ENCOURAGE MEMBERS TO PARTICIPATE. Tester said he had no intention of becoming a leader in the ALA when he joined. But the welcoming attitude of his unit's members changed his mind.

"They encouraged me at every step," he says of the members, "and never made me feel like an outsider or someone who wasn't one of them. I was always an 'Auxiliary member' — never referred to as the 'male Auxiliary member.'"

5. DON'T OVERDO THE RECOGNITION. Pape urges ALA members to be proactive about welcoming men but cautions against singling them out. There's no need, for example, to offer activities or prizes with the idea that they specifically target men.

"It can't be just, 'Throw a grill in there,'" Pape said. "I want to be treated equally, and I don't want to be called out for being different. It makes us feel more awkward when we're called out."



HELP YOUR ALA MESSAGING RISE ABOVE THE NOISE

People see between 4,000 and 10,000 advertisements each day, according to marketing firm estimates. But — thanks to everything from information overload to conflicting details — they notice only about 100 of those messages.

This tendency to choose what images and information to absorb and believe — reported by Missouri's Red Crow Marketing in 2015 — makes it critical for the American Legion Auxiliary to use care when sharing news and ALA-branded materials. That same care should apply in all types of messages, from those on websites and in social media to those in conversations and at events.

Messaging should be clear, consistent, and aligned with the national organization's mission and branding. Providing accurate and up-to-date materials and messages helps ensure the information cuts through the clutter to inform and inspire.

For those who currently belong to the ALA, accurate and aligned messaging instills confidence that we can trust the information presented. For prospective members, it sparks interest and builds understanding.

When inconsistent and out of date, however, branding and messages can leave people confused about what should get their attention

and what they should ignore. It can lead them to question what they should believe. And it can lead prospective members to tune out and lose interest in joining.

There are five key steps the ALA can take at the department and unit levels to ensure your messages rise above the noise and foster a sense of community and understanding:

1. Tell a consistent story. From the tagline on ALA materials — a community of volunteers serving veterans, military, and their families — to the text in social media posts, Auxiliary units should use language that's consistent with messaging in support of veterans, servicemembers, and their families. This uniform approach helps to eliminate confusion about what the ALA does — especially for those searching for information about the organization online.

2. Maintain a schedule. Sticking with a regular schedule of sharing information also is critical. This schedule is particularly important for social media posts,

which the Pew Research Center in 2023 reported were where half of U.S. adults turned to for information. An ALA unit that consistently provides information on Facebook and other social media shows that it's active, and it keeps its members up to date on events and other news.

3. Share a variety of information. Notifying members — and the public — about happenings like spaghetti dinners is important, but so is sharing details about the mission that these activities and others like them support. This mission-focused information is a helpful reminder for current members, and it's a crucial piece of background for those who are trying to learn more about the ALA as they consider joining.

4. Remember prospective members. ALA members may know acronyms like SAL and VA&R like the backs of their hands. But someone who's simply doing research about the Auxiliary may not be familiar with the Sons of The American Legion or Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation. That's why it's important to keep both current and prospective members in mind when sharing information about an ALA unit and its activities, using clear terms and avoiding the use of acronyms without explanations.

5. Follow ALA National Headquarters' lead. When in doubt, ALA departments and units can turn to www.ALAforVeterans.org and social media accounts for the organization's National Headquarters. There, they'll not only find examples of the latest information and the appropriate tone for communications, but they'll also find helpful resources.



Branding Information and Inspiration
American Legion Auxiliary materials, sites, and other references that can help with consistent branding and messaging:

- Website: www.ALAforVeterans.org
- Facebook: www.Facebook.com/ALAforVeterans
- Instagram: www.Instagram.com/ALAforVeterans
- Email with questions: PublicRelations@ALAforVeterans.org



ALA GIRLS STATE LEADS TO CHANGE IN CAREER GOALS

Taylor Fenner attended ALA Michigan Girls State in 2016. She applied to attend because of her love for politics and government. Her career goal at that time was to be a high school government teacher. She didn't know it, but her career path was about to change.

Early in the week, Fenner took the ALA Girls State bar exam and passed. She joined the legal sector at ALA Girls State, which gave her the opportunity to meet and work with attorney Justin Hayes, who was serving as an advisor for the program. Fenner spent her week preparing for a mock trial as the criminal defendant. She was also

the attorney for her city. The experience changed her career goal — instead of going into teaching, she wanted to become a lawyer.

Following ALA Girls State, Fenner stayed in contact with Hayes. She was able to job shadow him for

a day while he went to court and visited clients in jail. Fenner went on to earn her bachelor's degree at Wayne State University and her law degree at the University of Detroit Mercy.

While in law school, she participated in the Veterans Law Clinic — the first time she was exposed to veterans law. This led her to a position at Disability Law Group. Fenner is now an attorney practicing Veterans Affairs Disability Law in Troy, Mich., and is accredited through the VA.

"I would have never been exposed to this career path without going to ALA Girls State," she said. "I attribute my success in my career to my time at ALA Girls State."

Fenner also serves on the Oakland County Bar Association

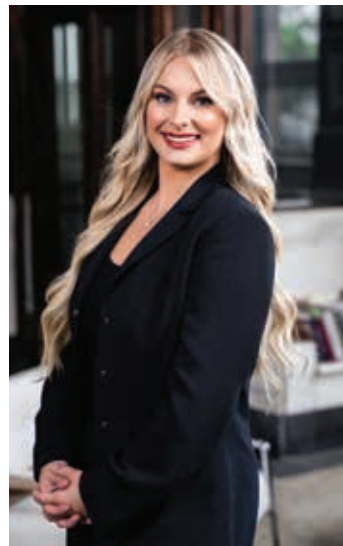
Veterans Committee, which helps veterans obtain legal services.

Fenner is still in touch with friends from ALA Girls State. Some of them who went into the military have reached out to her for help with their VA disability.

"Go in ready to absorb as much as you can," Fenner advises future ALA Girls State attendees.

"You will be exposed to so many people from different walks of life who have different ideas and experiences than you. You will learn so much about yourself and even

discover things about yourself you didn't know. It's an incredible experience, and you don't realize how much it will impact you until it's over. Enjoy every moment, always be willing to think about things from a different perspective, and have fun."



ALA GIRLS STATE ALUMNA NOW SERVES AS AN ALA UNIT PRESIDENT

Tami Paul attended ALA North Dakota Girls State in 2000. Now, 24 years later, she is serving veterans, military, and their families as ALA Shakopee, Minn., Unit 2 president. When Paul attended ALA Girls State, she wasn't an ALA member, but she fondly recalls the ALA members who encouraged her to attend ALA Girls State.

When Paul moved to the Twin Cities, she wanted to find a way to give back to the community. She thought of the American Legion Auxiliary. Of course she was

familiar with ALA Girls State, but she also remembered poppy distributions and seeing ALA members in her community. So, she found a local unit and joined in 2023. Fast forward a few months later: She was elected unit president.

Paul is now a preschool teacher. She applies to her teachings what she learned at ALA Girls State about patriotism and serving veterans.

"As a preschool teacher, I make sure to get my kids excited about the



flag, the Pledge of Allegiance, and what it means to be a good citizen and respect our troops," said Paul. "They can also tell you what a poppy represents, and what it means to wear red."

The ALA's Non-Traditional Student Scholarship helps members of The American Legion Family pursue a college degree later in life or allows them to pick up where they left off when their studies were interrupted. Pam Sullivan, Department of Georgia, is a 2024 Non-Traditional Student Scholarship recipient, studying for a health care degree.

Whose military service made you eligible for the Non-Traditional Student Scholarship?

I am eligible through Sean Sullivan, my husband of 19 years. A proud submarine veteran, he embodies strength, resilience, and honor — both in his service and in our life together. His love, dedication, and unwavering support mean the world to me, and I am grateful for every moment, challenge, and memory we've shared.

What does this scholarship signify to you?

Receiving the scholarship will allow me to attend more training sessions, enabling me to better support veterans and others in my community who are struggling with mental health issues and ultimately, help prevent the loss of lives.

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

As I expanded my involvement in volunteering within the veteran community, a glaring issue came to my attention: Many veterans are experiencing disability claim denials due to improper medical coding. Motivated by my husband's own journey, I became determined to understand the intricacies of medical coding and health care law.

Currently, I am attending Lanier Technical College to obtain a health care degree, which will serve as a foundation for pursuing further studies in the mental health field. My goal is to leverage this knowledge to assist veterans in securing the benefits they rightfully deserve, just as I have done for my husband. In addition, I have begun training with the QPR Institute to become certified as a QPR training instructor, helping others learn how to prevent suicide using

the "question, persuade, and refer" method.

What piqued your interest in this career?

Suicide. Have you ever been on the brink of giving up when support was out of reach? Imagine being in a situation where the necessary resources are just beyond your grasp. What if you were eligible for these resources, yet a trivial error or a misplaced file prevented you from accessing them?

As I sat in my husband's office on an exercise ball with my hand on his leg and heard "Wait time: 342 minutes," my heart sank. My unfiltered ADHD mouth uttered, "This is why we have 22 a day." I realized then that I had to do something. The despair I saw in my husband's eyes — knowing he needed a simple therapy appointment — was palpable. He was one of the fortunate ones already rated as a disabled veteran. The thought of all those who are not yet in that position made me feel ill. How can we help people who face errors in paperwork that the VA does not have time to address? I had a mission to Be the One.

Do you have any advice for other non-traditional students when it comes to applying for this scholarship?



SCHOLARSHIP WINNER: Department of Georgia ALA member Pam Sullivan with her husband, submarine veteran Sean Sullivan. His service made her eligible for the Non-Traditional Student Scholarship.

Know your "why." When I feel lost, I ask myself — or have my husband remind me — "What's your why?" Think about the experiences and challenges that make your journey unique. Share how your non-traditional path has shaped who you are and why it matters. Be honest about how these experiences have influenced your goals and aspirations.

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

Thank you. Your generosity is vital for students like me — helping us pursue our goals and make a difference. Your contribution will not only change lives but also amplify our voices to help those who are not being heard.



American Legion's Be the One efforts to prevent veteran suicide.

LaCoursiere was born in Honolulu to a military family. He and his wife, Lisa, have five children.

Navarreté is a charter member of Otero-Garcia-Navarreté Squadron 72 in Albuquerque, N.M. His eligibility is through his father, Tony Navarreté, a Vietnam-era United States Army veteran. The Navarreté name is familiar to the American Legion Auxiliary: His mother is Rita Navarreté, 2009-2010 national president of the American Legion Auxiliary.

He has served on a variety of committees and positions, including national vice commander, NEC, Membership Committee, Veterans Employment & Education Commission, and the Americanism Commission.

As national commander, Navarreté will continue to support the Be the One mission and will continue immediate Past National Commander Donald "JR" Hall Jr.'s Four Pillars Challenge in which squadrons are encouraged to raise \$1 per member each for Operation Comfort Warriors, the Child Welfare Foundation, the department's American Legion Boys State program, and host a blood drive.

Navarreté and his wife Loretta have seven children and eight grandchildren.

WELCOME TO OUR 2024-2025 AMERICAN LEGION FAMILY LEADERS

Elected during the August 2024 National Conventions of each American Legion Family organization in New Orleans were American Legion Auxiliary National President Trish Ward of Kansas, American Legion National Commander James A. LaCoursiere Jr. of Connecticut, and Sons of The American Legion National Commander Joseph Navarreté of New Mexico.

Ward is a member of John P. Hand Unit 250 in Louisburg, Kan. She is eligible for ALA membership through her father, John M. Brusati, and her grandfather, Edmund S. Lindberg. Her father served in the U.S. Army in World War II, and her grandfather served in the U.S. Navy during WWII. Read more about Ward on pages

38-40 in this issue of *Auxiliary*.

LaCoursiere is a member of American Legion Post 91 in Moosup, Conn. He is eligible through his service in the U.S. Air Force. LaCoursiere has served in several American Legion offices at the post, department (state), and national levels, including national vice commander, department of Connecticut commander, and chair of the national Legislative Commission.

LaCoursiere has been a longtime field representative for The American Legion Department of Connecticut's Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines Fund, which assists veterans and their families.

As national commander, LaCoursiere is strongly committed to raising awareness for The

Legion Family history: Did you know?

- In 1923, the first Flag Code was drafted during a Legion conference in Washington. Congress adopted the code in 1942.
- In 1944, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed into law the original GI Bill.
- In 1982, the Legion presented a \$1 million check to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund for construction of the Wall in Washington, becoming the largest single contributor to the project.



The American Legion magazine, March 1998

NEW PARTNERSHIP FOR THE AMERICAN LEGION

The American Legion has entered an official partnership with the Army-Navy Football Game presented by USAA. The Army-Navy Game is among the longest standing and most storied rivalries in college football history. This year, the game will be played on Dec. 14.

This new partnership aligns with the Legion's core values of service,

patriotism, and camaraderie. The American Legion is the first veterans service organization to sponsor this annual game.

The American Legion will also be participating in year-round sponsorships of both Army West Point Athletics and Navy Athletics. These agreements help raise awareness of the Be the One mission to reduce the number of veterans and servicemembers lost to suicide.



(Photos: Alyssa Schukar/
The American Legion)



(Photo: The American Legion)

THE AMERICAN LEGION'S NEC HONORS PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER

The American Legion's NEC passed Resolution 1, which names the historic NEC Room at The American Legion National

Headquarters in honor of Past National Commander John P. "Jake" Comer of Massachusetts. The room will now be called the John P. "Jake" Comer National Executive Committee Room.

Comer, a U.S. Air Force veteran of the Korean War, joined The American Legion in 1962. He served as national commander in 1987-1988. During his time as commander, he raised more than \$1.1 million for The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation and more than \$1 million for the Korean War Memorial in Washington, D.C.

The plaque bearing his name reads, "He devoted more than three decades to mentoring leaders at every level of The American Legion."

THOUSANDS TAKE PART IN SUICIDE PREVENTION TRAINING AT THE AMERICAN LEGION'S NATIONAL CONVENTION

An estimated 5,000 people took the Columbia University training Aug. 28 in New Orleans at The American Legion's 105th National Convention. The suicide prevention training is part of The American Legion's Be the One mission, which aims to reduce the number of veterans and servicemembers lost to suicide each year.

The training walked participants through the Columbia Suicide

Severity Rating Scale, which gives a suicide risk assessment via six questions anyone can ask to help identify whether someone is at risk for suicide and how to intervene if they are.

As of Sept. 1, more than 9,100 American Legion Family members and others have participated in the training through Columbia University. Virtual trainings are available through The American Legion. To learn how you can participate in the training, virtually and in person, and for additional Be the One resources, visit www.BetheOne.org.

MEMORIAL COMPLETE

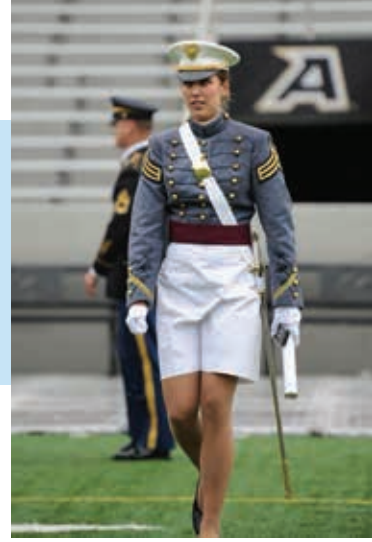
After more than a decade of planning, the National World War I Memorial in Washington, D.C., is officially complete. The final piece, *A Soldier's Journey*, was illuminated for the very first time on Sept. 13.

The 58-foot-long bronze artwork by Sabin Howard is the centerpiece of the memorial. It includes 38 figures depicting the story of an American father leaving for war and the experiences of battle. Howard wanted the piece to be about the process of being human, not glorifying war, and to show the human emotions in an intimate and accessible way.

In 2013, an act of Congress created the U.S. World War One Centennial Commission to create the memorial, located in Pershing Park, 14th Street NW and Pennsylvania Avenue, near the White House.

The World War One Centennial Commission's goal in the memorial is to raise awareness of WWI and our nation's participation. The American Legion is a commemorative sponsor of the commission. Read more about the memorial's unveiling at www.Legion.org.

With 2.6 million followers on Instagram alone, you’ve likely seen one of Julianna Claire’s lifestyle posts about everyday affordable finds. She served five years of active duty in the U.S. Army after graduating from West Point in 2013. She deployed to Afghanistan in 2014. During those five years, she served as an adjutant general officer, a position that provides personnel support. Claire got into blogging and shares how that helped her both during and after her military service.



What motivated you to join the military?

I got recruited to swim at West Point. When I started looking into the United States Military Academy, I realized there were many things about the Army that resonated with



me. I loved the aspect of being part of a team (I was always in sports and part of a team growing up), and I loved the idea of serving my country. I also knew West Point would be a challenge, and it was a challenge I wanted to go after.

We understand you got into blogging during your time in the military. Can you talk about that?

Back in 2013, there was a lot of buzz around this new app called Instagram. So, I downloaded the app and very quickly started following accounts that had the title “blogger” underneath their profile handle name. I had never heard that

term, and I had to google what a blogger was. I was fascinated with the content these women were creating and posting on Instagram and on their blogs. Every morning before PT, I would drink my coffee and look at all the new content my favorite bloggers uploaded to Instagram and their blog the day before. I knew after a few weeks of looking at these women’s Instagram handles that this is what I wanted to do with my life — I wanted to create content and start a blog too.

There were a couple of problems with my dream of becoming a blogger: 1) I owed the Army five years of active-duty service since I had just graduated from West Point; 2) I was deploying to Afghanistan in five months.

I decided I would learn everything I could about blogging leading up to and during my deployment.

I bought every book I could on blogging — *Blogging 101*, *Blogging for Dummies*, *Photography for Dummies*, etc. During any free time I had in Afghanistan, I was reading these books and learning how to create and secure domain names, what hosting platform was best to build my website, and how to use WordPress. I even came up with the original name of my blog (*Blush & Camo*) on a napkin during my deployment.

I was so well-versed in how to start a blog, I had my site up and

running within two months of being home! For the five years I was in the Army, I spent every single minute outside of the Army growing my blog and Instagram.

What are the main areas you blog about now? How did you find that niche?

I have been blogging for 10 years now, and believe it or not, I am even more obsessed with blogging and content creation than I was the day I knew I wanted to be a blogger in 2013. I first started off in fashion when I launched my blog, but I’ve grown up over the last 10 years. I got married, we have a beautiful daughter, and my content reflects the phase of life I’m in. I do Amazon Finds (that’s primarily what I’m known for), organization, and lifestyle ASMR videos.

Any advice for others who may want to get into the blogging world?

Just start! You don’t need to have all the answers when you start. I still don’t have all the answers about blogging, and it’s been 10 years. It’s more important to start creating content and posting consistently.

Find Her Here



Instagram: @julianna_claire



Website: juliannaclaire.com



TikTok: @julianna_claire



FLAG DONATION: Minnesota Past Unit 260 President Milissa Schmidt presents Monticello High School officials with a set of flags for the Veterans Memorial Plaza.

MINNESOTA UNIT DONATES FLAGS FOR HIGH SCHOOL'S VETERANS MEMORIAL

The Monticello, Minn., Veterans Memorial Plaza at Monticello High School (MHS) athletic complex was officially unveiled to the public in 2017 after four years of planning and work by four MHS graduates and numerous other community members and organizations, including the Monticello American Legion Family. The memorial features a plaque for each branch of the U.S. Armed Forces, three flags, and pavers honoring those who serve or have served.

Since the memorial's opening, Monticello Unit 260 has donated a set of three flags for the Veterans Memorial twice a year — in honor of Veterans Day in November and in honor and remembrance of veterans for Memorial Day in May. The flags donated feature the American flag, Minnesota state flag, and POW/ MIA flag.

In addition to the flags, Unit 260 President Christine Koehn said the Monticello American Legion Family — in cooperation with the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) — take turns hosting a Memorial Day program at the Veterans Memorial Plaza each year. Both The American Legion Family and VFW rotate hosting the ceremony that includes guest speakers, a patriotic music performance by the MHS

music department, a luncheon, and presentations from the Honor Guard and Color Guard.

Koehn also said the Monticello American Legion Family continues to support the memorial when requested for repairs and maintenance, and MHS students volunteer to clean up and plant new shrubs each spring to keep the Veterans Memorial Plaza beautiful.

Tips on starting a flag donation at your local school

Below are some tips on how your unit can make a flag donation to your local school to ensure flags are always in good shape.

Find support within your school. Build a relationship with a teacher, principal, or coach who will help support the project. In addition, work with your local ALA Junior members or ALA Girls State representatives in the school to get the conversation started.

Koehn said building those relationships is the first step of any project that's for the good of the community.

"Once a need arises, we can then reach out and work together, as we did with the Veterans Memorial Plaza," said Koehn. "It was truly a community event with a Legion Boys State representative and a faculty member starting the conversation."

Plan your budget. Koehn said that when the memorial was completed, their unit voted into their yearly budget the needed funds to supply two sets of three flags for the

memorial in honor of Memorial Day and Veterans Day. It is important to remember when making unit budgets to support our programs, our veterans, military, and their families, and in this case, supporting the Veterans Memorial Plaza each year, Koehn also advised.

If not budgeted, also consider fundraising activities in your community that can provide the needed funds and materials to support the event.

Plan a flag ceremony. Setting up a flag ceremony on Veterans Day and Memorial Day is a great way to thank local veterans and showcase the importance of our veterans to our community.

A flag ceremony can involve either the unfolding and raising of a flag or the lowering and folding of a flag. If your post or unit has a Color Guard, it should consist of a flag bearer and an even number of guards — typically four or six — in addition to the caller who runs the ceremony. The size of the Color Guard should depend on how many flags will be in the ceremony for raising or lowering the flag for unfolding or folding, to make sure no flag touches the ground.

Get approval from the school board. If you aren't already working with the administration of the school, it is important to get the necessary approval by school leaders so your event can be held within all required guidelines, especially if the plan is to invite members of the community into the school or on school grounds.



Items needed for a flag ceremony

- American flag
- state, organization, or military service flags (optional)
- caller (ceremony leader)
- Color Bearer for each flag used
- 4 to 6 people to be part of the Color Guard
- microphone (if gathering is large)
- printed caller instructions
- patriotic music or poetry (optional)
- Taps recording or live performance (optional)

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



WHY YOUR ALA UNIT SHOULD USE SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a valuable resource for nonprofit organizations. In a 2024 study by Pew Research Center, 68% of Americans report using Facebook, and 47% report using Instagram. While you don't want to solely rely on social media to get your message out, it is an important outlet. Here's why:

- It's free
- Advertise upcoming events
- Recruit new members
- Find volunteers for service projects
- Easily post photos to highlight the work your unit does
- Fundraise
- A space for members to engage online
- Educate the public on who we are, what we do, and why we matter



IS THE NAME CORRECT?

When you set up a social media account, the name matters. Already on social? It's not too late to make changes. Here are some tips on selecting a name:

- The account name should include your city, state, and unit number. For example, "American Legion Auxiliary Unit 123, city, state." This will allow those interested in learning more about your unit to be able to find the account.
- Don't use "women" or "ladies" in the title. This is incorrect — we are no longer a women-only organization. Remember: Male spouses are now eligible for our membership.



RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD

Marketing materials are available to help you promote your unit in your community. You can find newsletter templates, posters, brochures, and other materials available for download at www.ALAforVeterans.org.



BLAST FROM THE PAST

Looking for an article from a past issue of *Auxiliary* magazine? You can find copies dating back to 2010 at www.ALAforVeterans.org/magazine. For older issues, contact history@ALAforVeterans.org.



COMING UP:

In between issues of *Auxiliary* magazine, you can follow the ALA blog, social media, ALA eNews, and our website. Here's what's happening soon:

- Veterans Day is Nov. 11. We'll honor the brave men and women who served to protect our freedoms.
- Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day is Dec. 7. We'll remember the more than 2,400 lives lost that day.
- 2024-2025 ALA Mission Trainings and National Junior Meetings: Follow our social media to get the latest information and registration links.

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY

The 2024 Annual Report is Here



Download today at www.ALAforVeterans.org/About/Annual-Reports

“True heroism is remarkably sober, very undramatic. It is not the urge to surpass all others at whatever cost, but the urge to serve others at whatever cost.”

— Arthur Ashe, American professional tennis player



While we get ready for the holiday season, not everyone will be eating at the dining room table, sitting around the fireplace, or baking cookies in the kitchen. Some of our brave, selfless servicemembers will be halfway around the world using FaceTime from afar, unwrapping presents with their squad, or writing letters that (hopefully) make it home in time. Let us not forget those who have sacrificed being at home during the most wonderful time of the year so that we may have the freedom to celebrate the season in peace.

Above: In this Dec. 23, 2019, photo, U.S. soldiers deliver holiday gifts to their comrades on a base near the Al-Omar oilfield in eastern Syria (AP Photo/Farid Abdul-Wahid).

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

ALA Academy Live monthly training webinars are continuing!

Available to all ALA members at no cost, our upcoming topics include Youth Hero and Good Deed awards, Leadership, Celebrating Women of Service, TAPS, Junior Leader Training, Membership Benefits, Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, Honor Flights, Grant Opportunities, and many more.

Can't make it to a live webinar?
Don't worry — each training
is recorded and posted online.

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