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ON THE COVER: American Legion Family members and community volunteers help clean gravestones and beautify cemeteries for the 9/11 National Day of Service. Read more about this event and its positive impact on page 19 in this issue of *Auxiliary* (photo by Alexa Freeman/ALANHQ). **ABOVE:** Auxiliary members open confetti poppers during opening session of the 2026 ALA National Convention to celebrate the 250th birthday of America (photo by Sara N. Fowler/ALANHQ).



STRONGER TOGETHER: National President Dr. Coral May Grout visits with a female veteran in Maine with (from left) Sons of The American Legion Maine NEC George Rice and American Legion Department of Maine Commander Joseph Michaud.

What an honor it is to meet American Legion Auxiliary members across the country as your 2026-2027 American Legion Auxiliary national president! I have learned so much over the years — all leading to where I am today — and I am grateful for every mentor who was there each step of the way for me.

My eligibility to join the ALA comes from my father, Charles E. Grout, who served in the U.S. Air Force in the Philippines and Australia during World War II. I've been an Auxiliary member since 1953. The Auxiliary and how we serve may have changed over the years, but our focus on the mission has never wavered.

I'm humbled to have served in positions at the unit, district, department, and national levels throughout my years of membership. And even as national president, I'm still a unit member — our grassroots members work hard every day to honor and serve our veterans, military, and their families.

During this administrative year, we are continuing the legacies made before us, as well as expanding areas of focus we have already established. One important area of growth is a new Spirit of Youth scholarship for two military spouses.

Military spouses often face frequent moves, childcare challenges, and employment barriers. Through this scholarship, the ALA can change two lives with your support and donations in any amount.

We are also celebrating the 20th anniversary of the ALA's Give 10 to Education. Instead of helping your area school with 10 glue sticks, 10 pencils, etc., we are looking for you to donate 20 crayon boxes, 20 notebooks, etc., to support schools and teachers nationwide with these much needed supplies throughout the year.

For the 2026-2027 year, we will be continuing the national ALA sponsorship of Honor Flight. This amazing opportunity provides a fantastic chance for our veterans to travel to Washington, D.C. ALA members from across the country will be invited to participate in mail call. Stay tuned to our social media @ALAforVeterans for more information on when this Honor Flight will take place and how you can help.

Immediately after the ALA's 105th National Convention in September, I hit the ground running, visiting departments and meeting unit members to learn more about the mission work in our local communities. It's so energizing to see and learn how our Auxiliary and our American Legion Family work together throughout the country. Truly inspiring! I so look forward to meeting more of you, learning ideas on what events and activities work for your unit, and continuing to spread the word of who we are as the American Legion Auxiliary.

I've enjoyed learning from American Legion Family members, all the amazing food shared so far, visiting veteran homes, and even spending time with elementary students on a military base. I anticipate learning opportunities, collaboration with many of you, and ideas on how we can continue to be a valuable source to our nation's veterans, military, and their families.

Together, we can be a beacon for our veterans as we host and participate in mission-focused activities during this administrative year.

Dr. Coral May Grout
National President

Check out page 34 in this issue of *Auxiliary* to learn more about 2026-2027 American Legion Auxiliary National President Dr. Coral May Grout. Follow her on social media at www.Facebook.com/ALAnationalpresident. To download the official national president photo for your post home, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/National-President.

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FULL HOUSE: We had a blast hosting the ALA Girls State Leadership Conference at National Headquarters in September.

Happy 107th birthday, American Legion Auxiliary! It's so fitting that our special day is Nov. 10, the day before Veterans Day.

Plus: New year, new us! Opportunities abound membership-wise, thanks to a new resolution from The American Legion. At the 2026 National Convention, Legion delegates adopted new membership eligibility for the ALA, which, in plain terms, allows more people to join the Auxiliary.



How many times have you heard someone say, "I'd join your organization, but I'm not eligible"? We highly encourage you to read page 24 in this issue of *Auxiliary* to see how we may have a solution to that problem.

More options among eligibility provisions = more members!



We were sad to say goodbye to Gary Ward, ALA National Headquarters' Finance Division director, in September after six years of service. We also said "hello" to Susan Mattox, CPA, our new Finance director. Welcome aboard, Susan!



It's a side of National Headquarters staff in a way you've never seen! Check out the video on our YouTube channel @AmericanLegionAux or scan the QR code here. Let us know what you think! Email PR@ALAforVeterans.org.

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY

A Community of Volunteers Serving Veterans, Military, and their Families
November 2026

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The American Legion Auxiliary, founded in 1919, is a community of volunteers serving veterans, military, and their families. ALA members assist veterans in hospitals, advocate for veteran issues, support therapeutic creative arts festivals, distribute poppies for remembrance, and much more. In addition to serving the military community, the American Legion Auxiliary hosts ALA Girls Nation and the ALA Girls State programs that teach future leaders about government and civic responsibility. Learn more at www.ALAforVeterans.org and @ALAforVeterans on Instagram and Facebook.

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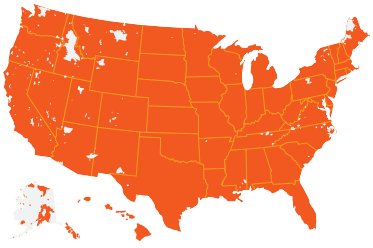
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Unit helps school with needed supplies

Cole-Smith Unit 350 American Legion Auxiliary, Spring Hill, Kan., partnered with Spring Hill Care and Rehab Center to collect school supplies for students in need for the current school year. We placed collection boxes and donation cans in area businesses and set up a booth at the local farmer's market. Auxiliary members and residents from the care center created the donation boxes and donation cans. We collected over $1,200 in donations, as well as many supplies needed for a successful school year. We also donated $500 to the school lunch program for students with



lunch debts. Auxiliary members and Spring Hill Care and Rehab employees and residents delivered the truckload of supplies and donations to Spring Hill Elementary School.

— Christine Hecke, Kansas

New Jersey unit involves its community in events

Members of Unit 127, Jamesburg, N.J., partnered with the local YMCA to bring Americanism programs, Poppy Poster Contest, donation drives, and an annual inter-generational Veterans Day program. Members participated in the Y campers 250th USA birthday celebration. Campers also collected ramen, toothpaste, and hydration



packets for a local sailor's ship, which was deployed.

— Gina Stravic, New Jersey

Volunteers clean up their local cemetery

American Legion Auxiliary Unit 63 members replaced flag holders and flags, tightened up the veteran medallions, hammered the holders straight for the 275-plus veterans' graves, and picked up litter at Assumption Cemetery, Greens Farms Road, Westport, on Saturday, Sept. 12. We were joined by VFW Post 399 Auxiliary members. Landscaping was also performed by our flagpole, and our 9/11 Memorial Bench was dedicated on Sept. 9 at a dinner for our visiting heroes of Catch A Lift at VFW Post 399 in Westport, Conn., which is also home to American Legion Post 63 and Unit 63.

— Patty Kondub, Connecticut

Unit participates in Give 10 to Education program

The Charles A. Hammond American Legion Auxiliary Unit 8 in Port Huron, Mich., recently honored five local teachers through the Give 10 to Education program.

Auxiliary Chair Susan Svacha delivered awards, along with a $100 check, to each teacher to help cover essential classroom needs. The teachers expressed deep gratitude for the support in purchasing supplies for their students. Children are our future, and supporting their learning through the Education Program remains a vital part of the Auxiliary's mission.

— Susan Svacha, Michigan

Youth also celebrate America's 250th birthday

Brick Auxiliary Juniors participated in "The Spirit of 1776 Hydrant Project."



The creativity, hard work, and community spirit displayed by these young volunteers have added a patriotic touch to our township as we celebrate America's 250th anniversary.

— Danielle Glass, New Jersey

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TIME TOGETHER: Juniors and young Sons of The American Legion at a 2025-2026 national Junior meeting. Fun and learning are planned for this administrative year's meetings as well, helping younger members discover more about the ALA and what it means to serve.

REGISTRATION OPEN FOR 2026-2027 NATIONAL JUNIOR MEETINGS

For Junior members age 8-17, national Junior meetings are an exciting way to meet kids from different ALA departments, make crafts, play games, and learn more about the ALA and the importance of being a Junior member. Young Sons of The American Legion are welcome to attend ALA national Junior meetings too.

This is the future of the ALA, and these events are a positive way to showcase what the Auxiliary has to offer and why serving our veterans, military, and their families is so important.

The meetings take place in conjunction with Mission Training on a Saturday, with one in each ALA division to reach as many members as possible.

Activities for the 2026-2027 administrative year's national Junior meetings include making custom quilt squares with Quilts of Valor, information from Wreaths Across America and the Congressional Medal of Honor Society, scholarships, ALA Patch Program, and back by special request — learning the Pledge of Allegiance in American Sign Language (ASL).





2026-2027 National Junior Meetings
Nov. 14: Omaha, Neb.
Jan. 30: Albany, N.Y.
Jan. 30: Springfield, Ill.
Feb. 6: Atlanta, Ga.
Feb. 6: Las Vegas, Nev.
Scan the QR code or visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/meetings/national-junior-meetings to register.

MICHIGAN YOUTH NAMED ALA'S JUNIOR MEMBER OF THE YEAR

Abigail Jones was shocked, excited, and honored when she found out she was the 2025-2026 National Junior Member of the Year. This was her second time applying for the prestigious award.

"It shows that the work I have done for the veterans did not go unnoticed — the scholarship will help me pay for college," she said.

A few of Jones' favorite ALA activities include the Poppy Program and volunteering in veteran homes. Of course, the Junior Activities Program is very important to her, as well as The American Legion's Be the One mission.

Jones is always partnering with other organizations to benefit our veterans, military, and their families in the most ways possible. She helped raise $48,600 for the Mid-Michigan Honor Flight.

"I also love spending time with my family at the events and fundraisers," she said. "My Nana, aunt, and cousins are closer because we spend so much time together."

Jones offers advice to other Junior members who may want to strive for the accolade of national JMOY.

"They call what we do volunteer work, but it's more like fun," she said. "Keep track of all you do. Get involved and have fun; it's not really work. Strive to talk to people outside of the organization about what we do."

Jones spoke in front of the 2026 American Legion Auxiliary National Convention delegates, accepting the award with a round of applause and support from fellow ALA members.

"Scary — all those people," she recalled standing on stage in front of about 900 audience members. "That was the biggest crowd I have

ever given a speech to, aside from when I was national Little Miss Poppy. I think then I was too young to be nervous. This time, I was nervous I would mess up my speech or trip and fall. But it turned out to be OK. This is such an honor and a learning experience."



HONORED JUNIOR: 2025-2026 Junior Member of the Year Abigail Jones with National Junior Activities Committee Chair Anita Biggs and National President Pam Ray.

As a Junior member, having solid senior members mentor her has made a big difference in her success.

"Just keep doing what you do," she said. "If it's constructive criticism to help you do better, listen to that so you can become a more successful member."



Greta Gronfeld, Minnesota (Outstanding Senator Award)



Mia Colom, Alaska



Lilly Jacobsen, South Dakota



Juliann Harlan, West Virginia (Outstanding Senator Award)

JUNIOR MEMBERS REPRESENT AT ALA GIRLS NATION

The 2026 ALA Girls Nation session was exciting for Junior member representation.

This year, four Juniors attended the premiere program. ALA Girls Nation staff voted on two participants (out of 102) for the Outstanding Senator Award — and in 2026, it was two ALA Junior members.

It's great to see our Junior members attending this event, showing how impactful the ALA is on young adults across the country. Way to represent the Auxiliary!

DIVISION JUNIOR MEMBERS OF THE YEAR, RISING STAR JUNIORS HONORED

Actively participating in our Junior Activities Program and ALA committees helps our younger members learn more about the organization, contribute, and grow to move the mission forward.

The Junior Member of the Year scholarship rewards ALA Junior members who are contributing to the organization and our mission, with a long-term goal of increasing Junior participation.

The Rising Star Junior Award recognizes our younger members and their active participation in the ALA's mission with five total, one from each ALA division.

Congratulations to the 2025-2026 Junior award winners!

Eastern Division Junior Member of the Year: Shelley Rose Widmer, New Jersey

Southern Division Junior Member of the Year: Alexandra Ridgeway, Virginia

Central Division Rising Star Junior: Avary Jones, Iowa

Northwestern Division Rising Star Junior: Charlotte Cleo "C.C." Fitzgerald, Colorado

Southern Division Rising Star Junior: Averi Rose Krogh, Florida

Not every division had a submission for these two awards.

For more information, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/Junior-Member-of-the-Year or www.ALAforVeterans.org/Rising-Star-Juniors.

"I became an ALA member to get involved in my new community. And most importantly, to honor my father..."



DEDICATED MEMBER: Barb Zeller (right) was recognized as South Dakota Unit 42's Legionette of the Year. Bottom right: Zeller's father, Robert E. Horton, who made her ALA membership possible.

BARB ZELLER

Barb Zeller exemplifies what it means to be an American Legion Auxiliary member by serving veterans, military, their families, and her community. Zeller was recognized for her volunteer work and dedication to the organization by South Dakota ALA Unit 42, which named her their Legionette of the Year.

"I greatly appreciate being recognized as Legionette of the Year," said Zeller. "Everything ALA members do is a team effort. I would like to thank each and every member of ALA Unit 42."

Zeller grew up in a military family, and five years ago, joined the ALA.

"I became an ALA member to get involved in my new community. And most importantly, to honor my father, Master Sergeant Robert E. Horton, and all veterans who have and are serving our country," said Zeller.

Her father served 30 years in the U.S. Air Force as a medic, and in later years worked in hospital administration.

"He proudly served his country and enjoyed his time in the United States Air Force," said Zeller. "He was a true inspiration to his family and everyone who had the honor to know him."

Master Sgt. Horton was stationed in Colorado, Kansas, Texas, Nebraska, Japan, and Belgium. He also served isolated tours in Vietnam and Korea.



Zeller made an immediate impact at her post home by volunteering for events and coordinating with other members of The American Legion Family.

"Right away, Barb became a wonderful leader and liaison to The American Legion and the Sons of The American Legion," said Lanell Quam, fellow ALA member.

"Working with the commanders to get things done in an organized and efficient way became easier with the excellent communication skills that Barb brought to the table."

Zeller is very active in The American Legion Family. Her involvement includes their annual Memorial Day program, Veterans Day breakfast, distributing poppy posters to local businesses and handing out poppies, and placing flags on graves.

She says her upbringing gives her perspective on the people The American Legion Family serves.

"Growing up as a military brat brings many ups and downs, but of all the life experiences, I believe that understanding and living among veterans allows us to firsthand experience and understand the many sacrifices veterans and their families make," said Zeller. "We understand that honoring our veterans should always be a way of life."

Zeller's family honors Master Sgt. Horton and other veterans by also being members of The American Legion Family. Her daughter and granddaughters are members, and her husband is a member of the Sons of The American Legion.

Zeller encourages others to join the ALA.

"Anyone eligible to become an ALA member should take advantage of this great opportunity to become involved in their community by doing, sharing, teaching, learning, and showing support to and honoring our veterans," she said.

The willingness of America's veterans to sacrifice for our country has earned them our lasting gratitude."

— Jeff Miller, former U.S. representative



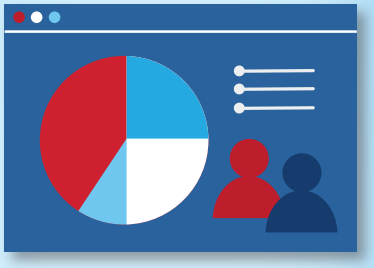
For most Americans, Veterans Day is celebrated one day in November, and then it's forgotten until the following year. But for American Legion Auxiliary members, each day is Veterans Day because we're always honoring those who served. Our mission is too great to simply leave it up to one day a year to honor those who have worn our nation's uniform. Together, we proudly wave our American flag, we say "Thank you for your service," we host stand downs for our homeless veterans, and the list goes on of all that we give to our veterans, military, and their families. We think of them every day. They are our mission … now and forever.

Above: U.S. Army Air Corps veteran Walter Rybarczik, who is 104 and served in World War II, is driven up Fifth Avenue during the Veterans Day Parade in New York City (photo by Gordon Donovan/NurPhoto via AP).

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY

The Best of 2025-2026

Celebrations, Milestones, and Memories



Much was achieved during the 106th year of the American Legion Auxiliary — from a national ALA-sponsored Honor Flight to the first National Poppy Day® Virtual 5K to celebrating America's 250th birthday.

See it all in the 2025-2026 ALA Corporate Report, available at www.ALAforVeterans.org.

What ALA committee is your unit most active with during the winter months?



"We deliver dinners in November and December, as well as small Christmas trees and stockings to our hospice veterans. We also do a Veterans Day parade and feed 200-plus meals to veterans and their families at the post."

— Tina Curcio, California



"Unit 573, Brilliant, Ohio, takes advantage of the winter months to focus on VA&R and Children & Youth. We provide a free dinner on Veterans Day to local veterans and their family. Our volunteer fire department delivers our meals to veterans unable to leave their home."

— Kimberly Nest, Ohio



"Community Service and VA&R. Our unit and American Legion Family adopt families for Christmas, make a meal, and donate to a local veterans housing and recovery program for homeless veterans."

— Crystal Shaw, Wisconsin



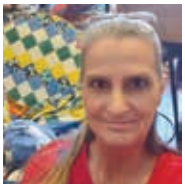
"Winter in Florida? Our 'flurries' are palm trees, sunshine, and activities! We're flurrying around at membership tables, craft fairs, and community events. If we had to pick two programs — Children & Youth and VA&R keep us busiest."

— Tricia Winegar, Florida



"This will be our 83rd year doing Christmas Gift Shop for inpatients at American Lake VA Medical Center. With funds from the Legion Family, inpatients shop for loved ones. We do shopping, storing, and planning, and it helps in recruiting too."

— Debra Ramirez, Washington



"Our nearby military base has Turkey Run for Thanksgiving meals and Operation North Pole for gifts for military children that our unit donates to. We donate to and participate in our local Toy Run for gifts for children in our community."

— Jeanna Fancella, Kansas



"We are most active in the fall and winter months to our local Veterans & Community Housing Coalition, raising funds and donating to their various veterans' programs. We donate funds yearly to our local Wreaths Across America campaign."

— Lorraine Thompson, New York

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ALA MEMBERS NATIONWIDE SHARE SUCCESSFUL EVENT IDEAS THAT POSITIVELY IMPACT LOCAL COMMUNITIES

The American Legion Auxiliary has become a fixture in many communities nationwide. Hosting activities regularly — from big events to small acts of kindness — helps build consistency and trust with the public.

Over time, repeated, annual functions will help ALA entities become known as a solid support system to their local area.

Across the nation, ALA members shared their successful, dependable events:

"We do a New Year's party, and the proceeds go to our Winchendon Emergency Fund that helps our community in times of need. We also do Field of Flags on Veterans Day where the proceeds go to a VA&R program."

— Monique Connor, Massachusetts

"Dietrich Luhman Unit 360 in Weatherly, Pennsylvania, goes to our elementary school and does *Sgt. Stubby: An American Hero* and The Pledge of Allegiance program. We sponsor a veteran to speak to a middle school grade and a high school class. Every other month, we have a Cards for Soldiers & Veterans event. We make cards to send to active duty that are blank for all holidays and occasions, so they can send home to loved ones. Signed cards go to the veterans in local VA centers for Christmas and birthdays. A Be the One coffee club is held every other month for coffee and pastries, fellowship, information on veterans benefits, and a luncheon. In October, we hold a Pumpkins and Pancakes event for our community, and in May, we have poppy night. A poppy craft is made, and 'the poppy lady' reads the book *The Poppy Lady*."

— Judy Desrosiers, Pennsylvania

"Northeastern Unit 459 does an annual school supply drive in September, Food 4 the Needy drive pre-Thanksgiving, and serves breakfast to the homeless monthly at a church."

— Margo Forrester, Michigan

"Unit 320 Maumee, Ohio: Our unit works hard year-round, helping our community collect food, school supplies, blankets, etc., and raking leaves for our veterans and neighbors. We hold bake sales, our annual veterans dinner to the public, and support the Salvation Army at Christmas time collecting a children's wish list. We hold events that bring everyone together. We support our other entities. We help where help is needed."

— Shannon Ries, Ohio

"Unit 39, Madison, Maine: For the past two-plus years, our unit has been displaced as our post home was condemned, and the building had to be taken down. Thanks to our wonderful town officials, we have been able to meet twice a month for our meetings at a centrally located town-owned building. Despite being displaced, we continue to hold our annual school/teacher supply drive. In October, we had our annual Turkey Pie fundraiser. In November, we'll be hosting our 39th Annual Craft Fair, thanks to the local VFW post. We held a Luck of the Draw and raised $6,500 for our department president's project — Honor Flight Maine. We have held many raffles, and we continue to support our veterans in any way we can."

— Robin Hauser Turek, Maine







COMMUNITY DRIVEN: American Legion Auxiliary members from Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Michigan are active in their communities, hosting regular events to get the word out about the ALA and all of the local activities units participate in.

This diverse collection of events can help jump-start you and your Auxiliary unit with potential ideas to try in your communities. Whether the event is weekly, monthly, or annually, all forms of consistency help spread the word and mission of the ALA.

Tips and tricks for planning successful ALA events:

- **If your unit is hosting a fundraiser, be clear about who the money will benefit.**
- **Use social media to promote the event.**
- **Define clear roles for your members to help with the planning and execution stages.**
- **Ask community organizations (schools, food banks, shelters, etc.) what support they need.**
- **Gather feedback from both event attendees and unit members to make the next event even better.**



FAMILY FOCUS: Shay Kuehner with her father, Donald Grannan. Kuehner has several family members who are veterans. Her ALA involvement led to more conversations with her dad and his service, connecting the two even deeper to the mission.

AMERICAN LEGION FAMILY CONNECTS A DAUGHTER TO HER FATHER'S SERVICE

American Legion Auxiliary member Shay Kuehner's family includes many veterans. But the one she honors most through her ALA eligibility is her father, Donald Grannan.

Grannan served 30 years in the United States Air Force, enlisting in 1950 at the start of the Korean War. He worked on the flight line maintaining bombers, tankers, and air power activities all over the world, including Vietnam. He retired in 1980 from Carswell Air Force Base in Fort Worth, Texas, as a chief master sergeant.

"Not only was he a dedicated man with an incredible work ethic, he was faith and family-driven his entire life," said Kuehner. "Though he was gone on duty or overseas much of our childhood, he managed to make sure his children were loved and cared for."

It wasn't until adulthood that Kuehner learned more about Grannan's service and who he was.

"His job was never talked about — nothing about the military or the war was talked about at home in those days," said Kuehner. "As I learned more about him, I realized that his work ethic, morality, dedication, and unwavering patriotism definitely impacted me, and I found that I wanted to carry on that legacy and momentum in whatever way I could."

One of her favorite moments with him is shared with the ALA.

"When I became Department of Texas president, I had just been diagnosed with colon cancer. He thought I should sit it out since there was chemo and such, but he supported my decision to serve, and he was incredibly supportive of the entire journey," said Kuehner. "We weren't very close growing up, but we had finally shared something — The American Legion Family! His health wouldn't allow him to attend my election, but he wrote me a letter, which I read part of to a very emotional crowd. I knew then that he was very proud of me, and it meant the world."

That shared connection led to new conversations.

"The Auxiliary opened so many opportunities to learn more about him and initiate those conversations to knowing him better," said Kuehner. "I lived it my whole life, but the ALA put me deep in the heart of his service and that interest and pride continued to grow."

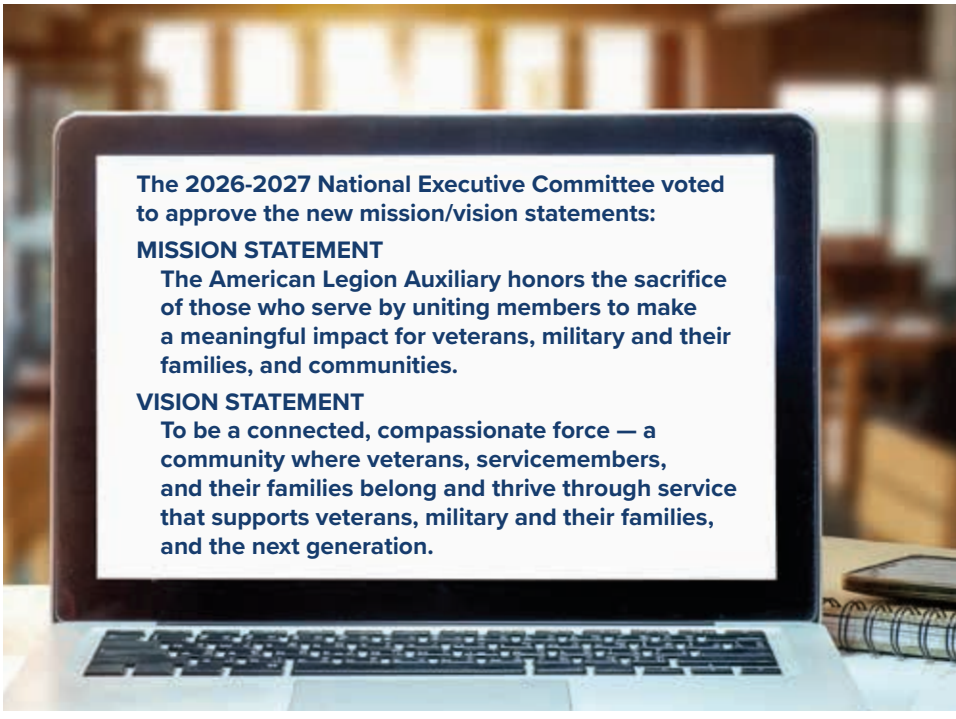
Grannan spent his retirement volunteering in his community through The American Legion, the Knights of Columbus, his church, local food bank, and more. He was a 70-year member of The American Legion.

"He always believed in helping others. When we were young, we were taught about stewardship through church and community," said Kuehner. "He often took his grandchildren to the food bank with him to help out and encouraged all of us to do whatever we could to help others."

Grannan passed away in 2024 at the age of 93, leaving 12 children and their spouses, 26 grandchildren, 27 great-grandchildren, and seven great-great grandchildren.



ALA'S NEW STRATEGIC PLAN FOCUSES ON MISSION, MEMBERS, AND MEANS



At the 2026 American Legion Auxiliary National Convention, the national Long-Range Strategic Planning Committee shared details on the new strategic plan.

What's different about this strategic plan compared to previous versions?

First, continuity and accountability. Through experience, we've learned that a strategic plan works only if it is actively managed, regularly evaluated, and adjusted when needed. That's why the 2025 National Convention delegates approved five-year terms for members of the Long-Range Strategic Planning Committee, while still making annual appointments. This approach gives us continuity and accountability.

Second, representation and clarity during the planning meetings to develop the strategic plan. Volunteers and staff were very intentional about who was at the table and what their role would be. This included Past National Presidents, National Headquarters staff, and unit-level members who had never served in a national capacity. That mix mattered. It ensured that every discussion included both strategic vision and real-world practicality.

The committee's responsibilities were also defined: Develop the plan, monitor progress, recommend adjustments, and report regularly to leadership.

This plan was created to be usable at every level of the organization — from the national president to the unit member — and from large departments to small communities. It is strong enough to guide where we are going but simple enough for every unit to use.

For two full days in late 2025, committee members and National Headquarters staff worked side by side. The National Executive Committee, the ALA's governing board, saw the initial framework and focus groups were held so every department had an opportunity to provide input. The feedback made the final plan even stronger.

The strategic plan was voted on by delegates and passed via a show of support at the 2026 National Convention, giving it the green light to be implemented at the national level.

Following are the three areas of focus for the national strategic plan:

Mission is why we exist.

Everything begins with serving veterans, military, their families, and our communities. Our goal is not simply to continue the work we have always done, but to make sure our programs are meeting today's needs, and that we are making the greatest impact possible.

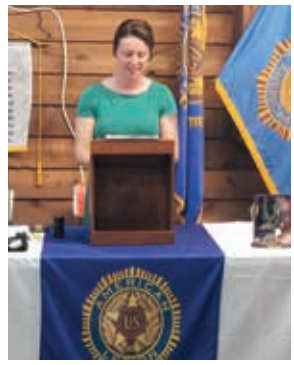
Members are how we make that mission happen.

We need to make it easier for people to join, easier for them to get involved, and give them reasons to stay. That means looking at the entire member experience — from someone's first impression of the Auxiliary through opportunities to serve, lead, and grow.

Means is what makes all of that possible — it's our people, our financial resources, our technology, our partnerships, and the systems that support the organization. We have to make sure those resources are strong enough to support both our mission and our members.

This is not a strategic plan built only for the national level — it's built to be used by everyone in the American Legion Auxiliary. So, what can you do to move mission, members, and means forward? Tell us at PR@ALAforVeterans.org.







ALABAMA UNIT'S LUNCHEON HELPS WOMEN VETERANS FEEL APPRECIATED

Hosting a luncheon to recognize women veterans is extra impactful when it happens near the 78th anniversary of the groundbreaking Women's Armed Services Integration Act that earned women a permanent place in the U.S. military.

President Harry S. Truman signed the act into law on June 12, 1948. Today, Women Veterans Day is observed annually on that date.

Women have been part of military service in some capacity since the Revolutionary War through present day. Over the years, women have gained access to positions previously unavailable to them — we see women on the front lines, as commanding officers, and retiring with over 20 years of military service to their country.

Unit 114 in Alabama wanted to recognize its women veterans a little extra this year and decided on a luncheon. During the planning phase, one of the women veterans asked if there would be a guest speaker.

"At that point in time, we did not have one, and she asked if she could do it," said Unit 114 First Vice President Sharon Shaver. "This obviously meant a lot to her because her speech at the luncheon became very emotional for her. After, she told me she really needed this luncheon."

With it being the first attempt at a gathering like this, there were about 20 people total. Everyone was grateful for the event and what military service means, especially as a female veteran.

"The male [American Legion] post members let our female veterans know how much they appreciated the sacrifices and difficulties women in the military face," Shaver said.

As a result of how well everything went, word spread, and a larger ALA unit asked if they could join Unit 114 next year. The Legion members also said they want to help share in future costs of the event.

"Our female veterans enjoyed themselves immensely, and we are already planning for next year," Shaver said. "I hope we have started something that will grow in the years to come."

Want to host your own women veterans luncheon?

Department of Alabama Unit 114 First Vice President Sharon Shaver offers advice:

- **You will need help from your Legion members to contact the female veterans in the post. Because of privacy laws, the post can't just give contact information without permission from that person. In our case, we created an invitation which was emailed to the post commander with a request to send it to the post members, including the male veteran members, in hopes that if they knew women veterans who are not post members, they would pass the invitation on to them.**
- **We also requested an RSVP to try to get a good count for food preparation. As is always the case, not everyone who attended let us know they were coming. We took the number that responded to the RSVP and doubled it. This worked out well. We even purchased gifts based on the double RSVP count and had gifts for everyone.**
- **If you are doing a luncheon, I would suggest something light for food.**
- **Decorations can be whatever you want and what your budget allows.**
- **As far as volunteer work, our members prepared the food at home and brought it to the post. We just transferred all the food into decorative bowls and trays we have at the post and set it up on the tables.**
- **Starting small, you can talk to all of your guests to get their feedback and hopefully get suggestions about things you could do to help you have a bigger event in the future.**



REMEMBERING THE SACRIFICE: Auxiliary members and community volunteers from around the country helped beautify veterans' gravestones and clean up cemeteries for this year's 9/11 National Day of Service.

ALA MEMBERS CLEAN VETERAN HEADSTONES NATIONWIDE FOR 9/11 NATIONAL DAY OF SERVICE

American Legion Auxiliary members across the nation helped power a record-breaking tribute to veterans, beautifying national cemeteries to commemorate the 25th anniversary of 9/11.

9/11 National Day of Service 2026 called on volunteers to clean veterans' headstones and complete landscaping projects at the cemeteries. The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) partnered with the nonprofit Carry The Load to organize the event at 141 national, state veteran, and private cemeteries in the United States and Puerto Rico.

Although the 9/11 National Day of Service is an annual event, this year's activities took on a unique meaning in light of the anniversary of the attack it commemorates.

The goal for the 9/11 National Day of Service was twofold, said Jim Theres, who conducts public affairs for the cemetery administration. The event served as a remembrance of those who died on 9/11 and as a tribute to veterans, including those who served in the War on Terror.

"We just hope people know service to the country and sacrifice to the country come with real consequences," Theres said.

Volunteers heeded the call to get involved, with more than 16,000 people signing up — representing a 500 percent increase compared with 2025.

Among those volunteers were ALA members, many of whom participated alongside others from their units. Vicky Balentine of ALA Unit 41 in Keokuk, Iowa, and Cindy Boehnlein of Ohio ALA Unit 2 in Cleveland, beautified cemeteries in their communities.

"We thought since it was 9/11, we needed to help," said Balentine, one of three Unit 41 volunteers at Keokuk National Cemetery.

9/11 National Day of Service organizers hoped volunteers would feel connected to the experiences of the veterans they were honoring. They asked participants to add to the online Veterans Legacy Memorial page for someone whose headstone they cleaned.

Boehnlein and Balentine had relatives buried in the cemeteries where they volunteered.

"It gave us a chance to honor the warriors," Boehnlein said, "and see the names of those who actually served."

Boehnlein also learned more about one veteran, Delvia Powers, whose headstone she cleaned at Ohio Western Reserve National Cemetery. After serving as a first lieutenant in the Army Nurse Corps in the South Pacific during World War II, Boehnlein learned, Powers was a public health nurse in Cuyahoga County in Ohio for 25 years.

Theres said event organizers hope the 2026 event plants the seed of service for younger volunteers to carry on for years to come. Boehnlein, for example, plans to suggest cleanup and research at Western Reserve as an activity for Unit 2 Juniors. Balentine said her ALA unit's Junior members will continue their longtime practice of volunteering at Keokuk National Cemetery.

"This provides an opportunity to pay respects," Theres said, "and it's very important that we do that. A lot of veterans' graves may not get many visitors, but on this day, you can be one of those visitors."

9/11 National Day of Service: By the Numbers

More than 16,000 volunteers registered
500% increase in registered volunteers from 2025
141 cemeteries hosting volunteers
More than 2X more participating cemeteries than in 2025
More than 300 posts added to Veterans Legacy Memorial pages



ALL HANDS ON DECK: Pennsylvania Unit 148 members are dedicated to helping the Delaware Valley Veterans Home in a variety of ways — from hosting events to assisting in organizing residents' rooms and closets.

PENNSYLVANIA UNIT FILLS GAPS AT LOCAL VETERANS HOME BY HELPING ORGANIZE ROOMS

Through the years, Jesse W. Soby Unit 148 in Pennsylvania has fostered a strong relationship with the Delaware Valley Veterans Home.

At Delaware Valley, members fulfill a range of needs, from hosting events to simply being a support for veterans and staff. While volunteering at the veterans home, they've overcome various challenges — from the COVID-19 pandemic to the growing number of residents.

With a wide range of activities the unit hosts, a big part of their success as constant support for the home is their relationship and communication with the staff.

Elizabeth Casey, a Delaware Valley Unit 148 volunteer, said the relationship between the unit and staff is like family.

"We've spent a lot of time there. We know the staff very well. When one of them leaves, we feel like we've lost one of our Auxiliary," Casey said.

This unique relationship has enabled employees to feel comfortable expressing their needs and the needs of the residents, said Dolores Danielson, unit chaplain and department representative at Delaware Valley.

"We're not afraid to open up, and they are not afraid to open up to us," Danielson said. "They know we would do everything we could if we could make it."

The openness has led to five members — nicknamed the Closeteers — working together to organize residents' rooms and closets, on top of their holiday events, bingos, and poppy making with the veterans.

When staff reached out to the unit regarding the project, they began with organizing for patients diagnosed with dementia.

What started as simple organizing has led members to make residents' rooms homier with framed photos.

As the Closeteers, the unit members help fulfill a need while also getting to connect with the veterans.

Casey's time at Delaware Valley has been impactful not just as an ALA member, but also because of her father.

"We are all descendants of veterans; I lost my father very young. He was 44, and he was in World War II, so I never had an opportunity to see him through his old age," she said. "That really touches my heart — going in there and meeting these guys and learning their story and working our mission because that's what it's all about. Our veterans, our military families, our troops — that's our true mission in the end. It's just a gift for us to be able to do that and get to know them so well and spend quality time with them."

The sentiment is felt throughout the whole group. Unit 148 member Deborah Farnham, like the others, appreciates how their time at Delaware Valley helps them bond with the veterans and staff.

"It's so rewarding to see how you start knowing somebody just on the surface, and then as the years go by, you see the stages of life they go through, and you can reach out to them if they have an issue or they're upset," Farnham said.

The advice the Closeteers have when it comes to start volunteering at veterans homes: Just do it and reach out.





INDIANA UNIT 117 MEMBERS SERVE THROUGH CONVERSATIONS, GIFTS

"There's no project too small."

Kathy Bellinger, Pendleton, Ind., Unit 117 secretary, shares that advice to all ALA members. It stems from a project, "Serving Those Who Served," with Unit 117 Executive Committee Member Ann Overmyer.

For this project, Bellinger and Overmyer work together to make gift bags for veterans — both residents and staff — of Rawlins House and Fall Creek Retirement facilities in Pendleton.

As of now, the project serves 21 veterans and a spouse. With the aid of other unit members, Bellinger and Overmyer work together to find quality, accessible, and fair-priced items for the bags.

Thought is put into every aspect of the bag — from pre-sharpening pencils for crossword puzzles to having easy-to-hold cups.

To ensure the needs and wants of the residents are met, Bellinger and Overmyer regularly reach out to the facilities for that information. They stuff the bags with a range of toiletries, snacks, entertaining activities, and patriotic goodies.

The goal of the gift bags is to show care and support to the veterans, providing a gift greater than the bag. Originally a Christmas project, it evolved to visiting and gifting the bags at least once every three months.

"We had been doing gift bags at Christmas for the veterans, but we felt like it wasn't enough," Overmyer said. "A lot of people do things for the veterans at Christmas time, but they're just kind of forgotten the other part of the year. We decided we wanted to do something on a regular basis for them, so they knew we cared about them."

Around February and March 2026, the unit decided to update their Christmas project to a more regular basis, rolling it out in May.

Their project is still in the beginning stages, but the lasting impact they aim to provide is through connection.

During their first visit to the facilities, Overmyer and Bellinger connected with 98-year-old U.S. Navy and Navy Reserve veteran Carl Scott.

While socializing with Scott, he shared his story — not only of his service starting in 1945, but how his time in the military gave him the skills to be a masterful metal worker. He shared ironworks he'd created that Overmyer and Bellinger described as beautiful and phenomenal, such as a wrought iron bed frame.

Bellinger and Overmyer were a conduit for Scott to share his daily life. In between tales from the past, he showed off his knowledge about the birds visiting feeders outside his room window.

To the unit members, their time and conversations with Scott were the highlight of the experience — one they wish to continue with more veterans.

"These [veterans] have something to say, and they're very interesting," Bellinger said. "I think [Scott] was really happy we were there, and we acknowledged [the veterans] and just wanted to spend time with them."

Unfortunately, after this *Auxiliary* interview, Scott passed away.

Overmyer and Bellinger recognize that their project, though simple, can mean so much — an impact they hope to continue and advise anyone else to do.

"Don't think just because you can't do some big, grand gesture that you shouldn't do anything because [veterans] appreciate even the smallest thing," Bellinger said.







GIVING BACK TO VETERANS: Members of Indiana Unit 117 visit residents and staff at local retirement facilities for chats and gifts at least once every three months.



GENEROUS DONATION: Arizona Unit 34 received a significant contribution from the Jack Ingebritson Foundation for $50,000 to help fund the unit's mission support programs. The donation came through an American Legion Auxiliary Foundation subgrant.

IT'S NOT WHAT YOU KNOW; IT'S WHO YOU KNOW

There's an age-old adage, "It's not what you know; it's who you know." And when it comes to the American Legion Auxiliary, it's spot on. The ALA is the embodiment of that phrase. Every ALA member knows somebody who knows somebody who knows somebody whose grandma was a 20-year-old Army nurse patching up soldiers in Vietnam. Those connections are why you're still here, reading this magazine.

The connections we forge with people who share our passions, our favorite pastimes, and belief systems are often referred to as "invaluable." But does introducing the topic of money to the relationship automatically make it transactional or less meaningful? Or could generosity deepen that connection by introducing a tangible way for someone to participate in a mission they already care about?

Volunteering for hours during the week is not an option for everyone, but some of those people have the ability to write a check. Both versions of support indicate that the person wants to be part of the solution to whatever problem you're trying to solve. Let them.

To be part of that solution, it matters where we invest our money and what happens when it gets to its destination. Money can be generosity in the hands of a donor. When it changes hands and journeys to an ALA unit, it can become a scholarship, a food pantry, a computer lab, or even a wheelchair-accessible golf cart. Money can do really cool things.

But as our parents told us growing up, money doesn't grow on trees. So, where does it come from? Behind every donation is a person who understands the Auxiliary's mission, has seen or benefited from the work ALA entities are doing across the country, or knows someone who has.

The relationships we already have in our own communities are some of the greatest untapped resources: a conversation at the Sunday pitch-in after church; a business that sponsors your Friday fish fry; a neighbor who serves on a veteran service organization board; a member whose employer has a matching gift program.

Those relationships don't begin with an ask. They begin with a shared passion, pastime, or belief system. But when people understand what your ALA entity is accomplishing for veterans and military families, sometimes they want to be part of that solution.

Frank W. Wright ALA Unit 34 in Cave Creek, Ariz., knows exactly what can happen when a relationship, generosity, and opportunity come together.

In November 2024, ALA Unit 34 President Sandy Cuttino received a call from Ron Coleman, chair of the Jack Ingebritson Foundation. Coleman said the private foundation wanted to support Unit 34's veteran programs with a "significant" contribution. However, they could only grant funds to a 501(c)(3) organization. Luckily, Cuttino had encountered a similar situation years earlier and called the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation to see if her unit could get some help.

At that point, Cuttino did not know if the donation would even meet the $2,500 minimum to process a subgrant through the ALA Foundation or when her unit would receive the gift. She contacted ALA National Headquarters' Development Manager Dean Sanders.

"From the moment we spoke, he treated our request as though it were his own priority," Cuttino said. "He patiently walked me through the subgrant process, answered every question, reviewed our paperwork, and helped us make the necessary corrections so we could meet the donor's deadline."

The result? **$50,000.**

The Jack Ingebritson Foundation awarded $50,000 to Unit 34 to fund its mission support programs.

That was only the beginning. In less than two years, Unit 34 has secured $107,000 by taking advantage of the ALA Foundation's subgrant program. When Cuttino submitted the first subgrant application, Unit 34 was actively partnering with 10 veteran-focused nonprofit organizations. Today, they have more than 20 partners. They've sponsored veterans on Arizona Honor Flight, funded PTSD treatment, provided wishlist items and care packages, and supported local food banks that serve veterans and military families.

The relationships we already have in our own communities are some of the greatest untapped resources.

So, who do you know? Not: Who do you know who has money? Who do you know who cares? Who in your community cares about veteran homelessness? Who cares about food insecurity for military families? Do any members of your unit work for a company with a matching gift program? Does anyone in your Legion Family serve on a nonprofit or foundation board? Do you know a business owner who cares about veterans or is a veteran?

Start there. Find common ground and a shared interest. Tell them what your unit is doing. Invite them to be part of the solution to the problems you both want to solve. And if they want to invest, let them. Make their money do really cool things.

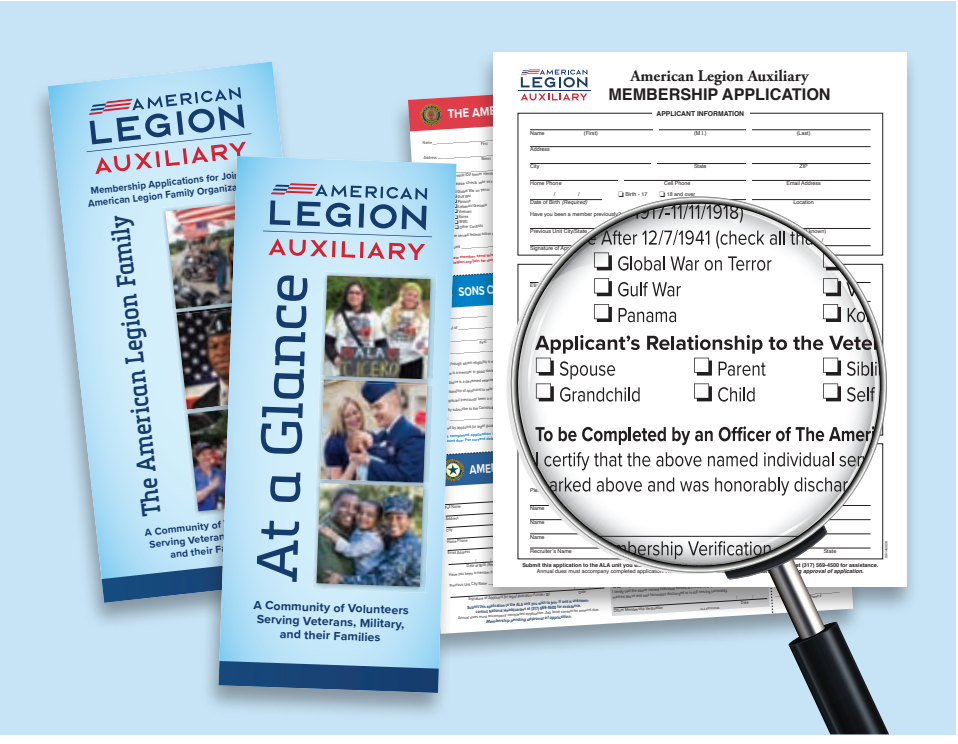
The ALA Foundation is a partner that believes in the work units, districts/counties/councils, and departments are doing across the country. The Foundation encourages their ideas and helps turn those ideas into solutions that go to work for the veterans and families who brought us all here in the first place. Because sometimes, it really is who you know.

To learn more about the subgrant process or to apply, visit www.ALAFoundation.org/grants.



Thank you for making the 2026 Wall of Heroes an incredible success!

Together, ALA National Convention attendees and online donors raised more than $31,000 for the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation's Mission Endowment Fund. Every name added to the wall honored a veteran or servicemember whose legacy continues to inspire us. We are grateful to everyone who made a gift, honored a hero, and helped carry the ALA's mission forward for generations to come.



UPDATED DOCUMENTS: Auxiliary membership applications and brochures with new membership eligibility information can be downloaded at www.ALAforVeterans.org.

NEW ELIGIBILITY RESOLUTION EXPANDS ALA MEMBERSHIP

At the 2026 American Legion National Convention, delegates adopted new membership eligibility language for the American Legion Auxiliary — expanding eligibility and allowing more family members to join the ALA.

The Legion has authority over the ALA's membership eligibility; this language change allows more people into our organization — strengthening our ability to better serve our veterans, military, and their families.

Following is the updated text from The American Legion that reflects the updated eligibility provisions for membership in the American Legion Auxiliary:

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE:

Section 2. Membership in the American Legion Auxiliary shall be limited to:

(1) grandparents, parents, siblings, spouses, and direct or adopted descendants within two degrees of consanguinity of members of The American Legion; and

(2) grandparents, parents, siblings, spouses, and direct or adopted descendants within two degrees of consanguinity of all servicemembers who served in either of the following periods: April 6, 1917, to November 11, 1918, and anytime after December 7, 1941, who, being a citizen of the United States at the time of their entry therein served on active duty in the Armed Forces of any of the governments associated with the United States during either eligibility periods and died in the line of duty or after honorable discharge;

(3) grandparents, parents, siblings, spouses, and direct or adopted descendants within two degrees of consanguinity of all servicemembers who were in the Armed Forces of the United States during either of the following periods: April 6, 1917, to November 11, 1918; and anytime after December 7, 1941, who served on active duty in the Armed Forces of the United States during either eligibility period and died in the line of duty or after honorable discharge; and

(4) to those women who of their own right are eligible for membership in The American Legion.

The revisions to the ALA's eligibility mentioned above allow individuals the potential to be members of both the Sons of The American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary. The Legion's national judge advocate has confirmed that this dual membership does not constitute a conflict of interest with The American Legion.

The eligibility changes were effective in September. Updated membership applications, brochures, and additional membership resources are available at www.ALAforVeterans.org.

Check out the FAQ blog post on these eligibility changes at www.ALAforVeterans.org. Your question may be answered there. For any further questions related to this eligibility change, please email ALA National Headquarters' Membership Division at membership@ALAforVeterans.org.



‘This saves lives’

Veteran camaraderie makes strong impact at National Veterans Creative Arts Festival

By Sara Fowler

There’s nothing quite like the friendships formed during military service — but the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival gives veterans that opportunity once again to experience that level of fellowship and understanding among one another.

2026 marked the 45th year of the Festival, co-presented by the American Legion Auxiliary and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Each year, there’s a mix of first-time attendees as well as veterans who have placed first previously and are back again. Either way, most Festival attendees will tell you the camaraderie during that week truly makes a difference for these veterans.

Carmen Rodolph

U.S. Navy
Washington State
Visual artist — mixed media



The arts have helped to keep Rodolph alive while navigating multiple sclerosis (MS), a traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, and her late husband’s cancer diagnosis and passing.

Rodolph was in bootcamp two weeks after high school. After a rocky start to figure out which military school was the best fit, Rodolph became a welder — which eventually inspired her artwork.

In 2005 while deployed, Rodolph went from her mission at the time to a humanitarian assignment in Indonesia after a tsunami hit at the end of 2004. She was there for three days, going in and out to bring supplies.

On the second day, the helicopter she was on crashed into a large rice paddy with 10 military members on the aircraft. She and others weren’t strapped in.

“When I woke up, my face was in water,” she recalled. “I was unconscious for I’m not sure how long and have a traumatic brain injury because of that.”

She also had a dislocated hip.

Rodolph spent almost a month in Singapore to recover enough to fly back to the U.S.

Despite the injuries, she was going to stay in the Navy as long as she could because she wanted to be a master chief petty officer. But in 2008, she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, a chronic disease of the central nervous system.

“It was hard,” she said. “I wanted to stay in. It still hurts. I felt like my life was over. It took me a couple years after I retired to figure things out and get everything I needed to be healthy and to be who I am.”

After she retired, her husband was diagnosed with cancer — service-connected from burnpit smoke. She was his caregiver for six years. During that time, she received her master’s degree to become a recreational therapist. After his death, though, she didn’t have the passion anymore to continue pursuing that career.

While he was going through chemo, Rodolph made a sculpture — it took about two years to put together. She submitted it to the Festival, and it won.

“So that started me off on sculptures,” she recalled. “There was a jackrabbit I was making while [my husband] was still alive that I hadn’t finished, so I finished it and got a call from a Seattle VA mental health facility and asked me if had any sculptures I could donate to the VA in Seattle. I said yes, and it’s still there. I see it all the time.”

Art was a distraction while her husband was going through chemo and while she was dealing with her MS diagnosis. But it also led her to the Festival.

“This saves lives,” she said about the Festival, and encourages veterans to participate in the arts. “If more veterans knew about this, suicide rates would slow down because they would find a purpose. If you make something and then people see it, your purpose is to

A closer look at the positive influence the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival has on veterans:

- 160 gold-medal winning veterans from the 2025 competition were invited to attend the 2026 Festival
- 59 VA facilities represented
- 71% first-time attendees
- 36% women veterans

make something better next time so you can focus on that. You want to be here."

After attending this year's event, she said it was a life-changing experience.

"It helped me survive the death of my husband," Rodolph said. "If it wasn't for this, I'm sure I would have gotten depressed. As soon as you start going down that slippery slope, it's hard to come back up. Just talking to each other [has helped]. I think once you put things that happened to you out in the open, you can survive better."

Despite the struggles she's faced, Rodolph said she's found her purpose through her artwork.

"My purpose is to build these sculptures and put them in as many hospitals and VAs as I can — that's what I'm going to do," she said.

Catherine Bundegreen

U.S. Navy
Texas
Music — vocal classical/world/ethnic



"It's very interesting being back here and being able to just go up to anyone, start a conversation, and we don't have to explain what we're talking about," she said of the natural camaraderie among veterans at the event.

For Bundegreen, having that safe space with veterans meant a lot.

"A lot of times, the civilian world doesn't understand because they didn't go through it — that's just the reality. But being around other veterans is that camaraderie and those friendships."

This year was Bundegreen's first time attending the NVCAF. She said she was surprised when she found out she had placed first.

"You never know who you're going up against, and there are a lot of really talented veterans here," she said.

She was a member of the church choir when she was a child but never had any formal training until college and has been singing at that level for four years. She's a dual major in music therapy and music composition, set to graduate at the end of the fall semester in December.

"One of the requirements with voice lessons is that we perform twice every semester in class, but I think it's very different when you know it's a group of veterans and those who are here to support us too and give us this opportunity to share what has helped us," she said.

Attending the Festival gave Bundegreen the chance to experience the therapeutic power of the arts, beyond what she was experiencing through her studies.











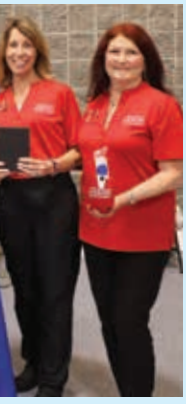


















SHOWCASING CREATIVE TALENTS: Veterans from across the country gathered for the 2026 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival in South Carolina. Participants attended a wide range of activities throughout the week, including rehearsals, workshops, stage shows, and more. Alongside the veterans, the national ALA Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Committee helped throughout the week from meal counts to being a listening ear to hosting a booth in the expo hall.

"There's something special that the arts can do that no other field, no other profession can really kind of tap into," she said. "There's just something really special about the arts."

Josh Sauvageau

U.S. Navy
Minnesota
Creative writing — rhyming poetry: military experience

This year was Sauvageau's first time entering the Festival — he placed first. Another veteran in Minneapolis told him about the Festival last summer and he decided to enter his writing.



"A lot of my writing is from military experience — a lot of my creative nonfiction," he said. "I would say like a third of my poetry is from military experience."

His award-winning piece for this event was titled, *An Obituary for the Unknown Soldier*.

"It was written to draw more awareness to veteran suicide," he said. "We often hear the number of causalities in wars that happen on either side of a war, but we don't often hear about the number of veterans who end up ending their lives after the war."

While at the Festival, Sauvageau was already thinking ahead to next year and entering again.

"This was such a cool experience," he said. "I've got veteran friends too. I'm going to be telling them about this if they're not already aware of it and asking them to send in submissions too."

Like other veterans, that camaraderie aspect plays a huge part in the week.

"It's really amazing, especially in all the workshops, getting to know folks," he said.

Like many other veterans, Sauvageau ended the week with a positive experience of the Festival.

"It's incredible that the VA offers this program, and really I'm just shocked and surprised at how amazing it's been," he said. ★

Mark your calendars

The next National Veterans Creative Arts Festival will be in November 2027, held in Orlando, Fla.

Want to view all the award-winning artwork?

Visit www.creativeartsfestival.va.gov.



Shaping the Next Generation of Leaders

By Hannah Amos

ALA Girls Nation is all about exploration. From across the nation, 102 high school students traveled to Washington, D.C. to explore the capital, take a deep dive into our government process, connect with a diverse background of other students, and discover more about themselves through this unique experience.

The next generation of leaders is in the beginning steps of who they will become.

Throughout ALA Girls Nation, attendees — called senators — actively participate in a mock Senate, closely studying how the U.S. governs. During the process, senators were able to discuss and share issues that face them and their states.

Virginia Senator Madeleine Bailey viewed the legislature as a form of expression.

"These laws aren't for ourselves; they're for our communities — for those we love and care about," she said.

Michigan Senator Mrudhula "Mimi" Kannan felt the program provided the chance to be the setting stage of change, and she wanted to embrace the full impact of the opportunity.

Kannan looked ahead to "really conceptualizing what government is supposed to be and learning how to create a reality that is better than the one we have right now, so that we can actually make it a reality in our world."

The lasting impact of ALA Girls Nation for many are the connections and friendships made along the way. ALA Girls Nation 2026 Vice President Teresa "Tessa" Ahn from Maryland felt honored to not only represent her state, but to make relationships across the nation.

"It was really about the people we were sitting with at lunch or dinner. It was about the people we were debating in legislative sessions. It was all about the connections and relationships we were able to form that I know will last a lifetime," Ahn said.

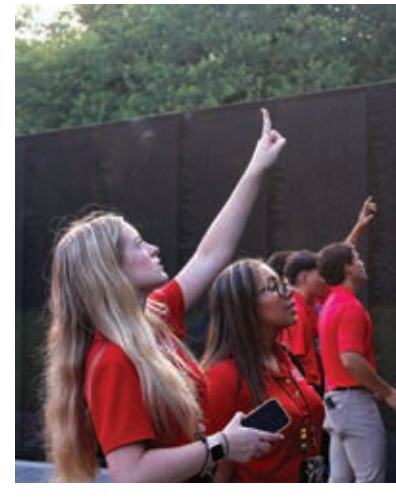
South Carolina Senator Reagan Hannah shared Ahn's sentiment of the influence ALA Girls Nation had on her.

"ALA Girls Nation has absolutely been one of the most life-changing things I've done," Hannah said. "It's truly something you can't put into words. The sisterhood here is so strong. Everyone wants to see everyone succeed, and most importantly, they want to see you be the true, ultimate version of yourself."

To Hannah, the support ALA Girls Nation brought felt unique. Her time at ALA Girls Nation was a practice in connection and embracing differences.

"You're getting to know other people from around the nation, as well as learning their perspectives and their lives, and I think that creates a better leader







because you're able to not only use your voice but also use your two ears," she said.

ALA Girls Nation 2026 President Pro Tempore Saara Wallace, California, appreciated the ability to learn from and connect with a diverse group of senators from across the country.

"At ALA Girls Nation, you really do get the full spectrum of not only personalities, but political ideologies — even down to basic things, like style or accents. You really get that fully national experience," Wallace said.

Not only did the senators get to connect with each other, but they gained insight from ALA Girls Nation alumna and U.S. Army veteran Maj. Virginia Clark, who shared her experiences from deployment to her current career at the Pentagon, all of which she attributes to the Auxiliary and ALA Girls Nation supporting and believing in her. Clark made sure to pay forward the opportunity she was given.

"I have complete confidence that the women sitting in this room are capable of becoming exactly what this country needs them to be — because 18 years ago, someone looked at a nervous high school girl sitting where you're sitting and believed that about her," Clark said. "So maybe tonight in this room, someone is quietly wondering if she's good enough, if she's capable enough, and if she's brave enough to make that hard choice. So, I'll tell you right now: I believe in you."



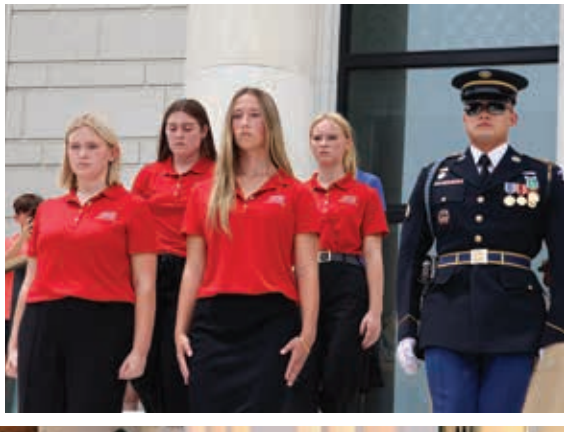
To learn more about ALA Girls Nation, follow @ALAGirlsNation on Instagram and Facebook. To see photos from the week, scan the QR code for the ALA Girls Nation Flickr account.

No matter where the senators' paths take them, Clark encouraged them to pay forward the opportunity they've been given.

"Wherever life takes you, please remember this: You have the opportunities and you have the skills. With this opportunity comes the responsibility to make your community stronger, to make your professions better, and to leave this place better than you found it." ★









LASTING MEMORIES (opposite page): Senators at the Washington Monument; ALA Girls Nation Supreme Court; Senator Anna Winnington at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial; ALA Girls Nation President Deborah Nkurumeh. This page: senators greet an Honor Flight participant; ALA Girls Nation and Boys Nation senators at the Capitol; Arlington wreath laying; group photo with National President Pam Ray (photos by Alexa Freeman and Hannah Amos/ALANHQ and Kristin Merrill).



Celebrating a Mission Driven, Family Focused Auxiliary year

By Sara Fowler

Red. White. Blue. The patriotic colors of our nation were on display extra this year through hats, attire, shoes, neckties, jewelry, and more as we celebrated another American Legion Auxiliary National Convention, administrative year, and America's 250th birthday in Louisville, Ky.

As an added bonus, confetti cannons and handheld confetti poppers showered the convention session hall with multicolored paper for members to commemorate the milestone birthday together.

A Kentucky bluegrass band welcomed attendees for opening day — a fitting addition with the convention taking place in the Bluegrass State.

Members nationwide gathered for the ALA's largest annual business meeting, making new friends and catching up with previous year's acquaintances.

"Mission for me may be different than mission for you, but that's the best thing about the American Legion Auxiliary — those differences make us unique," said 2025-2026 American Legion Auxiliary National President Pam Ray from the convention stage. "They make us better — stronger, together."

Throughout the administrative year, members took to heart the Mission Driven, Family Focused phrase and worked hard to show who the Auxiliary is and how we work together as an American Legion Family.

Each day, national committee reports shared positive stories about members focused on the mission of serving veterans, military, and their families. The reports not only celebrated all of the positive mission work in communities across the country, but they also gave members ideas they could implement in their units.

This year's voting centered on two major actions: delegates supporting a resolution from The American Legion regarding the ALA's membership eligibility (to read more in depth about the eligibility changes, go to page 24 in this issue of *Auxiliary*) and support for the ALA's new strategic plan (see details on page 17).

Six breakout sessions for attendees were offered, extending training to members and providing further education across a variety of topics — Navigating the New ALAMIS; Leadership that Lasts; C&B Case Scenarios; Funding Mission Impact; Wreaths Across America; and Warrior Beats.

New officers ready to lead

Although National Convention celebrates the culmination of an ALA administrative year, an exciting part of the event is also welcoming the new national officers and department presidents.

Dr. Coral May Grout of the Department of Massachusetts was elected the ALA's 2026-2027 national president. The national ALA focus this year is on education, with expanding the Spirit of Youth scholarships to two military spouses and celebrating the 20th anniversary of ALA's Give 10 to Education.

Read more about the focus and Grout's professional and personal life on page 34 in this issue of *Auxiliary*.



www.ALAforVeterans.org/convention

Want to see what you missed or re-watch your favorite parts of the 2026 ALA National Convention?

Catch up by watching archived video of the general session livestream, plus national officer elections and installation! Want to attend the ALA's largest national event? The next National Convention will be our 106th, held in Kansas City, Mo., in late August 2027. Follow our social media @ALAforVeterans for future convention information.

Other national officers elected to serve during the 2026-2027 administrative year: Dr. Lisa Chaplin, national vice president; Teri Miller, Central Division national vice president; Doreen Gallagher, Eastern Division national vice president; Jane Benzel, Northwestern Division national vice president; Patricia Murray, Southern Division national vice president; Ellen Nathan, Western Division national vice president; Kathy Daudistel, national secretary; Marybeth Revoir, national treasurer; Jeanne Haas, national chaplain; and Jane McKnight, national historian. Learn more about each of the national officers at www.ALAforVeterans.org/about/national-leadership.

Several award winners honored at National Convention

Public Spirit Award

"Honor Flight Inc. understands that service does not end when the uniform comes off," Ray said. "It continues in how we honor, support, and stand beside our veterans — every single day."

Auxiliary units and members at the local level had already been partnering with Honor Flight for many years, but in April, the national Auxiliary hosted the first ALA-sponsored all female veterans Honor Flight.

Honor Flight Inc. Founder Earl Morse and Chair of the Board Theresa Werner accepted the Public Spirit Award on behalf of their organization.

"Thank you so much for this award, and I thank you so much more for your support and everything you are doing to get these veterans the long overdue respect they deserve," Morse said from the convention stage.

To read more about the national ALA's partnership with Honor Flight Inc. and the value of the Public Spirit Award, check out the ALA blog at www.ALAforVeterans.org.

Unit Members of the Year

"Leadership has always been a passion of mine because I truly believe the future of this organization depends on how well we guide and support those coming up behind us," said Ray from the convention stage as she congratulated the winners.

2026 ALA Unit Member of the Year recipients:

Alabama: Judi Wheat; Alaska: Clair Sullivan; Arizona: Carol Stant; Arkansas: Charlotte Guest; California: Alejandra Ross; Colorado: Christina Fredrich; Connecticut: Christina Heise; Delaware: Wanda Pierce; District of Columbia: Colleen Walsh; Florida: Kate Oyer; Georgia: Laurie Edwards; Idaho: Cora Lockie; Illinois: Michelle Brown; Indiana: Melanie Findley; Iowa: Jodie Kruid; Kansas: Kimberly Vincent; Kentucky: Arcelia Moore; Maine: Lisa Huestis; Massachusetts: Theresa Rogers;












CELEBRATION TIME (top to bottom, left to right): Members celebrate in patriotic attire for America's 250th birthday at States Dinner and before general sessions; National President Pam Ray with her husband, Harl; 2026 Salute to Servicemembers Award recipients; members on polka dot day; Public Spirit Award recipient Honor Flight Inc. with Ray; Little Miss Poppy Aurora Vogel addresses the convention body; members in their ALA-branded attire.

Maryland: Mary Rose Schoppert; Michigan: Kathleen Edwards; Minnesota: Sheryl Stoltman; Mississippi: Jackie Sibley; Missouri: Brenda Williams; Montana: Carol Keats; Nebraska: Alvertus Jones; Nevada: Bonnie Beaning; New Hampshire: Marcia Merrow; New York: Cher Mackiewicz; North Carolina: Leilani Fallon-Gordon; North Dakota: Elaine Lange; Ohio: Mariane Borrelli; Oklahoma: Helen Lawrence-Phillips; Oregon: Tamera Martin; Pennsylvania: Paulette Evans-Gates; Puerto Rico: Evangeline Soto; Rhode Island: Lynn Stephen; South Carolina: Bailey Kennington; South Dakota: Jessica Kusser; Texas: Karen Fisher; Utah: Mary Speirs; Vermont: Michelle Bryant; Virginia: Fayth Heath; Washington: Sandie St. Onge; West Virginia: Sue Sager; Wisconsin: Christine Van Ryzin; Wyoming: Tione Willox. *(Note: Not all American Legion Auxiliary states submitted names for this award.)*

Salute to Servicemembers

The American Legion Auxiliary Salute to Servicemembers Award honors military personnel who are currently serving our country in the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard, Space Force, and the National Guard/Reserve. This year, there were 12 submissions for the award and the first year for a U.S. Space Force nomination.

- U.S. Army: Sgt. Maj. Lauren T.S. Flores (nominated in the Department of Hawaii)
- U.S. Air Force: Staff Sgt. Beautiful Reliford (nominated in the Department of Arkansas)
- U.S. Coast Guard: Petty Officer Ellen Davis (nominated in the Department of Virginia)
- U.S. Navy: Operations Specialist Master Chief Mark Ball (nominated in the Department of Virginia)
- U.S. Space Force: Master Sgt. Ryan Braat (nominated in the Department of Florida)
- National Guard/Reserve: U.S. Coast Guard Reserve Boatswain Mate First Class Shane Parent (nominated in the Department of Michigan)

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

Department Merit Medallion

The Department Merit Medallion focuses on recognizing and celebrating departments that strive for and achieve business management excellence. This year's winners:

- Department of California
- Department of Illinois
- Department of Indiana
- Department of Iowa
- Department of Minnesota
- Department of Nebraska
- Department of New York
- Department of Oklahoma
- Department of Texas
- Department of Vermont
- Department of West Virginia
- Department of Wisconsin

National President's Award for Excellence

This distinguished award reflects the ALA's core value of *Service Not Self* by recognizing those who have demonstrated extraordinary dedication, leadership, and impact through the Auxiliary's mission outreach programs.

National President's Award for Excellence unit winners:

- Arkansas Unit 91
- Wisconsin Unit 494
- Colorado Unit 2
- West Virginia Unit 174
- Iowa Unit 127

The department winner of the National President's Award for Excellence was Illinois.

Another year comes to a close

"As I visited members across this great nation and beyond, one truth became clear: The passion for our mission is alive and thriving," Ray said as she closed out the National Convention. "Every day, American Legion Auxiliary members are showing up — serving, leading, and making sure our veterans, military, their families, and our communities understand not just what we do, but why we do it." ★







Did you donate to the Wall of Heroes in Louisville or online and curious how much was raised for the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation's Mission Endowment Fund? Check out page 23 in this issue of *Auxiliary* to see the grand total!

YOUR OFFICIAL ALA STORE FOR

FALL APPAREL!





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(307.520X)



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(307.125X)





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AUX MG 1126

‘A Beacon for Veterans’

National President Dr. Coral May Grout’s deep connections to education guide ALA in 2026-2027

By Sara Fowler



Her dad was at an American Legion District Finance Committee meeting the day she was born.

At 3 months old, she was already attending American Legion Auxiliary meetings.

“My mother would go and she’d bring me along in this big laundry basket when I was a little baby,” recalled Dr. Coral May Grout. “I started in the ALA really, really young.”

Today, she is the 2026-2027 national president of the American Legion Auxiliary.

Grout is the third national president from the Department of Massachusetts since the ALA’s founding in 1919.

She became active at the local level at an early age — distributing poppies at 5 years old — and continuing to volunteer for many years since then.

“I volunteered with my mom and a whole bunch of other people for bingo every Thursday for 29 years,” Grout said. “The money we raised from the bingo started a wonderful scholarship through the post, and we supported the post, YMCA basketball teams, hockey teams, garden club, and high school teams, including the cheerleaders.”

A love for education

Grout has been Massachusetts’ District 4 education chair for 25 years. But her passion for education began long before that — 51 years ago to be exact.

She was pre-med through most of college but during her junior year, she had to take a course outside of her major. That class changed everything.

“I fell in love with education,” she recalled.

Her first job after college was as an English teacher in her hometown.

Over the years, Grout spent time working at different school districts in a variety of leadership positions — assistant teaching principal, curriculum coordinator, assistant superintendent for curriculum, assistant superintendent, and superintendent more than once.

Her favorite was at a K-8 public school four



“I wanted something that would be representative of me, and everybody who knows me knows how much I love to walk,” Grout said. “I do 4 to 6 miles a day. Everybody knows how much I love the ocean and lighthouses. I’d taken a picture of a lighthouse — Nubble up in Maine — the most heavily photographed lighthouse in the country. You can’t climb it, you can’t go to it; it’s on an island of its own. But it’s a gorgeous lighthouse. And every night, the lighthouse light beam goes out to the ocean and that’s where the idea comes from.

“We can be a beacon for veterans just like that beacon has been there for sailors for hundreds of years. It protects the sailors from hitting the rocks along the shore with their ships. And I want that lighthouse for the ALA to protect our veterans and ensure they get everything they need because they gave so very much so that we could live the lifestyles we live today. Some of them gave the ultimate sacrifice — their lives. And we need to be there and be that beacon for the widows, the children, and the living and the deceased veterans. And that lighthouse is representative of that entire group.”

miles from the ocean. Her first year there was very memorable, for it's unusual to get large amounts of snow on the south coast of Massachusetts or Cape Cod. Mother Nature dumped 48 inches of snow in one storm.

"My schools were encased in ice," she recalled.

She retired from there, and four years later was enticed to go back to education for the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to become an auditor for the state department for underperforming schools. She held the job for 14 years before fully retiring.

Devoted to the ALA cause

Grout has served several American Legion Auxiliary positions over the years from the unit level to department to national, including national secretary and national historian. Her first national appointment was Children & Youth Committee vice chair in 1992.

Grout learned a great deal through the experience of serving as national chair on a variety of committees 11 times over the years.

"I think it prepared me for the leadership role of national president," she said.

Grout is looking for every unit to do one mission-related activity this year. And it doesn't have to be anything extravagant.

"If you're a small unit and you only have three active members, you can still fly your flag," she said as an example. "Give $20 to education. Twenty dollars divided by three people is less than a trip to McDonald's."

Another idea is driving a veteran to the VA for an appointment or helping out military families with childcare — they need the opportunity to go out to dinner once in a while.

Having every unit do a mission-related task this ALA administrative year and reporting what they are doing is a high priority for Grout.

"If we can double the response rate this year, then I've accomplished my goal," she said.

Additionally, there is a focus on Give 10 to Education in honor of the 20th anniversary of the cause. But this ALA administrative year, it will be Give 20 — think 20 pencils, 20 notebooks, 20 glue sticks, 20 rulers, etc. Learn more on page 41 in this issue of *Auxiliary* magazine.

Leadership for the long run

Mentoring and passing down knowledge to the next generation of leaders is important to Grout.

In step with that focus, she asked Past National Presidents to volunteer to serve as mentors for the new national chairs.

She's also been asking department presidents — instead of having the same department chairs for











MISSION FOCUSED (from top): The Nubble Lighthouse in Maine, which inspired the 2026-2027 national president pin design; holding a photo of John F. Kennedy, which was delivered to her weeks before he was killed; Grout at the 2022 Milwaukee National Convention; with her parents; Grout at a veteran cemetery in France.







MEMORIES MADE (above): Grout during installation at the 2026 National Convention. Right: Grout with her mother Rachel at installation as Massachusetts department president in 2019 (her second term). Sadly, Rachel had a stroke and passed away two days later.

40 years without changing — to encourage those chairs to mentor someone new. Additionally, utilizing Past Department Presidents to mentor as well will be beneficial.

"We've got to rebuild the leadership procedure," she said. "We are in a position now where people are holding positions for years, and that includes unit presidents. You can't accomplish much when it's the same old, 'We've always done it this way, so we're going to continue to do it this way.' We need to focus on alternatives too."

Educating members on the ALA and potential leadership opportunities is important, Grout said.

"When you come to your first unit meeting, I don't want you sitting at the back of the hall twiddling your fingers," she said. "I want somebody to come up to you and say, 'Hey, welcome! Come and sit with me. I'll explain to you what we're doing if you want. By the way, what are you interested in? Would you like me to show you how to make a poppy?'"

This proactive approach engages members right away, helps them feel like they belong, and presents opportunities to them for potential within the unit.

Advice for new members

"My major advice is get involved," Grout said. "The best way to learn about who we are is by doing what we do. And we have a lot of programs. Oftentimes, I hear the complaint, 'You have too many programs.' You don't have to do them all — just pick the ones you want to work on."



Grout encourages new members to get involved with one program first to see if they like it, and if not, try another program.

"There's something here for every personality," she said. "That's how you build your future leaders as well. So, get involved."

Looking to the future

Grout said she's excited to meet grassroots members from across the country as she travels as the ambassador for the Auxiliary.

"I would love to go to more schools on military bases," she said. "I think it would be cool and offer me an opportunity to do a reading for the kids or just talk about the Auxiliary for the kids." ★

Scholarships to help military spouses pursue educational opportunities

The Spirit of Youth Scholarship Fund is the ALA's national fundraising focus for 2026-2027, including the addition of two new $10,000 American Legion Auxiliary Military Spouse Scholarships.

"Our military spouses move a lot, generally have children to care for, and this population has among the highest unemployment rates," Grout said from the National Convention stage in September during the installation of national officers. "It's hard to raise a family while the other spouse is away. So, hopefully, we can change two lives this year through your support and donations in any amount."

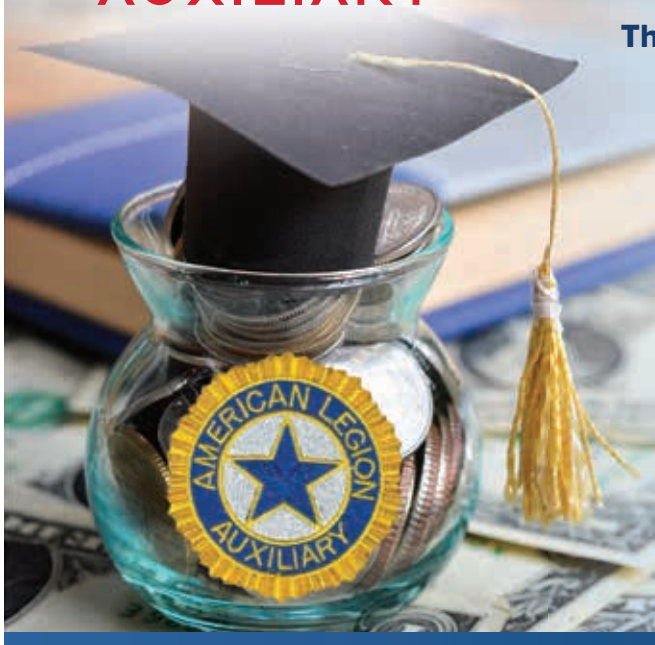
These two ALA scholarships are in addition to the scholarships that are already part of Spirit of Youth: one for American Legion Auxiliary Junior members, another for the Junior Members of the Year, one for participants in the American Legion Auxiliary Girls Nation program, and scholarships for non-traditional students.

To learn more and donate, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/Scholarships/Spirit-of-Youth.

Donate Here:

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY

Invest in the Future of Military Spouses



Through her Spirit of Youth Scholarships fundraising focus, National President Dr. Coral May Grout is championing educational opportunities for our military families.

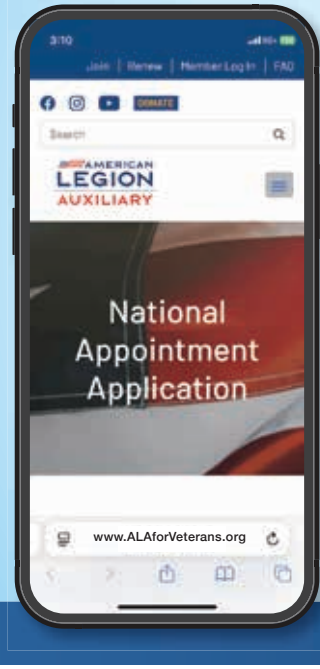
This year, the ALA is offering two $10,000 American Legion Auxiliary Military Spouse Scholarships to help open doors and build brighter futures through education.

Scan to support Coral's fundraising focus and Spirit of Youth Scholarships.

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AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY

Ready to Lead?



The National Organization is always looking for passionate, talented members to serve on our national committees!

Are you ready to serve? Or do you know someone whose professional experience, skills, and passion for our organization would make them a great fit?

The national appointment application window is opening early this year. Applications will be available on the national website beginning Nov. 1 and will close Dec. 1.

Consider sharing your time, talents, and ideas at the national level. We'd love to hear from you!

APPLY HERE:

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PROPER BRANDING: ALA members can proudly wear the Auxiliary membership pin, but this is a don't for our non-member volunteers.

CAN NON-MEMBERS WEAR ALA-BRANDED ATTIRE?

It's a simple question with a simple answer: Yes!

Whether a member or not, the more visibility the American Legion Auxiliary has — especially when it comes to serving our mission — the better.

Wearing an ALA-branded shirt, hat, tote, or other apparel or accessory can help start a conversation and spread the word of who we are as the American Legion Auxiliary — a community of volunteers serving veterans, military, and their families.

Branded apparel is most effective when worn at ALA events when the mission is actively being exemplified. There are many kindhearted individuals who want to help the ALA's mission but are ineligible to become a member.

As they say, many hands make light work, and all support is appreciated to help the ALA carry out its important mission of serving those who've served.

When your event volunteers are branded, it's a big help for attendees to know who to go to at the event, and it can make a lasting impact in the future by helping people associate the Auxiliary with the good deeds they see taking place.

It's a known fact that repetition lasts longer in people's memories. When the public sees ALA-branded materials more often — especially if those wearing the ALA brand are assisting veterans, military, their families, and their communities — the more the public knows who to go to when supporting these groups. Non-members help the Auxiliary with this endeavor.

Though non-members can wear ALA merchandise, there are some restrictions.

Only members can wear apparel that denotes membership to the Auxiliary. For example, membership pins given out during an initiation ceremony — whether a pin or a T-shirt that reads, "ALA member" — these items cannot be worn by a non-member.

In the same vein, non-members cannot wear items signifying Auxiliary leadership titles and/or past leadership titles. These articles should be worn only by the members who hold or have held the respective position.

Beyond those simple restrictions, the more the merrier! At the end of the day — member or not — the same goal of supporting our mission is what unites us.



How does the ALA's emblem approval process work?

Entrusted by The American Legion, the ALA helps protect the brand of the Auxiliary through an approval process for any products bearing official ALA marks (logos). For product approval, fill out the Emblem Use Approval Request Form. Next, send the completed form with a visual proof/representation of the product to your department/state secretary. After the department secretary reviews the form and artwork to make sure there are no emblem violations, it's sent to ALA National Headquarters for the final steps of the approval process.

Any questions? Feel free to email emblem@ALAforVeterans.org.

COMMUNITY SERVICE: WHAT DOES COMMUNITY SERVICE MEAN TO YOU?

www.Facebook.com/groups/ALACommunityService

Community service is unpaid work that helps people in a local area. This definition perfectly describes members of the American Legion Auxiliary. For decades, ALA members have generously contributed their time, talents, and resources to care for their communities and make them better places to live. Serving whenever and wherever needed embodies the ALA's legacy of *Service Not Self*.

One impactful example occurred during the kickoff of the 105th ALA National Convention in Louisville, Ky. ALA members — working alongside other members of The American Legion Family — volunteered to clean and beautify Louisville's Greenwood Cemetery. After decades of abandonment and neglect, the cemetery grounds needed considerable attention. Although every task was not completed, volunteers accomplished much of the to-do list, prompting the cemetery director to proudly state, "The cemetery looks great."

Cemetery cleanup is only one way to serve. Other projects may include hosting blood drives, shoveling snow, organizing neighborhood cleanups, collecting supplies for shelters and rescue missions, or partnering with other ALA programs, such as the Education Program to collect school supplies or organize a community letter-writing project. The possibilities are endless.

Community service happens year-round, but members are especially encouraged to volunteer on national days of service, including 9/11 National Day of Service and Martin Luther King Jr. National Day of Service in January. Units should also prepare early for American Legion Family Day, held annually on the last Saturday in April. Posts are encouraged to open their doors, welcome the community, and share information about the Legion Family's programs and mission.

For guidance, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org and type "What Counts as ALA Community Service?" in the search bar.

Whether an act is large or small, planned or spontaneous, the goal is simple: Get involved, serve others, and leave your community better than you found it.



April Sinclair is a 16-year honorary life member of Unit 57 in the Department of Alaska.

EDUCATION: CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF GIVE 10 TO EDUCATION

www.Facebook.com/groups/ALAEducation

What do you think of when you hear the words American Legion Auxiliary Education Program? Scholarships may be the first thing that comes to mind. While scholarships are a very important part of our commitment to helping students achieve their educational goals, the ALA Education Program is so much more. It is about supporting our schools, encouraging our students, and honoring our veterans through education.

This year, we are celebrating 20 years of Give 10 to Education. This program is as simple as donating school supplies but makes a huge impact.

For two decades, American Legion Auxiliary members have worked tirelessly donating school supplies in multiples of 10: 10 pencils, 10 notebooks, 10 folders, and other much needed classroom items. It was a way for us to build relationships with schools, support teachers, help students succeed, and make our organization and our mission visible in our communities.

National President Dr. Coral May Grout, who created the program 20 years ago when she was national Education Committee chair, proposed the concept in 2007 when she was asked to come up with an idea that would engage members.

As we celebrate this 20-year milestone, we are given the opportunity to make this program even more impactful by taking it to the next level: GIVE 20! We challenge members — in every unit — to partner with a local school and ask what they really need to make their classroom successful.

For 20 years, Give 10 to Education has proven that when we each give a little, together we can accomplish a lot. Our Education Program isn't just about providing scholarships; it's about investing in the future — 10 or 20 items at a time.



Debra A. Rumery is a nine-year member of Unit 86 in Gray, Maine.

PUBLIC RELATIONS: SHOWING OUR MISSION IN ACTION

www.Facebook.com/groups/ALApublicrelations

Public relations (PR) is how we tell and share our stories with each other, and, more importantly, with the public. It helps us build a positive image in our communities and trust among our membership. As ALA members, you do PR every time you wear our brand in public or create newsletters, flyers, or social media posts. Everything you do or say is public relations. Utilizing positive public relations helps you unlock the power of your story.

Public relations has key elements, no matter which media platform you use. Be positive and hook readers with an interesting headline. Experts say you lose a reader's attention within two to five seconds if the headline doesn't grab it immediately. Make your flyers eye-catching, yet easy to read. Know your target audience, and provide clear, concise information about your event. Always proofread and check your pictures for smiles, not frowns.

It is all about the journey that creates your unit's memorable story. Your unit's legacy and history are captured in those Facebook posts. We invite you to join our national PR Facebook group and share your posts — just answer a few membership-related questions and agree to the terms. In the comments, tell us about the event you are posting about, and always include your unit's name, number, and department so we can all celebrate your successes. Remember: No one counts the number of Facebook posts you create, but they remember the impression they make.

The national ALA Public Relations Committee is here to help you succeed. You can find many resources on the national website, including templates for flyers, newsletters, and press releases: www.ALAforVeterans.org/member/resources/media-templates.



Julie Smith is a 24-year member of North Carolina Unit 342.

VETERANS AFFAIRS & REHABILITATION: SUPPORTING HONOR FLIGHT INC.

www.Facebook.com/groups/ALAVAR

The American Legion Auxiliary collaborates with many outside organizations, one being Honor Flight Inc.

Honor Flight Inc. is a nationally known nonprofit organization with over 128 hubs across the country — all working together to achieve the Honor Flight mission: "To celebrate America's veterans by inviting them to share in a day of honor at our nation's memorials."

The first Honor Flight took place May 21, 2005, and that inaugural mission flew 12 World War II veterans from Springfield, Ohio, to Washington, D.C.

Honor Flight's impact is staggering: 22,098 veterans were honored in 2025 with 339,226 veterans honored since 2005, and there are currently 37,728 veterans on the waitlist nationwide.

Honor Flight is 100% free for military veterans, but their guardians must pay their own travel expenses.

How can the American Legion Auxiliary help? In 2021, American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters entered a formal partnership with Honor Flight Inc. The partnership enabled our units and departments to directly donate Poppy Funds to Honor Flight from the distribution of our poppy flower.

These funds can be used three different ways: First, money can be donated directly to Honor Flight hubs in your area or to the Honor Flight Lone Eagle program.

For more information on Honor Flight and Lone Eagle Honor Flight, visit www.honorflight.org or scan the QR code on the left.

The next way to assist is through Poppy Funds that may be used to help with the guardian's expenses: airfare, meals, medical training, hotel accommodations, special identifying clothing, and transportation to the airport. Donations can be made by visiting www.honorflight.org/donations. Click on "Poppy Funds from The American Legion Family."

The final way Poppy Funds can support Honor Flight Inc. is by purchasing specific items from those options previously mentioned. You will need to coordinate with your local hub first.

This project is so near and dear to my heart. What an excellent way to honor our veterans. WELCOME HOME!



Melanie Taylor is a 33-year PUFL member of William Russell Ledford Unit 293 in the Department of California.

CELEBRATE GIVE 10 TO EDUCATION IN A SPECIAL WAY THIS ADMIN YEAR

Give 10 to Education is a simple but effective ALA initiative that supports students, teachers, and schools.

Started in 2007, ALA members and their communities are encouraged to give 10 items to their local schools.

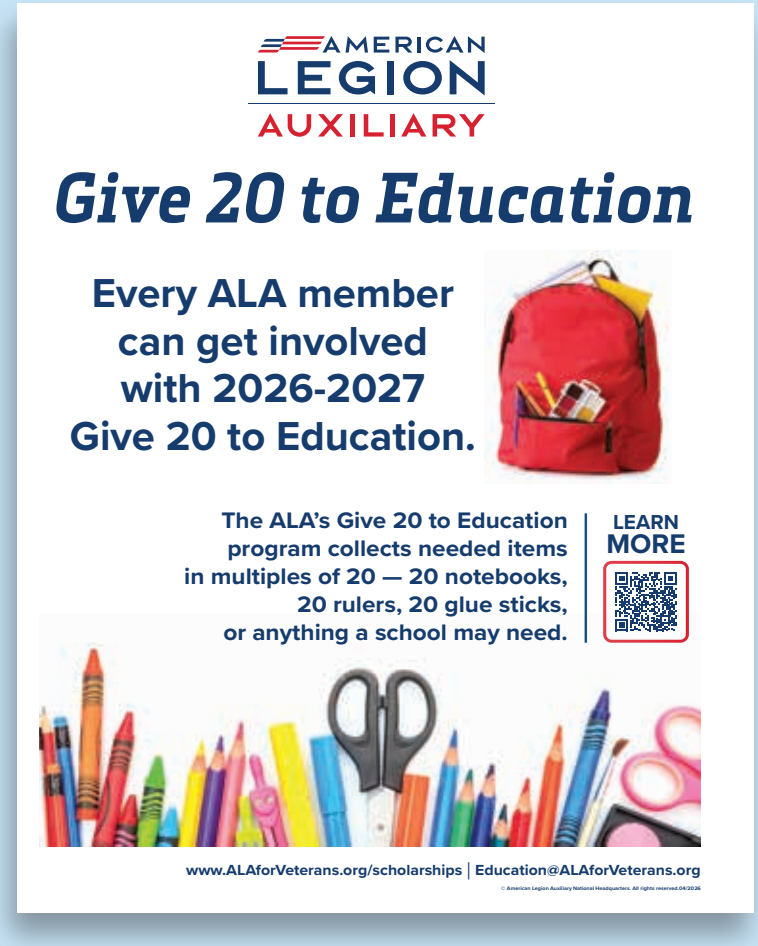
Participants of Give 10 can donate 10 packs of pencils, 10 tissue boxes, 10 books, or 10 other items a school may need.

To better understand the supply wishes of your local classrooms, it is encouraged to contact school leadership and teachers. Another resource is looking at your school's supply lists.

For nearly 20 years, Give 10 to Education has been supporting the classroom — 10 items at a time.

As this accessible program reaches its 20th anniversary in 2027, ALA members are encouraged to Give 20 to Education to celebrate the program's lasting impact.

Following the same idea as Give 10, for the 2026-2027 administrative year, units, districts, departments, etc., are being challenged to donate 20 items — whatever local schools need and what you can give — to education.



Scan for donation ideas:

If you need help with donation ideas, scan the QR code and check out the *Give 10 to Education Suggested Donation Items and Tracking Sheet*.

Get your community involved and host a school supply drive.

The ALA Education Committee Facebook group, @ALAEducationProgram, can help you with Give 20 and Give 10 to Education ideas, or you can share your own ideas in the group for others.

For any questions regarding the Give 10 to Education program and the 20th anniversary celebration of Give 10, reach out to the Education Committee at education@ALAforVeterans.org.

Practice Service Not Self on an ALA national committee

Does being a national advocate for veterans, military, and their families resonate with you? Consider being a part of an ALA national committee. All members are eligible to apply. To research the best committee for you, go to www.ALAforVeterans.org. The application window is Nov. 1 to Dec. 1. Scan the QR code to apply today!

Scan to apply:

Provided by Jeanne Haas, National Chaplain 2026-2027 | www.Facebook.com/groups/ALAchaplains

November

A Time for Thanksgiving

"Offer thanksgiving as you enter His gates, sing hymns of praise as you approach His courts, give thanks to Him, and bless His name." — Psalm 100:4

As the season of celebrations begins, families and friends will be gathering around tables and on couches enjoying good food, and, of course, sharing stories. The "remember when" and "how about that time" often brings a smile to everyone's faces, but it is the reflection of those memories that warm our hearts.

In the hustle and bustle of the season and everyday life, we need to recognize the spirit of blessings we are given. Take time to reflect on what really matters. Do not let the time of thanks end with the amen at the end of the blessing, but make it a part of your everyday life.

Thankfulness suppresses wants, worry, and self-centeredness, giving the gift of peace.

The second verse of *Thanks to God for My Redeemer* by August L. Storm describes thoughts of a thankful heart:

Thanks for prayers that Thou hast answered / Thanks for what Thou dost deny!

Thanks for storms that I have weathered / Thanks for all Thou dost supply!

Thanks for pain, and thanks for pleasure / Thanks for comfort in despair!

Thanks for grace that none can measure / Thanks for love beyond compare!

Prayer: Thanks be to Thee, our God, for the grace and love You have given to us. May our actions and our spoken words reflect Your teaching. May each of us be aware of the blessing with gratitude given unto us. Amen.

December

A Time for Light

"No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house." — Matthew 5:15

The book *God's Little Devotional Book for the Workplace* shares a story of Ben Franklin's actions for lighting up the streets of Philadelphia. Franklin did not protest or start a petition. Instead, he hung a beautiful lantern near his front door. He kept it polished so it shone brightly, faithfully lighting the wick each night before dusk.

People walking near his home found it to be a friendly beacon that would help guide them along the way. Soon, others placed a lantern at the front of their homes, and before long, Philadelphia sponsored the lighting of streets.

The childhood song *This Little Light of Mine* inspires in each of us to show our faith and good works. The light in the world of darkness comes from each person's higher power, but the light seen by the world is the reflection of each person's actions, words, and thoughts.

Make your light be a beacon of opportunity — a beacon for our veterans, military, community, and family. Let each of us keep a well-lit candle/lantern shining with upstanding, honorable actions.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please give each of us the courage to remove obstacles that prevent Your light to shine. In a season where darkness overshadows the light, may each of us be a beacon of Your grace and love. Amen.

January

A Time for Positivity

"Sharp words cut like a sword, but words of wisdom heal." — Proverbs 12:18

Growing up, Jan. 1 was a time to resolve, to make a change to better my life. These New Year's resolutions could be from eating healthier to connecting with old friends. As the new calendar year begins, the question is: What can our membership do to make our organization and our world better?

A common thread is misunderstandings caused by unkind words. How often do we use our earthly wisdom without asking our higher power for words of divine wisdom when we speak and email?

The chorus of the kindergarten morning song called *The Kindness Song* by Nick and Becky Drake says the message clearly:

We need a reminder / To be kinder / To pause before we speak / Will my words build up? / Show love? / 'Cause that is what we need / Kindness every day.

A visual lesson is to take a travel-size tube of toothpaste and squeeze a majority of the contents out on a paper plate. Then try to put the toothpaste back into the tube. Just as a person cannot return the toothpaste to the tube, sharp, unkind words cannot be taken back once said. May our words not pierce the hearts of others, but with the divine wisdom gifted by our higher power, rejuvenate others adding to their self-worth and confidence.

Prayer: May each of us use Thy gift of divine wisdom in all our thoughts, words, and actions. Give us Thy strength to build others up. May we act with kindness each and every day. Grant each of us Thy grace in our daily lives. Amen.



Jeanne Haas is a 72-year member of Phillips-Stukey-Shaffer Unit 296 in the Department of Kansas.



ACTIVE JUNIORS: Department of Alabama Unit 9 Junior members participate in several unit and community activities. Emphasizing Junior membership helps the Auxiliary mentor and educate the next generation of leaders.

ESSENTIAL TO THE ALA'S FUTURE: INVOLVING JUNIORS IN ACTIVITIES, EVENTS

Junior members play a critical role in the activities of American Legion Auxiliary Unit 9 in Jasper, Ala. During the 2025-2026 ALA administrative year, nearly 40 percent of the unit's 43 members were Juniors.

Unit 9 named its first Junior Activities chair, Heather Washington, to oversee its active group of Juniors. The younger members participate in a variety of activities and have earned impressive honors — from leading the Pledge of Allegiance at unit meetings while also conducting their own gatherings, to coordinating and conducting outreach and service activities, to receiving ALA and community accolades at the local, state, and national levels.

"From the very beginning, we viewed our Junior program as really important," said Linda Snow, unit treasurer. "It was an investment. Anything we did, we made sure we included our Juniors."

Unit 9's commitment to its Junior members is significant but not unusual in Alabama.

The ALA department places a high priority on Junior Activities, aiming to strengthen young people's commitment to serving veterans while also creating a pipeline of future senior members throughout Alabama.

The state boasts youth events with a long history of attracting Juniors — including a leadership camp that for decades has drawn dozens of young participants to learn about subjects ranging from patriotism to parliamentary procedure.

Snow and Washington of Unit 9 and Arletha Tucker, Alabama department Junior Activities chair, spoke of the benefits of focusing on attracting and engaging Junior members. Here are some of the reasons they said it's important for the ALA to emphasize active Junior membership:

They're good ambassadors. Junior members often get their friends interested in the ALA. Juniors' hard work also impresses adults, making those adults more likely to join the organization. "We all feel that our youth programs are our reward," Snow said, "and I think it's also true of the community."

They get senior members involved. Senior members whose children are Juniors are likely to engage in ALA activities. "If the kids are doing it, the parents are doing it," Snow said.

They represent the future. Active Junior members are prepared to become senior members who support the ALA's mission, with many continuing their work with the organization. "The transition is not difficult for them as they work with senior members," Tucker said.

"Once they get in here, they're there for life," Washington said of Unit 9's Juniors. "They're doing this based on their belief system, and they feel like they're actually contributing."

Tips for getting Junior members involved



Linda Snow, Heather Washington, and Arletha Tucker of the ALA in Alabama shared tips for encouraging strong Junior participation, based on the state's success:

- **Embrace their energy.** "They make everything fun and light, and they have ideas and things they want to try," Washington said. "So, allow Junior members to make some decisions about what they're doing in their community and not just always telling them what to do."
- **Incorporate online tools.** Unit 9 conducts online meetings for Juniors, with Washington — a retired teacher and counselor — introducing Google Classroom for posting information. "They're great kids who are involved in everything," she said of Junior members. "With Google Classroom, they can go to information whenever they are free to do it."
- **Start with a few members.** "You don't have to feel like you've got to have six kids to do this," Snow said. "If you've got one, they can invite a friend. That can be your Juniors group."
- **Include them in senior activities.** "Because their teaching comes from the seniors in their unit, I would include them in everything," Tucker said. "And they'll prosper."



POSITIVE INFLUENCE OF PREMIER PROGRAM: ALA Girls Nation impacted participant Aisha Sanwal (second from right) in her professional and personal life in many ways after attending.

ALA GIRLS NATION INFLUENCED ALUMNA'S PATH TO LAW SCHOOL



Aisha Sanwal describes her experience attending ALA Nevada Girls State and ALA Girls Nation in 2018 as truly transformative.

"ALA Girls Nation impacted my professional and personal pursuits in a profound way. For the first time, I found myself walking the halls of our country's most important institutions, meeting with leaders, and sitting in rooms I had only ever seen in history books or on television," Sanwal said. "Those experiences transformed my aspirations into tangible possibilities and gave me the confidence to believe that through hard work, perseverance, and preparation, I could achieve whatever I set my mind to."

Another unique experience for Sanwal was the community that formed at ALA Girls Nation.

"I had never been surrounded by such an extraordinary group of young women, each accomplished in their own way, yet remarkably humble, supportive, and deeply committed to service," Sanwal said. "Their passion, intellect, and encouragement inspired me to dream bigger while reminding me that leadership is strengthened through collaboration and mutual support."

This reinforced her confidence in the power of community development.

While Sanwal held an interest in politics and public policy prior to attending ALA Girls Nation, her passion deepened during the program.

"A notable memory was meeting with Senator Catherine Cortez Masto, who took the time to speak with me to discuss the future of Nevada, the realities of being a leader, and the importance of pursuing higher education," said Sanwal. "Those conversations solidified my dream of pursuing law school and hopeful that I too could be my community's vehicle for change."

That drive to make an impact in her community is evident in Sanwal's life today. As a law student, she became the first selected for the Albert Schweitzer Fellowship Program, where she developed an initiative providing legal services to older adults in San Francisco. She taught over 150 seniors about housing, social services, and end-of-life care while volunteering weekly at Legal Assistance to the Elderly.

Her dedication to public service earned her distinction as a 2025 Outstanding Volunteer in Public Service from the Justice and Diversity Center of the Bar Association of San Francisco. Today, Sanwal represents children in guardianship and abuse cases, helping ensure minors have a voice in a court of law. She is also a board member of JD Genesis, a nonprofit dedicated to supporting underrepresented women in the law through mental health, tutoring, and coaching.

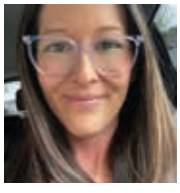
Adding to her accomplishments, Sanwal was selected as one of 12 law students to join the prestigious Ms. JD Fellowship program in her final year of law school. She will graduate from the University of San Francisco School of Law in May 2027.



This past July, 102 students from all 50 states and the District of Columbia attended ALA Girls Nation in Washington, D.C. For a look at this year's session, go to page 28 in this issue of *Auxiliary* magazine.

NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENT NUMBERS RISING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The ALA offers one $2,000 Non-Traditional Student Scholarship in each of the five divisions. The scholarship supports American Legion Family members, veterans, active-duty military, or military or veterans' spouses to pursue a degree later in life or finish a degree. To learn more, go to www.ALAforVeterans.org/scholarships.



Olivia Aldridge was awarded a 2026 Non-Traditional Student Scholarship from the American Legion Auxiliary to support her academic journey of pursuing a medical coding degree at MassBay Community College. Eligible for the scholarship through her spouse, Aldridge has completed her studies and is now searching for employment.

"The Non-Traditional Student Scholarship has made a profound difference in my life," Aldridge said. "By directly reducing my out-of-pocket tuition costs, it allowed me the opportunity to spend time on my studies rather than stressing over finances. This support has truly accelerated my path toward completing my degree and achieving my long-term career goals."

"This support has truly accelerated my path toward completing my degree and achieving my long-term career goals."

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

I am the spouse of a disabled veteran who struggles with mental and physical disabilities and requires multiple appointments. I also have three medically complex children, who require multiple appointments. I am the caretaker for all of them. I was completing my degree to work from home.

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

Offering scholarships like this really helps students financially, helps alleviate financial burden and stress, and allows the student to focus more on their studies rather than financial hardships and stress.

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

My advice is to keep going. Persevere even when things seem impossible.

YOUR STORY MATTERS

Are you a previous ALA Non-Traditional Student Scholarship recipient? We'd love to hear from you! Email PR@ALAforVeterans.org and share how this scholarship helped in your path to higher education.

READY TO APPLY?

Scholarships for the 2026-2027 administrative year are now open! American Legion Auxiliary scholarships available:

- Children of Warriors National Presidents' Scholarship: three $5,000 scholarships annually per geographic division
- Non-Traditional Student Scholarship: one $2,000 scholarship annually per Auxiliary geographic division
- Spirit of Youth Scholarship: a fund that supports three separate scholarship opportunities for participants in American Legion Auxiliary programs. New this year: two $10,000 American Legion Auxiliary Military Spouse Scholarships. Check out page 36 for more information on this scholarship.
- Member Loyalty Scholarship: 10 scholarships ($2,500 each) to current college students.

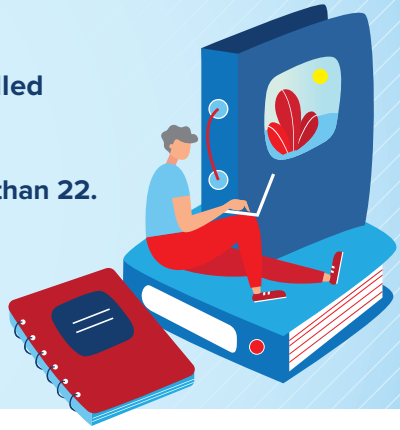
To learn more and to apply, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/scholarships.

What is a non-traditional student?

A non-traditional student typically isn't 18 to 24 years old and enrolled in a four-year program full time immediately after high school.

- **Over a third of students (32.3%) fit the non-traditional student traits.**
- **Four out of 10 (40.2%) of today's higher education students are older than 22.**
- **Nearly 7 out of 10 (69.3%) students have a job while taking courses.**
- **Almost 4 out of 10 (39.1%) are part-time students.**
- **About 1 in 5 (19.2%) have children.**
- **Three out of 10 are first-generation students.**

Sources: The New Majority Learner Report 2025 by Genio; Coursera





NEW 2026-2027 AMERICAN LEGION FAMILY LEADERS REPRESENT MASSACHUSETTS, COLORADO, AND TEXAS

Elected during the 2026 National Conventions of each American Legion Family organization in Louisville, Ky., were American Legion Auxiliary National President Dr. Coral May Grout of Massachusetts, American Legion National Commander Jay Bowen of Colorado, and Sons of The American Legion National Commander Thomas "Thom" Skelley of Texas.

Grout is a member of Eugene M. Connor Unit 193 in Massachusetts. She is eligible for membership through her late father, Charles E. Grout, who served in the U.S. Air Force in the Philippines and Australia during World War II.

Before being elected to the ALA's highest volunteer office, Grout held numerous leadership positions in the organization at the unit, district, department, and national levels. At the national level, she served as chair of several programs, Children & Youth, Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, Education (twice), Americanism, Constitution & Bylaws, Public Relations, Legislative, Leadership, Community Service, and Junior Activities committees. She also served on the National Executive Committee, and as national secretary, national historian, and national vice president.

In her professional life, Grout was in education for over 50 years in positions ranging from an English teacher to a superintendent.

Learn more about Grout on page 34 of this issue.

Bowen has held numerous leadership positions within The American Legion at the post, district, department (state), and national levels. A Paid Up For Life member of Neal Thomas Jr.-Centennial Post 209 in Colorado Springs, Colo., he is a past commander of the Department of Colorado. At the national level, he has served as chair of the Veterans Employment & Education Commission, chair of the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission, and chair of the Membership and Post Activities Committee, among other roles.

As national commander, Bowen emphasizes The American Legion's mission of service through "Be Part of the Solution (B.P.O.T.S.)," encouraging members to engage actively in their communities, support veterans, and their families, and advance the organization's legislative priorities. He is a staunch advocate for The American Legion's Be the One mission to prevent veteran suicide.

Bowen and his wife, Jackie, have two sons and four grandchildren, all members of The American Legion Family.

Texas' Skelley is a dedicated 21-year member of the Sons of The American Legion, earning his eligibility through the honorable wartime service of his father, William M. Skelley Sr., who served in the Pacific Theater during WWII from 1941 to 1945.

Throughout his years of service, Skelley has held numerous leadership positions at the squadron, district, division, and detachment levels. He has also served nationally on the Sons of The American Legion Children & Youth Committee and as chair of both the Veterans Employment & Education Commission and the Membership & Squadron Activities Committee.

Skelley is a graduate of the National Management Institute, The American Legion Extension Institute, The American Legion Basic Training Course, the SAL University Pilot Program, and Columbia University's Be the One training program.

In addition to his service within the organization, Skelley is a proud family man. He and his wife, Amy, have been married for 26 years and are the parents of two sons.

THE DOS AND DON'TS OF USING GENERATIVE AI AND HOW IT AFFECTS OUR BRAND

Generative AI use of The American Legion emblem and brandmark is becoming more widespread in artwork for flyers, posters, graphics, and more. Because of this, American Legion National Headquarters has updated its branding guidelines on incorrect usage of the emblem and brandmark with generative AI, along with a two-step method to align with branding guidelines when using AI tools. Download the updated American Legion Brandmark & Emblem Branding Guidelines from legion.org.

As outlined in the branding guidelines, generative AI tools of any kind may not be used to create, recreate, upscale or otherwise alter, stylize, or modify the official symbols of The American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, Sons of The American Legion, American Legion Riders, American Legion Family, American Legion Baseball, Be the One, American Legion Boys State and Boys Nation, American Legion Auxiliary Girls State and Girls Nation, American Legion Junior Shooting Sports, charities of The American Legion, and any associated sub-branding.

This includes any use of the Legion marks in the visual branding of departments, districts, posts, squadrons, or programs associated with any departments, districts, posts, or squadrons.



Do not use AI to generate the emblems or marks of The American Legion Family. The AI-created examples above are not acceptable and cannot be used for any purpose.

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY FOUNDATION

Direct Support in Your Community Starts Here.

You see the needs of veterans in your community. The Veteran Projects Fund can help you meet them.

Through grants of up to $10,000, the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation helps ALA entities turn thoughtful ideas into meaningful projects that improve the lives of veterans.

See a need. Build a solution. Make an impact.

Learn more, explore funded projects, and apply for a Veteran Projects Fund grant here: www.ALAFoundation.org/grants.



The American Legion Auxiliary Foundation is a 501(c)(3) public charity that supports the American Legion Auxiliary. All gifts to the Foundation are tax-deductible as allowed by the United States Tax Code and U.S. Internal Revenue Service. © American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters. All rights reserved. 08/2026

Department of Maryland member Patricia "Pat" Walker joined the American Legion Auxiliary in 1986 under the eligibility of her grandfather, Marcus McBride, who served in World War II. Walker also has several other family members who have served in the military, including her father, brother, uncles, grandson, and son. Walker is proud to be a Blue Star Mother and grandmother and wears her two Blue Stars proudly. She's been actively involved in several committees within her unit, including Community Service, Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, Americanism, Children & Youth, and Junior Activities (her favorite).



What does your ALA membership mean to you?

Membership in the Auxiliary means so much to me — fundraising for our veterans, children, community, and active military, and volunteering my service wherever needed to see that appreciative smile.

What does it mean to you to be the 2026-2027 Department of Maryland president?

I was overwhelmed to make it this far. It's an honor for me to hold this position because I've been a member for 40 years and never thought this could happen to me.

Why is holding a leadership position at the department level meaningful to you?

On the department level, I can communicate with the Past Department Presidents and officers for new ideas to better our department activities, share our knowledge, and pass it down to our members.

"I'm a proud member of the American Legion Auxiliary because of what we stand for: Service Not Self."

What advice would you give to members who want to step into a leadership role at any level of the organization but are unsure?

I would advise anyone who wants a leadership position to read your *Unit Guide Book*, Standing Rules, governing rules, and Constitution & Bylaws with understanding.

What are some important details about ALA membership you want to share with others?

Don't be afraid to ask questions. Never have your membership do anything you wouldn't do. Most of all, don't be a dictator. As the past membership chair for the department, I would advise every member to carry a least one application with you. Recruit, reclaim, and renew. Be branded as much as possible when you are out and about. Most of all, please do not hold on to your dues. Turn them in as soon as possible. Be ready and able to answer questions about what we do as the American Legion Auxiliary.

What recommendations do you have for new members about becoming active in the ALA?

Get involved. If there's a committee or activity you wish to be a part of, ask what it consists of and how you can help. There is plenty for all of us.

Is there anything else you want to add?

I'm a proud member of the American Legion Auxiliary because of what we stand for: *Service Not Self*.







ACTIVE MEMBER: Department of Maryland member Patricia "Pat" Walker understands the importance of leadership. She encourages members to get involved in the Auxiliary at all levels of the organization.





COMFORT FOR THOSE DEPLOYED: South Carolina Unit 3 members make custom neck pillows for servicemembers prior to their deployment. The "pillow parties" bring together post family, friends, and community members.

SOUTH CAROLINA ALA UNIT BRINGS COMFORT TO DEPLOYING SERVICEMEMBERS

ALA Unit 3 members in Greenville, S.C., are using their crafting and sewing skills to support deploying servicemembers through regular "pillow parties." Volunteers make custom neck pillows designed to bring comfort during long flights and assemble USA pocket flags that give servicemembers a small reminder of home to carry with them.

Brenda Collins, an ALA Unit 3 member and District 7 president, said the effort began as a district project and quickly became a regular American Legion Family initiative. It now brings together their post family, friends, community members, and like-minded groups, such as the Blue Star Mothers.

A growing community effort

The pillow parties are regularly attended by the post commander, Sons of The American Legion commander, and several members of the SAL and American Legion Riders. Friends, family members, and other community volunteers have also joined the effort, donating fabric, polyfil, and time to help assemble the neck pillows.

"Making neck pillows has provided so much more than just pillows for deploying soldiers," Collins said. "It has brought our post together. We have met other like-minded people from the community. It has opened so many doors that we couldn't have imagined when we started this project."

Partnerships and outreach

Since launching the project, Unit 3 has built strong connections with local National Guard contacts, including the Soldier and Family Readiness Group. Members attend deployment ceremonies to distribute the neck pillows and pocket flags, provide snacks as servicemembers depart and return, and continue supporting military families beyond the pillow project.

The unit has also partnered with Blue Star Mothers, which assists with the neck pillow project, while ALA Unit 3 helps collect items to be shipped to military members serving overseas.

How the pillow parties work

Collins said there is no set number of volunteers needed; the more people who attend, the more they can accomplish. Each pillow party includes stations for cutting, sewing, stuffing, and stitching the openings closed. Volunteers also fold pocket flags, while Junior members help stuff pillows, make cards, and place toy soldiers in bags as reminders to pray for the troops.

At a recent event, 18 volunteers completed 40 pillows in about two and a half hours. Members also took home 18 additional pillows to hand stitch, and the group folded 84 pocket flags during the same gathering.

Comfort, support, and a piece of home

Members involved in the project say they have seen the gratitude servicemembers show when they receive a neck pillow and pocket flag. "It's a small piece of home that they can hold on to," said Carol Burrell, immediate past unit president.

Tips for making neck pillows



Recommended materials include a simple "U" shape pattern (found online), soft fabric, polyfil, thread, and ribbon. Avoid scratchy fabrics and use plenty of polyfil.

Follow these steps for assembling:

- **Iron the fabric.**
- **Cut the neck pillow pieces on the fold.**
- **Sew on a "From American Legion Auxiliary" label, available through American Legion Flag & Emblem Sales at emblem.legion.org.**
- **Pin the pillow pieces together with a ribbon loop, then sew, leaving an opening for stuffing.**
- **Stuff the pillow firmly. Add more filling to provide proper support.**
- **Hand stitch the opening closed.**

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

WHAT'S COMING UP IN BETWEEN ISSUES OF *AUXILIARY* MAGAZINE?

NOVEMBER:

- National Veterans & Military Family Month
- Nov. 10: the American Legion Auxiliary's 107th birthday
- Nov. 10: U.S. Marine Corps birthday
- Nov. 11: Veterans Day
- Nov. 11: American Legion Auxiliary Foundation Veterans Day of Giving

DECEMBER:

- Dec. 7: National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day
- Dec. 13: U.S. National Guard birthday
- Dec. 19: National Wreaths Across America Day
- Dec. 20: U.S. Space Force birthday

JANUARY:

- Jan 18, 2027: Martin Luther King Jr. National Day of Service

2026-2027 ALA NATIONAL PRESIDENT TRAVELS TO FOLLOW:

A new administrative year calls for new experiences and new leadership. Keep up with ALA National President Dr. Coral May Grout's journey via Facebook: www.Facebook.com/ALAnationalpresident.

2026-2027 ALA MISSION TRAINING & NATIONAL JUNIOR MEETINGS:

Nov. 14: Omaha, Neb.*

Jan. 30: Albany, N.Y.*

Jan. 30: Springfield, Ill.

Feb. 6: Atlanta, Ga.

Feb. 6: Las Vegas, Nev.*

**Events will be held with The American Legion National Information Conference and the SAL Regional Meeting. Register: www.ALAforVeterans.org/meetings/mission-training.*

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL ONLINE:

Remember your *why* as an ALA member and renew your membership today! The American Legion Auxiliary is a compassionate force — a community where veterans, military, and their families belong and thrive through service that supports our mission. Your membership makes a difference, and you can easily renew online at www.ALAforVeterans.org/renew.

HAVE YOU JOINED AN ALA NATIONAL COMMITTEE FACEBOOK GROUP?

ALA committee Facebook groups are a great place for units and departments to ask questions and share ideas about topics related to the committee they are passionate about. Visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/social-media to join the groups that interest you.

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION

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17. I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete.

(Signed) Benjamin F. Hendricks III, Publisher

“Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all others.”

— Marcus Cicero, Roman statesman, lawyer, orator



As we near the end of another American Legion Auxiliary membership year, we are thankful for 365 days of serving our mission. Some of our military members will be home for the upcoming holidays … and some will still be deployed thousands of miles from their family and friends. This time of year, we are always reminded of the sacrifice our servicemembers make so we can enjoy the freedoms we have as Americans. You as an American Legion Auxiliary member are here for our veterans, military, and their families no matter what. Every day. Always.

Above: Sailors render honors aboard the USS Dewey during Multinational Exercise Komodo in the Bali Sea (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Devin Monroe).

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY

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

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

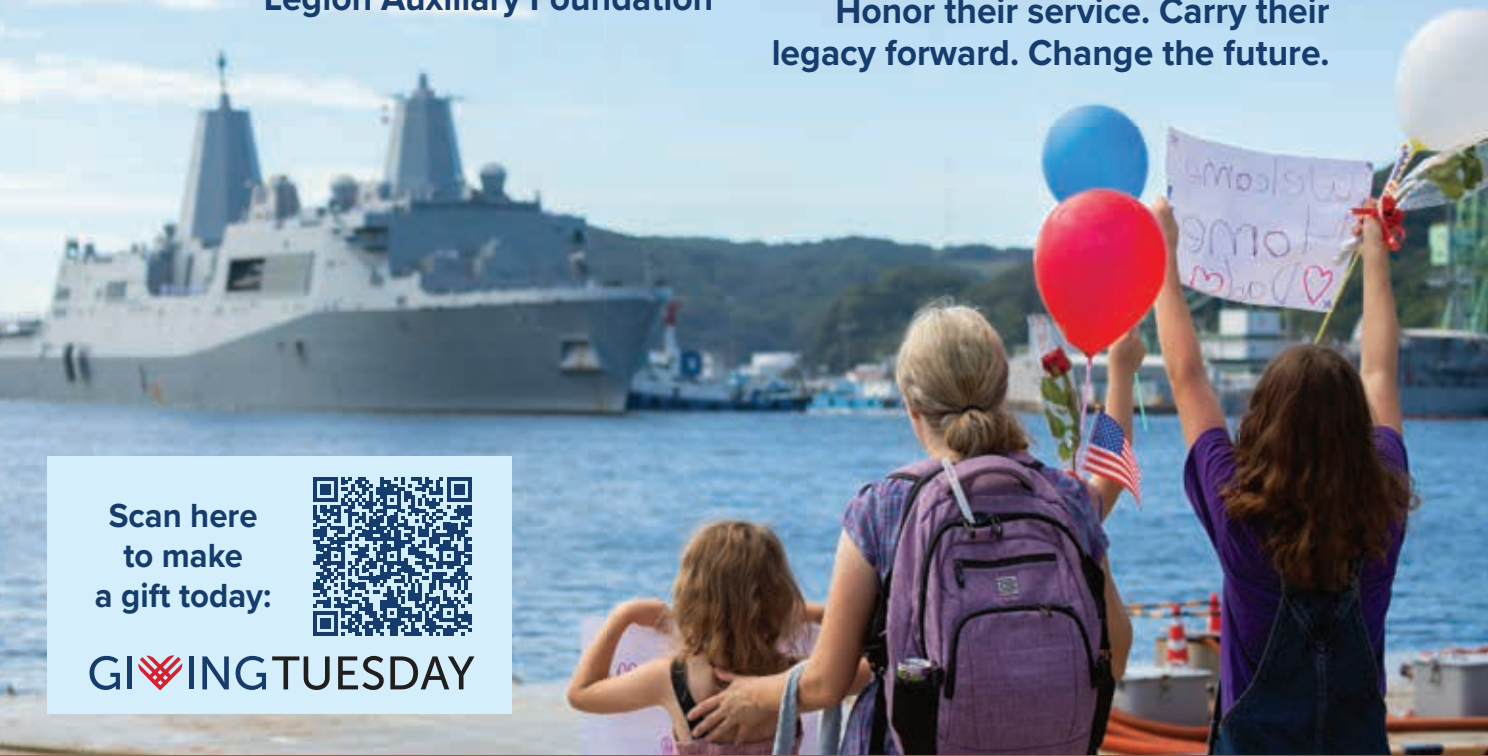
Change the future by honoring the past

This GivingTuesday, honor the servicemember who makes your American Legion Auxiliary membership possible.

Their service connects you to the ALA. Your gift to the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation can help ensure that connection, and our mission, continues for generations to come.

Make a gift in their honor to the ALA Mission Endowment Fund this GivingTuesday.

Honor their service. Carry their legacy forward. Change the future.



Scan here to make a gift today:

GIVINGTUESDAY

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