

PROGRAMS

Patriotism and veterans advocacy are so important to the American Legion Auxiliary that for more than nine decades, we've been serving, educating, and giving to America's finest – our servicemen and women. We answer the call of Service Not Self.

Poppy:

Connecting the visual image of the poppy with the sacrifice of service made by our veterans has been the no. 1 goal of the American Legion Auxiliary Poppy Program since its inception in 1921. Typically on Memorial Day and Veterans Day, millions of red crepe paper poppies, handmade by veterans whenever possible as part of their therapeutic rehabilitation, are distributed across the country in exchange for donations that go directly to assist disabled and hospitalized veterans in our communities. The Poppy Program raises community awareness and respect for our veterans by educating Auxiliary members and the public about the symbol of the poppy, memorialized from a line in the poem "In Flanders Fields," written on the battlefield during World War 1 by Col. John McCrae.

The financial benefit realized by our nation's veterans as a result of poppy distribution is huge; annually, nearly 7 million poppies are distributed to units, raising nearly \$2 million. In addition, making poppies allows disabled and hospitalized veterans to earn ancillary spending money. Children are also involved in spreading the poppy message by participating in the Poppy Poster Contest, which is held in local schools for students in grades 2 – 12. Meeting the continuing needs of our veterans should be the concern of every American who values his or her freedom. The Auxiliary promotes the poppy as a symbol of the sacrifices our military have made, a symbol to open people's hearts and inspire them to donate.

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation:

Coming home may be the end of one journey for many veterans; it is also the beginning of a new journey to transition to a "new normal." Helping them get there is at the core of the purpose and service of the American Legion Auxiliary. Members are passionate about providing care and comfort to our heroic U.S. service members who are so highly deserving of everything we can possibly do for them.

At VA facilities, Auxiliary sponsored gift shops and holiday parties have become a revered tradition and valued program. Members, units, and departments also purchase essential equipment and supplies for these facilities.

The Auxiliary joins with the VA as a national co-sponsor of the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. Through this sponsorship, the Auxiliary supports special visual and performing arts therapies for veterans.

Whatever a veteran needs – job assistance, transportation, food, clothing, etc. – Auxiliary volunteers will do their best to provide it. With troops constantly deployed during our nation's longest period of war and with many of our volunteer service

members multiple deployments, our mission to assist veterans and their families as they transition back to civilian life has never been more relevant than it is today.

Legislative:

Every day, hundreds of thousands of service members are fighting for our freedom across the globe. At the Auxiliary, we never stop thinking about what they face while deployed and what they will need when they return home. As advocates for our veterans, we encourage our members to contact their elected officials by phone, email, or letter to implore them to keep the needs and sacrifices of our military and their families front and center as they go about their legislative work on behalf of their constituents – that's all of us!

The American Legion Auxiliary supports the legislative priorities adopted by The American Legion. The American Legion's Legislative Division in Washington, D.C., keeps abreast of current legislation related to veterans' benefits, national security, and children and youth. Auxiliary members are encouraged to subscribe to the Legion's legislative ebulletins to keep the Legion Family aware of legislative issues and the official positions of The American Legion on these issues.

Each year, the Auxiliary convenes its Washington DC Conference in conjunction with the American Legion's annual meeting in our nation's capital to review The American Legion's legislative priorities and advise members how to be better advocates for those issues with their own state's legislators. Armed with information and enthusiasm, Auxiliary members take to the Hill to make their voices heard. The Legislative Program periodically provides members with specific reasons to contact their legislators and provides them with summaries about issues of importance to our veterans.

National Security:

The importance of the American Legion Auxiliary's National Security program is analogous to the sense of security one has from unwanted intrusion by locking the doors in our homes. By providing for the needs of our military families on the home front, we hope to ease the minds of our deployed service members so they won't worry about their loved ones back home and can focus on the monumental task of protecting our country.

Auxiliary members step up and reach out to help military families during deployments in very practical ways, such as assisting with their needs for child care and lawn work or by providing a listening ear to a spouse. Members do helpful things such as collecting coupons and sending them to overseas commissaries, hosting send-off and welcome-home events for our troops, providing them with pocket flags, and showing the gratitude of our nation by providing military families with Blue Star and Gold Star Banners. Auxiliary units are encouraged to partner with other organizations that serve the military, such as local USO affiliates and ROTC/JROTC units.

Auxiliary members also assist our communities in times of natural and manmade disasters through Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) courses. These trainings prepare members to act as an emergency response resource in times of natural disasters such as floods, hurricanes, and blizzards, as well as during manmade disasters.

The Auxiliary's National Security program works collaboratively with the FEMA Individual and Community Preparedness Division, in keeping with a standing agreement.

ALA Girls State:

Auxiliary units in 49 states proudly host ALA Girls State, an amazing week of learning focused on responsible citizenship and love for God and Country. Students are assigned to mock cities where, divided into the Federalist Party and Nationalist Party, they are immersed in learning about the political process from dedicated volunteers, making sure the program's nonpartisan governmental, patriotic, and civic objectives are carried out, along with some fun. The program directors also stay vigilant about raising the girls' awareness of the importance of service, particularly to our veterans, the military, and their families.

ALA Girls Nation:

Two girls are selected from each ALA Girl State program to attend ALA Girls Nation, where they assume the roles of U.S. senators, who meet for a week of immersive learning in Washington, D.C. After running for office, electing a Girls Nation president, and campaigning for the passage of mock legislation, the participants meet with the national government leaders. The highlight of the week includes a visit to the White House, where, for most years, the ALA Girls Nation senators visit with the President of the United States. While ALA Girls State/Girls Nation may impact the career aspirations of the participants, the program also encourages these bright young women to take their places as future leaders in the Auxiliary. With nearly 16,000 girls participating annually, what an impact they could have on our organization if all those eligible became members!

Junior Activities:

Engaging the next generation to become members in the American Legion Auxiliary is the important purpose of the Junior Activities Program. Junior Auxiliary membership is open to girls from infancy through age 17. The Junior Activities Committee prepares girls to become active adult members of the organization by providing positive volunteer experiences that instill the ideals of the Auxiliary. These girls develop leadership skills while having fun and will hopefully become the future leaders of our organization.

Juniors are members of the Auxiliary who are organized as a committee of a unit. Juniors are not a separate organization. Junior members conduct their own meetings and perform their own special activities. Junior members plan their own community service projects, along with support projects sponsored by the Auxiliary and The American Legion Family.

Children & Youth:

The Auxiliary provides significant cash assistance and direct service, and supports legislation that affects children at the local, state, and national levels. While all children are important, the Auxiliary particularly focuses on helping the children of our veterans and service members.

To recognize and reward the positive actions of our children and youth, the American Legion Auxiliary has two special national awards bestowed to youth nominated by units. The Youth Hero Award recognizes someone less than 18 years of age who perform a heroic act of physical bravery. The Good Deed Award is for youths 18 years of age or younger who have contributed in a special way to society through community service.

Americanism:

American patriotism is a fundamental value of the American Legion Auxiliary. Americanism programs teach respect for our country and our nation's flag. Patriotism is learned by seeing it in action. Patriotism is rooted in our character by practicing it throughout our lives. The Auxiliary creates opportunities that all Americans can do to show our respect and set positive examples of living as grateful, patriotic citizens. The Auxiliary provides learning opportunities and instructional resources for important things every good citizen should know, such as learning about the Constitution and flying the flag on patriotic holidays. They also fold pocket flags to send to our troops overseas and present flags to local schools and businesses. The Auxiliary is a member of the Citizens Flag Alliance and advocates for a constitutional amendment to protect the flag by supporting federal legislation and encouraging other people to do so.

To help our country's most promising young citizens learn firsthand the principles of our free republic guided by the principles of democracy, the Auxiliary promotes many patriotic youth programs, including the Auxiliary sponsored Americanism Essay Contest, which is conducted in local school systems. We believe promoting a spirit of patriotism by teaching about it develops lifelong respect for what we hold dear – our country and her flag.

Community Service:

Making our communities better places in which to live is something Auxiliary members strive for each and every day across this country. Whether it is hosting a stand down to bring vital health and support services to homeless veterans or coordinating a send-off or welcome home event for a deployed military unit, Auxiliary members are continuously at work in their communities, demonstrating the compassion and heart we have for those who serve our country and give so much. Community Service projects focus on enhancing the quality of life for veterans and their families.

A major outreach program of the Auxiliary since 1926, Community Service also demonstrates our longstanding commitment to supporting the work of American Legion posts and other organizations in providing assistance with blood drives, first aid and CPR training, child safety programs, support for women in shelters, and disaster and emergency preparedness programs. All community projects point toward improving life for our veterans and their families, and the most important Auxiliary Community Service projects involve making donations to and supporting shelters for homeless veterans.

In recent years, the Auxiliary has partnered with the Corporation for National and Community Service to make the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday – the third Monday in January – “a day on, not a day off” for service. Units and departments are encouraged

to plan special projects that focus on veterans, military families, or children as part of this national day of service.

Education:

The American Legion Auxiliary believes education is vital to democracy, and that investing time and money to educate our youth is literally an investment in America's future. Our Education Program involves fostering learning for children in our communities, with our main focus on the children of military and veterans.

We know veterans' sacrifices are the reason we live in freedom. Easing the burden of the cost of their children's education is one way we can express our gratitude to them. To that purpose, the Auxiliary supports a number of scholarship programs. These include the Children of Warriors National Presidents' Scholarship, awarded annually to 15 outstanding students who are the child and grandchildren of veterans; the Non-Traditional Student Scholarship, awarded annually to five students who are members of The American Legion, Auxiliary, or Sons of the American Legion; and the Spirit of Youth Scholarship, awarded annually to one Junior Auxiliary member in each of the Auxiliary's five national divisions. Units and departments are encouraged to publicize the availability of these scholarship programs in their communities and establish new scholarships at the local level.

Educating our communities about the sacrifices of our military is another goal of the Auxiliary. Units and departments are encouraged to participate in our organization's national education initiatives and those of the American Legion. One of these initiatives, Veterans in the Classroom, is an effort to bring history to life by having local veterans speak to students about their real-life experiences in the military. Other initiatives include collaborating with Family Readiness Groups assisting with special projects for National Guard families, military base schools and donating school supplies to children in need.

Why We Matter:

The 2013 estimated value of one hour of volunteer service is \$22.55, according to the Independent Sector, a coalition of charities, foundations, and corporations that publishes research important to the nonprofit sector. American Legion Auxiliary members have volunteered more than 9.3 million hours for a collective value of service to our veterans, service members and their families of more than \$2.1 billion. That's quite a global impact, and a powerful number that accentuates who we are, what we do, and why we matter!