

American Legion Auxiliary

www.ALAforVeterans.org

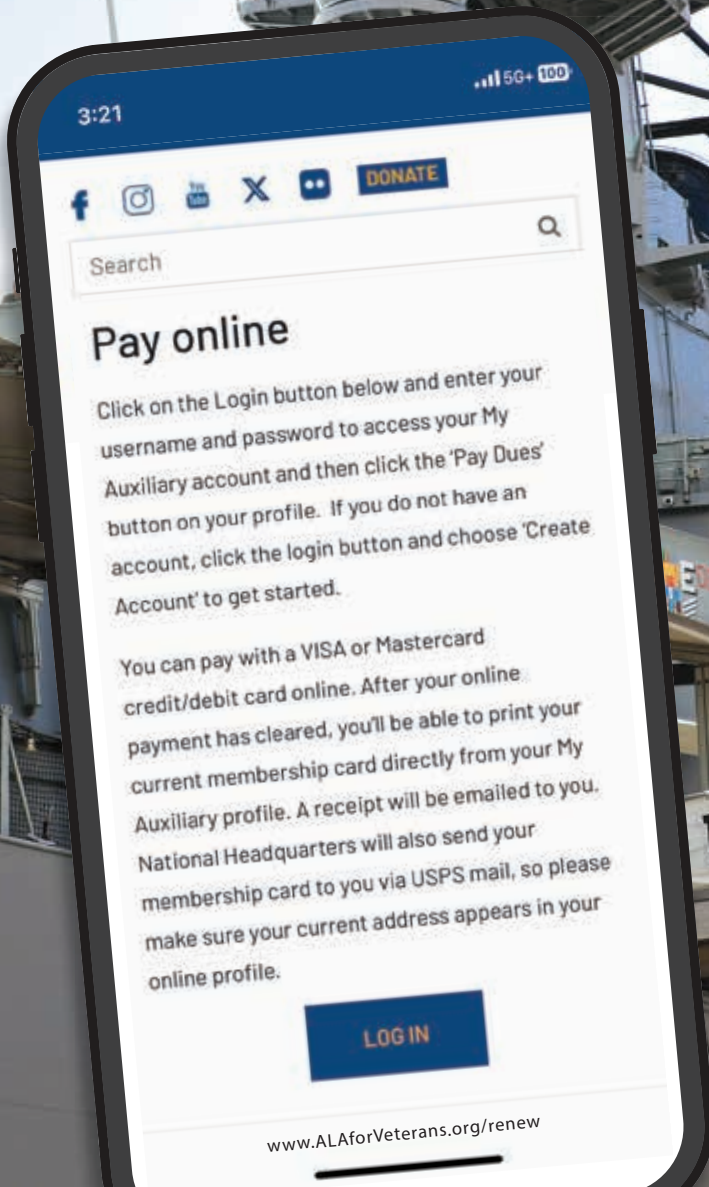
February 2024 \$3.75



BEHIND THE BIKE

ALA members move
American Legion Riders
program forward

Renew Your Membership from Anywhere





Auxiliary *contents*

FEATURES

- 22 PROUD TO SERVE**
Vietnam War era veteran reflects on her time in the service.
- 26 RIDING FOR A CAUSE**
ALA and Legion Rider members share experiences of serving from the road.
- 32 GIVING BACK TO VETERANS**
American Legion Auxiliary Foundation Veteran Projects Fund grants help our nation's heroes.

IN EVERY ISSUE

- 4 NATIONAL PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**
- 6 NHQ AT YOUR SERVICE**
- 7 OUR READERS RESPOND**
- 8 JUNIOR MEMBERS**
- 10 HEART OF THE MISSION**
- 12 IT'S ALL GOOD**
- 36 IMPACT ALA!**
- 42 VALUING EVERY VOICE**
- 43 BUILDING ALA BRAND LOYALTY**
- 44 ALL THINGS ALA GIRLS STATE/NATION**
- 45 ALA SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS: WHERE ARE THEY NOW?**
- 46 LEGION FAMILY IN ACTION**
- 48 WISE PERSON SAID**
- 49 MISSION MATTERS**
- 50 WE'RE DIGITAL**
- 51 THE LAST WORD**

ON THE COVER: ALA Department of Massachusetts member Jennifer Murray has been an American Legion Auxiliary and American Legion Rider member since 2019. **ABOVE:** Army nurses 1st Lt. Sharon Forman (left) of Antelope, Ore., and 2nd Lt. Roberta Steele of Tillamook, Ore., ride in a pedicab along a main street of Qui Nhon, a coastal town 270 miles northeast of Saigon, Feb. 18, 1966 (AP Photo/Eddie Adams).

Throughout my travels, I've seen that focusing on military and veteran suicide is relevant and needs to be discussed. Simply talking about the taboo subject of taking one's life resonates with our American Legion Family members far and wide.

Each time I'm asked to speak, I talk about it and The American Legion Family's Be the One mission. The more we talk about getting mental health help, we destigmatize and give someone permission to ask for that help. We can touch their life in a truly impactful way.

And without fail, someone comes up to me at each visit to tell me about a friend or family member's struggles with mental health.

One member told me about a success — a friend of her sister. The friend lost her job and boyfriend in the same day, but she still had the presence of mind to ask for help. She credits hearing the member talk about suicide awareness as what let her know she could ask for help. The basis of Be the One — letting people know it's OK to not be OK — potentially saved this person's life.

The basis of Be the One — letting people know it's OK to not be OK — potentially saved this person's life.

Not all stories are positive, sadly. One veteran told me about his battle buddy who was in crisis; they were able to store his firearm safely and voluntarily until he was on an even keel. Once the crisis was averted, his firearm was returned to him. All appeared to be fine, until he died by suicide a

couple of months later.

Later, they learned the battle buddy deliberately said the right things long enough to change his will and put his affairs in order. Sadly, we cannot save them all, but one life saved means we are on the right track.

While most of us are not mental health professionals, we can still take action when a veteran or servicemember may be in crisis. Our responsibility is to connect them to the resources they need.

Research shows that the window is short between the act and the actual decision to end one's life. Seventy percent of suicide deaths usually happen within one hour from the first thought to action; 48% of those attempts occurred in less than 20 minutes. Some studies

indicate that the time is less than five minutes.

What this tells us is that building time between the impulse and the act to harm one's

self can save a life.

As well, 70% of suicide deaths are firearm-related, and these suicide attempts are 90 to 95% successful. Reducing access to lethal methods is one of the few interventions shown to decrease suicide rates.



How can ALA members help support Be the One efforts?

- **Ask** the veterans in your life how they are doing.
- **Listen** when a veteran needs to talk.
- **Reach out** when you think a veteran might be struggling.

Reaching out can be as simple as calling **988** — the simple phone number for the Veterans Crisis Line. Thousands of veterans have called when they needed crisis support. Remember it just like 911!

Lisa Williamson
National President



Watch the ALA-hosted webinar:

Be the One: How Auxiliary Members Can Help

In this panel discussion, insightful measures are addressed about the mental wellbeing of our veterans and military and how The American Legion Family is incorporating Be the One into a combined mission. Watch the recording to learn more on how ALA members can Be the One — log in to the ALA Academy at www.ALAforVeterans.org.

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MILESTONE: In December, we celebrated five years in our beautiful building.

The American Legion Auxiliary has several levels, not just related to our officer titles or a ranking per se, but how our organization is structured. The most basic way to lay it out: unit (local community); district/county (groupings of these communities); department (state); division (groupings of states); and national (the whole). Within each of these levels is an organization chart.

Each level has its own setup, but all are very similar in how they function in terms of people and operations management. In general, there is a leader and an assistant leader. With officers, it's typically a president and vice president. At National Headquarters, we also have an executive director and deputy executive director.

Think of it as a management safeguard: When one person is away for business, travel, etc., the next person in line can make decisions in that person's absence. That way, there are no holdups and everything remains a well-oiled machine. Does your unit have a similar setup? If you've seen our social media guidance, you'll know we often recommend backups on every account. This is encouraged to prevent interruptions in case your

main person's account is hacked or locked.

How smooth is your operator system? Do you have a plan in place where your deputy manager can make decisions and continue with business on your behalf if an absence pops up?



Happy anniversary to us! In December, ALA National Headquarters celebrated five years at its current home at 3450 Founders Road in Indianapolis.

The building's stately design has been a perfect representation for our historic organization. Upon entering, guests are welcomed to a rotunda adorned with pictures that represent the ALA's rich history. Throughout the building, ALA and Legion Family items are displayed in cabinets, and special photos adorn the walls. We invite all members to come visit us! If you are traveling through Indianapolis, give us a call at (317) 569-4500 and arrange a tour.



AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY

A Community of Volunteers Serving Veterans, Military, and their Families
February 2024

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Thankful magazine mailing confusion resolved

Dear Alexa,

I wish to thank you so very much for personally sending the *Auxiliary* magazine on a consistent basis, but for however it happened, I am now receiving the magazine “normally” as well! I will miss hearing from my gal Alexa each quarter though. It has been fun. You are the best gal!

—Brenda Ekness, North Dakota

Editors’ response: Thanks so much, Brenda, for the kind words about Alexa Freeman, National Headquarters’ communications specialist. We are so glad you are receiving your magazine without interruption now. To all of our readers, if you stop receiving the quarterly Auxiliary magazine issues (February, May, August, November) for any reason, please reach out to the ALA help desk at alamishelp@ALAforVeterans.org and we’ll remedy the situation.



Quilters proud to take care of veterans

Harlan Sexton of ALA Unit 156

and chair of the Quilts of Valor accepted the City Island Chamber of Commerce Community Service Award on behalf of the Quilters by the Sea. Quilters by the Sea serves the mission of the national Quilts of Valor Foundation. Our mission since 2018 has been to sew and award Quilts of Valor for local veterans in a way that strengthens community bonds. We are from City Island, a small town of 4,200 in the Bronx (New York City), with a nautical heritage. We are deeply grateful to our volunteers, supporters, and veterans.

— Joanne Valletta, Co-Chair and Unit 156 Member, New York



Article about annual program brings back memories

Just a note to say how glad I was to see the photos about ALA Girls Nation in the recent magazine. It brought back fond memories for me of attending ALA Girls State and ALA Girls Nation many years ago, as I am now 83 years of age. My friend President Bill Clinton and I have shared in the past how much we enjoyed our experiences at ALA Girls and Legion Boys Nation.

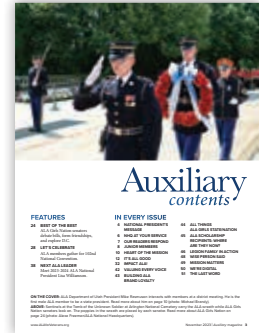
Another memory for me is distributing poppies in my hometown of McGehee, Arkansas, and enjoying social events at the McGehee American Legion hut.

Do girls from the Panama Canal Zone still participate in ALA Girls Nation? The ones there when I

attended and I became good friends — they had made up a song to the tune *Home on the Range* and theirs was entitled *Home on the Zone*.

With appreciation for a wonderful experience and a wonderful memory.

— Frances Henley Nixon, Arkansas



Amazing to see son’s photo in magazine

In November’s magazine on the table of contents, you have a picture of SPC Adam Platt, Sentinel 708, conducting your wreath ceremony from this summer. SPC Platt is my son! Is there a way I could pay for a few copies of the November issue? I am a member of the Legion. Thank you for such a wonderful picture! In the photo, my son is the Sentinel rendering the hand salute, in front. I have become a social media stalker ever since he took this job! I never get tired of seeing photos and videos of him in action. I usually make a few trips a year to visit and spend entire days in the cemetery.

— Brian Platt, Wisconsin Legionnaire

Editors’ response: You are an incredibly proud and supportive father. We’re sure he appreciates it greatly! And we can’t thank him — and you! — enough for your honorable and selfless dedication to our great nation. We’ve sent five copies of the November issue of Auxiliary to you. Thanks for reading our magazine!

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM you

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

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



BLAST FROM THE PAST: Nicky Flores, second from right, was installed as the Western Division honorary national Junior officer in New Orleans in 1985. Today, she is the 2023-2024 national Junior Activities Committee Western Division chair.

**LOOKING BACK TO LOOK FORWARD
NOW 56, NEVADA MEMBER REFLECTS ON ATTENDING
HER FIRST NATIONAL JUNIOR MEETING**



ALA member Nicky Flores attended the Auxiliary’s first national Junior meeting in 1984 in Salt Lake City. Later,

she was elected Western Division honorary national Junior division vice president. Today, she is the 2023-2024 national Junior Activities Committee Western Division chair.

“For me, it means to pay back,” she said of being a Junior member to her role now on the national level. “Hopefully it inspires some of these

Junior members we have in our organization that ‘what I’m doing now matters and it can continue to matter.’ To me, it’s important that just because you turn 18, it doesn’t mean our organization stops or the purpose of our organization stops. Hopefully I can be an example that this organization is worth staying with and we can make a difference.”

Flores recalled her first national Junior meeting experience.

“I had no clue what to expect when I walked into a room full of other kids who had the same purpose as me.”

Like many Juniors who attend

these ALA events geared toward ages 8-18, it didn’t take long for Flores to feel a sense of camaraderie among one another and feel at home, taking part in flag folding, crafts, service projects, and more.

With her personal experience attending national Junior meetings, Flores said it’s important for Junior members to do so too.

“Having Juniors attend gives them better knowledge of what our programs are about and why we do what we do,” she said. “If you want our Juniors to understand why they wear a poppy or why they are writing cards or folding flags, have them be with other kids. They can make a lifetime friend.”

Flores encourages departments to fundraise and send at least one Junior member to a meeting each ALA administrative year.

It’s also important to give them encouragement to continue their membership as senior members, she added.

Flores offers advice to Junior members on how to get involved and stay involved.

“Find your passion — that one Auxiliary program that means something to you — and concentrate on that,” she said. “So many of our programs interact with one another that you can work on and do multiple ones.”

**JUNIORS CAN RECEIVE
A PATCH FOR
ATTENDING THIS
NATIONAL EVENT**

Juniors who attend ALA national Junior meetings learn a lot about the mission of The American Legion Family. Now available is a physical reward in the form of a patch for that meaningful learning. The hope is that the patch will encourage Juniors who may not have heard about the ALA Junior Patch Program to become

interested in earning patches.

For the 2023-2024 national Junior meetings, members who received the new patches near the end of the event became visibly excited about earning the special incentive.

To learn more about national Junior meetings or for more information on the ALA Patch Program and how to get started, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org.





CHANGES MADE TO JUNIOR MEMBER OF THE YEAR AWARD

Change can be a good thing, especially for our Junior Members of the Year. Our younger members

are an integral part of the American Legion Auxiliary, and we often say “Juniors are our future.”

National Headquarters reviewed the procedure for selecting the national Junior Member of the Year and determined we needed to

increase the number of scholarships for our Juniors who are actively participating in the ALA’s mission:

- One overall national JMOY will win a \$5,000 scholarship, as well as a trip to the ALA’s National

Convention to bring greetings.

- Four division JMOY winners will receive a \$1,000 scholarship.
- Juniors must at least be in eighth grade or eighth grade equivalent and may win only once.

For more information on Junior Member of the Year scholarships or to nominate your Junior, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/member/awards/junior-activities-program-awards. Deadline is June 1 of each calendar year. Questions? Contact JuniorActivities@ALAforVeterans.org.

LEARNING THE ALA’S MISSION TOGETHER

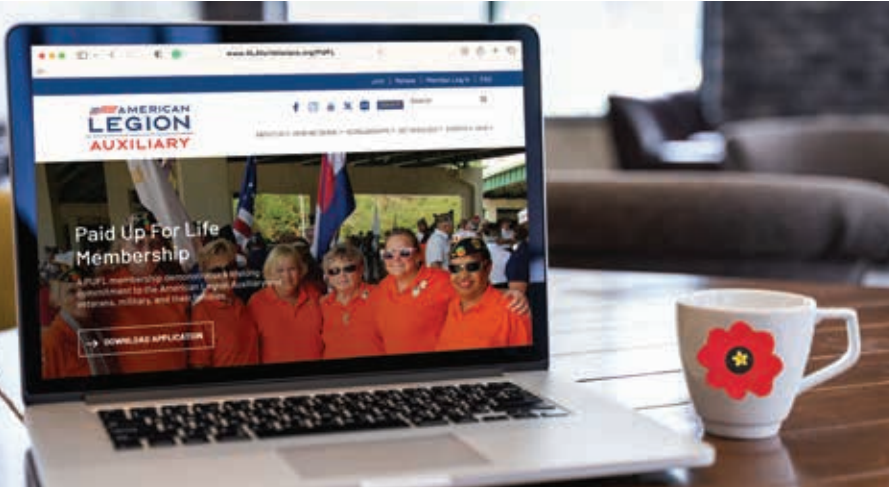
Our organization’s youngest members gathered in the fall and winter to participate in the 2023-2024 ALA national Junior meetings held in five cities across the nation. ALA Juniors ages 8-18 painted rocks with inspirational messages and unique artwork, spent time with a therapy dog to learn how canines can assist veterans, made new friends, created crafts, and so much more.



IMMERSIVE ALA: Our youngest members took part in fun-filled meetings during this administrative year, leading to friendship, learning, and many new memories. Juniors met members from other states, held elections, shared ideas, took part in crafts, met a therapy dog, learned to fold a flag, and more.

“Being a member of the ALA is my way to honor my father and it’s my way to give back to the people he would want me to give back to — our veterans.”

CORRINNA COLSON



Since her father’s passing in 2010, Corrinna Colson has dedicated her life to fulfilling the American Legion

Auxiliary’s mission of serving veterans, military, and their families. Her father, Eric Norman Colson Sr., was a proud U.S. Navy veteran who served in the Vietnam War.

“Being a member of the ALA is my way to honor my father and it’s my way to give back to the people he would want me to give back to — our veterans,” said Colson.

Colson has held many leadership positions within the Auxiliary at the unit, department, and national levels. She is the current national Membership Committee Eastern Division chair and Department of Vermont historian. As a proud member of Hardwick Unit 7 in Vermont, she is always looking for new ways to help veterans and support fellow members.

The American Legion Family is an incredibly important part of Colson’s life. All seven of her grandchildren are Junior members

and Sons of The American Legion members. She is working to ensure younger generations carry on the ALA’s mission of serving veterans for years to come. Colson is also a part of the American Legion Riders — she drives a purple 2016 Harley Heritage Soft Tail Deluxe that she loves to ride whenever she can.

Why did you join the American Legion Auxiliary?

My dad was a very proud veteran. He was my hero and my best friend. When he passed away, I was kind of lost. But when I was at his funeral and the commander of our Legion post gave my father’s eulogy and I heard about his service, it brought my dad’s service into perspective for me. Everything clicked and I knew what my dad would want me to do. So, I immediately joined the American Legion Auxiliary and I have been going strong ever since.

Why did you take the next step in the ALA and choose to purchase your Paid Up For Life (PUFL) membership?

As a membership chair, you try to encourage people to pay

their membership dues. And being offered the ability to pay it all at once and get the discount and everything else seemed like the right thing to do. Because how can I say to people, ‘Oh you should pay your membership or have you?’ I guess purchasing it was my way of saying this is how important being an Auxiliary member is. I felt I was setting an example for our members by buying my PUFL membership.

What does your PUFL membership mean to you?

It means I am a member of the ALA for life, and I am very proud of that. I am very proud to be a lifelong member of this organization because it does so much for veterans. This is the way I give back as my father would want me to do. And there is no greater gift that somebody can give you than to serve their country so you can serve in the capacity as an Auxiliary member — I strongly believe that. And that’s truly what I think my PUFL membership says. I am grateful I am able to be an Auxiliary member under my father. No one can take away the gift he gave me.

Why do you think fellow ALA members should consider becoming a PUFL member?

Well for one, it saves you a boatload of money in the end, and I think it’s basically committing to being a member for life. So, I think it’s a way for a member to say, ‘OK, I love serving veterans and I’m going to do it for a lifetime.’ It’s kind of like a badge of honor. All I can say is why not buy a PUFL membership? Being able to commit to something for life — I can’t think of a better organization to commit to for life than this one.

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“Create with the heart; build with the mind.”

— Criss Jami, author



Creativity breathes life into us and helps propel our thoughts in many directions, launching those brain-bursts of energy to inspire, encourage, or motivate others. Wisconsin ALA Junior member Rylee Turowski’s winning design for the 2023-2024 ALA national Junior meetings T-shirt gave numerous girls that inspiration. Every Junior participating in the event received the special shirt featuring poppies — an enduring symbol of remembrance.

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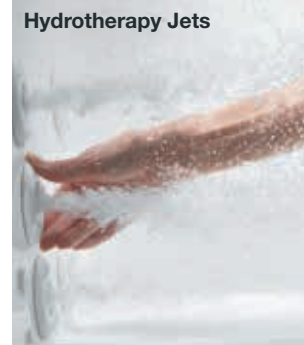
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What do you love about the American Legion Auxiliary?



“How we help veterans at all costs, no matter what!”
— Renee McDaniel, Ohio



“All the programs and all that we do for veterans, special friends I have made along the way, and most of all, the veterans I have met while volunteering.”
— Jean Walker, Minnesota



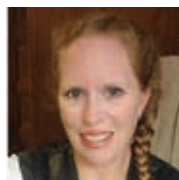
“The amazing people I have met. I am so blessed to have so many mentors in the Auxiliary who have guided my daughter and me over the years.”
— Tara Harris, Florida



“Volunteering with an amazing group of men and women who are helping to make a difference for veterans and our community.”
— Angie Kofalt, Pennsylvania



“I love the dedication to the mission of helping our veterans and their families. I also love the people I have met along the way.”
— Edna Shupe-Bland, Kentucky



“The ability to meet and work with like-minded people who have the best interests of our veterans, active servicemembers, their family, and our communities at heart.”
— Mary Brubach, Illinois



“Our mission serves a much greater good than we can imagine, and we get to sleep at night knowing we made some small advancement in enhancing the lives of our veterans, military families, and our communities. This organization has also given me the very best friends, whom I cannot imagine my life without.”
— Shay Kuehner, Texas

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in an ALA
leadership
position
and a
veteran?***

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SHOP, SAVE, AND DONATE TO THE AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY FOUNDATION

We've all taken a spin through "I got caught up in the moment" town while strolling through our kids' favorite store. We've all glanced at our carts knowing full well we've gone over our holiday budget but figured a few more things would make the year extra magical. And how many times have you seen something one of your kids just had to have — even though your shopping was done — and you grabbed it anyway, then had to "even it out" by buying your other kids something to make it fair? Before you know it, you've spent hundreds of unplanned dollars, but you don't care because

you can worry about it later. Well, now it's later, and the year-end charitable asks are still rolling in with no regard to your over-budget holiday escapade.

So, what do you do if you want to be charitable but don't have room in your budget now?



Go shopping! Everyone can now donate and support the mission of the American Legion Auxiliary

Foundation and save money when you use your Kroger Plus Shopper's Card! All you need to do is get a Kroger Plus Shopper's Card at your nearby store or one of their many affiliate stores, enroll your card online, and select the ALA Foundation as your charity of choice. Then, simply scan your card during checkout every time you shop, and Kroger will donate a portion of the purchase to the ALA Foundation.

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2. Create a digital account and enroll in Kroger Community Rewards to support the ALA Foundation. A digital account is required to participate in Kroger Community Rewards. If you already have a digital account, simply link your Shopper's Card to the ALA Foundation so that all transactions will apply toward a donation.

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5. Click on create account.
6. Click on community.
7. Click on community rewards.

8. Click on enroll.
9. Search for American Legion Auxiliary Foundation Inc. or enter our NPO number: SX830.
10. Click on enroll.
11. Enrollment is complete.

If your card IS registered online:

1. Log in to your account.
2. Click on community.
3. Click on community rewards.
4. Click on enroll.
5. Search for American Legion Auxiliary Foundation Inc. or enter our NPO number: SX830.
6. Click on enroll.
7. Enrollment is complete.

REMEMBER: Purchases will not count toward the ALA Foundation until after you have registered your rewards card. Participants must swipe their registered Kroger Rewards card each time or use the phone

number related to their registered Kroger Rewards card when shopping for each purchase to count.

Then, shop, scan, save, and donate to the ALA Foundation every time you shop the Kroger Co. family of stores. Every donation will positively impact the lives of our veterans, military, and their families by funding programs of the American Legion Auxiliary today and for future generations.





NORTH CAROLINA UNIT PROVIDES MONTHLY VISITS, DONATIONS TO VETERANS

Each month, members of the Edward G. Bond Unit 40 in Edenton, N.C. visit with veterans or spouses of veterans at different nursing homes and assisted living facilities as part of the unit's regular program of monthly visits. Volunteers bring snacks, cupcakes, fruit, and other needed items.

"I believe this program truly represents the best of our unit," said ALA Unit 40 President Cheryl Messenger. "These ladies have made contact with the nursing homes, received permission from the families to visit, and helped develop a list of needed items for the veterans."

Messenger said the unit struggled with the idea of providing direct

service to veterans since the closest VA hospital to their community is several hours away, and that they are always wanting to do more for veterans closer to home. This project has allowed for that very thing.

Initially, the unit would visit nursing homes during the Christmas holiday and deliver presents, where each veteran in the nursing home would be adopted by a unit member who would then purchase gifts for them. The idea of visiting veterans on other holidays was brought up by Past Unit President Kathy Lillard, along with unit member Karen Harrington.

Messenger said the project was the vision of both Lillard and Harrington and described it as a labor of love.

In addition to this project, Lillard delivers meals as part of Meals on Wheels in the area with her husband John, and Harrington is the volunteer manager for the local food bank.

At first, the unit visited veterans and brought cupcakes, along with holiday gift bags on Valentine's Day, St Patrick's Day, and Easter. Some veterans didn't have any relatives to visit them, so the Auxiliary members' interactions became a bright spot in their day. After seeing the response from veterans and staff as very positive, Unit 40 made financial contributions and committed to monthly visits. Volunteers work with Food Lion, a local grocery store, to provide bananas once a quarter to all residents at no cost.

Messenger said that in addition to regular monthly donations, the unit is working with the facility's social workers to develop a needs list for each veteran. Items include hats, gloves, and shirts, along with puzzle books and candy. Each veteran receives a gift bag every month and a larger bag at Christmas. The unit raised money for some of the expenses by volunteering for kitchen duty at the local fair, as well as donations from members.

Are You Using Old Branding?

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

Check out our new resources at www.AL4forVeterans.org.

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BE THE ONE

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BE THE ONE

THE AMERICAN LEGION'S TOP PRIORITY IS TO REDUCE THE RATE OF VETERAN SUICIDE. HERE ARE ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT THE MISSION.

By The American Legion

The American Legion launched its Be the One mission several years ago. Since then, it has steadily grown, directly leading to saving the lives of veterans on the brink of suicide, creating more awareness about the issue and pinpointing solutions.

American Legion departments, districts, and posts have thrown their support behind Be the One. American Legion Family members have hosted symposiums, conducted awareness hikes and 5Ks, and provided potentially life-saving resources to veterans in their community.

For the 2023-2024 ALA administrative year, the national focus is to increase awareness about the veteran and military suicide epidemic by embracing The American Legion's Be the One mission — be the one to save one. A few experiences of people close to ALA National President Lisa Williamson have led to this focus for our members.

On the national level, highlights include the creation of resource materials, launch of a monthly Be the One podcast in September, and the debut of a symposium at the 2023 National Convention.

But those achievements only

signal the beginning. Here are some common questions and answers about Be the One.

Question: How can my post home best support Be the One?

Answer: There are many ways to lend support. Like other sanctioned American Legion initiatives, it is best to take the concept for Be the One and incorporate it into the needs of your community. For example, a large post in a populous area might want to consider a symposium or similar event where community

agencies that support mental health and similar topics could present their information to veterans, their families, and others. A smaller post in a rural area might want to conduct Buddy Checks as a way to educate local veterans about Be the One and the assistance the post and other community groups can provide.

Question: Is there a preferred time to conduct a Be the One event?

Answer: The American Legion has declared the first day of each month as a Be the One day, so that

is ideal. But there is such a critical need to spread the word about preventing veteran suicide, that really any day, anytime, anywhere is a good step forward.

Question: Be the One is a great way to promote other initiatives like growing membership, supporting other causes, etc. Can we incorporate Be the One to draw attention to other priorities?

Answer: No. The American Legion's Be the One mission is the organization's highest priority, and using those words to promote another initiative would create confusion and detract from the brand.

Question: I've seen Be the One incorporated into membership drives that include Be the One panels or other activities. What's the difference?

Answer: There have been departments, districts, and post homes that have put together multi-pronged events featuring Be the One and other initiatives like a membership drive. It is completely fine to showcase Be the One as part of a larger effort that incorporates other aspects. Just be sure to use

Be the One only when highlighting suicide awareness and outreach, and not for other topics.

Question:

What promotional materials are available for post

homes to use for their Be the One events?

Answer: There are videos, brochures, pop-up banners, wallet-sized cards, and other resources available at [betheone.org/resources](https://www.betheone.org/resources). In the first quarter of 2024, additional resources will be added, including a toolkit.

Question: Where can I find out more about Be the One?

Answer: The Be the One webpage — [betheone.org](https://www.betheone.org) — is regularly updated with stories, videos, resources, and more.

The Be the One mission should be used only when highlighting suicide awareness and outreach, and not for other topics like membership drives.



IOWA MEMBER PASSIONATELY COMMITTED TO VOLUNTEERISM

For Ann Crawford, volunteering in service to veterans is as familiar as breathing. A member of the American Legion Auxiliary since she was born, Crawford can't remember a time when she wasn't involved in The American Legion Family.

As Crawford puts it, she was distributing poppies by the time she was able to walk. Not too many people in the small town of Cushing, Iowa, where she grew up, could resist the 2-year-old as she handed out handmade red crepe poppies in support of veterans. "I had the run of the town," she recalled with a laugh.

Decades later, Crawford, currently a resident of Onawa, Iowa, continues to be passionate about her commitment to volunteerism in honor of the servicemembers and veterans in her family. She has been consistently active at various levels of the Auxiliary, including Iowa department president in 2013. She also served on the ALA Iowa Girls State staff for more than 30 years, and as an ALA National Executive Committee member for Iowa.

Although she retired from life as a full-time employee — including 15 years as general manager of the Monona County Fair and 17 years at the local library — Crawford, who is also a seamstress, continues to volunteer for both organizations.

But the core of her volunteerism is in service to veterans. She devotes dozens of volunteer hours monthly to the Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service (VAVS). The initiative was formed in 1946 by The American Legion Family along with several other veterans service organizations, including the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Under VAVS, Crawford and others like her serve as a supplemental workforce of volunteers at VA hospitals and other facilities, ensuring veterans are receiving the care and support they need.

"Veterans have served us, so we need to serve them."

To maintain that commitment to VAVS, Crawford regularly drives to Sioux Falls, S.D. — two hours each way, three times a month — to support the VA hospital there with various duties, from office work to recreational and chaplain services. And about twice a month, she drives an hour each way to the Omaha (Nebraska) VA hospital to volunteer in a similar capacity.

About 12 years ago, she added volunteerism for the Quilts of Valor Foundation to her list, becoming a district coordinator through the American Legion Auxiliary District

of Iowa. She also regularly participates in the Veterans Creative Arts Festival in Sioux Falls.

Crawford's deep appreciation for the military came naturally.

"I've been surrounded by veterans my entire life. I just grew up knowing you're supposed to give back," Crawford said. "Both of my grandfathers served in World War I, my dad and mom both served in World War II, and then my dad later got recalled to serve during the Korean War."

All were members of The American Legion Family.

Military life permeated her early years so much that Crawford, whose first husband was a Vietnam War veteran, recounts milestones in her own life based on them.

"We lived on the Air Force base when I was a toddler. The same month my dad, a B-29 flight chief, got out of service from the Korean War, I started kindergarten," she said. "And when I was in high school, my dad received a notice that he may get recalled for Vietnam."

Crawford also remembers playing the flute for veterans at the Sioux Falls VA hospital, where her grandfather was a patient.

"I've been going to the Sioux Falls VA since the 1960s," she said.

The family tradition of military service expanded through more generations, with her son-in-law and two grandsons having served in the Air National Guard. All of them — including uncles who are veterans — are members of The American Legion Family.

Crawford's volunteer activity easily equates to a full-time job.

Why does she do it?

"Veterans have served us, so we need to serve them," she said. "We live in a nation in which we have total freedom to do what we want. We need to thank our veterans for that. We must honor their service.

"It breaks my heart when our veterans need something and we can't provide it," she added. "I feel like whatever I can do to serve them, I will do it."

MEET-AND-GREET STRENGTHENS LEGION FAMILY DISTRICT'S COMMITMENT TO SERVICE

Ellen Fedorowski was watching a Netflix movie one summer evening when an idea hit her.

That lightbulb moment — and the activity that followed — would become a testament to the power of leadership, camaraderie, and a commitment to *Service Not Self*.

As Fedorowski watched the show about a family gathering that night in July 2023, she realized a get-together would be perfect for a family in her own life: the California District 21 American Legion Family.

As American Legion Auxiliary president for the district, Fedorowski wanted to organize a meet-and-greet event to welcome new officers for the coming year. But it wouldn't just focus on the ALA — it would also include The American Legion, Sons of The American Legion, and The American Legion Riders for the district. The gathering would be an opportunity for leaders and members from the different groups in the district to connect and celebrate their shared mission.

Fedorowski, a member of ALA Unit 328 in Norco, knew this type of leadership transition event would be the first of its kind for the district — and perhaps for American Legion Family districts nationwide. But she also knew how to get the ball rolling to make this unprecedented event a reality.

"I got on the phone and called my fearless secretary, James," Fedorowski said of James Vass, ALA District 21 secretary and public relations coordinator. Vass, a member of ALA Unit 574 in Moreno Valley, is also in the Legion and Sons in the district.

"I said, 'What do you think about this? Do you think we could pull it off?'" Fedorowski recalled of her



conversation with Vass. "He said, 'Yeah, we could do it.'" I said, 'Good, because that's what we're going to do.'"

But there were a few catches.

First was the timing. It needed to take place soon.

Second was the budget. There was none.

Still, Fedorowski said, "it just sort of fell in line."

After getting buy-in from the district's Legion leadership, Fedorowski and Vass began working on logistics. Scheduled for Aug. 19, 2023, the meet-and-greet would take place at The American Legion Post 289 in Riverside. With indoor and outdoor patios, a canteen, pool tables, a horseshoe court, and an electric dartboard, the post seemed the perfect site for entertaining. And the post agreed to host the function at no charge to the organizers.

Next was the music. Vass, who has a side job providing deejay and karaoke services, offered to lend his talents to the meet-and-greet for free. Then Legion Post 328 in Norco agreed to donate additional chairs, tables, and equipment to the cause.

Next, Fedorowski tackled the biggest obstacle: food.

"I called around and got a vendor who would come in," she said. "I told him, 'You're not charging me a dime. I'm giving you an entire group that

you're going to feed and charge money to, and you're not giving me a bill for anything.' The guy agreed."

Now all that was left was getting out the word. The various groups that would participate in the party — the ALA, the Legion, Sons, and Riders — began promoting the activity to their members.

And that communication was effective. Despite the threat of an incoming hurricane, about 150 people poured into the Legion post on the day of the meet-and-greet. Wearing Legion Family apparel but sticking to casual attire as directed, leaders mingled with each other and with other members from the various groups represented. Joining them were officials from different districts and the national level.

The result of this informal interaction among the different groups, Fedorowski and Vass said, was a strengthened districtwide commitment to the Legion Family and their singular mission in support of veterans and the communities, departments, and nation they serve. They hope the success of the gathering will inspire other districts in the Legion Family to host similar events.

"We have to have the same vision," Vass said. "We have to figure out our part in that vision and what we can give to make it happen. Camaraderie helps us complete the mission."



Event Checklist: 1: Select the date. 2: Figure out budget. 3: Choose music. 4: Order food. 5: Spread the word.



TIME TO SPRING CLEAN YOUR CONSTITUTION & BYLAWS

It's February, which means winter is almost over and spring cleaning season is upon us — that fabulous time each year when closets get organized, junk drawers get de-junked, and homes get refreshed. Once your home is sparkling, why not keep the momentum going and spring clean your governing documents? After all, an annual review of your Constitution & Bylaws is a best practice, so let's set a date and make a pact to clean our documents every spring. Here are some things to consider during this year's cleaning:

1. The ALA's eligibility includes spouses, so make sure your wording has been updated. If the section is referencing general membership, consider swapping out "she" and replacing with the neutral term "member(s)." If the section refers to the duties of a specific office — for example, the unit president — consider changing "she" to "the president." Instead of saying "she shall preside over unit meetings," change the text to "the unit president shall preside over all unit meetings."

2. Consider adding a Code of Conduct and procedures

regarding the discipline of a member. Having a section outlining the Code of Conduct in your governing documents can help clearly define positive behavior welcomed by all unit members. This can be a great tool to share with new members and can decrease the potential for future conflicts. Clearly written procedures on disciplining a member can outline consequences for behavior deemed disrespectful to fellow members. When crafting your section on member discipline, don't forget to cite the principles of fundamental fairness which include notice and an opportunity to be heard.

3. Shouda, woulda, coulda — it all amounts to nothing. "Should" has no place in your governing documents. If the word "should" is anywhere in your governing documents, you better grab your

cleaning caddy and bleach it right out of your C&B. Remember: Your governing documents state the fundamentals of your unit. These rules and procedures should be as clear as possible, and the word "should" leaves far too much room for interpretation. Consider swapping "should" for "may" or "must/shall."

4. One thing that continues to be true is that old saying: "If you stay ready, you won't have to get ready." That simply means spring cleaning can be greatly lessened by staying on top of your closets and your governing documents. Take the time after each board meeting to update any changes voted on by your board. Assign segments of your C&B to be reviewed by members of your unit. Have them check for accuracy, clarity, and specificity. If there is room for interpretation, consider rewriting the section with clearer, stronger language.

Organizational governing documents are so important because they state the fundamental purpose, structure, and limits of an organization, as well as containing the procedures the organization must follow to conduct business effectively and efficiently. Up to date, well-written, clear, and concise governing documents help to clarify authorities, outline responsibilities, and can ultimately serve to solve issues before they become problems. Your governing documents matter, so this spring while you work to get your house in order, consider doing the same for your governing documents.



Constitution & Bylaws resources are available at www.ALAFORVeterans.org. Log in to the MyAuxiliary member portal, and under committees, select Constitution & Bylaws. There you will find:

- National Constitution, Bylaws and Standing Rules
- Unit Guide Book
- Robert's Rules of Order
- Basic parliamentary procedure
- And much more

UNDERSTANDING THE FACTS ABOUT CAMP LEJEUNE'S TOXIC WATER LITIGATION

In September 2023, the Department of the Navy announced an "Elective Option" relating to an initial offer of settlement to claimants suffering from toxic water exposure at Camp Lejeune. Unfortunately, this proposed remedy only recognizes nine diagnoses:

- bladder cancer
- liver cancer
- kidney cancer
- leukemia
- multiple myeloma
- Parkinson's disease
- scleroderma
- Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
- kidney disease/end-stage renal disease

Limits to the Elective Option:

Even if you have one of the nine diagnoses, there are many limitations to the EO.

First, you must have been diagnosed or treated within 35 years of your last date of exposure at Camp Lejeune. For example, if you were last exposed in February 1970, you must have been diagnosed no later than February 2005. Please note that if your diagnosis was more than 35 years after your last date of exposure, you will not qualify for compensation under the Elective Option.

Secondly, if you have more than one diagnosis, you can only receive compensation for one diagnosis under the Elective Option.

For claimants who qualify under the Elective Option and have submitted their administrative claim form, the government suggests they will make offers ranging from \$100,000 (for those who were exposed at Camp Lejeune for less than one year) to \$450,000 (for those exposed for five-plus years)



during the 1953 to 1987 time frame. Additional compensation is available in cases where the exposed person died of his or her diagnosis. The time frame of these offers is currently unknown.

"The government's Elective Option falls short of adequately valuing the harm caused by the contaminated water and fails to consider many factors that would warrant additional compensation like multiple injuries, lost wages, age at diagnosis, et cetera," said Glenn Bergmann, managing partner of Bergmann & Moore, whose firm represents Legionnaires and their families in many of these actions.

Accordingly, **Bergmann & Moore does not recommend acceptance of this offer** based on the belief that it will amount to pennies on the dollar in terms of expected awards.

As of early December, approximately 130,000 administrative claims are on file with the Navy, and just over 1,400 Camp Lejeune Justice Act complaints have been filed in federal district court in North Carolina.

Bergmann & Moore LLC is a national law firm managed by former VA attorneys. The firm has successfully represented over 12,000 veterans and their family members

in VA disability compensation claims in federal court. Bergmann & Moore was selected by The American Legion and the ALA to help assist their members in filing Camp Lejeune Justice Act claims.

Claimants who believe they were exposed to toxic water at Camp Lejeune may speak to someone personally by calling 800-898-9450, or by filling out the form online at www.camplejeunelitigationteam.com/al. Anyone who calls should note they were referred by The American Legion. If you have questions before filing a claim, please call Annita Best, Bergmann



Annita Best

& Moore's Camp Lejeune Justice Act spokesperson, at (301) 290-3148. Best is a retired U.S. Marine who served 31 years, most recently

as a public affairs officer at II MEF, MARFORPAC, MARFOREUR and MCIEAST, as well as Headquarters Marine Corps.

The American Legion encourages veterans/claimants to reach out to a Camp Lejeune Justice Act attorney for any condition they think may be related to toxic water exposure while at Camp Lejeune.



‘They did their job just like any other veteran did’

Vietnam Era veteran reflects on her service during America’s tumultuous war

By Sara Fowler

American Legion Auxiliary and American Legion member Pat Jarvis joined the military in 1973. At the time, she wasn’t quite sure what she wanted to do ... but wanted something different for her life.

Jarvis had to talk to her parents first.

“I don’t want you to get mad at me, but I think I want to go into the service,” she recalled telling her mom and dad. “Mom got excited and said, ‘I always wanted to do that, but I was so scared’ and Dad said, ‘Don’t go in the Army.’”

Jarvis’ father was an Army veteran and didn’t want his daughter serving in that branch because of things he had



witnessed regarding women in the service.

After going to the Air Force office first, Jarvis ended up at the Navy office.

“He was a super recruiter,” she said. “I did the same test [as the Air Force] and he said, ‘If you want to go in, you can just about take anything you want.’”

Jarvis remembers being curious about what it would be like. She asked the recruiter, but at the time, men and women were still separated while serving so he couldn’t really provide an answer. In the service, they were not allowed to talk to one another. They shared a chow hall, but men were on one side and women on the other, and the classes were separated too.

Jarvis recalls arriving at 1 a.m. to bootcamp and had to go into the barracks quietly, trying not to wake anyone up.

“I laid down on the top bunk, looked at the ceiling,

and thought, *What have I done?*” she said. “It didn’t make me cry; I wasn’t crying to go back home or anything.”

In the military, Jarvis was in communications and went to school to become a radioman. Learning to type was the first part of the class, but Jarvis was already skilled in that area. When she was in ninth grade, she moved to Thailand because of her father’s military career, and she learned to type to help her brother and sister in summer school.

“I ended up going into a different class — I typed too great,” she said. “I got to work in the office where all the teachers were doing administrative stuff.”

Jarvis also didn’t type on regular typewriters — all of their work was done on Western Union teletypes.

“Every place we would send a message, we had to have the first line perfect or it wouldn’t get there and it would be rejected,” she recalled. “It had to be absolutely, exactly right.”

During the Vietnam War, Jarvis spent 18 months in Okinawa, Japan, at her first duty station. She was in communications. While there, she saw a lot of classified documents go through and had to have top secret clearance.

“Every once in a while, we got something we had to turn around and send out to others,” she said. “A lot of that was coming out of Vietnam.”

She said she enjoyed serving her country, especially seeing places around the world beyond her hometown.

“Okinawa is not a terrible place — there are some very beautiful areas of it,” she said. “We rented a car and went driving around.”

Jarvis served in the Navy from 1973-1977. She comes from a military family — her father served in the Army for 30 years during World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, and her husband served for 32 years in the Navy.

Some of our country’s Vietnam War veterans went through a lot when they returned home — heckled, spit on, yelled at. The list goes on.

“This is something that blows my mind away, especially after World War I and World War II heroes,”



SERVING DURING THE VIETNAM WAR (opposite page): Vietnam War Navy veteran Pat Jarvis participates in a pass in review during her time in the service. This page: Jarvis being recognized at her radioman school graduation; Jarvis at the site of the 1975 World Fair that was held in Okinawa, Japan; Jarvis and fellow military members render a salute.

National Vietnam War Veterans Day



Each year on March 29, Vietnam veterans are recognized on National Vietnam War Veterans Day.

It is a time to pay special tribute to the 9 million Americans who served during the Vietnam War era, to the 58,000 names memorialized on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., and to those who never received the recognition they deserved when they returned to America from war.

March 29, 1973, is the day U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam was disestablished, and the day the last U.S. combat troops departed Vietnam. In addition, on and around this same day, the U.S. Vietnam War Commemoration stated that Hanoi released the last of its acknowledged prisoners of war.

Source: *Legion.org*



SERVING THEIR COUNTRY: Jarvis with fellow servicewomen during the Vietnam War. They were among the 265,000 women who served during the Vietnam War.

Jarvis said of the way some Vietnam veterans were treated.

She recalls her brother-in-law seeing signs in Norfolk, Va., that read, ‘Sailors and dogs stay off the grass.’ Additionally, her mother would get calls saying her dad had been killed while serving in Vietnam.

“I remember getting up to get a drink at night and seeing a light on and my mother would be sitting on the front porch waiting to see if someone came to tell her the news,” she said.

Jarvis was lucky and didn’t have the negative experiences some servicemembers had upon arriving home from the war.

“Overall, it was a very, very positive experience,” she said. “It was my honor to do it.”

Jarvis wants others to know that Vietnam/Vietnam Era veterans “did their job just like any other veteran did,” she said. “They followed orders and did what they were told just like everybody else did.” ★



VIETNAM WAR: Vietnamese troops of the 7th Division and U.S. 9th Division were on their first combined operation in the Mekong Delta. The allied forces landed by helicopters in the marshy, canal-laced paddy country 35 miles southwest of Saigon near ap Bac. In this photo, American infantrymen of the 5th Battalion/60th Mechanized Infantry wade through muddy canals and swamps on April 8, 1967 (AP Photo/Horst Faas).

Timeline: Major events of the Vietnam War

Late 1961

President John F. Kennedy orders more help for the South Vietnamese government in its war against the Vietcong guerrillas. U.S. backing includes new equipment and more than 3,000 military advisors and support personnel.

Dec. 11, 1961

American helicopters arrive at docks in South Vietnam, along with 400 U.S. personnel who will fly and maintain the aircraft.

Jan. 12, 1962

In Operation Chopper, helicopters flown by U.S. Army pilots ferry 1,000 South Vietnamese soldiers to sweep a National Liberation Front (NLF) stronghold near Saigon. It marks America’s first combat missions against the Vietcong.

Aug. 7, 1964

The U.S. Congress passes the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, giving President Lyndon B. Johnson the power to take whatever actions he sees necessary to defend southeast Asia.

Feb. 7, 1965

A U.S. helicopter base and advisory compound in the central highlands of South Vietnam is attacked by NLF commandos. Nine Americans are killed and more than 70 are wounded. President Johnson immediately orders U.S. Navy fighter-bombers to attack military targets just inside North Vietnam.

Feb. 13, 1965

President Johnson authorizes Operation Rolling Thunder, a limited but long lasting bombing offensive. Its aim is to force North Vietnam to stop supporting Vietcong guerrillas in the South.

April 7, 1965

The U.S. offers North Vietnam economic aid in exchange for peace, but the offer is summarily rejected. Two weeks later, President Johnson raises America’s combat strength in Vietnam to more than 60,000 troops. Allied forces from Korea and Australia are added as a sign of international support.

Aug. 17, 1965

After a deserter from the 1st Vietcong regiment reveals that an attack is imminent against the U.S. Marine base at Chu Lai, the American Army launches Operation Starlite. In this, the first major battle of the Vietnam War, the United States scores a resounding victory. Ground forces, artillery from Chu Lai, ships, and air support combine to kill nearly 700 Vietcong soldiers. U.S. forces sustain 45 dead and more than 200 wounded.

Jan. 8, 1966

U.S. forces launch Operation Crimp. Deploying nearly 8,000 troops, it is the largest American operation of the war.

The goal of the campaign is to capture the Vietcong's headquarters for the Saigon area, which is believed to be located in the district of Chu Chi. Though the area in Chu Chi is razed and repeatedly patrolled, American forces fail to locate any significant Vietcong base.

End of 1966

By the end of 1966, American forces in Vietnam reach 385,000 men, plus an additional 60,000 sailors stationed offshore. More than 6,000 Americans have been killed in this year, and 30,000 have been wounded. In comparison, an estimated 61,000 Vietcong have been killed. However, their troops now numbered over 280,000.

Feb. 21, 1967

In one of the largest air-mobile assaults ever, 240 helicopters sweep over Tay Ninh province, beginning Operation Junction City. The goal of Junction City is to destroy Vietcong bases and the Vietcong military headquarters for South Vietnam, all of which are located in War Zone C, north of Saigon. Some 30,000 U.S. troops take part in the mission, joined by 5,000 men of the South Vietnamese Army. After 72 days, Junction City ends. American forces succeed in capturing large quantities of stores, equipment and weapons, but there are no large, decisive battles.

January 1969

Richard M. Nixon takes office as the new president of the United States. With regard to Vietnam, he promises to achieve "peace with honor." His aim is to negotiate a settlement that will allow the half million U.S. troops in Vietnam to be withdrawn, while still allowing South Vietnam to survive.



LANDING IN WAR ZONE: Marines unloading and moving through a tree and branch strewn landing zone on Dec. 17, 1969 (AP Photo).

Operation Ranchhand sprays 11 million gallons of Agent Orange — containing 240 pounds of the lethal chemical dioxin — on South Vietnam. More than one seventh of the country's total area is laid waste.

Jan. 1, 1972

Only 133,000 U.S. servicemembers remain in South Vietnam. Two thirds of America's troops have gone in two years. The ground war is now almost exclusively the responsibility of South Vietnam, which has over 1 million men enlisted in its armed forces.

Dec. 13, 1972

In Paris, peace talks between the North Vietnamese and the Americans break down.

Jan. 27, 1973

All warring parties in the Vietnam War sign a cease fire.

March 1973

The last American combat soldiers leave South Vietnam, though military advisors and Marines, who are protecting U.S. installations, remain. For the United States, the war is officially over. Of the more than 3 million Americans who have served in the war, almost 58,000 are dead, and over 1,000 are missing in action. Some 150,000 Americans were seriously wounded.

April 29, 1975

U.S. Marines and Air Force helicopters, flying from carriers off shore, begin a massive airlift. In 18 hours, over 1,000 American civilians and almost 7,000 South Vietnamese refugees are flown out of Saigon.

April 30, 1975

At 4:03 a.m., two U.S. Marines are killed in a rocket attack at Saigon's Tan Son Nhut airport. They are the last Americans to die in the Vietnam War. At dawn, the last Marines of the force guarding the U.S. embassy lift off. Only hours later, looters ransack the embassy, and North Vietnamese tanks roll into Saigon, ending the war. In 15 years, nearly a million North Vietnamese and Vietcong troops and a quarter of a million South Vietnamese soldiers have died. Hundreds of thousands of civilians had been killed.

Source: pbs.org



FAITH SERVICE: Chaplain Charles Watters of New Jersey holds Easter services in a jungle clearing in War Zone C, March 26, 1967, in Vietnam. The paratroopers are from the 173rd Airborne Brigade and services were held just two hours prior to a helicopter assault in a new sector of War Zone C (AP Photo/Horst Faas).

April 1969

U.S. combat deaths in Vietnam exceed the 33,629 men killed in the Korean War.

Summer 1971

While herbicides containing dioxin were banned for use by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1968, spraying of Agent Orange continues in Vietnam until 1971.



Riding the Bike to Give Back to Veterans, Communities

ALA Legion Rider Members Share Lessons from the Road

By Sara Fowler

They often travel in groups, wearing black leather vests adorned with the emblems of The American Legion Family. American flags are attached to the backs of their motorcycles, proudly waving in the breeze as members make their way to their next destination to honor our nation's veterans or support local children.

They are the American Legion Riders.

Throughout the country, many of our own American Legion Auxiliary members are also Riders. Even our 2023-2024 National President Lisa Williamson is a Rider.

Some of these members ride their own bikes, and others ride with a spouse or friend.

Auxiliary magazine takes a closer look at ALA members who are Riders — what it's like to put the helmet on and serve a mission from the road.

Dawn Burgess
Department of Florida

What sparked your interest in joining the Legion Riders?

I have been riding since I was a young girl — I think my dad wanted boys! I never knew the Legion Riders existed until I moved to Palm Bay, Florida, in 2012 and transferred my membership to Unit 117. What better way to combine two of the things I love most — riding (Burgess is in photo above) and giving back to our veterans and community? It was a no-brainer!

What are some Legion Rider activities you've participated in?

Living in Florida has its perks because we are able to ride year round. We participate in in-state legacy runs,

Veterans Day activities at nursing homes, escorting veterans to their final resting spot, Toys for Tots fundraisers, escorting Santa to our children's Christmas party, delivering meals to police and fire departments on 9/11, various parades, poker runs to help the homeless, children and youth, and many other charities.

What do you want fellow Legion Family members, as well as your local community, to know about being a Legion Rider?

We are all about having fun, raising money, raising awareness for our veterans, children and youth, and anybody in need in our community, state, or nation. It is also my Zen place. It allows me to be one with my bike and the open road, to de-stress and relax.

What does it mean to you to give back as both an ALA member and a Legion Rider?

It makes my heart sing. It brings me to tears to know that we can put a smile on a child's face when they see us pull up on our bikes, and to know that we are doing our part to help in many ways through the Auxiliary, as well as our whole Legion Family.

What advice would you give to an ALA member interested in joining the Riders?

If you love to ride, there is no reason NOT to join. I guess the only advice is to not let drama get in the way of your efforts and what you want to accomplish. We are all in this together. There will be disagreements, but we cannot allow them to cloud our judgment or impede our process to accomplish our goals. This goes for any organization, and life in general!

Trisha Lawson
Department of Kansas

What interested you in joining the Legion Riders?

My husband is an avid motorcycle rider/enthusiast. He had joined the Riders several years before. I joined to be a member instead of a supporter.

Can you describe what it's like to be a Legion Rider? Many of our members have seen the bikes but might not understand what it's really like.

For me, it is an honor. To escort a veteran and soldier to their destination is humbling. We escort a funeral procession to the cemetery then stand flag line. For most funerals, we stand flag line outside the service as they bring the casket out, we line up to protect the casket as it is being put into the hearse, then we will lead them to their final resting spot at the cemetery. Our goal is to protect and honor the fallen veteran and their family. It is a sign of respect and tribute. We also send off new recruits who have joined to serve their country. When they come home, we will escort them into town and welcome them back. Our mission is to show them support, protect them as they do for their country, and for them to know there is a group that will always be there through all stages of their journey and to care for their families when they are gone.

Tell us more about the benefit run you do every year to the Fort Dodge Soldiers Home.

It started out in 2016. Learning that so close to us there was a community/fort that was specifically for veterans, we agreed it would be perfect for a benefit run. I started contacting the person in charge of donations where I learned so much about the Soldiers Home. They have a building where all types of donations are delivered, from canned goods to couches. It is like their own store free of charge! The residents of Fort Dodge come in and get what they need or want.

We decided to concentrate on non-perishable items. On top of that, we do monetary donations. This money goes directly to veterans. They go on trips, outings, theater, or use it to support one of their own who may need an extra hand. We start our benefit run registration at our veterans memorial park in Norton. We make several stops where we fuel up and where area motorcycle enthusiasts and other Legion Riders join in. We flag up our motorcycles once we get to the entrance then parade through the streets of the community. Once

we park, we unload our trailer of donations then meet back at the nursing home facility where the veterans gather to greet us. We visit, hear stories, laugh, and joke. There we all travel to Boothill Casino for fun before coming home.

There are several ALA women who are also Riders in your post home. That's great! What is it like for you to be with members of both organizations?

Each faction of the Legion brings its own dedication. I love that more ladies are joining. Each section of the Legion brings such unique ideas to support our veterans and military. The goal is showing that they are not alone.



DRIVING FOR A CAUSE: ALA member and Legion Rider Trisha Lawson of the Department of Kansas drives to the next destination. She said it is an honor to be a Legion Rider.

Kaitlyn Debow
Department of Pennsylvania

How did you end up joining the Legion Riders?

My mom and dad became Legion Riders, and it was always an interest of mine. I would help with Rider functions that our chapter would be doing, so it was only right I would join a few years later when my husband and I got our first Harley-Davidson.

What does it mean to you to be an ALA member and Legion Rider all before age 30?

To be a young ALA member can be challenging. I mean not all people my age are into doing things like we do for veterans. Being the granddaughter of a Navy veteran and a Marine veteran, I knew it was something



Who are the American Legion Riders?

American Legion Riders chapters are well known for their charitable work, which has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for local children's hospitals, schools, veterans homes, severely wounded servicemembers, and scholarships. Since 2006, Riders nationwide have participated in The American Legion Legacy Run to annually raise money for the Legacy Scholarship Fund, established to provide scholarships to children of U.S. military personnel killed since Sept. 11, 2001.

Source: Legion.org

I wanted to do. I want to show other girls my age that we can help veterans, children, and community while having fun and making a difference. We will be the ones who keep the organization alive in the coming years, so it is important to start making a difference now.



PROUD MEMBER: Kaitlyn Debow, Department of Pennsylvania, loves being a member of both the ALA and Legion Riders.

Can you describe what it's like to be a Legion Rider?

Being a Legion Rider is very rewarding. I remember going to Legion College last year and hearing the saying, "The Legion Riders are the billboard of your post." I found this saying to be truer than true. Legion Riders go out as an advocate for your Legion by supporting other Legions' events or just simply by making a donation to a fundraiser. I have found out over the years that other Riders chapters in our area are so supportive of what we do and always show up whether it is to help out or just support the cause. We do a lot of fundraising and item drives throughout the year.

You are the secretary and historian for the Riders. What's it like to hold leadership roles within the group?

I enjoy being a part of our leadership team. That could be the businesswoman in me, but I think I am a natural. I am very organized, so this helps with taking our meeting minutes and running our Facebook page by posting pictures/posts about things we are doing. This way, people are seeing where the money we are raising is going and how we are donating our time. Plus, what better way to remember all these memories we are making than by taking pictures? I love being able to document all the things we are doing together.

What do you want community members to know about being a Legion Rider?

That we are here to help. Yes, the veterans are our

No. 1 priority, but we also support the community. Some may think motorcycles and our leather vests are intimidating. Our vests are so people know where we are from and what post we are representing. It really is a symbol of our brother and sisterhood. But we really love helping out any way we can.

What does it mean to you to give back as both an ALA member and a Legion Rider?

It means something special to be an ALA member and a Legion Rider. Nothing is more rewarding than seeing yourself make a difference, whether it is to a veteran or to the community. When working with kids or veterans, just seeing the smile on their faces when they see us coming on our motorcycles feels good. We do a ride every year called the Bunny Run around Easter time. We all bring a stuffed bunny or animal and ride to hospitals all over central Pennsylvania and deliver bags of stuffed animals to the kids. No better feeling than seeing a child happy.

Q&A with ALA Legion Riders

Sandy LeClair
Unit 25, Department of New York

As an ALA member, what motivated you to become a Legion Rider?

I had been very active in our Auxiliary for the past 18 years, and an officer for five years, so when I found out our post had started a Legion Riders, I had to be a part of it! I joined. I wasn't the first female who rides her own bike to join our charter, but I was our first (and only, to date) who was elected president. I then served as our secretary for the past year.

What do you enjoy about being a Legion Rider?

It has been great meeting other women Riders living in my area! I love our Legion Riders. They are a great and caring group. The guys are very supportive of us gals. The entire group is always there to lend a helping hand to each other and our veterans.

Jennifer Murray
Unit 58, Department of Massachusetts

As an ALA member, what motivated you to become a Legion Rider?

My husband is a Legion member, Sons, and Rider. We are very committed to our Legion and are always looking for more ways to help our local veterans. As a motorcycle enthusiast — owning and riding my own bike — I was always at Riders events and grew closer with all the members. I saw how the group united our entities and could help on a larger level working together.

What do you enjoy about being a Legion Rider?

Aside from the joy and freedom of riding a motorcycle, it has helped connect the Legion entities, not just at our local post/unit, but at a larger level. No matter

where you ride, when wearing the Riders vest, you are part of a large family, all dedicated to these common interests. I love that we can walk into any Legion and feel welcomed. Our local towns recognize and respect our commitment to helping veterans, their families, and the community. Whether it be participating in parades, honoring a deceased veteran, or organizing a benefit run, it definitely is humbling and fulfilling to be a member of both the Auxiliary and the Riders.

Cynthia Guthrie
Unit 192, Department of Georgia

As an ALA member, what motivated you to become a Legion Rider?

As a U.S. Army Desert Storm veteran, I joined The American Legion first so that I could become a Rider. At the time I joined, I did not know much about the Auxiliary, I thought it was for dependents only. I joined the Auxiliary after being in the Riders because I learned more about what they were about. I found that the Auxiliary and Riders go hand and hand. Both go out of their way to help veterans and families in our community, which is what I am all about. I originally joined the Riders because I love riding. I enjoy being able to go out into my community and wear my vest and have people recognize the symbol of my patch as the Legion Riders patch. Also, there is nothing better than seeing the smile on the face of a child in the car next to you when you wave at them and rev the engine.

What do you enjoy about being a Legion Rider?

I love being a Legion Rider because of the camaraderie I feel with my fellow Riders, they are a family to me. As a group, we go out and visit the VAs

in our area and try to bring happiness to those who aren't able-bodied. I love participating in the Christmas parades and tossing candy to the children. I love meeting new people and traveling to new places. Being a Legion Rider has given me the opportunity to travel to so many new places.

Mabelle Jane Green
Unit 146, Department of Virginia

As an ALA member, what motivated you to become a Legion Rider?

I moved to Virginia about six years ago. I had never been in the ALA and was looking for an organization to do volunteer work. I had been a Boy Scout and Girl Scout leader for 35 years and was looking to go in a new direction. I wanted to work and help veterans, so I went to American Legion Post 146 and got an application for the ALA. In Ohio, I had friends who were in the American Legion Riders and I always wanted to ride a motorcycle. After I became an ALA member, I was introduced to ALR members. The idea of riding a motorcycle for different causes really excited me, and I decided to buy a Harley Trike. Believe it or not, I was just turning 68 at the time. I signed up for every ride I could that benefited veterans, children, and other community/family causes. It has been awesome to ride with fellow Legion Family members. I have ridden in the last five years of the Virginia Legacy Run, and this year, our group raised over \$121,000 for the State of Virginia American Legion Riders. I have ridden for children with cancer; to raise money for Freedom Farms, a group that helps veterans with PTSD; ridden for Sickle Cell Fund Raising for VCU; and I ride each year for the 9-11 Ride



PROUD LEGION RIDERS: ALA members from across the country are proud to ride for our veterans (left to right, top to bottom): Sandy LeClair, Department of New York; Cynthia Guthrie, Department of Georgia; Ruth Higgins, Department of Maryland; Mabelle Jane Green, Department of Virginia; Jennifer Murray, Department of Massachusetts; and Juli Zajc, Department of North Carolina.



REPRESENTING THE TWO MISSIONS: More members from across the nation share their Legion Rider stories (left to right, top to bottom): Amanda Washburn, Department of Nebraska; Janet Romero, Department of New Mexico; Cindy Crane, Department of Wisconsin; and Beth Batts, Department of Arizona.

that recognizes firefighters and first responders lost on 9-11-01. Children love motorcycles. When I ride somewhere, I always make sure I reach out to children who are there. I want to set a good example of “doing my part” and *Service Not Self*.

What do you enjoy about being a Legion Rider?

There is just something about riding a motorcycle. I love going on the trips, community rides, visiting the VA hospital, and watching the eyes light up of the veterans. Nothing stirs them more than when a large group of motorcycles comes riding up. I participated in the 100 Miles for Hope several years for The American Legion riding my bike. I have gotten to visit so many great places in the state of Virginia and so many American Legion posts. I usually am the oldest woman, riding my own in the group. I turned 74 this year and still ride. I am proud to wear my vest, talk to people about the Legion Riders, and tell them what we do. American Legion Riders have a passion to help others, and it shows when they turn out to support a cause. I want to set a good example for our youth who need to know they can do this too.

Juli Zajc

Unit 81, Department of North Carolina

As an ALA member, what motivated you to become a Legion Rider?

It was a great way to be with a ton of others who were mission oriented. I learned a phrase in the process from a great Rider, Jim Day of Florida: It is for the cause, not the applause. This is a huge part of my WHY every day.

What do you enjoy about being a Legion Rider?

The enjoyment I feel is that the people I am with stop dealing with all the politics within all the organizations. They don't treat anyone differently. We are all the best we can be.

Ruth Higgins

Unit 70, Department of Maryland

As an ALA member, what motivated you to become a Legion Rider?

There's a Legion Family bond that flows between. It's that bond that inspires me to be a part of such an awesome organization. When I enlisted in the Navy, I pledged an oath that didn't end when I was discharged. There's a fellowship that inspires me to do more. Being a member and serving The American Legion, American Legion Riders, and the American Legion Auxiliary gives me the opportunity to continue to serve fellow veterans and their families.

What do you enjoy about being a Legion Rider?

As current commander of the Department of Maryland, I have the opportunity to travel throughout the state and see all the great events/programs being held. I'm proud of the Department of Maryland and to be a Legion Rider.

Amanda Washburn

Unit 360, Department of Nebraska

As an ALA member, what motivated you to become a Legion Rider?

I knew the great work that Legion Riders do within

their local communities and the impact they have on getting more members to join all three organizations. Once I got my own bike, I knew I wanted to be a part of a group that does so much for others. Being able to ride safely together was a huge plus too.

What do you enjoy about being a Legion Rider?

The chapter I belong to does a lot of great things in the community. Going on the different poker runs is so much fun, and raising money for individuals and causes is an added benefit of it.

Janet Romero

Unit 25, Department of New Mexico

As an ALA member, what motivated you to become a Legion Rider?

My brother was one of the first American Legion Riders in Albuquerque. He came back home to Clovis and started Chapter 2 in 2005. I became the secretary and maintained that until last year when I was elected director of our chapter. I am also the state Riders secretary.

What do you enjoy about being a Legion Rider?

I enjoy being involved in this wonderful organization, helping our veterans, my community, and making friends nationwide.

Beth Batts

Unit 24, Department of Arizona

As an ALA member, what motivated you to become a Legion Rider?

I have ridden bikes most of my life. On New Year's Eve, we were sitting with some Legion Riders and they were talking about some rides coming up. We joined at their next meeting.

What do you enjoy about being a Legion Rider?

I enjoy everything about the Legion Riders. We have great officers. The Riders are an amazing group. The rides are great with amazing road captains. I have no complaints.

Cindy Crane

Unit 164, Department of Wisconsin

As an ALA member, what motivated you to become a Legion Rider?

I took motorcycle safety class in July 2008 with my husband. We purchased our motorcycles shortly thereafter. We joined our local HOG (Harley Owners Group) chapter at that same time and began doing charity rides and fundraising.

My parents met in Fort Knox when they were in the Army. Having 14 family members who served in the military, I felt this was the perfect opportunity to honor their service. My maternal grandfather served in World War I, and my paternal grandfather served in World War II. I became an ALA member in 2012

when my friend, Brenda, recruited me.

In 2012, my husband Rodney (Legion) and I, as well as Brenda and her husband, Jeff (Sons of The American Legion), continued to do charity rides and fundraisers for our HOG chapters, which we enjoyed. Over the course of 2012, we explored the Legion Riders, and in 2013, we decided to join the Legion Riders because we felt we could contribute to their mission (fundraising, charity rides, and parades) but with a focus on veterans. It seemed like a natural fit, and we were the only Riders from our unit/post. (Wisconsin Legion Riders are part of a district vs a post/chapter).

What do you enjoy about being a Legion Rider?

Being able to continue to participate in charity fundraisers for our veterans, and our Legion Riders district members are awesome. As Legion Riders from our post, we have been hosting poker runs (charity rides) to raise money for Camp American Legion (Tomahawk) or other local veteran charities. We have a number of friends who own motorcycles, and we are able to involve them in these fundraisers while visiting other American Legion or VFW posts. In summer 2022, we participated in the ALR Association of Wisconsin State Run, which raised \$37,873 for the Highground Veterans Memorial Park in Neillsville. I love supporting our veterans, and when we participate in a parade or a large group ride, it is amazing to see so many people come out and support our veterans. Being a Legion Rider provides another means to bringing like-minded people together to raise awareness to veterans issues. ★



Eligibility Requirements for Legion Riders

- Members must hold membership in and be in good standing with The American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, or Sons of The American Legion.
- Members must be legally registered motorcycle owners or be the legally registered owner's spouse within the state of registration.
- All operators must be properly licensed and insured per state laws.
- All members must obey motor-vehicle laws in the state in which they are operating a motorcycle or riding as a passenger.

Source: Legion.org



AN EASY WAY OF GIVING BACK TO OUR MISSION

This American Legion Auxiliary Foundation grant can help

By Jennifer Donovan

American Legion Auxiliary members are known for supporting our veterans. Serving our nation's veterans is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Veterans' needs can vary from community to community. ALA members are great at finding solutions to those needs.

Unfortunately, sometimes the cost of the solution may seem out of reach. That's where the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation can help. Units and departments that have found a need in their community can get assistance meeting that need by applying for a Veteran Projects Fund grant to help assist with the cost of the project.

The Foundation awards grants up to \$10,000 to units and departments addressing a new, one-time need for veterans in their community. The project can be done alone or in collaboration with another organization in the community. The applying ALA entity must fund at least 20% of the overall project cost, and the project needs to align with the ALA's mission. For example, if the total cost of the project is \$12,000, the ALA entity must fund \$2,400 and the ALA Foundation will fund the remaining \$9,600. If the ALA entity cannot fund 20% of the project, they can state their case in the application and the ALA Foundation Board of Directors will take it into consideration.

Do you have more than one project in mind that would qualify for a grant? Spread the projects out. Entities can apply for a grant once every 12 months if they see a need that meets the grant criteria. In other words, keep planning and keep applying!

"I would encourage other Auxiliary units to apply for the grant," said Patti Purcell, Indiana ALA Unit 492. "We hope to apply for another grant too." (Read ahead for more information about Unit 492's grant project.)

PLAN A PROJECT

Now that you know about the grant, your unit/department may have one in mind or need inspiration. There are a few steps to take before applying:

- Identify the greatest needs in your community for veterans.
- Research what is needed to address those needs.
- Compile ideas on possible solutions.
- Make sure your ideas align with the ALA's mission of supporting veterans, military, and their families.
- Determine the cost of the project.
- Make a plan.

"It's easy to discuss doing things for veterans at the monthly meetings and walk out of there, and before you know it, it's your next monthly meeting and nothing has



PAST GRANT RECIPIENTS' PROJECTS:

- Wheelchair bicycle for the New York State Veterans Home
 - Dragon Boat racing gear in Connecticut
- Housing addition to North Strand Housing Shelter in South Carolina
- Picnic tables on the grounds of the Illinois Veterans Home in Quincy
 - Quilts for our heroes in North Carolina



AEF UPDATE



ALA increases Auxiliary Emergency Fund assistance for members

The National Executive Committee approved the updated grant award of \$3,000 for ALA members who have been affected by a natural disaster or other crisis and need urgent financial assistance.

Learn more about the Auxiliary Emergency Fund and apply for a grant today by visiting www.ALAforVeterans.org/AEF.

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Benefits of Membership

- Disaster and Hardship Assistance Grants up to \$3,000.
- Discounts, rewards, and perks on 1,000s of brands including Hertz, Sam's Club, Walt Disney World, Toyota, Skechers, and more.
- ScriptSave® WellRx Premier Prescriptions Savings Program.
- Travel discounts with Armed Forces Vacation Club and Wyndham Hotel Group.
- Vision, dental, and life insurance discounts.



Learn more about your ALA member benefits here:
www.ALAforVeterans.org/member-benefits

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GIVING BACK TO VETERANS (top): North Carolina Unit 346 makes quilts for veterans; Indiana Unit 492 purchased blanket warmers for Indiana Veterans Home; Connecticut Unit 72 helped fund a new barn for equine therapy; Department of Maine purchased tablets and accessories for the Maine Veterans Home.

transpired,” said Amy Wagner, Indiana ALA Unit 492. “Set reachable goals each month. We continuously look for ways to benefit our veterans not only at the Indiana Veterans Home, but in our community.”

ALA Unit 492 in Indiana received a Veteran Projects Fund grant that is helping provide comfort to veterans. They used the grant to purchase four blanket warming cabinets for the Indiana Veterans Home.

The idea came about when Auxiliary members learned residents were getting cold after being taken back to their room after showering. Warm blankets would help solve this problem. Staff at the veterans home told the Auxiliary they dreamed of having a cabinet on each of the four floors, but the cabinets were too expensive.

Unit and post members met with representatives from the Indiana Veterans Home to see how they could make the dream a reality. At that time, The American Legion Family members weren’t thinking about getting a grant to help.

“A few days later, in perfect, divine time, I got our *Auxiliary* magazine and read an article about the grant program, which was the first time we had heard about it,” said Purcell. “I talked to our Auxiliary president and an idea was born.”

They decided they would apply for a grant for four warming blankets so each floor would have one.

“We had an Auxiliary member take this project by the horns and run with it and it paid off in the end,” said Wagner.

The blanket warmers have been well received by the veterans and staff. The blankets keep the residents warm and comfy, allowing for better sleep. The staff say the warm blankets are also helpful for those who are ill or have an injury.

HOW TO QUALIFY

Now that you have identified a need for a Veteran Projects Fund grant and made a plan, does it meet the criteria?

“Projects most likely to get approved are projects that impact multiple veterans and will continue to do so for a long time. Examples include bedroom furniture for a transitional housing facility, blanket warmers at a VA medical center, or a new barn for a horse used for equine therapy for veterans,” said Carley Schutz, ALA National Headquarters Development Division director. “The purpose of the VPF grants is to improve the lives of veterans and their families; the more lives we can improve, the better we can execute the mission of the Foundation.”

When deciding on a project, keep the following in mind:

- Applicant must be an ALA entity (unit, district/county, department).

- Be able to provide 20% of the project cost. The ALA Foundation will provide the other 80%, up to \$10,000.

- One grant per grantee will be awarded in a 12-month period.

- Funds may not be used to reimburse expenses paid prior to grant approval.

“Go for it,” said Lydia DeGumbia, Connecticut ALA Unit 72. “It was well worth it just to see the results of what these grants give to the veterans and their families. It really warmed our hearts. The application was actually very easy to do. If anybody is looking to help veterans with a grant, they shouldn’t be afraid of doing it because it took me only a few minutes to do.”

DeGumbia’s unit chose a project that will allow veterans to participate in equine therapy.

Unit 72 is involved with the Shepard Meadows Equestrian Center that offers a program for veterans and their families at no cost. The unit has two horses they have adopted, Moses and Kentucky. The horses needed stalls, and the center was fundraising to build a new stable.

The unit decided to help the center by raising funds for a new stable and a bathing station for horses in the veterans therapy program. The new stable allows the horses to have a safer and drier place to live. Another benefit — veterans can still visit the horses even if it is raining.

So far, more than 25 veterans have participated in the veterans program.

“These veterans get up every day and look forward to going to the farm,” said DeGumbia.

In Maine, ALA Unit 132 identified a need for technology for residents at the Maine Veterans Home.

“During the pandemic, we became brutally aware that not being able to have access to the outside was affecting our veterans; having my mother hospitalized also during this time also gave me a bird’s-eye view of how technology would help,” said Stella Trahan, Unit 132 in Maine. “Many nurses, aides, and activity personnel started bringing in their tablets so patients could have face-to-face contact with their families.”

Unit 132 met with the activities department at the Maine Veterans Home to see what they could do to help. The unit decided they could raise money to buy a few tablets.

“We started to fundraise through word of mouth and letter writing to units throughout the state. It began slowly at first, but we were able to raise a sizable amount,” said Trahan. “After bringing this information to my unit, they wanted to know what else we could do, and if we could do more.”

Department of Maine Secretary Michelle McRae suggested they apply for a Veteran Projects Fund grant.

“The application was easy to fill out, and with the monies previously raised, we were able to purchase not only the original 10 tablets with headsets, cases, and screen protectors, but we could now purchase 40 of everything,” said Trahan. “Now, not only can our heroes at the MVH FaceTime their loved ones whenever they want to, they can also listen to audiobooks, watch movies, and play games.”

Residents are also participating in a program with area schools where students read to them. But Trahan said there are times when residents want to participate but don’t want to leave their room. The tablets allow them to join from their room and feel comfortable.

“It has improved their overall quality of life,” she said.

AFTER GRANTS ARE AWARDED

After you apply and receive the grant, you will have a few requirements to meet compliance standards. This includes grant reports, which will need to include a summary of the grant progress or outcome, photos of the project, media coverage, and financial reports. Members must return the reports within 30 days of the project’s completion.

American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters wants to ensure your hard work gets noticed! You will receive assistance creating a press release on spreading the word to your local media outlets.

“If you have a question about whether your project qualifies or about the application, please ask,” said Schutz. “Email ALAFoundation@ALAforVeterans.org or call the Development team. We are happy to answer any questions you have about your project. We want to do everything we can to help your unit, district, or department fund initiatives in your community where you see a direct need for a veteran.” ★

READY TO APPLY?

- Visit www.ALAFoundation.org
- Click on the grants tab and select Veteran Projects Fund
- Complete application and submit

DETAILS REQUIRED WHEN

FILLING OUT THE APPLICATION:

- Information about your ALA entity
- Project description
- Amount desired
- Action steps
- Target completion dates
- Actual budget



SHOW YOUR SUPPORT FOR OUR MILITARY CHILDREN THIS APRIL

Military children are strong, resilient, and supportive individuals who face many challenges and unique experiences due to their parents' military service. According to the U.S. Department of Defense, there are more than 1.6 million military children in the United States. These kids encounter trials and tribulations that are often invisible and unacknowledged.

"Military children grow up facing a myriad of different issues than most children living in our communities — they face a huge number of challenges," said Dr. Coral May Grout, ALA national Children & Youth Committee chair. "The responsibilities of dealing with a parent in the military impact not only the spouse or other caregiver, but it impacts the child."

To show military children our gratitude and recognize their bravery, April is dedicated as Military Child Appreciation Month, officially known as the Month of the Military Child (MOMC). Created in the mid-1980s, military support organizations use the month to honor the sacrifice and commitment our military children make every day.

"Devoting a month to these children demonstrates that we are behind them and that their needs are not forgotten," said Grout. "With all of these challenges facing military children, it's imperative that we join together within our communities and with our schools to provide support to these kids."

There are countless ways you can show your appreciation to our nation's military kids during the Month of the Military Child, and all year long. We need to come together to celebrate their selflessness and sacrifice from behind the scenes as they too, serve our country.

"Units can contact their nearest

United Service Organizations (USOs), and the USO will provide opportunities to help with events and activities," Grout recommended. "Contact Big Brothers Big Sisters of America to offer your help — the ALA recommends this in the Children & Youth Program Engagement Plan. If you don't live near a military facility, offer your help to local schools."

In addition to April focusing on military children, there is also a specific day to honor them — Purple Up! Day — April 15, 2024. On this special day, people are encouraged to wear purple as a symbol of support for military kids. Purple symbolizes the combined colors of the branches of the military — Army green, Marine Corps red, Navy blue, Air Force

blue, and Coast Guard blue. Purple Up! Day raises awareness of the unique challenges faced by military children, including frequent moves, deployments, and separations from loved ones. This day also serves as a reminder that these young heroes face obstacles not experienced by their civilian peers.

"Military children don't wear a badge that identifies them as military children — their friends and family know, but it's not something shared elsewhere," said Grout. "Wearing purple is a quiet but powerful way to show those military kids you care."



Ways to celebrate Month of the Military Child:

- **Get involved in schools.** Contact your local schools and ask if you or your unit can devote a special day to military kids with a breakfast or lunch to show your appreciation.
- **Volunteer your time.** Volunteer at military events and activities in your area. Military bases offer events and celebration-like festivals and carnivals in April. Contact your closest military base or USO for any opportunities.
- **Plan an event at your American Legion post home for military children.** Plan fun crafts, followed by a dinner. Ask them to share their story and the adventures they've experienced.
- **Wear purple on Purple Up! Day.** Encourage your community members, friends, family, and Legion Family members to wear purple on Purple Up! Day. Anyone can support our military children — ask as many people as you can to acknowledge this day.
- **Raise awareness.** Share pictures of your American Legion Family wearing purple, and post them on social media to spread awareness. Post photos to the ALA Children & Youth Facebook group at www.Facebook.com/groups/ALAChildrenandYouth. Ask your local mayor, state senator, or state representative to recognize Purple Up! Day.
- **Share information.** Contact your local newspaper, radio station, or news station so they can include a segment about MOMC and spread the word about this important month.

AUXILIARY EMERGENCY FUND: SUPPORTING ALA MEMBERS IN NEED

 www.Facebook.com/groups/AuxEmergencyFund

Throughout 2022-2023, the National Centers of Environmental Information reported more than 70,000 individuals were displaced from their homes because of disasters. Hurricanes, severe weather, tornadoes, flooding, and fires prevailed across the nation, affecting members of the American Legion Auxiliary. Thanks to the Auxiliary Emergency Fund (AEF) program, \$239,134.29 in funds were awarded to 169 ALA members for disaster or hardship assistance during the ALA's 2022-2023 fiscal year.

Established in 1969, our AEF program was created with a bequest from the estate of Auxiliary member Helen Colby Small of Burlington, Wisc. With generous donations from members, the AEF program has been helping ALA members

during their times of life's hardships and natural disasters.

To be eligible for this member benefit, a member must have maintained annual ALA membership for three consecutive years (the current year applying for AEF assistance and the immediate past two years) and has not been awarded AEF funding in the prior 12-month period. The AEF disaster and hardship assistance applications and program information can be found at www.ALAForVeterans.org/AEF.

AEF grants may provide up to a maximum funding award of \$3,000 in assistance. These grants can make a huge impact on the lives of our ALA members during their times of need.

However, these grants are possible only by continuing donations

from our members to sustain the program. You can personally donate to the AEF program by visiting www.ALAForVeterans.org/donate. Members who choose this method will receive the "Members Helping Members" pin when they donate \$100 or more. If a member donates to their department's collective AEF donations, they may receive a pin from their department when a listing of members who contributed a single donation of \$100 or more accompanies the check sent to ALA National Headquarters. Your personal donations and AEF fundraisers are vital to supporting this Auxiliary member benefit.



Jeanne Haas is a 70-year member of Phillips Stuckey-Shaffer Unit 296 in Gridley, Kan.

AMERICANISM: OUR STAR SPANGLED KIDS PROGRAM HELPS YOUTH

 www.Facebook.com/groups/ALAAmericanism

The ALA Star Spangled Kids project promotes Americanism and patriotism by teaching students the U.S. Constitution and respect for our nation's flag. The knowledge they gain through this project will enable them to become insightful citizens and future leaders.

Star Spangled Kids, a component of our Americanism program, encompasses the Auxiliary's mission and vision statements. Members work with their youth and community to "educate our citizens, mentor youth, and promote patriotism, good citizenship, peace, and security" and "shaping a positive future in an atmosphere of fellowship, patriotism, peace, and security" ... thereby creating Star Spangled Kids!

Through schools and youth organizations, members guide and

assist our youth in understanding the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights and their history and creation. Only by understanding our nation's history and sacrifices made to gain our citizens' rights and freedoms today will our youth comprehend the meaning of patriotism. There is no individual better suited to converse with students and make the history of the United States come to life than veterans who served our nation.

Sponsoring U.S. Constitution handouts, flag etiquette training, coloring contests, history fact presentations, the ALA Americanism Essay Contest, The American Legion Oratorical Contest, and Constitution Day events are ways to expand students' knowledge of the U.S. Constitution and patriotism. Our Junior

members are destined to be Star Spangled Kids as they participate in Legion Family events surrounding the Constitution and historical events. Acknowledging the students as ALA Star Spangled Kids through school and community award presentations encourages further youth and community engagement in our Star Spangled Kids project.

The Star Spangled Kids project instills in our youth patriotism (loyalty and commitment) in our country, which will create a nation of citizens inspired to protect our liberties and respect for the flag for future generations.



Sallie Rossman is a 20-year PUFLL member of the ALA. She belongs to Virginia Unit 325 in Danville, Va.

CHILDREN & YOUTH: INFORMATION TO HELP RECOGNIZE OUR YOUTH

 www.Facebook.com/groups/ALACHildrenandYouth



Have you ever read about a child who has done something special or significant?

The American Legion Auxiliary recognizes such accomplishments through two awards: the Youth Hero Award and the Good Deed Award. Let's delve into their differences.

The ALA Youth Hero Award recognizes youth who have saved a life or handled an emergency situation. Examples include saving a family during a house fire or obtaining help for someone who suffered a medical emergency. Our Good Deed Award recognizes youth for doing something special to help others. An example includes earning money with a lemonade stand to

purchase items for a VA hospital day room. A group of youth can be recognized. For example, the soccer team might be providing tutoring at their school.

Some suggestions for finding candidates for these awards include looking at your local sources. Media outlets love to run stories on special activities accomplished by our youth. Watch the local news, read the local newspaper, and talk with your friends and neighbors. The award doesn't need to necessarily go to your community, so be on the lookout for area towns and cities celebrating a youth's activity, yet do not have an active Auxiliary unit.

Applications are easy to complete and are available at www.ALForVeterans.org/youth-

hero-good-deed-awards. Once approved, you should arrange a photo opportunity to recognize the recipient. Remember to invite the media. If they can't come, put together a press release with photos and submit them.

Next year, please be aware that these awards will need to be completed fully online. You can still submit via regular mail for this year's awards. Let's have one or more awards from each department this year for both categories. If you have questions, please contact us.



Dr. Coral May Grout is a 70-year-member of the ALA. She is a lifetime member of Eugene M. Connor Unit 193 in Massachusetts.

LEGISLATIVE: UNDERSTANDING OUR LEGISLATIVE RESOURCES

 www.Facebook.com/groups/ALALegislative



Legislative alerts and personal letters from constituents have a powerful

influence on members of Congress. They want to hear from you so they can gauge public opinion on specific issues.

What are our resources, and what do they mean?

Grassroots advocacy is a community or organization mobilizing to address an issue they are all impacted by. ALA members are the grassroots advocates for our veterans, military, and their families.

Action alerts are messages you receive via email when a legislative issue supported by The American Legion is in a crucial state and

needs your support immediately. You must register for these action alerts online.

Votervoice is our grassroots advocacy software that lets you reach out to elected officials and ask them to vote for or against legislation that matters to our organization. American Legion messages to Congress are linked through this software program.

All of these resources for American Legion Family members to assist in becoming effective grassroots advocates can be found through The American Legion's Grassroots Action Center. You can find current legislative issues on the Action Center's website. You can also look up your legislative representatives simply by entering your ZIP code. If you subscribe to the Legion's Action Alerts, you will receive a notification

when a vote is near and your voice is especially needed.

With one click, you can send a message written by The American Legion's legislative staff to your U.S. representatives and U.S. senators. No need to maneuver through several websites or pages — all of this information is on one page and can be accessed at www.votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/home.

Remember: Tips for contacting members of Congress with the traditional methods and email can be found on the ALA Legislative Committee page in the MyAuxiliary member portal at member.legion-aux.org/member/committees/legislative.



Donna Dillard is a PUFL member of Lake Kiowa Unit 265 in Lake Kiowa, Texas.

POPPY: CHANGES TO ALA POPPY PROGRAM YOUTH CONTESTS

 www.Facebook.com/groups/ALAPoppy

Many members have expressed concerns about the cost of Little Miss Poppy scrapbooks and postage, saying it's what prevented them from entering Junior members in their unit/department, so we are excited to share a new method for our Little Miss Poppy national entry.

We have not changed the rules, and, as a department, you can require your Little Miss Poppy to make a scrapbook just as they have in the past. However, national Little Miss Poppy entries must apply electronically. The mailing cost will no longer be a factor in an applicant being able to compete.

The youth of today are very well-versed in computers. I am sure they will be excited about this new method of sharing how they spread the poppy story in their

communities.

The first and most important thing is to determine the age of your Junior member on June 1, 2024 — she must be at least 6 years old and not more than 12 years old. Additionally, any Little Miss Poppy can submit an application. She doesn't need to be the Little Miss Poppy chosen by the department.

You will find all of the rules, as well as the electronic application, at www.ALAforVeterans.org/Member/Awards/Little-Miss-Poppy-Contest. Read the application carefully, and if you have any questions, please email poppy@ALAforVeterans.org.

Also new this administrative



year is a cover sheet for the ALA Poppy Poster Contest which may be found at www.ALAforVeterans.org/National-Poppy-Poster-Contest. Please be sure the student's home address is completed on the form. We look forward to some great posters again this year!

Poppies remind us of the sacrifices many made so we can live in a free country. It's up to the American Legion Auxiliary to continue spreading the word as we share poppies throughout the year.



Norma Tramm has been a member of the ALA since she was 3 years old. She belongs to Frank Kray Unit 455 in Cold Spring, Minn.

NATIONAL SECURITY: COLLABORATE WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

 www.Facebook.com/groups/ALANatlSec



A key statement of the American Legion Auxiliary's National Security program is to

maintain and promote a strong national defense by strengthening and supporting military servicemembers and their families. Many ALA units have established relationships with Family Readiness Groups on nearby military installations. This is a wonderful way to get actively involved in helping to enhance the quality of life for servicemembers.

Collaborating with outside organizations is another way to get involved either with monies or time. Armed Services YMCA (ASYMCA) supports food pantries for servicemembers and their

families. The Blue Star Families organization touches more than 1.5 million military family members every year. Find a Blue Star chapter near you and make a difference. The United Service Organizations (USO) has 250 locations around the globe and relies on support to help servicemembers stay connected to the people, places, and things they love. Some of the outreach support includes care packages, snacks, holiday celebration items, and internet services. The Quilts of Valor Foundation wraps active duty and veterans in a comforting and healing Quilt of Valor. There are groups in every state that can use financial assistance or your skills in making or awarding quilts.

Looking for ways to get involved if there is no military installation

close to you? Remember that the National Guard or Reserve unit in your area may be activated, and they and their families can be supported in many ways. Another area often forgotten: recruiting stations in your town. Recruiting officers are active-duty service personnel and may be serving a long way from home and loved ones. Stop by and drop off a thank-you treat and ask what you can do for them.

Check out the National Security Facebook group and www.ALAforVeterans.org/Member/Committees/National-Security for more information on these and other National Security emphases.



Ann Rehbein is a lifetime member of the American Legion Auxiliary. She belongs to Ames, Iowa Unit 37.

AUXILIARY READER SURVEY PROVIDES IMPORTANT MEMBER INFORMATION

Auxiliary is a membership magazine, meaning it's all about you! It highlights what ALA members are doing to support our longstanding mission of serving veterans, military, and their families.

Every few years, American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters conducts a reader survey to learn more about our *Auxiliary* magazine audience, which articles are most read, overall satisfaction with the magazine, and more.

Based on feedback from each reader survey, we are better able to tailor *Auxiliary* magazine toward what you — the readers — want to learn about and implement within

your own units and departments to help fulfill the ALA's mission.

Like *Auxiliary* magazine, it's common for other publications to also survey their readers every year or every few years. Doing so allows the publication to target the content of the magazine to its unique readers.

In mid-2024, National Headquarters will be conducting a reader survey in an effort to better understand members' interests, preferred modes of communication, and much more. The more National Headquarters knows about our membership and their expectations, the better we can serve our members' needs.

The survey will be randomly sent out to a sample of American Legion Auxiliary members in early May. If you are one of the members who receives it, we would appreciate you taking the time to respond. The survey will be

conducted by Readex Research, a nationally recognized independent research company. It will be sent to ALA members via postal mail and email to request your feedback on the quarterly *Auxiliary*.

Our magazine — like other association publications in the industry — is in a unique position related to membership. According to The YGS Group, the high-quality and relevant content of an organization's magazine is almost always directly tied to attracting and retaining members. *Auxiliary* is a great tool to do just that!

Member feedback is extremely appreciated in any capacity and is compiled and considered on a constant basis as National Headquarters plans content for future magazines and other national ALA media. We want to know your thoughts as an *Auxiliary* magazine reader — email ALAMagazine@ALAforVeterans.org.



New ALA history-focused blog series debuts

Get acquainted with our latest blog series — the *American Legion Auxiliary History's Mysteries*! Every month, we will explore the accomplishments, ALA members, the Auxiliary's Cavalcade of Memories Museum, recent acquisitions, projects in the archives, and so much more.

Visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/history-blog.

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Provided by Brister Thomas, National Chaplain 2023-2024 | www.Facebook.com/groups/ALAchaplains

FEBRUARY

Embracing love for your fellow ALA members

Love is in the air.

February is most often a time imbued with themes of love. Agape love, puppy love, infatuation, eros, and even with a tender embrace, love is in the air — a divine symphony echoing through hearts. Whether romantic or familial, love transcends, weaving a tapestry of warmth and connection. Inspired by 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, let us embody love's essence. Patient and kind, it fosters understanding and heals.

For our Jewish members, may this month bring a renewed sense of community and connection. Shabbat, the day of rest and worship, is a time to disconnect from the hustle and bustle of daily life and reconnect with one another and with God. May your observance bring you joy and peace.

For our Muslim members, may this month also be a time of reflection and spiritual growth as you honor Ramadan, a time of fasting, prayer, and charity.

As we breathe in the sweet air of February, may we exhale compassion and kindness. In this season of love, let every heartbeat echo the profound truth: Love is not merely spoken; it's lived. Maybe ask ourselves: How have we loved those in our unit? Our department? As members of the American Legion Auxiliary, let's reflect on the profound power of unity and faith. When was the last time you looked around your ALA meeting to see who might be feeling lonely? Who might need an extra hug or a note of kindness? Share your love.

As we journey through February, let love and unity be our constant companions. Let's work together to put love in the air.

MARCH

March'ing Forward in Faith

"Forward, March!" Many of us have heard this term. But what might it mean to us?

The people of God are often likened to an army as when the children of Israel were told to march in Exodus 14: "Go forward!" "Forward, March!"

I'm reminded of this story about 'March'ing — It was a hot, blistering day, and the men, longing for water and rest, were impatient to reach the next town. A rancher rode past and one of the soldiers called out to him and said, "Hey! How far is it to the next town?" The rancher said, "Oh, about 2 miles or so, I reckon." Another long hour dragged by, and they saw another rancher. "How far to the next town?" the men asked him eagerly. "Oh, it's a good 2 miles," he said. After another half hour of marching, a third rancher came by, and again the men said, "Hey, how far is the next town?" "Not far" was the encouraging answer. "Only about 2 miles." And the optimistic sergeant sighed and said, "Well, at least we're

holding our own." — www.ahajokes.com/war062.html

It may sometimes seem like our progresses are few or as if our steps are not getting us anywhere. Let's remind us that we are called with the command: "FORWARD, MARCH!"

As members of the American Legion Auxiliary, let us use this month to renew our commitment to service and to each other. Whether in supporting veterans, empowering youth, or uplifting our communities, let our actions be a testament to the enduring power of faith in action.

March forward with purpose, fueled by the flame of faith that burns within each of us. Together, let us march forward, hand in hand, as a testament to the unyielding power of faith that unites us all.

APRIL

Hope Revealed

Hope, hope, hope. It's a powerful action if we allow it.

April unfolds with the radiant threads of Easter and Passover, both proclaiming a universal theme: "Hope Revealed." In February, we reached out to our ALA members then we "March"ed forward together. Now, let our common bond be our shared hope for the future. As Christians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, the embodiment of hope, and Jews commemorate the liberation during Passover, a shared narrative of hope emerges.

Hebrews 6:19 — This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain into God's inner sanctuary.

Easter echoes with the triumphant proclamation that hope is not only alive but eternally victorious. The empty tomb signifies the revelation of hope beyond human understanding — a hope that transcends darkness, bringing forth new beginnings and spiritual rebirth.

Simultaneously, Passover reflects a historical journey from oppression to liberation, illustrating that hope can emerge even in the bleakest of circumstances.

In the convergence of these sacred moments, believers of various traditions find common ground — a profound belief in hope as an enduring force.

Let's work together to allow April to become a testament to the universality of hope, inviting us to embrace its transformative power across all faiths and traditions.

May each of you be blessed in a way that fills your heart and energizes your spirit. Thank you for your continued commitment to our organization and to the communities we serve. Let us live and spread hope every day.



Brister Thomas is a military spouse, daughter, and PUJL member from eUnit 56 in Hawai'i.



ARE YOU BEING NICE OR ARE YOU BEING KIND?

IT MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE IN MEMBERSHIP

An American Legion Auxiliary unit's answer to the question of being nice or being kind can hold the key to attracting new members — and to retaining those who've been with the organization for years.

“Those two words — nice and kind — aren't synonyms,” said Minju Witte, an Indianapolis-based etiquette expert and trainer.

Being nice is just that — it's nice. And while that's important, being kind goes a step further.

“Nice is being pleasant, polite, and civilized,” Witte said. “But I would argue that to make somebody feel included and welcomed, it also takes kindness. Kindness is about being thoughtful, caring, and considerate. There's a difference.”

Karen Toll, 2023-2024 ALA national Membership Committee chair, said for the organization's units, exhibiting the type of kindness that makes people feel valued and included is critical. And that means doing more to welcome new members while also reminding existing members about why they're important to the organization's mission.

It means being nice, telling newcomers hello and welcoming them to the group. But it also means being kind — going the extra mile to build relationships and encourage inclusivity among new and existing members alike.

These behaviors pay dividends for an entire organization, as groups whose participants feel appreciated

and connected are more likely to attract and retain members.

So, how can ALA units extend this membership-building kindness to their new and existing members? Here are four tips from Toll and Witte:

1. Explain the details. Toll, a member of ALA Unit 203 in Latonia, Ky., said communication is the cornerstone of kindness for Auxiliary units. And nowhere is that more apparent than during new member onboarding. Too often, she said, “we get new members, and we're very excited to sign them up, and then we just drop the ball.”

Toll recommended conducting periodic new-member sessions to outline the ALA's mission and programs, as well as encouraging attendance at Mission Training meetings. Another source of information that can connect members is the American Legion Auxiliary National Membership Group on Facebook. Additionally, assigned mentors can be a resource to shepherd new members through the basics of ALA membership.

2. Offer to help. Kindness includes taking the initiative to assist those who might need it, Witte said. To do this, she recommended paying close attention to any specific needs a member might have, such as those related to disability issues. Then the group should ensure that its practices — from offering lower tables to accommodate wheelchair

users to providing up-front seating for people who are hard of hearing — address those concerns.

Toll suggested establishing a committee to answer questions, offer rides, and connect members to the resources they need for assistance.

3. Make it personal. Witte encouraged ALA members to look for opportunities to learn about new and existing members' interests and concerns. “Go out of your comfort zone,” she said. “Make conversation with others and get to know them.”

And that personal connection shouldn't stop there, according to Toll. One opportunity to continue that outreach is through general membership announcements, like events information or holiday greetings. She suggested occasionally including a separate message just to the recipient. “It's a personal touch,” she said. “I've been a member for 26 years and I enjoy getting that.”

4. Plan a gathering. Social activities, such as cookouts or picnics, are great for encouraging kindness among members. Events that include members' families present an opportunity to build connections — and even get the attention of relatives who might become members. In fact, Toll said, allowing members to bring friends and family to ALA events can be a great way to showcase the organization's mission and value.

Toll also suggested asking those who attend these ALA functions to wear nametags, noting that they do more than identify the people wearing them. They also put people at ease when reaching out to others whose names they might not recall. Random seating is another way to encourage connections between people who otherwise might not have gotten to know each other.

The bottom line, Witte said, is for members to challenge themselves in all ALA activities, thinking about whether they are being nice or being kind.

“Kindness,” she said, “is action-oriented and authentic. Your number-one goal is trying to meet the needs of others.”



opportunity, it's a pretty easy way to get the American Legion Auxiliary's name out even more to the public.

Is your ALA department interested in applying for the same benefit in your state? An SGR plate can promote an organization while using the revenue to improve services provided or special projects. An organization seeking initial participation in the SGR license plate program must submit a completed application, including the required documentation to the BMV.

Applying for Indiana's specialty ALA plate wasn't an overnight deal.

"The process was long and tedious," Schutz said. "Development Assistant Amanda Freeman and I worked together for several days to pull together all of the documentation needed for the application. We created a Formstack form to obtain the 500 signatures, we compiled several years of financials, and submitted everything on file for the Auxiliary Emergency Fund to plead our case. I presented the idea to the National Executive Committee, and they voted to approve it in February 2022. Ultimately, I had to testify in front of the Roads and Transportation Committee at the Indiana Statehouse. We submitted our application in March 2023, I testified in October 2023, and we received the final approval Nov. 1, 2023, for the 2024 registration year beginning January 1."

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS GETS ALA LICENSE PLATE APPROVED FOR INDIANA

DEPARTMENTS ARE ENCOURAGED TO APPLY FOR ONE TOO!

The American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters was approved for a Special Group Recognition (SGR) license plate for the first time! The ALA-branded license plate is available to all Indiana residents this registration year, which began Jan. 1. Indiana residents can select the plate when they renew online at www.in.gov/bmv/registration-plates/home or at their local BMV. The exciting update also included a motorcycle license plate.

The SGR license plate is \$40 to purchase, and \$25 of that will go back to the national American Legion Auxiliary to support the Auxiliary Emergency Fund. The

opportunity is a wonderful way to give back to fellow ALA members facing a financial hardship or crisis.

"This is such a great way to display your support and membership to the American Legion Auxiliary," said ALA National Headquarters Development Director Carley Schutz. "It's a great branding tool for the organization, and it directly benefits a program — AEF — that is crucial to so many of our ALA members."

Think of how many times you've sat in traffic or passed people on the road, and you noticed their license plate. The unique plates usually stand out! Through this license plate

Thinking about applying? Make sure you can provide documentation for the following:

1. 500 signatures of state residents who pledge to purchase the SGR plate. You must sell at least 500 plates in the first two years that the plate is offered and maintain that sale or renewal during each subsequent year thereafter.
 2. Financial statements, including three consecutive annual reports and the last three annual audits.
 3. A copy of a certified motion passed by the board of directors of the special group requesting that the SGR license plate be issued by the BMV.
 4. Evidence of statewide public benefit from the special group.
- Find the complete application checklist on your state BMV's website to get started. If you need

additional help navigating the process, reach out to ALA National Headquarters' Schutz at cschutz@ALAforVeterans.org or (317) 569-4500.

"Take your time," Schutz advised. "Make sure your application is complete and thorough. You will not get a second chance to submit if something is missing — you will have to wait until the following year. And, ask questions. Reach out to the BMV and ask questions along the way."

If approved for the license plate, states won't have to reapply for 10 years. It will become a steady income stream for your department.





AN UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCE: Loor Elbedour, wearing purple at left at ALA Virginia Girls State 2023; Laila Ali proudly representing California at ALA Girls Nation 2023.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: ALA GIRLS STATE/NATION PARTICIPANTS SHARE THEIR STORIES

Our ALA Girls State and Nation programs shape the lives of thousands of teens each summer and lead to lifelong friendships. The impact can be seen right away. Here are the personal stories from two recent alumnae.

Loor Elbedour ALA Virginia Girls State 2023

Marvelous and unforgettable. These are the two adjectives I would use to describe the singular week I spent at ALA Virginia Girls State. From the dance parties in the auditorium to the intense late-night moot court prep sessions, I enjoyed every minute.

Being surrounded by highly motivated and intelligent girls inspired me to challenge myself and prompted me to become an active member of the city sessions. At ALA Girls State, every voice mattered, and everyone was encouraged to participate. I witnessed the shyest girls break out of their shells and become leaders.

At ALA Girls State, my horizons were broadened drastically by how many diverse groups exist all over Virginia. I made long-lasting

friendships with girls I would have never met if it weren't for the program. In one week, I made memories and learned principles I will never forget.

In my perspective, ALA Girls State isn't only for individuals interested in government but rather for anyone who truly aspires to get firsthand experience in leadership roles. Every speaker we had highlighted the importance of leadership and why it is crucial for our generation to speak up.

As a refugee, I dreamed of becoming part of a community so welcoming and enriching. I went from being a 7-year-old girl who couldn't speak English to becoming an elected lawyer who argued a case in front of a packed auditorium at ALA Girls State. The amount of gratitude I feel for being able to participate in a program like this is infinitely abundant. This opportunity is truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience I believe every high school junior should strive to receive.

Laila Ali ALA California Girls State and ALA Girls Nation 2023

ALA Girls Nation taught me the

true value of democracy. In a world filled with divisions, this program reinforced the importance of open dialogue, compromise, and unity in shaping our nation's future. I had the privilege of engaging in debates, discussing policy matters, and working closely with my fellow delegates. It was through these interactions that I came to appreciate the power of diverse perspectives in finding common ground and achieving progress.

ALA Girls Nation allowed me to witness the potential for positive change. I had the opportunity to draft and debate mock legislation, advocating for policies I believed would improve the lives of Americans. It showed me that regardless of our age, we can make a difference by being engaged, informed, and passionate about the issues that matter most to us.

Perhaps one of the most impactful aspects of ALA Girls Nation was the bond I formed with my fellow delegates. Despite our diverse backgrounds and perspectives, we came together as a tight-knit community, supporting and learning from one another. These friendships transcended state lines, and I'm grateful for the lasting connections.

My ALA Girls Nation experience was truly transformative, and I'm thankful for the opportunities the American Legion Auxiliary have provided me. Debating in the senate allowed my passion for legislation to intensify. Campaigning for president taught me the value of my words, of having a platform, and utilizing it. Viewing the D.C. monuments instilled in me a profound sense of patriotism and civic responsibility. I am so excited to take what I learned and use it to make a positive impact on my community and beyond. One day, when I become a legislator, I will credit ALA Girls Nation for allowing me to recognize my passions for government and legislation.



ALA Missouri Girls State program featured in AppleTV+ documentary

Girls State premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in January. Directed and produced by award-winning filmmakers Jesse Moss and Amanda McBaine (*Boys State*), the documentary will be available on Apple TV+.

SCHOLARSHIP HELPS ALA MEMBER PURSUE NAVY CAREER

Through the Spirit of Youth Scholarship fund, three separate scholarship opportunities are available for participants in American Legion Auxiliary programs: one for American Legion Auxiliary Junior members, one for the Junior Member of the Year, and one for participants in the ALA Girls Nation program.

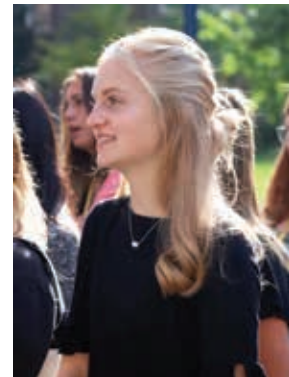
Maria Cornelius has been a lifelong Auxiliary member for 19 years. She is eligible for membership through George E. Fehringer, a World War II veteran.

What does it mean to you to have a World War II connection to the military?

I feel extremely fortunate and blessed to have this pre-existing and continual connection with the military. Being a member of the American Legion Auxiliary has been nothing but a positive experience. The resources and programs this community provides for upperclassmen in high school really shaped my college decision upon graduation, and ultimately influenced my decision to join the United States Navy to later commission as an officer.

Do you have any favorite events or programs you've participated in as an ALA member?

As a junior in high school,



GETTING INVOLVED: ALA member Maria Cornelius is in the Navy ROTC program at the University of San Diego in California and is a past participant of ALA Colorado Girls State.

I attended ALA Colorado Girls State. During this experience, I was able to meet other women who were also passionate about global affairs and had high aspirations after graduating high school. I met other women who were also interested in joining the military, and these acquaintances helped me decide that I wanted to be a part of Navy ROTC in college. As a little kid, I remember distributing poppies at my elementary school and singing the National Anthem for our school's field day in sixth grade.

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

I am attending the University of San Diego in California. I am studying political science with a double minor in naval science and music.

What sparked your interest in this area of study?

I hope to commission into intelligence or surface warfare intelligence upon graduation in 2027. I chose to study political science because the pathway is a great setup for pursuing intelligence later in my military career. The San Diego Navy ROTC unit is one of the most involved with the United States naval fleet and is located in a beautiful part of the country.

What inspired you to apply for an ALA Spirit of Youth Scholarship?

I have been a lifelong member of

the ALA. My great-grandma Dorys — whom I was very close with when I was younger — volunteered and was a part of the ALA for almost 75 years. I was inspired by her contribution to this organization and her timeless sense of patriotism. I applied for this scholarship in her memory, knowing she would be proud I am pursuing an education and career with the United States Navy.

How did you feel when you found out you won this scholarship?

I was greatly honored, as I considered it a gift from those who volunteered and served before me. Winning this scholarship made it possible for me to attend the University of San Diego, and I feel very fortunate that I am able to study at this university.

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

For one, I would like to say thank you! Your contribution to the ALA to help support students like me makes their education and career goals a possibility; it means so much. I feel blessed that I will be able to give back to my country as I go on to serve in the United States Navy but fully acknowledge that this opportunity has been made possible by the generous donors who help to support the funding of the ALA scholarship.



BE THE ONE: The Department of Arizona American Legion Family hosted a Be the One walk. Go to Legion.org to see a video about this project (photos: Carlos Moreno/The American Legion).

BRINGING ATTENTION TO THE MISSION OF BE THE ONE

Be the One. It's a mission of The American Legion Family to end veteran suicide and destigmatize the need to ask for mental help.

The Department of Arizona American Legion Family brought attention to the mission last November by hosting a Be the One walk and fireside chat with National Security Commission Chair Matt Shuman and National Executive Director/Chief Marketing Officer Dean Kessel. They discussed the mission and how everyone can save a life.

The purpose of the walk was to push out a message to the community that anyone can check in on a veteran or invite them to an event.

That simple action can help save a life. A Be the One flag led the walk as Legion Family members shared their stories of why this mission matters to them. They also stopped along the route to share their stories

at a coffee shop.

Following the walk, Legion Family members attended the fireside chat and learned how the mission became a reality and how each of them could Be the One.

Kessel shared the story of a servicemember who approached the

Be the One mobile activation unit at the INDYCAR race in St. Petersburg, Fla., and needed support. The man was in the Navy and had learned he was deploying for the 17th time, and he didn't want to go. A Legion service office was onsite and was able to talk with the man. He then connected him with mental health services with the VA. Not only did he

get the help that day, but he joined the Legion Riders, where he will continue to be supported by other Riders.

Shuman discussed how every Legion Family member can Be the

BE THE ONE

ASK
A veteran in your life
how they are doing

LISTEN
When a veteran
needs to talk

REACH OUT
When a veteran
is struggling

BETHEONE.ORG



One, emphasizing the need to check in on veterans you haven't seen in a while. If they aren't showing up at the post, figure out why.

Any action, large or small, can make a difference. Learn more about how you can Be The One at www.BetheOne.org. If you are struggling or know someone who is, the national crisis line is available by calling 988.

A NEW CO-HOST JOINS 'TANGO ALPHA LIMA'

Television producer, retired Air Force photojournalist, and American Legion member Stacy Pearsall has joined the Legion's award-winning *Tango Alpha Lima* podcast team, and co-hosts alongside



Air Force spouse and American Legion Auxiliary member Ashley Gutermuth for the fifth season.

Tell us about your combat deployments.

My first real combat deployment was in 2003. I was documenting medical evacuation and resupply missions on C-17 combat sorties from Ramstein to Baghdad. Later that year, I was assigned to cover ground-force and helicopter operations in and around Baghdad. I was injured the first time after my Humvee was struck by an IED. I rehabbed for a stint before being accepted at Syracuse University, where I studied journalism. Upon course completion, I volunteered to go back to the 1st Combat Camera Squadron. Of course, I had several more overseas temporary assignments before deploying back to Iraq in 2007. I was assigned to Forward Operating Base Warhorse in Diyala Province. It was there I suffered another combat trauma, which ended my career.

Describe the film-to-digital evolution for you, as a storyteller.

I started learning photography using black-and-white and color slide film — a medium that is unforgiving. You really had to know what you're doing. In the digital age, where most smartphones have

intuitive cameras built in, one can snap a pic and it will likely be decent. However, using a dedicated camera — digital or otherwise — still requires skill. For professional photojournalists like me, there's still an ethical obligation to the public too. While everyone has a camera in their cellphones, very few people understand the power it holds. The pictures that are shared, how they're captured, and how they're edited, may all influence how the viewer interprets the information.

Can you give us an update on your PBS series about veterans?

After Action is a TV series I host on PBS where I sit down with three new veterans every episode to discuss topics important to the veteran community. Season 1 premiered on Veterans Day 2022 and was well received by veterans and non-veterans alike. From the beginning, I knew if we could touch one life — one veteran or a loved one of a veteran who may be struggling — that it was worth it. I'm thrilled to say Season 2 will hit PBS beginning in May.

What interested you in co-hosting the podcast?

It's a natural fit considering all I do within the veteran community already, and the podcast has such a diverse cast of guests. I couldn't pass up the opportunity to meet and chat with them.

What will you bring to the podcast that's new?

I hope to offer a fresh perspective and ask questions others might not. I will draw from my own experiences and more than 8,500 other veterans I've met and interviewed through the years. Plus,

my service dog, Charlie, will be by my side, and who doesn't like dogs?

You can listen and watch future and past episodes of *Tango Alpha Lima* on www.Legion.org, the Legion's YouTube channel, and other major podcast-hosting sites.

By Henry Howard

SAVE THE DATE

The second annual American Legion Family Day is April 27. A Legion resolution passed in October 2022 established the day to be observed annually on the last Saturday of April.

On this day, posts are encouraged to open their doors for the community to learn about The American Legion Family and the Be the One mission. This is a great opportunity to connect with



veterans in your community and others who want to know who we are, what we do, and why we matter.

Follow American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters' social media @ALAforVeterans for more updates as the event day draws closer. Do you already have a plan in your post home? Email us at ALAMagazine@ALAforVeterans.org.



Be active in our advocacy

The American Legion Auxiliary can help The American Legion's advocacy efforts in Congress. It's easy to join in by going to The American Legion's Grassroots Action Center at www.Legion.org/Legislative. There you can stay informed on the issues and communicate online with your members of Congress.



At the age of 80, Stan Cottrell has had more than his share of experiences and accolades. The renowned ultra-distance runner has been recognized by the Guinness Book of World Records numerous times.

He ran through all five continents and dozens of countries, including China's forbidden zones in 1984.

Cottrell completed 100-day coast-to-coast runs across the United States three times. He received presidential and congressional awards for his humanitarian achievements, and accolades from foreign leaders. He has served his country as a Marine. And he has written several books, has been the subject of numerous films, and has conducted hundreds of media interviews.

But Cottrell is not ready to hang up his running shoes just yet. Nor is he ready to stop giving back.

Cottrell is hitting the pavement in March to raise awareness about veterans who suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, suicide, and other mental health challenges. The run — which winds through Georgia — is the latest in a series of ultramarathons undertaken by Cottrell for more than four decades.

Cottrell, who currently lives in Tucker, Ga., grew up in eastern Kentucky. It was there that he discovered his love of long-distance running. As a 12-year-old, he won a 100-yard dash running barefoot at the county fair, walking away with a treasured blue ribbon.

Since then, Cottrell — a former CEO/executive for numerous companies — has pushed the limits of what many would consider possible. So far, his more than 283,000 miles run — a world record — have included the following:

- 3,100 miles from Los Angeles to New York in 1980
- 2,125 miles across China, from The Great Wall to Guangzhou in 1984
- 6,000 miles in Russia in 1992
- 150 miles in Nairobi, Kenya in 2005
- 2,022 miles through Georgia, Florida, and Tennessee as part of the VET 22 Suicide Prevention Run, a fundraiser for the nonprofit VET 22, named in honor of the estimated 22 U.S. military veterans who commit suicide every day.

Cottrell, who has held roles as a serial entrepreneur, college instructor, coach, and pharmaceutical salesperson, launched the Amazing Friendship Run as part of the nonprofit group Friendship Sports Association he founded. Cottrell's life of inspiration is captured in his books Thoughts on the Run and No Mountain Too High.

Why are you dedicating this run to veterans?

It's important to raise awareness about a major problem we're experiencing in America right now. Every day, an average of 22 veterans are committing suicide. These are the people who fought for us on the battlefields in foreign countries. They're coming home, but the nightmare of what they've experienced is still with them. They're having a hard time processing it. Back when I served in the Marine Corps, our motto was "Leave no man behind." That's still true. We must do everything we can to support our veterans. God has poured into me to give me these abilities. I'm using them to give back, to raise awareness about the challenges facing our veterans.

After decades, how do you stay inspired to keep running long distances?

We can never put limitations on what we're capable of doing, no matter our age. We need to hold on to our dreams. A long time ago, I made it my mission to use my long-distance running to encourage people to discover their own gifts.

Some of your runs have had incredible challenges, including extreme weather. How do you keep going?

One of my favorite scriptures is Philippians 4:13, which says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." When I run, I'm constantly thinking of Christ, who strengthens me, and I keep saying, "Hang on for just five more minutes."

As a 12-year-old, did you ever imagine you would be here?

Never in my wildest dreams did I think that running would take me all around the world ... to places

like Ethiopia, Scotland, Poland, Argentina, and Korea. Through running, I have had the privilege of meeting many incredible people from all walks of life, including students, farmers, and dignitaries. I am blessed.



Stanley W. COTTRELL, Jr., Western Ky. State College, at USMC PFC Summer Training 1962, Quantico, Virginia



TIME TO MAKE PLANS FOR NATIONAL POPPY DAY®

National Poppy Day is May 24 this year (always the Friday before Memorial Day), and now is a great time to prepare.

If American Legion Auxiliary units want to distribute the traditional crepe paper poppies, they will need to procure an adequate supply of poppies — either from veteran poppy makers within their department/state, from American Legion Flag & Emblem Sales, or from other departments within the American Legion Auxiliary. Need help? Contact poppy@ALAforVeterans.org. If you'd like to learn how to assemble poppies, refer to the *ALA Poppy Program Guide*, which can be found in the MyAuxiliary member portal at www.ALAforVeterans.org.

National Poppy Day resources

Visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/National-Poppy-Day to find resources as you make plans for your activities. Here you will find:

- **Overview of the ALA Poppy Program:** Learn more about the history of the poppy and the designation of the Friday before Memorial Day as National Poppy Day.
- **Poppy funds information:** Learn how ALA members can use poppy funds to support veterans and active-duty military.
- **Tips on how to participate:** There are many ways individuals

and groups can help bring greater awareness to this symbolic flower, honor our fallen, and support the living on National Poppy Day. View suggestions of simple ways to get your community involved.

- **ALA-branded banners:** Use these National Poppy Day banner templates for printing on vinyl material to ensure your American Legion Family is always prominently displayed and represented at mission-related functions.

Banner sizes are 8 feet by 2 feet and 8 feet by 3 feet.

- **ALA-branded posters:** Both 11-by-17-inch and 18-by-24-inch National Poppy Day posters are available in print-quality PDF formats. These posters can be printed at most commercial printers such as a FedEx Office/Kinko's that offer oversized color digital printing.

- **ALA poppy coloring books:** Consider ordering ALA poppy coloring books — a great way to educate kids about the meaning behind the poppy. The books are



available for purchase from Emblem Sales and can be downloaded for free from www.ALAforVeterans.org.

- **In Flanders Fields video:** View and share a video of actor James McEachin providing a special reading of *In Flanders Fields*.

- **Media templates and logos:** Raise awareness and increase participation in your post, unit, and community.

- **Link to the Poppy Shop at Emblem Sales:** Purchase National Poppy Day pins, event supplies, and products.

Marketing your National Poppy Day and Memorial Day events

No matter what you have planned, an important part of every event is letting people know about it. Here are some tips to get the word out about your activities:

- **Post your event on social media:** Let people know when and where the event will be. Also, as we approach National Poppy Day, consider posting poppy-related information like the meaning behind the poppy, *In Flanders Fields*, etc. Many of these posts can be shared from National Headquarters' social media accounts [@ALAforVeterans](https://www.instagram.com/ALAforVeterans).

- **Contact your local media:** Send them a news release with the information about your event. Be sure to include the importance of the poppy and Memorial Day.

- **Display branded flyers and posters:** Distribute throughout the community and show at your post.

- **Get it in the news:** Include information in American Legion Family newsletters.



Share your plans and activities with us!

We'd love to hear what you're doing for National Poppy Day and Memorial Day! Drop us a line at ALAMagazine@ALAforVeterans.org.

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



COMING UP

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

- Month of the Military Child: April
- Purple Up! Day: April 15
- American Legion Family Day: April 27
- 2024 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival in Denver: May 11-18
- National Poppy Day®: Friday before Memorial Day (May 24 this year)



ONLINE RESOURCES FOR NATIONAL POPPY DAY®

As you start planning your National Poppy Day activities, you can find several resources at www.ALAforVeterans.org. Log in to the MyAuxiliary member portal and go to the Poppy Committee page. Some of the materials you will find:

- Donation can label
- Poppy bookmark
- News release template
- Sample proclamation
- Poppy coloring book



DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA?

Q: How do I know if a Facebook group is connected to ALA National Headquarters?

A: Great question! It can be overwhelming to search “American Legion Auxiliary” in Facebook and see all of the many groups and pages available. Here’s an easy way to find our official Facebook groups: Visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/social-media and halfway down the page, you’ll see a listing of the official ALA Facebook groups. From there, just click on the groups you want to join.

Q: Our unit is starting a Facebook page. How should we name it?

A: A Facebook page is a free and ideal way to be in front of the public. We encourage your profile name to be as specific as possible. Include your unit number, city, and state. For example, “American Legion Auxiliary Unit 123, city, state.” Also make sure your name is not “American Legion Ladies Auxiliary” or “Women’s Auxiliary.” Remember: Male spouses of veterans and current military who are Legionnaires are eligible for ALA membership, so be inclusive to all members — present and potential.



DO YOU READ THE ALA BLOG?

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

START PLANNING NOW FOR NATIONAL POPPY DAY!



Poppy Display Board
340.135



Button/Ribbon Combo
(to identify volunteers)
320.115



Poppy Day Bracelet
414.960



Crepe Paper Poppies
(with labels)
340.400CP



Table Runners
Auxiliary (340.132) or
Poppies (440.130)

Many additional Poppy items available on our web site!
* Proceeds support American Legion Family programs



Emblem.Legion.org

AUX MG 0224



NEED MEMBERSHIP APPLICATIONS IN A FLASH?

American Legion Family membership applications can be downloaded from www.ALAforVeterans.org and printed in black and white and color formats. The traditional brochures are still available from your department office.

**“We cherish, too, the poppy red
that grows on fields where valor led.”**

— Moina Michael, *We Shall Keep the Faith*



Looking back at history is often bittersweet, filled with fond memories. Miss Poppy at the unit, department, and national level has been part of the ALA's history for decades as it continues to remind us of the importance of the poppy itself. Julie Ross, Department of Arizona poppy chair, recently made an exciting discovery of Arizona's first Miss Poppy (1959): Peggy Chilton Closky is still active as a member and serves as a unit treasurer today. Her mother was ALA Past National President Lois Maxine Chilton (1972-1973). Let us continue to preserve our rich history for future generations, and always remember the significance of the poppy.

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

Celebrating Women of Service

International Women's Day is March 8. Support the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation by donating to the Celebrating Women of Service campaign in honor of a woman who inspires you. A tribute donation offers you a thoughtful way to celebrate a special person while contributing to our

mission to positively impact the lives of our veterans, military, and their families by funding programs of the ALA today and for future generations.

You can make a gift today by scanning the QR code, texting **WOMAN** to 1-844-940-3450, mailing a check to

the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation at 3450 Founders Road, Indianapolis, IN 46268, or by visiting us online at: donate.legion-aux.org/woman.

Scan here to make a gift:

