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Auxiliary



FEATURES

- **28 YOUTH EMPOWERMENT** Young women from across the country attend ALA Girls Nation.
- 30 LEADING THE WAY Members mark the end of the 2024-2025 ALA year.
- 34 MISSION + FAMILY FOCUS Meet 2025-2026 National President Pam Ray of Illinois.

IN EVERY ISSUE

- **NATIONAL PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**
- 6 NHQ AT YOUR SERVICE
- 9 OUR READERS RESPOND
- 10 JUNIOR MEMBERS
- 12 HEART OF THE MISSION
- MISSION FOCUSED
- 38 IMPACT ALA!
- 43 VALUE OF WHAT WE **BRING TO THE MISSION**

- 44 ALL THINGS ALA GIRLS STATE/NATION
- 45 ALA SCHOLARSHIP **RECIPIENTS: WHERE** ARE THEY NOW?
- **46 LEGION FAMILY IN ACTION**
- 48 WISE PERSON SAID
- **MISSION MATTERS** 49
- 50 **WE'RE DIGITAL**
- THE LAST WORD 51

ON THE COVER: High school juniors attend ALA Girls Nation in Washington, D.C., a weeklong event of mock senate sessions, campaigning for office, working together to pass legislation, and much more (photo: Alexa Freeman/ALANHQ). ABOVE: Motorcycles from all over Kansas and numerous cars escorted a semitruck carrying the three-quarter sized replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall to Ball-McColm American Legion Post 5 (photo: Mark Reinstein/MediaPunch/IPX).



SACRIFICING AT HOME: National President Pam Ray with the sixth grade class of Hill Field Elementary School. All but two students are military kids with 95% of the school made up of children whose parent(s) are in the military.

In the spirit of Service Not Self, I humbly was installed as your national president on Aug. 27. Thank you to each of you for your confidence and trust. This year, we will be Mission Driven, Family Focused. Why would I choose this focus? Mission is who we are; it is what we do. It is our mission to serve those who have served or who currently are serving, as well as their families and our communities. What better way to honor our eligibility than to do just that?

My eligibility is through my late father, Clay Lofton. He was a World War II and Korean War veteran. I watched him serve my entire life. He was there for many veterans who came home from many conflicts. He was there to listen and help — two words that mean so much. Our continued support of the Be the One mission teaches us to listen to someone who needs us to listen, to help by decreasing the stigma of seeking help, and to assist them in finding that help. I would encourage each of you to take the Columbia Training. It gives you simple ways to recognize and assist those who

may be struggling.

becoming a

Why family focused? We need to focus on the families of our military and veterans. Many of you are those families. You have a veteran in your household, and you know what you need to successfully care for a veteran. Who better than you to assist others because of your experience? That is who we are. The veterans in our VA medical centers around the country are looking for people to listen (there's that word again!). Consider

Who better than

regularly scheduled you to assist others volunteer at because of your a VAMC or a experience? That is Community Based who we are. Outpatient Clinic (CBOC). If you do not live close to a facility, consider becoming part of the Compassionate Contact Corps. You can pick up the phone on a regular basis and call a veteran and listen to them. You can help them find services if they are in need. Find a veteran in your neighborhood whom you can help. These are all ALA Service to Veterans hours we love

Family focused is also about our American Legion Family. We need to work together to create a stronger organization so we can do the work we need to do. American Legion National Commander Dan Wiley, Sons of The American Legion National Commander Bill Clancy, and I are all family focused this year: Dan's emphasis is "Better Together." Bill's is "Community, State, and Nation — Live Your Obligation."

We are encouraging your local American Legion Family to work together in your communities. We need to be the go-to organization when your community is in need. Host a family celebration — maybe on American Legion Family Day (the last Saturday in April). Work with other area organizations to let the community know we are here. Make it a family-friendly event with activities for all ages. Let us know what you did, and share it with the American Legion Auxiliary national Community Service Committee chair at

> CommunityService@ ALAforVeterans.org. We would love to send you a certificate of recognition from the three national Legion Family leaders.

As I continue my travels, I am so excited to meet our members and see our mission in action. Remember: By living our obligation, we can be mission driven and family focused because we are better together.

> Pam Rav -National President



Where is the ALA national president today?

to hear about.

Follow National President Pam Ray at www.Facebook.com/alanationalpresident as she travels across the country meeting grassroots members working the mission to always put our veterans, military, and their families first.



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PREPARATIONS: National Headquarters'
Maggie Smith (left) and Alexandra Goree with flyers
during setup in the general session room of the
ALA's National Convention in Tampa, Fla.

While Veterans Day falls on a very specific date (Nov. 11), we like to think every day is Veterans Day here at the American Legion Auxiliary. No matter how someone left the military — honorable or dishonorable discharge, medical, you name it — it doesn't matter to us. We only see the sacrifice these brave men and women made when they entered the military. Our hearts go to them ... daily.



The American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters has named a new executive director to establish strategic direction and increase membership through leadership of the organization's external initiatives, including cultivating partnerships, guiding public engagement, and

positioning the organization as a leader in its field.

Ben Hendricks has spent more than 25 years leading marketing

and communications efforts for nonprofits, agencies, and Fortune

500 companies. Most recently, he served as Chief Marketing and Communications Officer for Kiwanis International, where he guided a global team.

Hendricks'
career has included
everything
from launching
national social
responsibility
campaigns to
starting and
selling his own

PR agency. With both an MBA and a master's in journalism, he combines strategic thinking with a love of storytelling. He's excited to partner with the board and staff to strengthen the organization and grow its impact.



It saddens us to announce some bad news. Cathi Taylor, ALA National Headquarters'

archivist, passed away in September after a long illness. Taylor was a 14-year employee at ALANHQ and served as national chair of the History Committee for a couple of years. She was a member of Speedway Unit 500 in Indiana and a regular contributor to the ALA history blog. Taylor leaves behind an extensive knowledge of the Auxiliary's legacy and nearly knew by heart everything about the ALA's Past National Presidents since our founding in 1919. She will be missed.



A Community of Volunteers Serving Veterans, Military, and their Families November 2025

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The American Legion Auxiliary, founded in 1919, is a community of volunteers serving veterans, military, and their families. ALA members assist veterans in hospitals, advocate for veteran issues, support therapeutic creative arts festivals, distribute poppies for remembrance, and much more. In addition to serving the military community, the American Legion Auxiliary hosts

ALA Girls Nation and the ALA Girls State programs that teach future leaders about government and civic responsibility. Learn more at www.ALAforVeterans.org and @ALAforVeterans on Instagram and Facebook.





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Supporting Veterans through Connection and Community

The American Legion Auxiliary
Foundation is proud to award
\$10,000 to ALA Unit 283 in Pacific
Palisades. This grant will help bring
video gaming systems to veterans'
homes in Los Angeles and Palo
Alto, providing entertainment,
connection, and a renewed sense of
community for those who served.

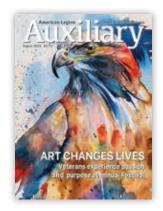
Even after the devastating Palisades wildfire, Unit 283 never stopped showing up for veterans.

Their resilience and dedication embody the ALA mission.

Do you have a project that supports veterans? Turn your vision into impact with a Veteran Projects Fund Grant.



Learn more and apply today: www.ALAFoundation.org/grants.



Weight machine gets new home for veterans

As Department of Nebraska Gretna Unit 216 member Cindy Moore was moving, she remembered a request that ALA-VA Omaha Medical Center Rep Paula Pillen sent out that the Omaha VA was looking for a weight machine. She contacted the Omaha VA and told them she would donate her weight machine, but they would need



to find a way to transport it. They were thrilled but did not have the resources to move it. The VA wanted

to relocate it to the 10th floor of the hospital. Moore asked movers, The American Legion, and others if they could move it with no luck. Finally, she found a mover who specializes in moving exercise equipment; however, at a cost. She approached the Gretna American Legion Auxiliary, and they sponsored the fee to move the equipment. It was a feat to take apart, move it from the basement of the Gretna home, transport it to

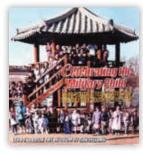
the Omaha hospital, take it up to the 10th floor in an elevator, and reassemble it. The veterans were so excited as the team was assembling it. What began as an impossible mission was completed for the love of veterans.

- Cindy Moore, Nebraska

A world away still connected to the ALA

Photo was taken at United on the Rok, Youth and Teen Center

near the military base in Osan, South Korea. A member of Unit 104 in Sylva,



Cathy Loucks and her husband, Willard, have a son serving in South Korea.

> — Donna Seay, North Carolina

Auxiliary centenarians celebrate milestone birthday

Pictured below celebrating their 100th birthdays are Marcella (Onsted) Barricklow (left) and Doris (Dentel) Morningstar-Bayes (right). After graduating



together in 1943 from Onsted High School, they married

World War II servicemen and became charter members in 1948 of the Durkee-Seager American Legion Auxiliary Unit 550 in Onsted, Mich. Both centenarians are former Auxiliary presidents and have held many offices and chaired many committees during their Auxiliary legacy. A joint birthday celebration was held at Post 550 with numerous family, friends, and community attendees. A remembrance area for the two living charter members now welcomes visitors to the post.

— Lisa Cyrus, Michigan

Unit grateful to longtime member

Angie Schuster is one of the reasons Omro, Wis., has an Auxiliary unit. She's been a member since birth and wanted

to bring the
Auxiliary to life
in our town.
Her grandma,
Mary Leinonen,
from Unit 192 of
Franklin, Wis.,
signed Angie
up the day she
was born in
honor of her



grandpa, dad, and uncle (as well as three of Angie's brothers). Because of Angie's dedication to the ALA mission, we've been going strong now for over 11 years! We recently presented Angie with a certificate for 50 years of continuous service to the American Legion Auxiliary! The Omro ALA is so thankful and blessed to have her be a part of our Auxiliary family.

— Jodi Kallas, Wisconsin

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM *YOU* Email: ALAMagazine@ALAforVeterans.org or send letters to: ALA National Headquarters 3450 Founders Road, Indianapolis, IN 46268

JUNIOR MEMBERS: THE NEXT GENERATION OF ALA SERVICE









IOWA JUNIOR CAMP FOCUSES ON EDUCATING YOUTH

For Juniors in Iowa, attending a five-day overnight camp is a fun yet helpful way to learn more about the American Legion Auxiliary.

For 40 years (apart from 2020), the camp has educated youth on ALA values, programs, and helping young girls form lasting friendships.

"Throughout the week, girls get to listen to presenters, work on earning patches for the Patch Program, and get the chance to make crafts and community service projects together, along with numerous other exciting activities," said Alyssa Sparrgrove, 2024-2025 program director and current Department of Iowa Junior Activities chair. "I think it's important for Juniors to go to camp so they can gain confidence, knowledge, and leadership skills to become our future leaders."

This past summer, daily music classes were introduced, and the girls learned the military song associated with the veteran they are eligible through. At the end of the week, they performed

the military medley for everyone to hear — a special tribute to the veteran bond — further solidifying a commitment to our veterans, military, and their families.

"I believe it is very important to educate our Juniors about their role in the American Legion Auxiliary," Sparrgrove said. "By teaching them the history of the ALA, our core values, and to have a *Service Not Self* mindset, we not only engage but also encourage them to remain active in the ALA and eventually become senior members."

Sparrgrove offers advice on what to do to get something similar successfully set up like the Iowa camp.

"Include your Juniors in activities year round; make them feel heard, valued, and important," she said. "Make eye-catching camp flyers to promote your Junior camp throughout your units, districts, and department. Partner with local schools to share information about the American Legion Auxiliary and your Junior camp."

Continuing to focus on Juniors as the organization's future, the Iowa camp looks forward to 2026 and many more years of developing the next generation of leaders.

"Starting a Junior camp program for your department is such a great decision for Junior and senior members," Sparrgrove said.

NEW 'RISING STAR JUNIORS AWARD' CRITERIA ANNOUNCED

Like the Junior Member of the Year program, the new Rising Star Junior Award recognizes our younger members and their active participation in the ALA's mission. Criteria for the award:

- The application should be completed by the Junior member applying for the Rising Star Junior Award.
- Five Rising Star Juniors one in each ALA division will

be selected by the national Junior Activities Committee.

- Winners will receive a citation plaque and will be authorized along with their chaperones to travel to the national Junior meeting in their division during the 2026-2027 administrative year.
- Applicants must be between the ages of 8-13 at the start of the current administrative year.
- Applicant must be a Junior member in good standing.
 - Applicant's narrative should

detail the Junior member's ALA participation and activities from June 1, 2025 to May 31, 2026. Only activities from that time will be considered. Document with photographs, screenshots, and other evidence of the Junior's ALA participation and activities.

• Essay questions should be

the applicant's original writing and may be checked for AI. Essays deemed 20% or more written by AI will be disqualified.





CALIFORNIA JUNIORS FUNDRAISE FOR ALA SCHOLARSHIPS USING ROCKS

Junior members from ALA Unit 180 in the Department of California have been painting planter rocks and selling them as a fundraiser.

California Unit 180 Junior members Samantha and Natalie Goldman have been selling the rocks for \$5, with a discount of \$3 for veterans.

"The first round was sold in one day," said Unit 180 President Christine Evans. "We had to get more rocks. They went to our post family, neighbors, friends."

Designs have included the American flag, poppies, and more patriotic-themed art.

"I hope more units catch on and do this — it's an easy fundraiser," Evans added.

So far, the two Iunior members have raised over \$550 for the ALA Spirit of Youth Scholarship Fund, an umbrella that supports three separate scholarship opportunities for participants in American Legion Auxiliary programs. One is for American Legion Auxiliary Junior members, another for the Junior Members of the Year. and one is for participants in the American Legion Auxiliary Girls Nation program.

"I love it when Juniors get involved," Evans said. "They are our future."

How to do this project:

- Purchase flat river rocks. These can be bought at a store or online.
- Use acrylic markers to draw designs or to write inspirational messages.
- Spray the top of the rocks with clear lacquer.



Central: Zoie Crupper, **Department of Kansas** · Eastern: Emma Davidson, **Department of New Hampshire** · Northwestern: Hayden Will, **Department of Colorado** Southern: Grace Billeci. **Department of South Carolina** · Western: Olivia Thunev. Department of California* *Also named the National Junior Member of the Year

Celebrating Division Junior Members of the Year, National Junior Member of the Year

The Junior Member of the Year program is designed to reward Junior members who are actively participating in the ALA's mission. Learn more about requirements and see a list of FAQs on the JMOY program at www.ALAforVeterans. org/Junior-Member-of-the-Year.

KENTUCKY MEMBER WINS NATIONAL **HEADQUARTERS' T-SHIRT DESIGN CONTEST**

ALA Junior members ages 8 to 17 years had an opportunity to participate in a National Headquarters-hosted contest to design the next T-shirt to be worn at ALA national Junior meetings. Participants created a digital design of their shirt and submitted their original art. Seven entries

were submitted. Members voted on one of three designs with 320 votes online.

This year's T-shirt design winner was Carmelita Dallaire, 15, from the Department of Kentucky.

Juniors — attend a 2025-2026 national Junior meeting to get your T-shirt:

Nov. 15: Albany Nov. 15: Minneapolis Jan. 31: Las Vegas

Jan. 31: Indianapolis Feb. 7: Atlanta

For more information, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/Meetings/ National-Junior-Meetings.





"I'm proud to have earned my post membership eligibility for my service, my SAL eligibility from my dad's service, and even prouder to have earned my ALA eligibility from my wife's service."

RANDY CONLON





PROUD ALA MEMBERS (above): Department of Maryland member and veteran Randy Conlon speaking at a Veterans Day event; his wife, Angela, during a U.S. Army promotion ceremony. Bottom right: Maryland Post 128 Honor Guard.

U.S. Army veteran Randy Conlon recently made history by joining the Bernard L. Tobin ALA Unit 128 in Maryland. He's their first "triple-header" — in addition to being an American Legion Auxiliary member, he's a member of The American Legion and Sons of The American Legion.

Conlon's eligibility for the Auxiliary is through his wife, Angela, who is also a U.S. Army veteran. They both retired from the Army after serving a combined 43 years. They met in 1985 in Bad Kreuznach, Germany, and married in 1988. They have four grown children.

Conlon's involvement in The American Legion Family began as soon as he entered active duty. His dad, a World War II era veteran, signed him up at Plains American Legion Post 558 in Pennsylvania.

Conlon and his wife's

participation in The American Legion Family as a couple began when they were stationed at the Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland. They became involved in The American Legion Family at Post 128. They were later reassigned, but eventually returned to Aberdeen Proving Ground and their Legion Family.

Why did you decide to join the ALA, American Legion, and Sons?

Upon returning to Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland, I fell back in with my comrades at Post 128 without missing a beat. The post was looking to kickstart the Sons of The American Legion and approached me to consider taking the helm, and I did. At the same time, my wife joined, and was active in the post and unit. She was also a member of the Honor Guard. It wasn't long before I rose in various leadership roles within the post

and Sons, and this culminated in serving as post commander and Harford County commander. My journey in becoming an ALA member was the result of the unit's relentless membership chair and, of course, Maryland member Sharon Holter. It's hard to say no to either one of them.

Why is membership important to you?

We all know membership is the lifeblood of a thriving and vibrant post family, not just in numbers, but the broad array of talent among those members who can help achieve the mission of serving veterans and their families.

How did you feel when you found out you were eligible to become a member of the Auxiliary through your wife's service?

I'm proud to have earned my post membership eligibility for my service, my SAL eligibility from my dad's service, and even prouder to have earned my ALA eligibility from my wife's service.



Any advice for other spouses considering joining the ALA?

Do it! The unit does so much good locally, and across the Department of Maryland, it should be seen as an obligation and a privilege to participate.

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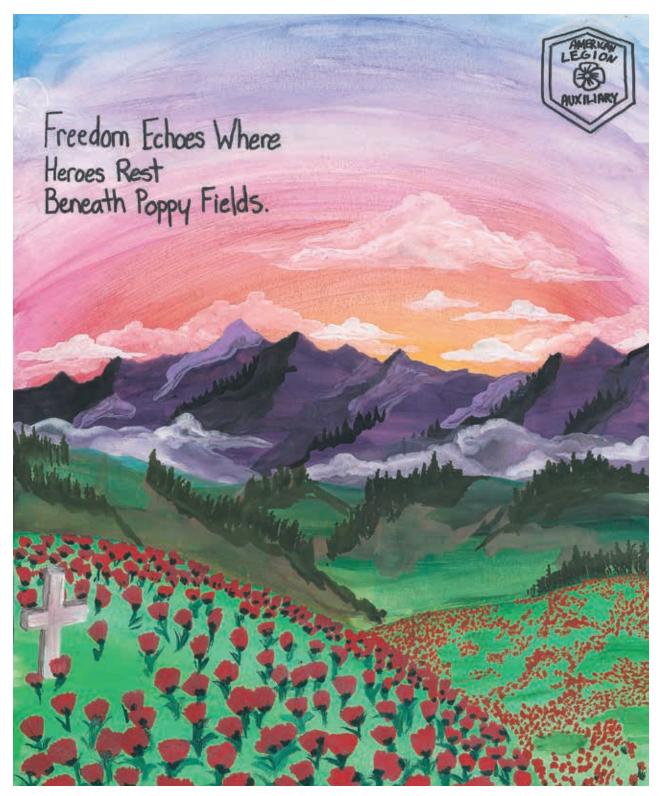
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Artwork depicting row upon row of poppies reminds us as Veterans Day approaches to honor the fallen and support the living who have worn our nation's uniform. From across the country, youth participate in the ALA Poppy Poster Contest, spreading the poppy message so this remembrance flower can continue to support the future of veterans, active-duty military personnel, and their families.

Above: Poppy Poster Contest Northwestern Division Overall Class VI winning design by Nevaeh Myers, grade 12, from South Dakota.

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY

Register today! 2025-2026 **ALA Mission** Training



Nov. 15: Albany, N.Y. Nov. 15: Minneapolis, Minn. Jan. 31: Las Vegas, Nev. Jan. 31: Indianapolis, Ind.* Feb. 7: Atlanta, Ga.*

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

Scan here to learn more:



How do you keep members active in ALA programs?



"Get to know your members and what ALA programs they are interested in. Use the skills and gifts they have. Don't try to fit everyone into the same mold."

- Terry Morrow Giles, Wisconsin



"We are a very active unit. We send a quarterly newsletter and constantly post events or new updates on social media and text messages to our members. We try to communicate all the time. This is definitely working. So far, at the start of this new administrative year, we have 10 new members."

Anne Francis Baglio, New York



"The honest answer is you will be as active as you want to be. Yes, some are busier than others. But if you love and believe in this organization, you want to grow in it and watch it bloom!"

- Rosemary Lancaster, Iowa



"Let them do what they love to do and bring one of our programs into it! We all come together for our big events, but it's the little events that give us character."

- Tami Jo Paul, Minnesota



"Keep members engaged in the programs that pique their passion. Some like C&Y or VA&R. Find their passion."

- Eileen Wilson, Florida



"We all work together on event projects. We like to do food sales like taco plates. Last month, our SAL did a ribeye steak dinner, and our Auxiliary unit enjoyed serving up the plates to our customers. Toys for Tots is a good way to be involved for Christmas — have a children's Christmas party at your unit. Yes, Purple Up! is always great."

- Shelly Carney Leach, New Mexico



"Communication and staying focused on the mission! Our unit president sends a letter monthly to all members, keeping them up to date on the unit and Legion Family activities. We are all here for the mission, so we stay focused on the mission!"

- Jammie Phillips, Wisconsin





Follow us on Facebook and Instagram at @ALAforVeterans. You could be featured in an upcoming issue of Auxiliary.



TEACHING AMERICANISM: American Legion Auxiliary units partner with schools from kindergarten through high school, teaching youth about flag etiquette and how to fold the flag.

VOLUNTEERING AT ANY AGE IN THE ALA REAPS BENEFITS FOR EVERYONE INVOLVED

The American Legion Auxiliary is a membership organization, but at the heart of it all, we are a community of volunteers serving veterans, military, and their families. We roll up our sleeves and host stand downs, we volunteer at U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers, we educate and mentor our youth, and so much more.

You can join the ALA at birth to over 100 years old — and you can volunteer at any age. This wide range helps benefit our organization in many ways.

The benefits of volunteering are numerous, with upward boosts in emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing.

According to an article in WashU Magazine, for both retirees and working individuals who volunteer more than 200 hours, the health benefits are significant.

There are also positives for those who start volunteering much earlier in life, based on an article from the conversation. com. Research found that

children and teens who volunteer tend to have better health, lower levels of anxiety, and fewer behavioral problems versus those who don't volunteer.

In a study highlighted by NPR, high school students were assigned to volunteer for 10 weeks with elementary school kids. The high schoolers who were engaged in volunteering activities saw healthier levels of the following: body mass index, inflammatory markers, and total cholesterol.

For an aging population, research cited by The Guardian shows that volunteering and maintaining a sense of purpose and meaning in life helps provide older people with a wide array of benefits to their physical and mental health.

No matter the age, volunteering is tied to fewer symptoms of depression and overall more satisfaction with

With a Service Not Self mindset, Auxiliary members of all ages are encouraged to volunteer to support veterans, military, and their families.

Ways to volunteer as an ALA member:

Make a buddy basket

Many homeless veterans have difficulty finding transitional or permanent housing. Baskets usually contain items such as cleaning supplies, linens, towels, dishes, and cutlery.

Organize an ALA Star Spangled Kids activity

Star Spangled Kids is the American Legion Auxiliary initiative to educate our youth about United States history, Americanism, and the U.S. Constitution. Learn more about this great civics-for-kids

initiative at www.ALAforVeterans.org.

Assist in a job fair for veterans or military spouses Some veterans and military spouses face unique challenges in obtaining a job or advancing a career. You can help them overcome those challenges by volunteering at a job fair for veterans or

military spouses in your area. Check with your American Legion post.

Volunteer with the VA

Veteran patients at U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers depend on volunteers for their recovery. ALA members have served as VA volunteers for decades through the VA Voluntary

Service program, which is part of the VA Center for Development and Civic Engagement. You can do your part as a member too!

Teach flag etiquette lessons Have you thought about teaching members of your local community flag etiquette? It is important for people of all ages to know about the history of the flag and the proper way to care for it. For even more volunteer ideas, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org.



GI JOAN PROJECT PROVIDES ADVOCACY, SUPPORT FOR WOMEN VETERANS

WELCOME HOME

There are women veterans who grapple with recognition as veterans — even among themselves — so they don't seek out the assistance that could address mental health and other challenges they may face.

"Many veteran women have this strange concept that if they didn't serve in combat, they're not worthy of all the resources," said Miette Wells, president of ALA Texas Unit 55, service officer for

Post 55, and a combat-disabled veteran who was a K-9 handler in the Air Force.

Wells is on a mission to show all women who served in the military that they deserve whatever assistance they need — and to help them find the resources that can provide that support.

That's why she created the GI Joan Project, which provides advocacy and support for women veterans.

Collaborating for impact

In 2024, Wells and the GI Joan Project joined Luann O'Boyle, ALA Unit 55 secretary and Legion Post 55 adjutant, to coordinate a resource fair, wellness events, and to lead the assembly and distribution of

wellness packages for women veterans.

Wells and O'Boyle enlisted support from other groups and businesses as well. American Legion Post 317 in Jarrell, Texas, and Post 133 in Temple, Texas,

were among the entities assisting with the events.

The collaboration led to a variety of initiatives that, together, reached hundreds of women veterans. Among the services:

- A resource fair for women veterans. The event provided access to veterans assistance services, vendors, and featured speakers with expertise in healing from military sexual trauma, or MST. Each person attending received a bag filled with helpful information and wellness gifts.
- A faith-based mental health wellness program focused on women who were in the military. More than 800 women veterans have taken advantage of support for overcoming PTSD, anxiety, depression, spiritual crises, and MST.
- Three MST workshops. Wells, herself an MST survivor and expert who has written books about recovering from MST experiences, led the sessions.

• Wellness packages included information about VA services, suicide prevention, trauma recovery, and arts and crafts kits. Organizers distributed more than 650 packages throughout Texas, with some going out of state as well.

Expanding the support

And now Wells is hoping to broaden this support for women veterans. She's encouraging others in The American Legion Family nationwide to provide resource information and wellness packages — or to work with the GI Joan Project to supply packages to women in their own local areas who have served.

Wells encourages others to visit the GI Joan Project on Facebook at www.Facebook.com/ GIJoanProject, or go to www. GIJoan.org to learn more about the effort and how you can get involved.

Planning support for women veterans: Where to start



Miette Wells of American Legion Auxiliary Unit 55 in Texas and the GI

Joan Project, said coordinating events and gifts to assist women who served has taught her two keys for getting started:

- · Enlist help. One unit may not have the resources to help all of those who need it, but partnering with other local groups — or the GI Joan Project can make a program more manageable.
- Explore options. Whether it's handing out a sheet with information about local resources for women veterans, hosting events, or providing wellness packets, there is a variety of ways to help.



DADDY'S HOME: Sailors disembark USS Nimitz (CVN 68) after arrival at Naval Base Kitsap - Bremerton, Wash. Nimitz, part of Nimitz Carrier Strike Group, returned to its homeport after more than 11 months following a deployment to U.S. 5th Fleet and U.S. 7th Fleet (U.S. Navy photo by Wendy Hallmark).

DON'T FORGET THOSE WHO KEEP THE HOMEFRONT STRONG

American Legion Auxiliary members are known for helping veterans, military, and their families. It's important for ALA units to remember all three when offering support, including those who hold down the fort military spouses.

Auxiliary members can support spouses and their children by providing opportunities for connection, volunteering to help with needs, and providing resources. There are several ways ALA members can support military spouses in their community.

Provide connection

- Invite families to your American Legion post home for free dinners: This is a great opportunity to get to know the families and provide a sense of community outside of their network.
- Host family events: Invite military spouses and their children to your post home for an afternoon of fun activities, such as games or crafts in a supportive environment.

- Assist with holiday parties: Connect with and support the Family Readiness Groups when they host their annual holiday parties. This support can come in the form of volunteer time and/or donations.
- Check in often: Once you've gotten to know a military spouse, call, text, or visit to be a listening ear and find out how you can offer assistance.
- Simple gestures can make a big impact: Send holiday, birthday, and even "thinking of you" cards throughout a deployment. Loneliness is oftentimes the hardest part of the deployment cycle. Small gestures mean so much.

Help provide self-care

• Offer a Parents Night Out: Designate an evening where parents can drop off children while your unit provides activities for the kids. This gives parents a break to take time for themselves. Be sure members have background checks on file so they can provide such services for children. This necessary step keeps members, your unit, and

the organization safe when hosting an event like this. Having members take child safety training and first aid training will also ensure the safety of the children you watch and put parents' minds at ease.

• Offer self-care events: Ask local business to provide free sessions at your post home. For example, ask a yoga studio to provide a free class or a local salon to give a free service such as chair massages.

Lend an extra hand

- Help with lawn care, grocery shopping, and more: Because of frequent relocations, spouses may not have family nearby. Helping with these chores can relieve the stress of doing it all alone.
- Be ready to support in times of crisis: Emergency trips "home" due to death or illness are always stressful when so far from family. Offer to watch their house, pick up their mail, or mow their yard. Have groceries or a gift card (DoorDash/ Uber Eats) ready for them when they return.

Resources available

- Have a list of contractors on hand: It can be difficult to navigate the myriad of community listings to find a reputable mechanic, plumber, landscaper, electrician, etc. You can help by providing numbers of trustworthy companies that will alleviate unnecessary stress.
- Offer information about youth programs: Provide information about ALA Girls State and American Legion Boys State, scholarships, the Poppy Poster Contest, and the Americanism Essay Contest. Your unit can sponsor military children in these
- Connect spouses with other miliary support agencies in your area: For example, Armed Services YMCA or Blue Star Families.



We want to hear from you! How does your ALA unit support military spouses and families in your area? Email us at PR@ALAforVeterans.org.



ALANHQ PARTNERS WITH SMILEASSOCIATE TO SUPPORT SPIRIT OF YOUTH SCHOLARSHIP **FUND**

The American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters is thrilled to announce a new partnership with SmileAssociate, giving members, supporters, and friends an easy way to make a difference with every Amazon purchase. By simply starting your shopping at the ALA's SmileAssociate page via www. smileassociate.com/alahq, you can help raise funds for the Spirit of Youth Scholarship Fund — at no additional cost to you.

This initiative also aligns directly with National President Pam Ray's fundraising focus, which centers on the Spirit of Youth Scholarship Fund. By engaging members across the country to participate in

this simple, everyday giving opportunity, the ALA can expand scholarship support while uniting behind Ray's vision of empowering youth through education.

The Spirit of Youth Scholarship Fund provides essential financial support to young people who demonstrate strong academic achievement, community service, and a commitment to leadership. These scholarships open doors for students to pursue higher education, equipping them to become leaders in their communities and beyond.

Another benefit of SmileAssociate is its transparency and ease of use. Nonprofits receive quarterly donations with full performance reports, ensuring every contribution is tracked. Donations are generated 24/7, 365 days a year, creating a steady stream of support that grows as more ALA members participate.

This program will feel familiar to those who used AmazonSmile, but it comes with significant improvements. Through this program, every eligible purchase generates a 1.5% donation to the ALA, tripling the impact of AmazonSmile's 0.5% return.

SmileAssociate

There is no alternate login or separate portal - just click, shop, and give automatically. Other



organizations are already seeing success with SmileAssociate. For example, PETA created a highly specific vegan, cruelty-free store experience for its supporters, while Breast Cancer Ireland launched a simple branded shopping site that generates ongoing contributions. These examples showcase the program's flexibility and potential, and what we — as Auxiliary members can achieve together.

By joining forces with SmileAssociate, the ALA is embracing an innovative, accessible way to strengthen its mission. Every Amazon purchase you make through www.smileassociate.com/alahq directly supports scholarships for deserving young leaders. For even more convenience, scan the OR code to download the Amazon app and start shopping with just a tap.

Did you donate to the Wall of Heroes at National Convention?



With a donation to the ALA Foundation, attendees recognized a hero in their life by writing their name on a paper star and placing it on the Wall of Heroes. You can view the names of this year's honorees, recognized during the American Legion Auxiliary National Convention, by visiting the ALA blog at www.ALAforVeterans.org/blog. Follow the link to see the tribute to these individuals whose service and sacrifice continue to inspire us all.



RECAP OF 2025 NATIONAL CONVENTION **AMENDMENTS**

At the 104th ALA National Convention, delegates met to debate and vote on 15 amendments. Following is an overview of the changes. To see the updated text, visit www. ALAforVeterans.org later this fall to download the National Constitution, Bylaws and Standing Rules guide book.

Amendment 1: Constitution, Article III, Eligibility

Proposal: Clarify how one becomes a member of the ALA; highlight authority. No substantive changes.

Result: Title change to "membership": adopted.

Add a Section 3: adopted.

Add a Section 4: adopted. Add a Section 5: adopted.

Add a Section 6: adopted.

Amendment 2: Constitution, Article V, National Executive Committee, Section 4

Proposal: Omit redundant wording in Section 4 that also appears in Section 2. No substantive changes.

Result: Adopted.

Amendment 3: Constitution, Article VI, National Convention, Section 1

Proposal: Add "force majeure" language to allow for continued business and election of officers in times of emergency.

Result: Defeated.

Amendment 4: Bylaws, Article I, Organization, Section 3

Proposal: National organization has authority to cancel department charters; therefore, it is possible for a state to not have a department. Added wording for clarification. No substantive changes.

Result: Adopted.

Amendment 5: Bylaws, Article I, Organization, Sections 4, 5

Proposal: Omit Sections 4 and 5, as purpose of intermediate bodies already exists in Article VIII on departments. No substantive changes.

Result: Adopted.

Amendment 6: Bylaws, Article III, Duties of Officers, Section 5, National Secretary

Proposal: Clarify duties and responsibilities of the national secretary to match current practice.

Result: Adopted.

Amendment 7: Bylaws, Article IV, National Executive Committee, Section 2

Proposal: Rearrange information to present uninterrupted section on National **Executive Committee authorities** followed by Executive Committee to the NEC responsibilities.

Result: Adopted, but amended — removed "eligibility" from Section 2: "address all questions regarding elections and capacity..."

Amendment 8: Bylaws, **Article VIII, Department** Organization, Section 3, **Intermediate Bodies**

Proposal: Department **Executive Committee has** authority to discipline members of department headquarters unit.

Result: Adopted.

Amendment 9: Bylaws, Article X, Finance, Section 2

Proposal: Omit duplicate language.

Result: Adopted.

Amendment 10: Bylaws, Article X, Finance, Section 4, Salaried Officers

Proposal: Removed national secretary and national treasurer as salaried officers.

Result: Adopted.

Amendment 11: Bylaws, Article XI, Discipline

Proposal: To capture all references to discipline in one section with clearer explanations and wording on member, unit, department, and national authorities.

Result: Adopted.

Amendment 12: Bylaws, Article XII. Cancellation of Charter

Proposal: Delineate roles of units, departments, and national as they pertain to charter cancellations. Remove language on discipline, as that information has been absorbed into new Bylaw XI, Discipline. No substantive changes.

Result: Adopted.

Amendment 13: Bylaws, Article IX, Unit Organization

Proposal: Move language from Standing Rules on units' autonomy into Bylaws. No substantive changes.

Result: Adopted.

Amendment 14: Bylaws Article IV, NEC, Section 2 Standing Rules V, National Executive Committee

Proposal: Change composition of Executive Committee of the NEC to include: national president, national vice president, national secretary, immediate Past National President, five National Executive Committee members, and one Past National President from the national Finance Committee.

Result: Adopted with amendments.

Amendment 15: Standing Rules VII, Committees, Long Range Strategic Planning Committee

Proposal: Change terms, composition, and require the committee to be appointed each administrative year.

Result: Adopted.



JUNIOR-FOCUSED EVENT KEEPS YOUNG MEMBERS INVESTED IN THE AUXILIARY

Involving our Junior members from young ages helps the American Legion Auxiliary in many ways — mainly ensuring the next generation is ready to carry the ALA legacy forward.

The Department of California annually holds a threeday Junior Conference, bringing together young leaders from across the state for a weekend filled with tradition, leadership training, service learning, and plenty of fun.

Through interactive and age-appropriate sessions, Juniors learned about Americanism, Children & Youth, Junior Activities, Legislative, National Security, Poppy Program, and Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation.

"Each activity tied service to leadership, showing girls how their voices and actions matter," said Martha Romano, California Junior Conference director. "Through tradition, service, and sisterhood, the girls discovered that leadership means both honoring the past and stepping boldly into the future."

Participants had a chance to run for office in mock elections, campaigning, and public speaking as well.

"Focusing on leadership at the Junior Conference is vital because every activity — whether solemn ceremonies like the flag retirement, program workshops on advocacy and service, or the mock elections and officer installations — gives Juniors the chance to practice responsibility, decision-making, and teamwork in real time," Romano said. "These exercises move leadership from an abstract idea to a lived experience, showing the girls they have the skills and confidence to guide others, speak up for causes they believe in, and carry forward the mission of the American Legion Auxiliary. By blending tradition, service, and interactive learning, the conference ensures leadership development isn't just taught — it's experienced."

Romano hopes participants walked away with lifelong skills they can use in their daily lives, confidence in public speaking, the ability to work as a team, and the courage to step into leadership roles.

Mentoring our members from young ages is crucial for the organization, Romano said.

"When seniors take the time to mentor, they provide not only knowledge of Auxiliary traditions and programs, but also a living example of commitment, respect, and service," she added. "That mentorship creates a safe space for Juniors to practice leadership, build confidence, and develop their own style. Simply put, Juniors will only flourish with the steady support of their senior mentors whose influence helps shape them into capable, compassionate leaders for the future of the Auxiliary."

Tips for hosting your own Junior Conference

"Creating or holding a Junior Conference that mirrors your own department conventions and programs not only introduces them to the full scope of the ALA, but also reinforces a natural progression into senior leadership," Romano said. "This structure [provides] a builtin succession plan for your department, ensuring continuity and growth. My advice would be to combine tradition, education, and fun, to give Juniors opportunities to learn through interactive sessions, practice leadership through elections and ceremonies, and bond through shared experiences. With strong mentorship and a well-rounded program, you're not just putting on an event - you're investing in the future of the Auxiliary."



Top 3 Tips for Success:

- Prioritize mentorship. Ensure senior members are actively engaged, modeling leadership and guiding Juniors through every aspect of the conference.
- 2. Make it interactive. Use hands-on activities for each program area so Juniors learn by doing, not just listening.
- 3. Celebrate and recognize.
 End with ceremonies,
 certificates, and officer
 installations that make Juniors
 feel valued and inspired to
 step into leadership roles.



HONORING A FATHER, OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS THROUGH MEMBERSHIP IN THE AUXILIARY

Many people join the ALA join to honor a veteran(s) in their life. For Anne Quinn, a Department of West Virginia member, ALA membership began to honor her father's service. But he wasn't the only veteran in her life.

Membership in the ALA began with Quinn's mother, Maureen O'Malley, who became a member in the late 1960s at Unit 272 in Rockaway Beach, N.Y. Quinn and her sister, Marie O'Malley Korber, joined in 1971. Quinn honors her father as an active member of ALA Unit 71 in Charles Town, W.Va., and is a location coordinator for Wreaths Across America. Her sister remains an active member of ALA Unit 272 in New York.

Fenton O'Malley

Quinn's father, Fenton O'Malley, was a World War II veteran who served in the U.S. Army until 1946. Then he joined the U.S. Navy Reserve. He was an American Legion post commander for Daniel M. O'Connell Post 272 in N.Y.

"My dad was very proud of his time in the service and his affiliation with the Fighting 69th," said Quinn. The 69th Infantry,

known as the Fighting 69th, is an infantry regiment of the United States Army from New York City. Many of its recruits were of Irish heritage. The name originated during the Civil War.

"He was a proud member of The American Legion. He fostered a culture of service to our veterans. which was embedded in me," she said. "During the late 1960s and early 1970s, many of my friends and family served in Vietnam. When returning home, despite the general culture in the U.S., my dad always welcomed them with open arms and encouraged them to join The American Legion."

Other relatives who served

Quinn has three uncles who served as well. Charlie Duffy was in the Army Air Corps, and later, just like her father, served as a commander for Post 272. Her uncle, James O'Malley, served in the Navy as a deep-sea diver in the Pacific. Another uncle, Bernard Cunningham, served in the Army.

Cormac Quinn

Quinn is also married to an Army veteran, Cormac Quinn. He is a past commander of Jackson Perks Post 71 in Charles Town, W.Va., and served in the Army and Army Reserve during Granada.



Auxiliary membership honors service of veterans, creates lasting legacy

Having an ALA membership and volunteering with your local unit are great ways to honor those who served our country. To learn more about the path to eligibility for membership, download this free poster at www.ALAforVeterans.org. Here are some ways to express gratitude to a veteran:

- A simple "Thank you for your service" when you see a veteran.
- · Write a letter, send cards, or send a care package to a veteran.
- Attend parades and ceremonies to show your support.
- · Place flags or wreaths on veteran gravesites.



Tell us about the veteran who made you eligible for membership in the American Legion Auxiliary. Your story could appear in national ALA media. Email us at PR@ALAforVeterans.org.



REMEMBERING ALEX: Pawsitive for Heroes trains service dogs and named one of them in honor of fallen veteran Alex Gleason-Morrow.

FALLEN VETERAN'S LEGACY LIVES ON THROUGH SCHOLARSHIP, SUPPORT FOR SERVICE DOGS

Our veterans, military, and their families come first. That's our mission. When we lose one of those people, it is heartbreaking.



U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Alex Gleason-Morrow lost her life while performing maintenance duties in

support of Operation Inherent Resolve assigned to the 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing in Jordan in March 2017. She left behind her husband and two daughters, as well as many family members and friends.

Livingston County American Legion Auxiliary in New York is working to continue Gleason-Morrow's legacy through a memorial scholarship, as well as helping other veterans get a service dog.

"Alex was loved by all who had the privilege to meet and get to know her," said New York Livingston County President Deb Herrmann and Gleason-Morrow's grandmother.

Gleason-Morrow was an ALA member since birth, an active Junior member for years, and became a dual member of The American Legion Family at 17 when she joined the Air Force.

Following her tragic death, and to help keep Gleason-Morrow's name remembered, the New York Livingston County American Legion Auxiliary Memorial Scholarship in her honor began.

"Alex was an excellent student and had a love of learning

everything and anything she could, so it was only fitting we used the scholarship as a way to remember her," Herrmann said. "After some discussion. the members present voted to start one for Livingston County students. A committee was formed, and our

first fundraiser was in 2018 when we did a dinner and basket raffle. Since then, we hold an annual Memorial Ride with a dinner after the run."

The first \$1,000 scholarship was awarded in 2019.

"Alex's mother and I went to the school awards ceremony to present our first scholarship to a young lady whose name also happened to be Alexandria, and it was very emotional for both of us, but also gave us great pleasure to know we were helping someone to further their education," Herrmann said.

The memorial committee has awarded \$15,000 in scholarships since its inception.

"It wasn't until this year that we actually sat down to add up everything we have given in scholarships since 2019, and we were blown away," Herrmann said.

Members of the Livingston County American Legion Family decided to expand the scholarship by raising funds for service dogs for veterans in Gleason-Morrow's honor. Currently, they are working with Pawsitive for Heroes, a 501(c)(3) organization that trains service dogs for a veteran's individual needs and purpose. They name their service dogs after a fallen hero, and the family felt

honored when they named one of the training service dogs after Gleason-Morrow.

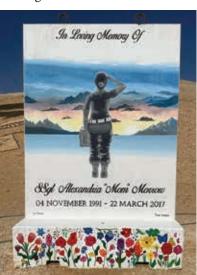
"In 2023, we had the pleasure to meet Alex and the veteran who was to have him," Herrmann said.

Earlier this year, the Staff Sgt. Alex Gleason-Morrow Memorial Committee presented Pawsitive for

Heroes with a check for \$15,000 that will be used for Western New York veterans and service dogs. The goal is to present a total of \$30,000 in 2025 to help other veterans get their well-deserved service dog.

For fellow units and American Legion Family members who want unique ways to honor our fallen, Herrmann offers advice.

"It takes a team effort with dedicated individuals to make something like what we have accomplished happen," she said. "Each of us is coming to the table with different talents but always with the same goal, which is to always have Staff Sgt. Alex's name and all that she accomplished remembered."













HONORING VETERANS: Kentucky American Legion Auxiliary Unit 4 and Kelly Elementary School students team up to learn about Americanism and paying respect to veterans' graves.

KENTUCKY UNIT PARTNERS WITH SCHOOL FOR AMERICANISM EDUCATION, FUNDRAISER

The partnership between Kelly Elementary and American Legion Auxiliary Boone Unit 4 in Kentucky extends well beyond the fundraising project the two have worked on together. Auxiliary members regularly volunteer in classrooms, teaching students about the history of the American flag and the meaning behind coins left on veterans' headstones. Each May, students are accompanied to the local cemetery to place flags on veterans' graves and leave a penny, honoring the service and sacrifice of those who served.

The Kelly Elementary Student Council and Boone Unit 4 plan to keep building on their partnership, finding new ways to blend learning, leadership, and service for the benefit of both the community and its veterans.

Part of that partnership is

a fundraiser that is supported by members of Boone Unit 4. Auxiliary members help by teaching basket-making skills, managing the online auction, promoting events, and volunteering alongside students during the Color Run.



BINGO HELPS VETERANS, COMMUNITY THROUGH FLORIDA UNIT

In October 2022, Titusville Unit 1 in Florida began hosting a weekly bingo at the post on Sunday afternoons. Not only did it bring in much needed revenue for the unit, but it also attracted more business for the post and increased memberships of the unit, post, Sons, and Riders.

The post home benefits additionally because the unit pays a small amount of rent for use of the dining hall/meeting room to help offset utilities and insurance. Many new faces appeared as they noticed the activity around the post. Another benefit is the kitchen staff now offers meals on Sunday afternoons to feed the hungry bingo players.

Unit 1 no longer needs to worry about fundraising due to the success of the Sunday bingo. All funds are being used to support various programs such as ALA Girls State, Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, Community Service, and Education.

The Education Program now offers three to five \$1,500 scholarships to high school seniors each year since the inception of Sunday bingo. They are also able to supply four local elementary

IOWA UNIT CONTINUES TO RECOGNIZE VETERANS IMPACTED BY AGENT **ORANGE**

American Legion Auxiliary Iowa Unit 682 hosted its 2nd annual Agent Orange Awareness Program with a candlelight ceremony. The event was organized by Auxiliary member Kathie Bingaman and held at the Enabling Garden in Altoona, Iowa.

American Legion Post 682 assisted with the Color Guard, Chaplain Becky Teed gave the

schools with much needed school supplies.

Community service plaques have been received from organizations the unit has supported with donations of \$1,000 each. One organization supplies cold shelter relief for the homeless. providing them with a hot meal and a place to sleep. Two others are food banks which provide much needed food and supplies to the local homeless and economically disadvantaged.

Donations have been given to veterans organizations such as Their Voice of Hope, which



provides therapeutic help for female veterans suffering from PTSD due to sexual trauma while serving, along with PTSD from combat duty. Another donation was given to an organization titled Solemn Pride Inc., which provides caisson services for deceased veterans at the local national cemetery.



PROJECT REVAMPS NATIONAL CEMETERY ROAD

The Road of Honor project in the Keokuk National Cemetery, Iowa, was started eight years ago when a committee started working on getting the street repaved to become a respectable path for families to visit loved ones in the cemetery, and to be more respectful to the veterans taking their last ride before burial.

The town of Keokuk was home to five military hospitals during the Civil War. The need to give soldiers a proper burial led to the cemetery being created after the town donated a portion of land for the cause. It is the only national cemetery in Iowa, and

the first west of the Mississippi River. The road honors the loyalty and dedication to soldiers who came before us.

At the ribbon cutting ceremony for the road, Mayor Kathie Mahoney, an Auxiliary member, said the street isn't paved with just concrete, but paved with gratitude and respect to veterans. The road is a tribute to all who have served or will serve.

The road and cemetery will also serve to educate future generations about the debt owed to all buried in the cemetery.

With the new Road of Honor, the community can now visit the national cemetery and their loved ones who sacrificed their lives for our freedom.

opening prayer, and Department of Iowa American Legion Auxiliary President Kim Dixon and 6th District President Sharon Luellen assisted with the wreath laying.

Bingaman's husband was a Vietnam veteran who passed away from a blood cancer due to Agent Orange exposure while serving in Vietnam.

"The subject of Agent Orange and how it has impacted the lives of thousands of Vietnam veterans and their families is very close to my heart," Bingaman said. "So

many have died and are still suffering and dying from the harmful effects of this deadly toxin that was sprayed during the Vietnam War. I wanted to help bring awareness and support for their service and sacrifice. So much of our population does not know about this. The war may be over, but the battle continues for the Vietnam veterans."

Last summer, the newly formed Unit 682 held a small. private remembrance ceremony for Agent Orange awareness at the Enabling Garden with

one orange candle and a small wreath. Then-Unit President Whitney Smith-McIntosh told Bingaman she wanted her to do it next year too. So, with the help of Bingaman's fellow Auxiliary members, her family, and American Legion Post 682, they put together a beautiful public candlelight ceremony with nearly 150 orange candles at dusk on Agent Orange Awareness Day in honor and remembrance of the Vietnam veterans and their families effected by Agent Orange.



VARIETY OF MESSAGING TOOLS HELPS YOUR UNIT GET THE WORD OUT

Pamela Oliver-Shepheard, Unit 828 in Texas, is a dual member of the American Legion Auxiliary



and The American Legion. She serves as the post home's adjutant and social media manager.

The big priority in her

roles is communication.

"I was a supervisor in the military for 16 years, so communication is important so people know what's going on," she said.

The Legion published an article about a texting program for communicating with members, SimpleTexting, and Oliver-Shepheard started using it to communicate with American Legion Family members at the post home.

"Because of the size of our post and the cost, I'm only able to use it on a limited basis, but it is an excellent form of communication. And for us, it can be used quickly in a pinch to notify members about an event or meeting," she said. "I think members like it better because it allows them to respond easily to acknowledge receipt and ask questions, and it's easy for me to respond."

Oliver-Shepheard said she would recommend the texting service to other units as well.

"I think communication with members is very important," she said. "Even if a member isn't able to get physically involved or participate to the level they'd like to, being informed about what is happening still lets them be involved."

She uses the texting service for meetings and events, and if

something comes up that might have forgotten to send in an email, she can push a quick text instead.

In addition to texting, Oliver-Shepheard also utilizes a newsletter as a form of communication. She tries to email the PDF newsletter once a month.

The newsletter often has information about membership, events, and other organizations the Family is involved with.

Oliver-Shepheard also uses Facebook and encourages other units to follow suit.

"I create ALA event announcements, forward emails from the Auxiliary president, and serve as a liaison with the members," she said.

She also uses the Facebook page to recognize members' birthdays. Many of them love the extra acknowledgement.

"Every bit helps — it doesn't have to be big or spectacular or fancy — it just lets them know you are there and doing something for veterans and the community," she said. "Create a Facebook page, do a one-sheet newsletter. Start with something."

Between the texting, newsletter, and active Facebook page, more effective communication with members has been making a positive impact.

"It seems the turnout has been a little bit better — even in the community — not just our members," she said. "Word has gotten out a little more in some of the community about the things we are doing."

For those unsure of using a texting service, creating a newsletter, or using Facebook, Oliver-Shepheard said, "Just do it."



You have to begin somewhere

- · Start simple: What do you want members to know about?
- Research all communications service providers. Some vendors offer discounts to nonprofits.
- Check out what other ALA units or organizations are doing to communicate. Borrow an idea that looks good.
- Request to join the ALA Public Relations Facebook group to share ideas, ask questions, and let others know what worked or didn't work for your unit. Join here: www.Facebook.com/groups/ALApublicrelations.

TIPS FOR BEING AN EFFECTIVE LEADER. **MENTOR**

High-quality leadership gets people interested in participating in organizations, according to 2025 research in Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly. And poor leadership often drives them away.

That means to keep members and the community engaged in efforts to support our mission, the American Legion Auxiliary needs effective leaders and mentors.

But leading in a nonprofit service organization can be a challenge, said Beverly Flores, founder and CEO of Thyme Out Consulting, an Overland Park, Kan.-based firm focused on leadership.

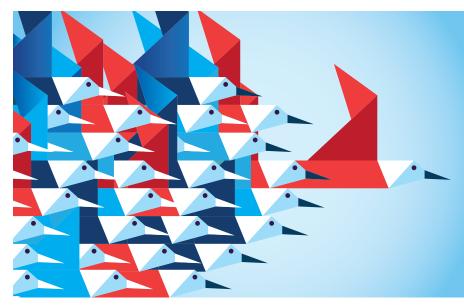
"The team is comprised of volunteers who don't have to follow you," she said. "They must be inspired to."

How can ALA members provide leadership that inspires others and builds loyalty? Following are some suggestions from leadership experts:

1. Practice Service Not Self.

"Without the ability to be selfless — to put the needs and wants of others before your own — you will never get people to follow you to a place where they wouldn't go by themselves," said Paul Dillon, a management consultant in Durham, N.C., who serves the military veteran community.

2. Show confidence. Jim Rettew, a Sausalito, Calif.-based interim CEO and executive director for nonprofits in crisis, said leaders should use "purpose, priorities, and praise" when communicating with other members. "Confidence comes from clarity, not just charisma," he said, recommending that members "start every meeting with a 10-second mission reminder and the single most important next step. Close by naming two volunteer wins."



3. Share stories. "Facts inform, but stories inspire," said Lyn Corbett, president of The Pivotal Group leadership consulting firm in Chula Vista, Calif. "Frame your message around a story that illustrates impact in an individual helped, a community moment, a breakthrough. These mission moments are opportunities to show how the work has changed lives and why it matters."

4. Develop expertise.

"See one, do one, teach one" is the formula for becoming knowledgeable about any topic, Rettew said. "After any activity, ask a newer volunteer to teach back the key step in 60 seconds," he said. "That locks in learning and signals trust." He recommends maintaining a cheat sheet with relevant details to update after any event.

5. Be media-ready. "In today's world, every leader is a spokesperson," said Grayce McCormick, who leads a public relations and marketing agency

based in Los Angeles and Milwaukee and helped found the veterans support organization Operation Warrior Shield. "Anticipate questions, craft clear talking points, and rehearse. But remember: It's not about changing who you are. It's about being prepared to share your story authentically."

6. Embrace the unexpected. "Nonprofit work mirrors the

unpredictability of service: The best leaders don't panic. They roll up their sleeves," said McCormick. "Embracing the unexpected means being prepared to step in and lead by example when things don't go as planned."

And for those who believe their leadership and mentoring skills could use improvement, a 2016 career development webinar from Walden University has some advice: Volunteer. Assisting with events and activities strengthens leadership skills, including those in public speaking and communication.



The ALA national Leadership and Public Relations committees have a new enewsletter for unit presidents. Want to get on the distribution list as a unit president? Be sure your email is current in ALAMIS (our member database) or contact us at ALAMIShelp@ALAforVeterans.org.



From Empowered Youth to **Impactful Leaders**

By Alexa Freeman

In a time when the world needs strong, visionary leadership more than ever, 102 high school students from across the country traveled to Washington, D.C. for a weeklong experience that would not only positively impact their own lives, but also renew hope for the future ahead. This is ALA Girls Nation: a lifechanging program of the American Legion Auxiliary. Since 1947, it has continued to inspire passion, purpose, and patriotism in the hearts of

our country's future leaders.

American Legion Auxiliary Girls Nation is truly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for students entering their final year of high school. During their week in D.C., attendees are referred to as "senators" and participate in a mock legislature where they gain practical insight into how the federal government operates. They are responsible for submitting bills and resolutions, participating in senate sessions, debating, campaigning, and electing officials such as president and vice president. Although ALA Girls Nation is an exceptional educational program focused on mock government, it is so much more than that.

"I have never met such capable and incredible women — it was women empowering other women and I had not known what that truly felt like until I came to ALA Girls Nation," said 2025 Nevada senator Thifany Ortega Gavarrete, member of JROTC and a U.S. Marine Corps enlistee.

The 2025 session of ALA Girls Nation brought together 102 young adults with different backgrounds and beliefs who want to make a positive impact in our country. The bright and bold students debated 20 pieces of legislation on the floor — 15 passed with four resolutions and 11 bills. Of the 11 bills that passed, six passed with an amendment. When they weren't in senate sessions, debating, or campaigning, participants went on field trips to visit Capitol Hill, historical Washington monuments, Arlington National Cemetery, Twilight Tattoo, and the White House.

"My favorite moment from the week was at Twilight Tattoo when they honored all branches of the military everybody was looking at me — waiting for the moment they said United States Marine Corps," said Ortega Gavarrete. "As soon as they did, I stood up and everyone just erupted in applause — I had never felt so proud to be who I am and to serve our country. I just felt so supported, and I felt so much pride in who I was, and in my decision to serve."

Throughout the week, senators learned a lifetime of leadership lessons that go far beyond politics and government. They gained a deeper understanding of themselves. From the beginning of the week to the end, the growth shown by participants was extraordinary. They are not afraid to make their voices heard.

"I am standing here today as the 2025 ALA Girls Nation president because 101 girls from across the nation believed in me," said ALA Girls Nation President Maanyata Raju Srikantam, California, at the ALA's

> National Convention in Tampa, Fla. "I'm living proof that empowerment really can change the course of a girl's life. That is what ALA Girls Nation does. What ALA Girls State does. What the American Legion Auxiliary does. These programs aren't just about mock government. They are the empowerment young women need to keep on breaking glass ceilings."

The seven-day immersive ALA Girls Nation program has laid the foundation for thousands of bright futures in not only public service, but other careers as well. The 2025 attendees are not just our nation's future leaders — they are leaders now. This group of young women represented the best of our nation's youth, and the future is in exceptionally capable hands.

"Take every chance, stand up every time, and know that you are not powerful in spite of being a woman you are powerful *because* you are a woman," said ALA Girls Nation president pro-tempore Helena Hosseini from Virginia, as she closed the final senate session of ALA Girls Nation 2025.

Check out **ALA Girls Nation** highlights on our socials: @ALAGirlsNation

Surprise reunion: Two former ALA Girls Nation attendees reunited at this year's session. Check out the ALA blog to read more: www.ALAforVeterans.org/blog.



























MOMENTS THAT LAST A LIFETIME (opposite page): Capitol Hill Day. This page, from left: ALA Girls Nation Supreme Court; Texas Boys Nation & ALA Girls Nation senators; junior counselors and senior counselor Jane Thurston; Arlington National Cemetery wreath laying; Vietnam Veterans Memorial; poppy ceremony; Nationalist party; Boys Nation and ALA Girls Nation presidents and vice presidents; Nevada senator Thifany Ortega Gavarrete standing to represent the U.S. Marine Corps at Twilight Tattoo; Federalist party; senators on Monument Tour Day; name shading to honor a veteran from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial; a veteran with senators at Twilight Tattoo.

LEADING THE WAY

TO COMMEMORATE THE 2024-2025 **AUXILIARY YEAR**

By Sara Fowler



Epic and awesome — those two words were the focus of the 2024-2025 administrative year at the American Legion Auxiliary's 104th National Convention in Tampa, Fla.

"It has been an epic year for the ALA," said 2024-2025 Auxiliary National President Trish Ward from the convention stage. "So many lives were changed because of the incredible work and dedication of our grassroots members."

The year was focused on membership training and equipping units with the skills to succeed to continue making a difference for our veterans, military, and their families. National Convention is the opportunity to celebrate members and all they've accomplished while working our mission day in and day out.

Opening session began with motivational speaker Steve Gilliland. A member of the Speaker Hall of Fame, Gilliland is recognized as a storyteller and comedian. He shared personal stories with the convention crowd throughout his talk, often inciting laughs from the audience to get the week started on a fun, positive note.

Auxiliary members gathered from across the country for convention general sessions to mark the year's accomplishments, hearing from each of the national committees about members in action. Committee reports were informative, inspiring, and motivated members to try new ideas to better serve our veterans, military, and their families, as well as our communities.

A few of the reports included youth special guests who are always a wonderful addition to the convention lineup of speakers: Junior Member of the Year Olivia Thuney (California), 2025 ALA Girls Nation President Maanyata Raju Srikantam (California), and Little Miss Poppy Kinsey Kuhlman (Ohio).

Delegates also voted on a number of amendments at this year's convention, with much discussion on several of them. To read more about each amendment and the voting outcomes, go to page 20 in this issue of Auxiliary.

New national officers at the helm

Wednesday of convention week always brings excitement and momentum for the incoming administrative year. General session business is paused to take time for the election of national officers celebrates the successes of those who have served and the excitement of the next in line to lead.

Pam Ray of the Department of Illinois was elected the ALA's 2025-2026 national president. The national ALA focus this year is Mission Driven, Family Focused.

"Thank you all so much for the trust you have shown today by electing and installing me as your national president," Ray said from the convention stage. "I promise to do my very best to respect that trust and protect our mission and our organization."

Read more about Ray's professional and personal life, ALA involvement, and direction for the administrative year on page 34 in this issue of Auxiliary.

Other national officers elected to serve during the 2025-2026 administrative year: Dr. Coral May Grout, national vice president; Ann Buchanan, Central Division national vice president; Ree Ross, Eastern Division national vice president; Shareen Johnson, Northwestern Division national vice president; Vickie Thrower-Mills, Southern Division national vice president; Joan Cannon, Western Division national vice president; Kathy Daudistel, national secretary; Marybeth Revoir, national treasurer; Nancy Magginnis, national chaplain; and Hilary Ott, national historian. Learn more about each of the national officers at www.ALAforVeterans.org/about/national-leadership.

The 2025 convention commemorated another successful ALA administrative year — learning, growing, and adapting so members can continue to work our mission for our veterans, military, and their families.

"Part of leadership is setting the next team up for success and giving them their space to lead," Ward said. "That is what our Leading the Way team was all about, and that's what we'll continue to do."

National ALA awards presented to recipients **Department Merit Medallion**

Earning the distinction of the new Department Merit Medallion Award, 15 department presidents representing their states were honored to walk across the convention stage, shaking their red, white, and blue pom-poms to a room full of cheers, being among those who achieved all the criteria for this distinguished award. The award-winning departments:

- Department of Alaska, President Lori Fruhwirth
- Department of Arizona, President Stacey W. Mayberry
 - Department of California, President Linda Hayes
- Department of Connecticut, President Janice Sentivany
 - Department of Florida, President Charlotte M. Bass
 - Department of Hawaii, President Irene J. DeVirgilio
 - Department of Iowa, President Verlinda R. Prior
 - Department of Kansas, President Tracy M. Kinnick
 - Department of Minnesota, President Judith

Ackerman

- Department of Nebraska, President Amanda F. Washburn
- Department of Pennsylvania, President Tracie Seiders
 - Department of Utah, President Michael Rasmuson
 - Department of Virginia, President Ethel M. Carson
 - Department of Washington, President Diana L.

Hagen

• Department of Wisconsin, President Becky A. Mueller

"All of these department presidents represent departments that achieved excellence in membership, impact reporting, governance, financial health, and investing in the organization," Ward said during the award presentation.

Departments earned the distinction of having a special

state delegation sign, and those from the winning departments received a Merit Medallion medal to wear during all of National Convention week.

Public Spirit Award

"What is often mentioned in the military is to leave no man behind," said 2025 American Legion Auxiliary Public Spirit Award recipient Ann Mills-Griffiths, chair emeritus and acting CEO of the National League of POW/MIA Families, from the convention stage. "And those now serving likely don't know that this meaningful goal came from the efforts that began during the Vietnam War."

The American Legion Auxiliary's prestigious Public Spirit Award recognizes outstanding individuals and organizations for contributions that positively impact communities through service to our veterans, military, and their families.

Cmdr. James B. Mills, U.S. Navy, Mills-Griffiths' brother, was listed as MIA on Sept. 21, 1966, when the Navy F4B on which he served as radar intercept officer disappeared on a night, low-flying bombing mission over North Vietnam. He was serving his second tour, assigned to Fighter Squadron 21, USS Coral Sea, when the F4B in which he and the pilot, Navy Capt. James Bauder, were last seen and disappeared off radar.

"The reality hits home when the war ends and your loved one doesn't come back," Mills-Griffiths said.















CELEBRATION TIME (opposite page):
National President Trish Ward with Little
Miss Poppy Kinsey Kuhlman. This page,
from top left: Department of Florida pages;
Ward and Tragedy Assistance Program for
Survivors (TAPS) Founder Bonnie Carroll
sign a Memorandum of Understanding;
ALA members before session; Salute to
Servicemembers winners; Unit Members of
the Year; Auxiliary members in the crowd.

"Then you truly gain an understanding of what forever really means and what sacrifice really is."

Despite uncertainty surrounding this incident, and due to nearly miraculous site discovery and sincere dedication by DPAA's underwater archeologists, the remains of Bauder were recovered and identified in August 2017, and those of Mills in August 2018. He was interred with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery on Aug. 24, 2019.

Mills-Griffiths is a member of American Legion Auxiliary Unit 364 in Virginia.

Unit Members of the Year

The American Legion Auxiliary Unit Member of the Year Award recognizes those serving at the unit level who exemplify the values and ideals of the Auxiliary and whose accomplishments significantly impact the program work in their units.

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

Alabama: Irene Starr; Alaska: Sandra Toenies: Arizona: Lisa Thaler: Arkansas: Mariette Flores: California: Susan "Susie Q" Mihaltan; Colorado: Audrey Quick; Delaware: Roberta Halle Bass; Florida: Debbie Nixon; Georgia: Barbara Howard; Hawaii: Alicia Motomura; Idaho: Eileen Banholzer; Illinois: Vicki Lynn; Indiana: Eloise Passwater; Iowa: Kristi Bridges; Kansas: Debbie Holden-Plagmann; Kentucky: Michelle Warren; Maryland: Brenda Stonesifer; Massachusetts: Coral Steiger; Minnesota: Tami Paul; Mississippi: Priscilla Carbo; Missouri: Ruby Steffens; Montana: Brenda Allison; Nebraska: Karen Cerny; Nevada: Penny Juoni; New Hampshire: Charlene Lamprey; New Jersey: Helen Vardaro; New Mexico: Linda Knull; New York: Julie Montello; North Dakota: Lynn Helm; Ohio: Rhonda Romine; Oklahoma: Marilyn Hughey; Pennsylvania: Mary Hayslett; Puerto Rico: Gladys Bracero: Rhode Island: Darleen LaRose: South Carolina: Dawn Billeci: South Dakota: Sandra Durfee: Texas: Velois Vaughns; Utah: Lisa Nichols; Vermont: Donna Shaw; Virginia: Tracey Antley; Washington: Susan Baker; West Virginia: Theresa "Jane" Stepp; Wisconsin: Stephanie Benson. (Note: Not all American Legion

Auxiliary states submitted names for this award.)

Read more about the UMOY award on the ALA blog at www.ALAforVeterans.org/blog.

Salute to Servicemembers

Our American Legion Auxiliary Salute to Servicemembers Award honors all military personnel who are currently serving our country in the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard, Space Force, and the National Guard/Reserve. The award is given to one servicemember from each branch of service, as well as National Guard/Reserve.

This year, there were 34 submissions for the award in all branches but Space Force.

- U.S. Army: Sgt. Jared N. Reber (Nominated by Urbana Unit 71, Department of Illinois)
- U.S. Air Force: Sen. Master Sgt. Charles Robbins Jr. (Nominated by Shore Boros Unit 351, Department of New Jersey)
- U.S. Navy: Senior Chief Patrick Dixon (Nominated by Unit 56, Department of Hawaii)
- Air National Guard: Chief Master Sgt. Ronald J. Polivka (Nominated by Pleasant Dale Unit 354, Department of Nebraska)
- U.S. Marine Corps: Lance Cpl. Jonathan F. Morocho-Ludizaca (Nominated by Hugh Gilbert Strickland Unit 138, Department of Florida)
- U.S. Coast Guard: Petty Officer First Class Casey Boyle (Nominated by Sitka Unit 13, Department of Alaska)

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

National President's Award for Excellence

Units can win this award by highlighting the amazing work accomplished while working at least three of the mission outreach programs, with a maximum of five unit winners; departments can win by working up to four of the mission outreach programs, with one department winner.

National President's Award for Excellence unit winners: Hugh Gilbert Strickland Unit 138, Florida; Meade Sturgis Unit 33, South Dakota; Woods W. Lynch Unit 19, Texas; Barrett-Davis-Watson Unit 233, Georgia; John J. Morris Unit 62, Arizona. The department winner of the National President's Award for Excellence was Kansas. ★



www.ALAforVeterans.org/convention

Want to see what you missed at the 2025 ALA National Convention?

Catch up by watching archived videos of the general session livestream, plus national officer elections and installation on the national website. Want to attend the ALA's largest national event? The next National Convention will be our 105th, held in Louisville, Ky., in late August 2026. Follow our social media @ALAforVeterans for future convention information.

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* Proceeds support American Legion Family programs

Shop online: Emblem.Legion.org

MISSION DRIVEN, **FAMILY FOCUSED**

Learn more about 2025-2026 **ALA National President Pam Ray**

By Sara Fowler



The American Legion Auxiliary has long been a part of Pam Ray's life.

The 2025-2026 American Legion Auxiliary national president from Illinois is the fifth from that department (state) and is focused on The American Legion Family as a whole.

Ray has been married for 46 years to Harl "Butch" Ray, a very active member of the Sons of The American Legion. Both are now retired. They have two daughters — Sara is an associate dean of students at Morton College, and Ami is a licensed counselor in Kentucky. They have two grandchildren, Chloe and Ben. Ray's parents were active in The American Legion Family until the day they passed. Her sister, Sharon Conatser, is the 2015-2016 national president of the American Legion Auxiliary.

Early life

Ray grew up in the Champaign-Urbana area with her parents at Post/Unit 634.

"My sister and I went with them whenever they went to the post," she recalled. "I spent so much time there, I thought everyone did this. As I got older, there was a kind of awakening that not everyone knows about The American Legion Family. That was just how we grew up."

When she was about 10 years old, Ray and her sister's memberships were transferred to Urbana Unit 71, where they have belonged since. The new unit had a more active Junior group versus the other unit, which was located in a small farming community that didn't have as many young members. Ray's parents remained at Post/Unit 634.

During her years as a Junior member, Ray served as a Junior district president, as well as honorary department Junior president.

When she became a senior member, she continued with her unit through nursing school and her move to Springfield.

Devoted nursing career

Ray wanted to be a nurse since the age of 3. She received scholarships from the ALA and the 40&8 for nursing before she started college, a great benefit to help further her education. After graduating from nursing school, she began her career in pediatrics. Once she started having her own children, she said it was harder to see critically ill kids. She also worked in the ear, nose, and throat area, as well as in a regional burn center.

"It was devastating and also rewarding at the same time," she said of the burn center. "I learned more in the two years I was there than I ever learned in school



An explanation of Mission Driven, Family Focused

The national president's pin is traditionally given by the ALA's highest volunteer national officer in person during mission outreach and meet-and-greet events. 2025-2026 National President Pam Ray provides a breakdown of the pin's design:

"The pin is shaped like flight wings because of my love for Honor Flight," she said. "The red, white, and blue are because of the pride I have in my country and the patriotism that is much needed. The gold stars around the

ALA emblem are to celebrate Gold Star Families."



about how the body responds to trauma. I saw all ages. The youngest was 3 months old."

Ray finished her career helping those with head and neck cancers. She has had family members suffer from this type of cancer, and through her education and commitment to care, was able to assist families in understanding what was happening to their loved ones.

She said she had a wonderful 47-year nursing career, helping countless people in many different areas of health.

A passion for the mission

"Nursing was a good segue into the ALA and taking care of people," Ray said. "I've always been one who likes to take care of others. As a nurse, that's what I did for a living. Taking care of other people in the Auxiliary gives me an opportunity to volunteer to take care of those who need it."

Ray enjoys volunteering at the outpatient veterans' clinic as part of her way to give back to veterans.

"At Christmas, I love giving gifts to those at the clinic," she said. "They are so grateful for it."

She also helps prepare Christmas bags for a transitional home. They receive the bags the week before Christmas.

Ray has taken the lead on varied projects and has held many leadership roles during her years of involvement in the Auxiliary. A favorite was unit chaplain.

"I loved being chaplain," she recalled. "I have a really strong faith. I could share my faith through prayer cards."

She also enjoyed working with youth through Junior Activities and ALA Girls Nation and ALA Girls State.

"ALA Girls Nation was amazing for me," she recalled. "Those young women are so motivated to make this country better — you can tell that in their bills. I served 10 years for our Illini Girls State as director and volunteered for over 25 years. We've created a great program."

In other leadership roles, she has enjoyed meeting members and learning what keeps them coming back.

"I love being able to spread the word to those who don't know who we are," she said. "We aren't always the best at that. We do what we do; we go onto the next. Sometimes we need to invite those non-members to see what we are doing."

This year's ALA national focus is Mission Driven, Family Focused.

"The mission is what draws people in — that's what we have to utilize. That's why I chose it," she said. "The mission is how we are going to make everything work. If you don't work the mission, no one is going























CONTINUED ALA INVOLVEMENT (top to bottom, left to right): 2025-2026 ALA National President Pam Ray when she was Illinois department president with Illinois Department Commander Richard Groharing; Ray with her parents and sister; baby and youth photos; senior year portrait; Ray's engagement photo with husband Harl "Butch" Ray; wedding day photo; Ray's extended family; official department president photo; Ray's immediate family at the 2025 National Convention; Ray with National Vice President Dr. Coral May Grout on the convention stage celebrating the next leadership team.

to know why we are here or even that we are here."

The member focus for the administrative year is on leadership and mentoring.

"We need to train leaders for today and for tomorrow," she said. "Through a mentoring program and leadership opportunities, we can do that. I have charged the 2025-2026 national committee chairs with holding at least one webinar of what is happening with their program so our members can learn more about each program."

The national Public Relations and Leadership committees are utilizing a new enewsletter to be distributed to unit presidents. If a unit has their current president's email in ALAMIS, they will receive the quarterly newsletter.

"This focus is on communication down to the unit, where the magic and mission happen at the grassroots level," she said. "If we don't tell members what they need, they don't know. We rely on department chairs heavily, but we felt we needed to try something on the national level for that to happen."

In addition to leadership and mentoring, there is a family focus for this administrative year — working together, reaching out, and what we can do together as a family to strengthen relationships and community.

The 2025-2026 fundraising focus is the ALA Spirit of Youth Scholarship Fund.

"Both of my girls were blessed to receive a scholarship from the ALA for their schooling," Ray said. "I want to be sure we continue to support our children and youth."

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

For more information, visit www.ALAforVeterans. org/scholarships/spirit-of-youth. To donate, text SPIRIT to 1-844-940-3450.

Major partnership with **Honor Flight Network**

Ray is looking forward to the national level of the Auxiliary working with Honor Flight during this administrative year. She was first made aware of the organization in 2010 when she was a department president and made it the department's focus. At the time, Honor Flights consisted of only World War II veterans. Ray took her dad, a U.S. Army veteran, on a

"My dad had the time of his life," she remembered. "He exchanged stories with veterans and had that

camaraderie like they had known each other all their lives. He met a guy who had been in the same area, and they shared stories. It touched my life, and I've been part of it ever since."

The national American Legion Auxiliary is sponsoring an all-female veteran Honor Flight that will provide them with an opportunity to see memorials for the wars they served in.

"With our sponsorship will come that opportunity to do something for the veteran, and an opportunity for us to have recognition as well show who we are," Ray said. "We could have our logo on their shirts. Hoping we can get a banner made that reads something like 'American Legion Auxiliary Sponsored Honor Flight.' What a great way to give back to veterans."

The special flight for female veterans is currently scheduled for April 2026.

Importance of ALA recruitment and retainment

As a longtime member, Ray's advice for new members is to find a mentor.

She and her husband have a rule when recruiting: When you sign someone up, you are their best friend for five years.

"Let people work the mission in areas they are interested in," she said. "If they don't like kids, don't give them a youth program. Also, know your why. It's very important to share your why. People can't read your mind. Don't get discouraged. It's easy to have one misunderstanding and say, 'I'm going to walk away.' Give us a chance. Our mission is one of the most important missions of any organization because we serve those who protect our freedoms."

Ray is excited for all of the members she's already met and those she will continue to meet during this administrative year.

"I look forward to meeting members and seeing how our units work the mission," she said. "I have so many friends in The American Legion Family always room for more."

Looking ahead

Having held leadership roles from unit level to now the highest volunteer position in the organization, Ray said she follows the golden rule — treat others how you want to be treated.

"I think sometimes in leadership we forget that golden rule," she said. "And the need for power takes over. Wherever you are, always remember that leadership is fleeting — it's a title — but mentorship and kindness are forever. We would all just be better off if we remembered that, and our organization would be stronger." ★



Invest in the Future. Empower Students Today.



The Spirit of Youth Scholarship Fund is the ALA's 2025-2026 national fundraising focus, and your support can change lives. By contributing, you open doors for deserving students who may not otherwise be able to afford college. Every gift helps young people achieve their dreams through education and creates a lasting impact on their future.

Text SPIRIT to 1-844-940-3450 or scan the QR code to make your gift today! Together, let's fuel the Spirit of Youth and invest in tomorrow's leaders.





AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY AND TAPS ENTER PARTNERSHIP

American Legion Auxiliary
National Headquarters and
Tragedy Assistance Program for
Survivors (TAPS) commemorated
their alliance by signing a
Memorandum of Understanding
(MOU) to expand collaboration
and strengthen support for
the families of America's fallen
servicemembers, veterans, and
active-duty servicemembers.

The MOU, signed at the ALA's 104th National Convention in Tampa, Fla., formalized a shared commitment to work together in honoring and assisting military families through coordinated outreach, advocacy, and community-based initiatives.

"This MOU allows both organizations to utilize each other's networks to further promote our missions where they overlap," said ALA National Headquarters Programs Division Director Chrystal Daulton. "Both organizations can provide a strengthened sense of community for survivors. Additionally, this MOU will enable unit members to speak from a knowledgeable place on services and support that may

be found in their local area for survivors."

Since our founding in 1919, the ALA has had an unwavering legacy of serving veterans, military, and their families through

educational initiatives, service programs, and grassroots advocacy. We know military service is a sacrifice for the whole family, so ALA members quietly look for ways to ease the burden — whatever it takes to get families the help they need. If we don't have the resources, we connect military families with our partners who do.

TAPS, established in 1994, has provided compassionate care and survivor support to more than 100,000 loved ones grieving the loss of a military member. Regardless of the relationship to the servicemember or the circumstances around their death, TAPS exists to support anyone mourning the loss of a loved one in the military and veteran community by providing help, hope, and healing through a variety of programs to survivors nationally and worldwide.

"The survivors of those who sacrificed to serve our country have not been previously addressed by our organization at a national level before this partnership," said Daulton.
"With the addition of the ALA Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Committee purpose statement — adding that the committee will expand its focus to survivors

as well as veterans, families, and caregivers — this MOU allows our members to utilize TAPS' resources and networks to provide support for those left behind by the loss of their loved one who served."

The signed MOU between the Auxiliary and TAPS marks the beginning of an even stronger alliance rooted in service, remembrance, and dedication to America's heroes and their loved ones. Both organizations strongly believe in the power of *Service Not Self* and continue to put veterans, military, and their families at the center of their missions. Together, we will strengthen support and care for all those loved and left behind.

The partnership will foster collaboration in these areas:

- joint outreach and survivor support initiatives
- community service projects honoring veterans and their families
- expanded access to grief resources, peer mentoring, and educational programs
- increased visibility and advocacy efforts for military families nationwide
- educating youth about advocacy and education

To learn more about the partnership between the American Legion Auxiliary and TAPS, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org or www.taps.org.

"I am hopeful that this partnership will be successful in the following ways: allow more survivors access to all of the much needed resources and information provided by TAPS, to strengthen both of our organizations' presence in local communities nationwide, and our combined voices will provide a greater impact nationwide when advocating for the needs of survivors," said Daulton.



STAY CONNECTED TO THE ALLIANCE

Be sure to follow the ALA's socials @ALAforVeterans, and TAPS @TAPSorg to see stories of this collaboration between our two like-minded organizations.

COMMUNITY SERVICE: FULFILLING OUR MISSION THROUGH SERVICE



www.Facebook.com/groups/ALACommunityService

The mission statement of the American Legion Auxiliary is to honor the sacrifice of those who serve by enhancing the lives of our veterans, military, and their families. Community service is an important part of what we do every day to fulfill our mission.

There are several ways you can participate in a community service program or event. The Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service is Jan. 19, 2026. Some examples of ways to make a difference in your community on this day could be to hold a job fair, help clean up a local park, or help those less fortunate with yard work or home repairs.

You can host or sponsor many community service programs and events on any day. Host a blood drive, collect winter coats for kids, do a food drive for food-insecure families, or reach out to a homeless shelter and find ways to help. The list is endless.

Lastly, American Legion Family Day, observed on the last Saturday in April, is an excellent way to show the community what The American Legion Family is all about, who we honor, and how we do it. Events — big or small — have a great impact on your unit and post. Have food — either lunch, dinner, or just

some snacks. Invite your local dignitaries and first responders. Showcase the history of your post home and its activity in the community through stories from Legionnaires, Sons, and Auxiliary members. Use this opportunity to talk about membership and have applications on hand. Most importantly, advertise!

Visit www.ALAforVeterans. org for more ideas and other ways you can participate in community service.



John Tester has been a member of the ALA for six years and belongs to Ballard Hobart Unit 36 in Ludlow, Vt.

EDUCATION: SET THE TONE FOR A GREAT YEAR IN EDUCATION



www.Facebook.com/groups/ALAEducation

Whether you're an Education Committee chair or someone who enjoys working with the ALA Education Program, there are many ways to get involved by visiting the Education page at www.ALAforVeterans.org.

The ALA's four national scholarships serve as a starting point, and now is the time to promote them. Applications are available online, along with the eligibility rules and essay questions. Applications must be submitted online by 11:59 p.m. ET on March 1, 2026.

During American Education Week (Nov. 17-21), download a card from the national ALA website to say "Thank you" to your educators. It's a simple gesture that makes an impact. Be sure to mark your calendars for Teacher Appreciation Week (May 4-8, 2026) and create innovative ways to celebrate all

week. To further engage your community, promote ALA's Give 10 to Education, and gather school supplies. Don't forget to present a Give 10 certificate to recognize the efforts of members who donated school supplies.

How about including Veterans in Community Schools as part of your education curriculum? This program is relevant at any time of the year, but especially meaningful around Veterans Day. It is a great way to honor our veterans, providing students with insights and history told from those who lived it — our veterans.

Finally, we can support our military children with their educational needs as well. The Military Child Education Coalition offers resources for students, parents, and educators to help military children stay

on course with academic, social, and emotional challenges.

The ALA Education Program Facebook group offers a platform for exchanging ideas and resources. Monthly newsletters focus on various aspects of the program, providing ideas and guidance on a variety of educational topics. Request to join the group at www.Facebook.com/groups/ ALAEducation.

Being actively involved in students' futures is our responsibility. With the tools and support provided through the ALA Education Program, we are equipped to make a lasting and positive impact on the next generation.



Barb Washburn is a 49-year member of the Auxiliary. She belongs to Unit 360 in Cook, Neb.

PUBLIC RELATIONS: SHARING OUR STORIES AND CONNECTING

www.Facebook.com/groups/ALApublicrelations

Public relations (PR) is storytelling that connects. It is headlines, newsletters, and so much more. PR is about connecting, communicating, and showcasing the heart of who we are as the American Legion Auxiliary. Every member, unit, and department has a story to tell. So, let's get out there and start sharing!

The national Public Relations Committee is here to help guide you from the ground up. Whether you are brand new to using social media or a seasoned communications professional, the PR Committee is here to provide support, ideas, and practical tools to help build your presence internally within units and departments and externally as you build bridges and strengthen

partnerships in your community.

Sharing your stories can be accomplished in numerous ways. Start with one element at a time. Do you have a newsletter that goes to your unit or department members? Do you send press releases or event information to local media outlets? Have you started a Facebook page for your unit? Facebook and other social media platforms are free, easy ways to share our mission with members, potential members, and the community.

We encourage all ALA members to join the ALA PR Facebook group at www.Facebook.com/ groups/ALApublicrelations. It is a space where members can learn, engage, share ideas, and explore how to create and share stories. You will discover ways to

engage the public, connect with the community, and expand awareness. We will share bestcase practices, creative ideas, and everything from how to create a media plan to creating flyers, designing a newsletter, and working with local media outlets.

Public relations is fun, flexible, and powerful. From highlighting a weekend barbecue to securing legislative support for American Legion Family initiatives, every story makes an impact. Together, we can spread the stories of Service Not Self because we are mission driven and family focused.



Brister Thomas is a Paid Up For Life member from eUnit 56 in Hawaii.

VETERANS AFFAIRS & REHABILITATION: CONNECTING WITH SIMILAR MISSIONS

www.Facebook.com/groups/ALAVAR

The American Legion Auxiliary collaborates with several likeminded organizations that center their mission on veterans, military, and their families. One of those collaborations is with Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, or TAPS, a 501(c)(3)nonprofit organization. Founded in 1994, TAPS provides a wide variety of resources to those grieving the loss of a loved one in the military or veteran community through a peer support network and offers resources to help navigate the grief process, along with the often-complex benefits process.

Some of their programs include regional survivor seminars for adults, youth programs such as the Good Grief Camp held

annually during Memorial Day weekend in Washington, D.C., as well as connections to local counseling services. They provide all services at no cost to survivors. and these services are available to survivors both nationally and internationally.

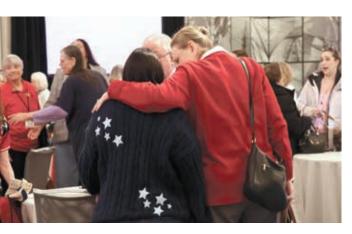
The American Legion Auxiliary celebrated its alliance with TAPS by signing a Memorandum of Understanding at the ALA's 104th National Convention, which formalized the two organizations' shared commitment to honoring and assisting military families. This partnership will foster collaboration in areas such as joint outreach and survivor support initiatives, community service projects honoring veterans and their families, expanded

access to grief resources, peer mentoring and educational programs, increased visibility and advocacy for military families, and educating our youth about advocacy.

To support this alliance built upon service, remembrance, and dedication to America's heroes and those they leave behind, members can donate or volunteer time and talent to the programs they offer. Equally important is to become fully aware of what TAPS can offer so that we may share these resources with individuals when the need arises. To learn more, visit www.taps.org.



Dr. Lisa Chaplin is a 42year member of the ALA. She belongs to Unit 284 in Colonial Heights, Va.



SAVE THE DATE FOR ALA MISSION TRAININGS, JUNIOR MEETINGS

Are you interested in networking with national leaders and other American Legion Auxiliary members in your ALA division who share your dedication and enthusiasm for supporting our veterans? Are your ALA Junior members looking for an opportunity to collaborate with other Juniors who share their passion for our mission? If your answer is yes, then we encourage you to attend one of the ALA Mission Trainings and national Junior meetings.

These one-day conferences offer an engaging, inspiring, and interactive environment where you will gain deeper insights into implementing the ALA's core programs in your unit, department, and community. ALA Mission Training and national Junior meetings help members better understand, and ultimately advance, our mission.

The trainings are for members

of all ages, all levels of the Auxiliary, and all walks of life who want to receive important information on numerous topics relevant to our mission: veterans, national security, youth and education, community service, Americanism, leadership, and so much more.

You are also more than welcome to attend a Mission

Training in a different division. Ask members in your unit to join you, and make sure to bring your Junior members!

Adult members will explore ways to increase volunteer participation at Veterans Affairs Medical Centers (VAMCs), learn about Honor Flight, Poppy Funds, VA&R mission engagement and sponsorship opportunities, and be updated on Be the One. Presenters will also discuss youth scholarship opportunities, community service projects, America's 250th birthday and challenge initiative, new requirements for the Merit Medallion Award, our Veteran Projects Fund grants, and more.

National Junior meetings held during Mission **Trainings**

Our Junior members are the future of this organization, so we need to keep them inspired and engaged for them to continue the

2025-2026 ALA Mission Training & National **Junior Meetings**

Nov. 15: Albany, N.Y.

Nov. 15: Minneapolis, Minn.

Jan. 31: Las Vegas, Nev.

Jan. 31: Indianapolis, Ind. *

Feb. 7: Atlanta, Ga. *

*Events will be held with the **National Regional Information Conference for The American** Legion and Sons of The American Legion.

For more information and to register, visit www. ALAforVeterans.org/Meetings/ Mission-Training.

ALA's Service Not Self legacy and fulfill our mission of supporting veterans, military, and their families. When these young and talented members come together at ALA national Junior meetings, new ideas and inspiration develop.

The national Junior meetings are always filled with fun and engaging educational opportunities. This year, members will complete a service project called Hats for Heroes, where they will fill a knit hat with personal hygiene-type items for homeless or hospitalized veterans. They will also learn how to recite the *Pledge* of Allegiance in sign language and receive "little liberty gnomes" to give out and share the importance of freedom in a creative and entertaining way.



Want to serve on a national ALA committee?

The application process for 2026-2027 national committee appointments is now open! National committee chairs and members are appointed annually and confirmed by the National Executive Committee to serve on a wide variety of ALA committees for you to explore. All members are eligible to apply. The application window is through Jan. 1, 2026.



Provided by Nancy Magginnis, National Chaplain 2025-2026 www.Facebook.com/groups/ALAchaplains

NOVEMBER

One of my favorite childhood memories was attending my dad's Army reunion. Following their military service together, his group started holding reunions. At these reunions, they didn't talk war and the ravages of war — they shared some of the fun things they did. I'm not sure how this company survived not being court marshaled. Through these stories, I learned to see veterans share their experiences and find healing from telling their stories.

We need to encourage veterans to share their stories — share the good times they spent with those who served with them. By sharing the positive they experienced, the blessings and healing from the negative they witnessed will come. God also brings us through varying experiences in each of our lives.

In the song *Through It All* by Andrae Crouch, he reminds us that God is always with us: "I've had many tears and sorrows, I've had questions for tomorrow/There've been times I didn't know right from wrong/But in every situation, God gave blessed consolation/That my trials only make me strong/ Through it all, through it all, I've learned to trust in God."

Let us all bow our heads in our individual faith as we pray. Dear God, thank You for giving me faith no matter what I am going through. Thank You for letting me trust You when I don't know what's going on in my life. You are always there, and I am thankful for all You have done for me, today and always. Thank You that I can trust in you through it all. Amen.

Matthew 17:20 — I tell you the truth, if you had faith as even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain: Move from here to there, and it would move.

DECEMBER

How many times have you thought you weren't worthy of God's love? Felt that God wasn't there for you? You're going through what you view as a crisis, and yet God seems to be nowhere in sight.

Matthew West's song, The God Who Stays, seems to express these emotions:

"If I were You, I would've given up on me by now/I would've labeled me a lost cause/'Cause I feel just like a lost cause/If I were You, I would've turned around and walked away/I would've labeled me beyond repair."

From God's perspective, "But somehow You don't see me like I do. Somehow You're still here."

A final reminder from West: "You're the God who stays/ You're the one who runs in my direction when the whole world walks away/You're the God who stands with wide open arms/And You tell me nothing I have ever done could separate my heart from the God who stays."

Wow!!! What an awesome reminder of who God is and that He is always with us.

Let us all bow our heads in our individual faith as we pray. Dear God, thank You for being the God who stays! Thank You for Your promise to us in Deuteronomy that You will always be there. No matter how many times we walk away from You, You're always there waiting on us to return, helping us to pick up the pieces when we have messed things up. God, we thank You for the wide open arms that You will never allow us to be separated from You. Amen.

Deuteronomy 31:8 — God himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.

JANUARY

As a child, I remember growing up in church, attending Sunday School and Vacation Bible School. I don't remember the exact time I knew I was a child of God. As a 3-year-old, I was burnt in a fire. I know my medical chart said, "Give her whatever she wants, whenever she wants it," as the doctors didn't believe I would live. But God claimed me as a child of His. He eventually healed me and saved my life even when medical knowledge told them otherwise.

In the song *The Truth* by Megan Woods, God reminds us that we are His child:

"The truth is, I am my Father's child/I make Him proud and I make Him smile/I was made in the image of a perfect King/He looks at me and wouldn't change a thing/ The truth is I am truly loved/By a God who's good when I'm not good enough."

Yes, God has made each of us for His purpose and to follow where He leads us. We need to be reminded that we were made in His image and He wouldn't change anything about us. He just needs us to accept the role He has given us.

Let us all bow our heads in our individual faith as we pray. Dear God, You created us in Your image and want us to be a child of God. Please help us accept the role You have for us. Remind us of the beauty, love, and compassion You gave us. Help us to be reminded that we are Yours today and forever. Amen.

I John 4:7 — Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God.



Nancy Magginnis is a Paid Up For Life member from Kendallville Unit 86 in Indiana.



GIVING BACK: ALA member Lauren Godfrey with American Legion Family members after organizing a Be the One 5K to help raise awareness in ending veteran suicide.

NORTH CAROLINA UNIT MEMBER BRINGS COMMUNITY TOGETHER FOR VETERAN CAUSE

For a student still in high school and an American Legion Auxiliary unit that's one of the smallest in its state, planning and hosting a large-scale event to raise awareness for charity in only months might seem impossible.

But Lauren Godfrey and ALA Unit 436 in Angier, N.C., are proving that passion for a cause, dedication to succeed, and support from others can make the impossible possible.

"People would tell me, 'I don't know if that's going to work. I don't know how you're going to get that done in such a short time frame," said Godfrey, who is now a freshman at North Carolina State University in Raleigh. "I've always been the type of person who, if you tell me I can't do something, I'm going to try even harder to do it."

Godfrey and her ALA unit conducted a 5K run/walk in Angier to support Be the One, an American Legion initiative aimed at reducing the rate of suicide among veterans. The event drew nearly 200 people — including 140 race participants — who learned about Be the One and its mission.

Finding her cause

Godfrey got the idea for supporting veterans while in high

school when she participated in North Carolina's 2024 ALA Girls State with Auxiliary Unit 436 as her sponsor. There, she learned about the prevalence of suicide among those who have served in the military.

She decided to dedicate her Girl Scout Gold Award project to organizing a 5K event that shined a spotlight on the issue.

At the urging of Unit 436
President Jo-Anne Martin,
Godfrey also became a Junior
member of the ALA. Auxiliary
Unit 436 has only four locally
active members, Martin said, so
they knew managing an event
that would draw hundreds
of people would require help
beyond Godfrey and her new
ALA unit.

Godfrey's family, the Girl Scouts, and the ALA all pitched in, as did other organizations and a local school and church. As part of her efforts to garner assistance, Godfrey led presentations for local service organizations about suicide and veterans. She shared information online about Be the One and its focus.

And she learned to pivot and persevere whenever she encountered obstacles.

"Lauren remained steadfast to her goal," Martin said. "Her strength and energy were a shining light to our unit in continuing to support her mission."

The resulting 5K accomplished Godfrey's goal of drawing attention to the issue of suicide prevention for veterans. She's working to host another 5K for Be the One in spring 2026.





Coordinating an event, no matter the obstacles



For ALA members who want to plan an event in support of veterans — but are concerned they don't have the resources to do so — Lauren Godfrey and Jo-Anne Martin

of Auxiliary Unit 436 in Angier, N.C., offer the following tips:

- Have a vision. Establish a "why" for the event that guides every action and reinforces the importance of the work.
- Make it a group effort. Start with a committee, even a small one, and be willing to ask for help when it's needed.
- Be confident. Believe that the event will be successful and make an impact.
- Accept imperfections. Every first-time activity is an opportunity to learn how the next one can be even better.





POPPY PRESENTATION AT ALA GIRLS STATE INSPIRES POEM



Participants in ALA Girls State programs learn more than just politics. They often discover more about themselves and increase their

confidence. 2025 ALA Magnolia Girls State (Mississippi) attendee Madison Waters developed an appreciation for government, but she also honed her talent as

Waters said she always wanted to write plays and still plans to pursue that dream, but at ALA Girls State, her writing took

another direction.

"ALA Girls State taught me how politics and advocacy can affect the world, so I've started to integrate more themes of social justice into my work," said Waters. "I've started using my art as a tool to express my opinions instead of just creating something to be entertaining or good."

While at ALA Magnolia Girls State, she wrote for the studentrun newsletter that was all about the activities during the program.

"I needed to write something. I knew that as far as journalism went, I didn't really know how to put a spin on it," said Waters. "I really like creative writing, so I decided to try poetry."

Learning more about veterans and the meaning behind the poppy inspired her to write a poem.

"It got me thinking: *I only* really notice people talking about honoring veterans on Veterans Day, Independence Day, and other holidays. How come we don't honor them every day? If they died for us, why do they only get a sliver of the spotlight? So, I decided to write a poem that discussed that."

Waters said she was nervous because writing poetry is out of her comfort zone. However, she found support from others at ALA Girls State.

"When I read *Poppies on the Floor* in front of the veterans on the last night of the program, I was a little bit nervous about how it would be received since I referred to poppies as 'trash to be tossed," said Waters. "I was really happy when I saw that the veterans in the front row were smiling up at me. It was nice to know my work had an impact on them."

Waters is in her senior year of high school and plans to attend college and double major in English and theater, while also studying playwriting.

Poppies on the Floor

When the war is done. We think of all we've won. The freedom we've earned. The lessons we've learned, We embrace our loved ones. Fathers, brothers, sons, We're happy we have them home, Tucked safely in our protective dome, But some are stuck in despair, With a pain that they struggle to bare. They can't embrace their loved ones. Fathers, brothers, sons, For them, we throw parties, parades, To them, we dedicate whole holidays. But then we stop our celebrations, We return to our own situations. We turn our backs and close the door. We leave the poppies on the floor, They were meant to represent our loss, Now it's trash and going to be tossed. Why is it we let this happen? They fought while

Few enter the empty room, And pray for the souls in the tomb, They carry those poppies with pride, In memory of those who died, They remind us of sacrifices made, The people who fought in times of aid, Let's pick up the poppy flowers, And carry them in all the hours. We owe them our freedom after all, We owe them our future when we're big and tall, We thank those who fought in our wars. By not leaving their poppies on the floor.

Bv Madison Waters





PROVIDING HELP FOR A CAREER IN PR AND CREATIVE **MEDIA INDUSTRIES**

For ALA Junior members who retain their membership into adulthood, the American Legion Auxiliary offers the Member Loyalty Scholarship to current college students. Learn more at www.ALAforVeterans. org/scholarships.

Alyssa Enriquez is a sophomore at Texas Tech University. She's connected to the military through her father, Raymond Swann, a U.S. Army veteran who served 22 years. Enriquez, 19, first joined the ALA in 2015.

What did your ALA Junior membership mean to you?

It connected me to a community of strong, serviceminded individuals. I am so grateful I had the opportunity to be an ALA Junior member, and I am honored to be a part of this community and will always carry this part of my life — doing whatever I can to support our military servicemen and women.

What does it mean for you to continue your membership as a senior Auxiliary member?

I am able to carry forth the traditions and values I had as a Junior member, while also taking on greater responsibilities. It allows me to continue honoring and supporting veterans and military families, while also mentoring younger members. What college degree are you pursuing? Why does this career interest you?

I am pursuing a bachelor's degree in public relations and creative media industries, along with a certificate in sports media. I am passionate about working in the professional sports industry, specifically in roles like sports photography or as part of a social media team for organizations like the NFL or NBA.

Growing up, I was always involved in and surrounded by sports, and photography has long been one of my biggest passions. As I continue to pursue a career in a field that is still male-dominated, I hope to be a role model for other young women, showing them that their passions are valid and their goals are achievable. Representation matters, and I aim to be part of the growing movement of women breaking barriers in sports media. I want to inspire others just as I have been inspired by the women who came before me.

Tell us about additional experiences preparing you for your career.

This is my third semester participating in Raider Vision, where I work behind the scenes running cameras for televised collegiate athletic games, working with ESPN. This experience has been high pressure and fastpaced, requiring quick thinking and strong communication skills that are critical in the professional sports media world. I am also actively pursuing an internship with my college's athletic department.

How will being a recipient of the ALA Member Loyalty

Scholarship benefit you?

It will alleviate some of the financial burdens of college, allowing me to focus more on my academic and professional goals. But more importantly, it also serves as a reminder of the support I have from such an amazing organization.

Why is it important for donors to support ALA's scholarship funds?

It empowers the next generation of leaders and serviceminded individuals. Many students like me are working hard to pursue higher education [for] a variety of meaningful careers. Donors help make these dreams possible.

What would you say to others who are eligible for this scholarship but unsure of applying?

You never know what opportunities may come from simply putting yourself out there. Just remember: Nothing bad can



come out of applying, so take the risk because you never know what may come from it.

Is there anything else you want

I am just so incredibly grateful for the opportunities and values the ALA has provided me throughout my life. I just want to say "Thank you" for everything, and especially for this scholarship, as it's going to play a very impactful role in my life.



WELCOME TO OUR 2025-2026 AMERICAN LEGION FAMILY LEADERS

Elected during the 2025
National Conventions of each
American Legion Family
organization in Tampa, Fla.,
were American Legion Auxiliary
National President Pam Ray
of Illinois, American Legion
National Commander Dan K.
Wiley of Kansas, and Sons of
The American Legion National
Commander William "Bill"
Clancy III of New York.

Ray is a member of Urbana Unit 71 in Illinois. She is eligible for membership through her late father, Clay Lofton, who served during the Korean War and World War II. Before being elected to the ALA's highest volunteer office. Ray held numerous leadership positions in the organization at the unit. district. department, and national levels. In her professional life, Ray was a nurse for 47

years and loved caring for people who needed help. As a nurse, she worked in the burn center, pediatrics, neurosurgery, and spent much of her career caring for head and neck cancer patients and their families.

Ray's own family is an integral part of her life. She has been married to Harl "Butch" Ray for 46 years. They have two daughters and two grandchildren. The 2025-2026 ALA administrative year emphasis is Mission Driven, Family Focused. Read more about Ray on page 34 in this issue of *Auxiliary*.

Wiley has held many leadership positions at The American Legion post, department (state), and national levels. He is a Paid Up For Life member of Byron H. Mehl American Legion Post 23 in Leavenworth and is a past

department commander of Kansas. He also represented the state as a member of The American Legion's National Executive Committee.

Continuing Be the One the Legion's suicide prevention program — is one of Wiley's priorities for the upcoming administrative year. The others are "Better Together," which focuses on The American Legion Family; The American Legion legislative agenda; the Veterans & Children Foundation; celebrating America's 250th birthday; and what he says are the three Cs: communication, community, and camaraderie. Wiley and his wife, Sonia, have two children, Austin and Christy, and one grandson.

Clancy is a founding member of SAL Squadron 156 in City Island, where he has served multiple terms as squadron commander. He also has served as New York detachment commander and in national leadership positions, and also is a graduate of New York Legion Boys State. He is eligible for Sons membership through the military service of both his grandfather and father. At National Convention, Clancy spoke of goals for the upcoming year, including plans to continue to promote all principles laid out in The American Legion Preamble. In addition, The Sons of The American Legion will continue to promote the Legion's veteran suicide prevention mission and be involved in the USA 250 challenge.

REGISTER FOR THE AMERICAN LEGION'S NATIONAL REGIONAL INFORMATION CONFERENCES

Registration is underway for The American Legion's next two National Regional Information Conferences (NRIC). The events are designed for any Legionnaire and Sons of The American Legion member to learn valuable training on the organization's mission, vision and programs, and to connect with American Legion Family members. Attendees do not have to hold an officer position to attend. The NRICs will be held in conjunction with ALA Mission Training and national Junior meetings.

Dates and locations for 2026 NRICs:

• Jan. 31: Marriott East,

7202 East 21st St., Indianapolis

• Feb. 7: Westin Atlanta Airport, 4736 Best Road, Atlanta

Curriculum for the one-day sessions:

- Legal topics
- Be the One
- American Legion programs
- Running an effective meeting
- Post operations
- Membership retention

Learn more at www.legion.org/information-center/training.









NEW RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR USA 250 CHALLENGE

American Legion Family members can use these items to support their plans to engage in the USA 250 Challenge for Veterans Day, year-end community service projects, and more.

Now is an excellent time to fine-tune plans for your post or squadron's USA 250 Challenge events for Veterans Day, around the year-end holidays, or early in 2026.

In fact, the projects many American Legion posts conduct around Thanksgiving and Christmas are ideal for completing the community service challenge. The American Legion's USA 250 Challenge offers participants three challenge categories — community service, physical activities, and mental health awareness — to celebrate the nation's 250th birthday.

In addition to celebrating America, proceeds from the \$30 registration fee and all donations go to the Legion's Veterans & Children Foundation, which supports disabled veterans and military families in need.

About the Challenge

The American Legion Family is honoring the nation's 250th birthday with a commitment to embracing physical activity, supporting mental health, and serving its communities. The USA 250 Challenge encourages American Legion Family members, other veterans, and all Americans to participate. The year-long initiative offers three categories - fitness, mental wellness, and community service — to engage more American Legion Family members and others

to participate. Participants may engage in one, two, or all three activities as an individual or as part of a team like an American Legion post, American Legion Auxiliary unit, Sons of The American Legion squadron, and/or an American Legion Riders chapter.

(photo: Nickolas Wolf, The American Legion). **Challenge Categories**





Rahal is joined by members of The American Legion Family to kick off their USA 250 Challenge during a track walk at the Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course near Mansfield, Ohio

BE THE ONE TRAINING



As part of The American Legion Be the One mission to end veteran suicide, the Legion

has joined forces with Columbia University to develop training for those who want to learn more about interacting and responding with veterans who may be in crisis.

After the training, participants will be able to:

• Use the Columbia Suicide

Severity Rating Scale to determine at-risk individuals.

- Identify risk factors and warning signs.
- Outline the types of suicidal ideation and four behaviors that indicate imminent risk.
- Communicate effectively with an individual who may be at risk of hurting themselves.

Members of The American Legion Family are encouraged to take part in this training and share it with their communities. Visit www.legion.org/advocacy/ be-the-one/be-the-one-training to learn about upcoming training opportunities.

LEGION FAMILY GETTING FIT: IndyCar driver Graham

Fitness: Participants walk, cycle, or cover 250 miles any way they choose. Or they can aim to do 250 hours of activity like playing pickleball, strength training, or kayaking.

Wellness: Participants complete 250 hours of wellness activities such as yoga, meditation, and other forms of mindfulness. Other options include tallying 250 participants in Be the One training, completing 250 Buddy Checks, etc. American Legion Riders chapters (or individuals) could create an event and ride at least 250 miles.

Community service:

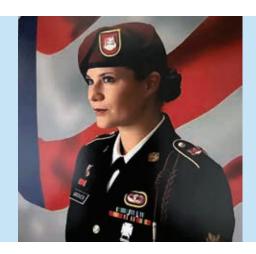
Participants achieve 250 hours of community service or reach the 250 threshold of a specific community service project. Examples include volunteering for 250 hours, cleaning up 250 graves in a veterans cemetery, teaching flag etiquette to 250 students, or sending 250 care packages to deployed troops.

To learn more, register, and download resources, visit www.legion.org/usa250/challenge.



U.S. Army combat veteran Lisa Mannion served active duty from 2012 to 2018 at Fort Bragg, N.C. As a combat veteran, she faced isolation, PTSD, and moral injury.

As a music educator, she is passionate about veteran mental health and music education. Music therapy and songwriting have both helped Mannion heal and reconnect. Now, she performs at Chicago American Legion veteran events and leads group ukulele classes to help her fellow veterans heal through music.



When/how did you start playing ukulele?

I started playing after graduating high school and soon began songwriting - and never stopped. I believe everyone carries a melody inside them. I even wrote a song called *Anybody* Can Play the Ukulele.





What does it mean to you to teach group lessons to your veteran community?

Teaching group ukulele lessons to my fellow veterans means everything — it's a way to heal together, build connection, and remind each other we're not alone. Music brings people

> together, and it's for everyone — no matter the skill level.

Can you explain where

"Music saved

my life, and

I believe it can

help others too.

You're never too old.

too broken, or too

late to start healing

through music."

your passion comes from for helping veterans work through difficulties by using music?

My passion comes from knowing the

pain veterans carry because I've lived it too. Songwriting is my first and foremost way of expressing myself, and I've seen how music helps relieve stress, depression, and pain. I just want to share that healing with others.

Can you explain the therapeutic power of music?

Music is powerful therapy — it helps express emotions, reduce stress, and create connection. It

speaks when words fall short and brings healing from the inside out.

What do you hope veterans who participate in your lessons take away from the experience?

I hope veterans leave feeling heard, connected, and empowered with a new way to cope, express themselves, and find peace through music.

What advice would you give to veterans who are interested

in learning to play the ukulele, but maybe don't have someone like you near them?

Start small and don't be afraid — just one chord at a time. The ukulele is simple, fun, and healing.

There are tons of free lessons online, and remember: Anybody can play the ukulele.

Is there anything else you want to add?

Music saved my life, and I believe it can help others too. You're never too old, too broken, or too late to start healing through music.



Lisa's social media: Instagram: ukuladyLisa Facebook: ukulisa

IOWA LEGION FAMILY OFFERS TIPS ON HOSTING MOBILE VIETNAM WALL

On Veterans Day 1996, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) unveiled a three-quarter scale replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., designed to travel to communities throughout the United States. Since its dedication, The Wall That Heals has been displayed at nearly 800 communities throughout the nation.

The mobile memorial is 375 feet long and 7 and a half feet high



at its tallest point. The memorial honors the more than 3 million Americans who served in the Vietnam War and bears the names of the more than 58,000 men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice. In addition to The Wall, the exhibit includes a mobile education center, which features photos of servicemembers whose names are on The Wall, a map of Vietnam, a chronological overview of the war, and more.

Over the years, several American Legion posts and Auxiliary units have hosted the mobile memorial, including American Legion Auxiliary Unit 48 in Iowa, along with The American Legion Family, Main Street Nevada, Iowa, and fellow community leaders at a local

park in their community. The mobile memorial and education center were on display 24 hours a day and allowed locals to honor servicemembers and gave those who are unable to travel to D.C. an opportunity to see a replica of The Wall and learn about the memorial.

"More than 10,000 guests were greeted, helped, and comforted by those who came together to pay tribute to the more than 58,000 servicemen and women who died in the Vietnam War," said ALA Unit 48 member Cathy Vincent. "We paid tribute not just to those who died in the Vietnam War, but we also found ways to recognize

> all servicemembers in our community."

Vincent said Legion Family members served as boots on the ground to find local servicemembers who could be featured in the mobile education center's *In Memory* exhibit, a digital display that honors those who returned home from Vietnam and later suffered from causes related to their service, including Agent Orange exposure and PTSD/suicide.

American Legion Family members were involved in planning special ceremonies, recruiting and managing volunteers, facilitating community education tours, providing food for volunteers, and helping with logistics. Members of The American Legion Riders also participated in a motorcycle procession alongside the semitruck carrying the exhibit as it came into

Tips for serving as a host site

Form a planning committee: Establish a dedicated committee to manage the entire planning process and oversee the display. Work with the VVMF, community partners, and organizations that can help with the planning and execution.

Secure the venue and coordinate logistics: Arrange for a public site that will be accessible 24 hours a day, with no admission fee. According to the VVMF, the organization seeks host site locations that can provide a welcoming, quiet atmosphere large enough to accommodate both The Wall replica and the mobile education center.

Recruit volunteers: Gather a large pool of volunteers for crucial roles, including assembling The Wall, staffing it during open hours, assisting visitors, and disassembling it. Volunteers also provide on-site assistance, including visitor direction, help with the mobile education center. and overall parking and visitor management.

Promote the event: Utilize social media, newspapers, television, radio, and word of mouth to advertise.

Create a welcoming environment: Volunteers should act as a welcoming presence, providing support and assistance to visitors. Vincent said it was important to be mindful of the sanctity of the event, giving people space to take in the meaning and emotion of the exhibit.

Support visitors: Offer guidance in locating names, assist with name rubbings, and offer compassionate support to those who are emotionally impacted by the experience.

Host ceremonies: Arrange for events and ceremonies to honor veterans and their sacrifices.

Community appreciation: Look for other ways to show appreciation in the community. A motorcycle procession is often used to escort The Wall, allowing the community to line the streets as a gesture of welcome and appreciation for the veterans.

For more information on hosting the mobile memorial and upcoming events, visit www.vvmf.org.







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



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

- · November: Military Family Month
- Nov. 10: The American Legion Auxiliary's 106th birthday
- · Nov. 10: U.S. Marine Corps birthday
- Nov. 11: Veterans Day
- Nov. 11: American Legion **Auxiliary Foundation Veterans Day of Giving**
- Dec. 2: GivingTuesday
- Dec. 7: National Pearl Harbor **Remembrance Day**
- Dec. 13: U.S. National Guard birthday
- Dec. 13: National Wreaths Across America Dav
- Dec. 20: U.S. Space Force birthday
- · Jan. 19, 2026: Martin Luther King Jr. Day



RENEW YOUR **MEMBERSHIP**

For over 100 years, the heart of the American Legion Auxiliary has not wavered. Continue helping our mission outreach and advocacy efforts to serve our nation's 18 million veterans and their families by renewing your membership online. Visit www.ALAforVeterans. org/Renew to renew.



MISSION TRAINING AND NATIONAL JUNIOR **MEETING DATES:**

- · Nov. 15: Albany, N.Y.
- Nov. 15: Minneapolis
- · Jan. 31, 2026: Indianapolis*
- Jan. 31, 2026: Las Vegas
- Feb. 7, 2026: Atlanta*

*Events will be held with The American Legion and SAL National **Regional Information Conference** Meeting.

Register: www. ALAforVeterans. org/meetings/ mission-training.





INTERESTED IN WHAT THE **ALA NATIONAL PRESIDENT** IS UP TO?

Follow National President Pam Ray's journey on Facebook: www.Facebook.com/ alanationalpresident.



ALA COMMITTEE **FACEBOOK GROUPS ENCOURAGE** DISCUSSION

These national committee groups are spaces on the social media platform for ALA members to discuss or share ideas about topics related to each committee. Groups provide a safe place for organic discussion about your

local programs or services and support efforts to grow our organization's awareness.



Visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/ social-media or scan the QR code to join the groups you're passionate about.



DIFFERENT **WAYS** TO CONNECT

You can follow the latest news from American Legion Auxiliary **National Headquarters digitally** in between the quarterly magazine issues. Stay informed by following the ALA blog, our social media (Facebook and Instagram), ALA eNews, and website.

- www.ALAforVeterans.org/
- www.Facebook.com/ alaforveterans
- www.lnstagram.com/ alaforveterans/
- www.ALAforVeterans.org/ eNews

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(Signed)

"The valor and courage of our young women and men in the armed services are a shining example to all of the world, and we owe them and their families our deepest respect."

- Bill Frist, physician and former majority leader of the United States Senate



We know we are thankful to members of the military so we can have the freedoms we do. But that level of gratitude is difficult to grasp — time away from family and friends and the mental, emotional, and physical toll it can take to serve your country — with the potential of paying the ultimate sacrifice. Words don't do it justice, but truly, we say thank you to our military: past, present, and future.

Above: The crew of the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Stockdale stand in formation during the change of command ceremony (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Kelby Sanders).



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

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



Join the global movement of generosity by commemorating your military hero with a gift to the American Legion Auxiliary Mission Endowment Fund. Your contribution not only honors the sacrifices of the past but also strengthens the future of the ALA's mission to serve veterans, military, and their families.

You can make your gift today by:

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 Together, we can make this
 GivingTuesday one to remember honoring heroes, inspiring hope, and changing lives.

Scan here to make a gift today:



