

American Legion Auxiliary Department of Arizona History

July 2023 through June 2024

Marge Christianson, Historian

To all in the American Legion Auxiliary who selflessly dedicate their time to aiding this  
great nation's veterans, military, and their families.

### PURPOSE

By poet: Edgar A. Guest

Recited by Renee Ficklin at the 2023-2024 Officer Installation

Not for the sake of the gold,  
Not for the sake of the fame,  
Not for the prize would I hold  
Any ambition or aim:  
I would be brave and be true  
Just for the good I can do.

I would be useful on earth,  
Serving some purpose or cause,  
Doing some labor of worth,  
Giving no thought to applause.  
Thinking less of the gold or the fame  
Than the joy and the thrill of the game.

Medals their brightness may lose,  
Fame be forgotten or fade,  
Any reward we may choose  
Leaves the account still unpaid.  
But little real happiness lies  
In fighting alone for a prize.

Give me the thrill of the task,  
The joy of the battle and strife,  
Of being of use, and I'll ask  
No greater reward from this life.  
Better than fame or applause  
Is striving to further the cause.

Prayer

Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom his love commits me here.  
Ever this day be at my side, to light and guard, to rule and guide.

Amen

### The Pledge of Allegiance

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America,  
and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God,  
indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

“The Star-Spangled Banner”

O say can you see, by the dawn's early light,  
What so proudly we hail'd at the twilight's last gleaming,  
Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous fight  
O'er the ramparts we watch'd were so gallantly streaming?  
And the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air,  
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there,  
O say does that star-spangled banner yet wave  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?

## Preamble to the Constitution of the American Legion Auxiliary

For God and Country, we associate ourselves together for the following purposes:

To uphold and defend the constitution of the United States of America; to maintain law and order; to foster and perpetuate a one hundred percent Americanism; to preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in all wars; to inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and nation; to combat the autocracy of both the classes and the masses; to make right the master of might; to promote peace and goodwill on earth; to safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom, and democracy; to participate in and contribute to the accomplishment of the aims and purposes of The American Legion; to consecrate and sanctify our association by our devotion to mutual helpfulness.

Department of Arizona Officers 2023-2024

President – Rose Ficklin

Vice President – Stacey Mayberry

Second Vice President – Dolores Chavez

Treasurer – Yolanda Bonilla

Secretary – Barbara Matteson; interim Barbara White

Historian – Marge Christianson

Chaplain – Lynda Griffin

National Executive Committee – Barbara White

Junior Past President – Jennie Molina

Advisory Committee -- Yolanda Bonilla, Cindy Queen, Karen Smith, Jennie Molina,  
Barbara White

Active Past Department Presidents –

1995-1996 Penny Maklary

2004-2005 Paula Burgess

2005-2006 Ginger Cox

2006-2007 Helen Griffin

2007-2008 Barbara Matteson

2008-2009 Vickey Zwall

2010-2011 Doris Theiss

2013-2014 Karen Smith

2014-2015 Jane Shoemaker

2015-2016 Josephine Herrera

2016-2017 Jan Cushing

2017-2018 Yolanda Bonilla

2018-2019 Cindy Queen

2019-2021 Patricia Lugo

2021-2022 Jennie Molina

2022-2023 Barbara White

Department of Arizona Officers 2023-2024 (continued)

District Presidents

District 1: Denise Jungen  
District 2: Jeannine McGaughey  
District 3: Dawn Davidson  
District 4: Kathleen Roche  
District 5: Margarita Chacon  
District 6: Beckie McLarty  
District 7: Rebecca Faris  
District 8: DeDe Dexter  
District 11: Stephanie McMullen  
District 12: Monica Stein

Honorary Junior Department Officers

President -- Joselynn Messer  
Vice President -- Isabella Ward  
Secretary -- Johana Norman  
Chaplain -- Jhie Acosta  
Sergeant at Arms -- Trinity Roberson



Rose Ficklin  
2023-2024 President  
Department of Arizona  
American Legion Auxiliary



Department of Arizona Chairman 2023-2024

American Legion Auxiliary Arizona Girls State – Penny Maklary

Americanism – Maggie Montijo

Auxiliary Emergency Fund – Patti Hartfiel

Cavalcade of Memories – Paula Burgess

Children & Youth – Katie Wojahn

Community Service – Lisa Young

Constitution & Bylaws – Vickey Zwall

Education – Julie Vietri

Finance – Yolanda Bonilla

History – Marge Christianson

Junior Activities – Patricia Lugo

Leadership – Karen Smith

Legislative – Kathy Amery

Membership – Stacey Mayberry

Music – Alma Mattingly

National Security – Barbara White

New Unit/Unit Development & Revitalization – All Past Department Presidents

Parliamentarian – Penny Maklary

Past Presidents Parley – Jennie Molina

Poppy – Josephine Herrera, Kat Sticklin

President's Scrapbook – Shauna Taylor

President's Special Project – Shannon Mead

Public Relations – Danny Murphy

Department of Arizona Chairman 2023-2024 continued

Trophies & Awards – Alissa Montijo

Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation – Dolores Chavez

Creative Arts – Anita Ritter

Service to Veterans – Sara Decker

Veterans Administration Volunteer Services:

Phoenix – Gloria Torres

Tucson – Kathy Szakonyi, Dawn Davidson

Holiday Gift Shop:

Phoenix – Christine Paulson, Joyce Livingston

Tucson – Carla Neill

Prescott – Trish Aljets

State Veterans Home:

Phoenix – Cat Ludwick

Tucson – Nancy Morrow

Yuma – Winnie Moir

Liaison to National Cemetery -- Lynda Griffin

Department of Arizona National Officers and Chairman 2023-2024

Western Division National Vice President – Jan Cushing

National Executive Committee -- Barbara White

Western Division Honorary Junior National Vice President – Leah Rosales

Western Division Chairman ALA Girls Nation -- Yolanda Bonilla

Western Division Chairman Leadership -- Marge Christianson

Department of Arizona National Awards and Citations 2022-2023

Western Division Best Overall Department Education Program

Western Division Best Overall Department Leadership Program

Western Division Most Outstanding Department Legislative Program

Membership Awards:

Departments reaching 85 percent of goal by March 15, 2023

Departments reaching 95 percent of goal by May 26, 2023

Departments reaching 100 percent of goal by July 4, 2023

Departments reaching 102 percent of goal by July 29, 2023

Gold Citation: Department National Creative Arts Fundraising

Kathy Szakonyi – Citation 100 percent attendance as Tucson VAVS Representative

The administrative year of 2023-2024 was a freedom-song born of struggle. The COVID pandemic that has handicapped the world for the past four years has come under control and with it, the world has a renewed sense of vigor and need for meaning and connection. COVID claimed millions of lives across the world including some dear Legion Family members. Many have suffered isolation and fear. But with unrelenting human spirit, the American Legion Auxiliary Department of Arizona went forth, together, to face the opportunities and challenges of 2023-2024!

The 2023-2024 Department and District Officer installation ceremony for the Department of Arizona American Legion Auxiliary (ALA) was held, without face masks or social distancing, on June 25, 2023. It took place as part of the American Legion Family annual convention held at the beautiful El Conquistador Resort, graciously hosted by the Oro Valley American Legion Family of Post 132. The Auxiliary Convention had 377 registered attendees. The installation ceremony was officiated by past Western Division National Vice President Penny Maklary. Past Department of Arizona Presidents Yolanda Bonilla and Cindy Queen performed the Sergeant at Arms role, while past Western Division National Vice President Ginger Cox performed the role of Chaplain.

It was a heartwarming ceremony welcoming Rose Ficklin into her role as the 102nd Department of Arizona President. Chaplain Cox recited “If” by Rudyard Kipling-- substituting “You’ll be an Auxiliary President” for the poem’s original ending “You’ll be a man, my son”. Wife Renee Ficklin, recited the poem “Purpose”, by Edgar A. Guest, to reflect the Auxiliary’s motto of “Service not Self” which she noted, Ficklin epitomized. The recorded music selection included “Brave” as performed and written by Sara Bareilles. Ficklin, an Arizona Unit 26 member since her youth, paid tribute to her mentors: Legion

member Michael Thelen, U.S. Air Force Veteran; parents Goebel (U.S. Air Force) and Mary Jo Ficklin and Past Department of Arizona Auxiliary President Cathy Jarvis.

Department President Ficklin, a dedicated school bus driver and long-time leadership mission training instructor, also presented her education theme for the year: Educating Tomorrow's Veterans Today. President Ficklin cleverly extended her education theme to include educating ALA members about the ALA organization and programs as well as to her special project and passion: American Legion Auxiliary Arizona Girls State.

Following the installation, Vice President Stacey Mayberry presented incoming National President Lisa Williamson's membership theme of the Alaskan Iditarod. The entire of Department of Arizona felt honored to have a National President from "Northern Arizona" (as Alaska became referred to in Arizona since Williamson spent winters in Arizona and fondly referred to Arizona as "Southern Alaska"). The marathon nature of the Iditarod was particularly pertinent for two reasons. First, the Department of Arizona, for the first time in many years—reflecting the renewed post-COVID spirit-- had exceeded its previous year's goal (achieving 107.77 percent of goal with 15,258 members in 2022-2023). Second, nearly every Unit in Arizona had raised their 2023-2024 membership dues to compensate for the six-dollar National increase voted in at the 101st National ALA Convention. Vice President Mayberry, wearing a "Be the One" T-shirt (with the new Legion branding introduced in 2022), also presented the National American Legion Family "Be The One" effort to stop—not just reduce-- veteran suicide. Mayberry reminded each of the attendees that not only might any member "Be the One" to save a life, every new member brought on-board might also "Be the One". Members left the Convention excited

about education theme, enthused to increase membership and especially committed to learn more about how to Be The One!

The Phoenix Veterans Creative Arts Festival was held June 29 at the Carl T. Hayden VA Care facility. Past Department Presidents Yolanda Bonilla, Cindy Queen and Barbara White along with Chairman Margaret Ellis helped set up the event and then enjoyed the sixty-four submissions. For the first time since the pandemic, they were able to assemble and visit with the veteran artists. The art was judged by the Sonoran Art League and awards were presented by Veteran Affairs Medical Center Representative, Tim McAlee.

It may have been a record 113 degrees in parts of Arizona, but Independence Day 2023 was never-the-less celebrated by the American Legion Family all over Arizona! Watermelon eating contests in Yuma, patriotic parades in Heber-Overgaard and Bisbee, one hundred flags placed across Gilbert, kids' fishing Derby in Safford, country music in Apache Junction, waterslide and dunk tank in Phoenix and pot-lucks in Tucson were combined with flag-raising all over the state! President Ficklin even found herself in ALA Unit 39 "jail" -- but she was generously bailed out as part of a nurse's scholarship fundraiser.

The first post-COVID ALA-sponsored monthly birthday party at the Tucson Arizona State Veterans home was also held in July. Department of Arizona Auxiliary Second Vice President and VA&R Chairman Dolores Chavez, District 3 President Dawn Davidson, State Home Department Chairman Nancy Morrow and Unit and Squadron members from multiple Post families attended. The American flag cupcakes served with old fashioned ice cream cups with wooden spoons were a nostalgic hit. With Department Chairman



Nancy Morrow's leadership and help from local Units, the birthday party became a much-anticipated event each month.

July ended with a successful Department organizational meeting presided over by President Ficklin at her home Unit in Mesa, Arizona. Fifty-three Department Officers and Chairman attended the six-hour session where they learned about National and Department priorities and their role within the organization. Of particular interest was the impending full access to the National ALA membership information system, the Department President's Special Project (ALA Arizona Girls State) and upcoming Fall Conference training opportunities.

July ended and August continued with an unprecedented heat wave in the Phoenix Valley. Relentless temperatures reaching 119 degrees and highs above 110 degrees for thirty-one consecutive days caused the loss of many specimens of the state's trademark saguaro cactus. Too hot even for cactus, people and pets were forced to stay inside during the heat of the day. The Department of Arizona American Legion family encouraged the buddy call system to ensure members were safe and had the care they needed.

The Tucson Creative Arts Festival was held from August 22 to 23. Thirty-six veterans submitted seventy-two art entries and sixty-four entries were submitted to the National Creative Arts Festival. Additionally, there was a unique collaboration with the Southern Arizona Artist Guild in Tucson: the local first place winners in each category were invited to display their works of art in their gallery for the week! This was a very rewarding opportunity for the veterans and created a new relationship among area artists. Five entries from this show received National awards: one First Place, two Second Place and two Third Place. One veteran won First Place in the Creative Writing and Second Place in Drama!

In August, at the 102nd National convention held in Charlotte, North Carolina, Past Department President Jan Cushing was installed as the Western Division National Vice President, an honor bestowed once every ten-years for an Arizona member. Unit 62 Peoria Junior member Leah Rosales was announced as the 2023-2024 Western Division Honorary Junior National Vice President—a position her sister, Audrina, held the previous year. President Ficklin was also officially installed. The Department of Arizona was honored with a Gold Citation for donations greater than \$5,000 to the National Creative Arts program (from previous year's Bronze level). The Department was also awarded \$1,180 from the National organization for meeting multiple membership goals.

On August 30, ALA AZ Girls State Director, Penny Maklary was featured in the *Douglas Dispatch* for her dedication to the program. It said in part “For the past 43 years Penny Maklary has been devoted to assisting the youth in Douglas and throughout Arizona through a program called the American Legion Auxiliary Arizona Girls State, a citizenship education program privately sponsored by the American Legion Auxiliary Department of Arizona.”



*Penny Maklary of Douglas tends to business at ALA Arizona Girls State.*

In September, the membership goal for the Department of Arizona was announced: 14,244.

The Prescott Veterans Creative Arts Festival was held September 7 to 10 and was for the first time held in conjunction with the Yavapai County Fair. Fifty-six works of art were submitted by twenty-nine artists in twenty-three different categories. Department Creative Arts Chairman Anita Ritter and local Prescott area Unit members were among the thousands that were in attendance at the event. Three Prescott entries received National Awards—one First Place and two Third Place!

Later in September, Unit 25 and District 8 sponsored a President's special project fundraiser. They put President Ficklin in a dunk tank and District 8 had a branded patch made up that said "I dunked ALA Dept President Rose". Everyone had fun taking their turn at dunking President Ficklin. All told, \$620 was raised for ALA Arizona Girls State!

Arizona's Honorary Junior Fall Conference was held on October 15, 2023. During the action-packed half-day, they signed Christmas cards for troops, talked about the patch program, officer responsibilities and poppies in between lots of dancing, singing and eating. Western Division National Vice President Jan Cushing provided greetings virtually and elections for the 2023-2024 year were held.

November was kicked off with the Department Fall Conference Nov 3-5. Preconference meetings for ALA Arizona Girls State, Finance and the Executive Committee were held on November 3. The ALA Arizona Girls State budget, which included \$50,000 from President Ficklin's special project, was approved. Without these special project funds, the unit cost would be an additional \$200 per attendee (up from \$400 to \$600)!

The Finance Committee reported that the new administration volunteer/employee, Rae Hopf, had made material progress in converting past financial records to Quick Books. There was also a discussion regarding the current Secretary/Treasurer salary relative to current market conditions. It was estimated that the per capita charge from Department will need to increase two to three dollars to cover these inflationary costs. Deb Munchbach led a discussion on updating the Constitution and By-Laws to reflect budgetary practices as it related to National Conferences. Cost savings items were presented including potentially changing payroll vendors.

The Executive Committee opened and closed with a prayer from Chaplain Lynda Griffin. Everyone was pleased to welcome WDNVP Jan Cushing to the meeting. There was a discussion regarding Unit 87 (Bullhead City) who was still owing mandates from 2022-23 as well as from 2023-24. It was agreed that a certified letter would be sent informing them of pending disciplinary sanctions if payment was not made. Two potential new Units were discussed: Unit 123 Seligman who had surrendered their charter a few years ago and Unit 145 in northern Peoria. There was also a discussion about the trickle-down implications of National changes: the Department of Arizona will move Unit Member of the Year to the Leadership Committee (in sync with National), but retain its Cavalcade of Memories and Past President's Parley committees despite dissolution at National. President Ficklin also discussed the imperative for Units to work together. She, as well as National sources, had received some anonymous letters regarding Unit disagreements. President Ficklin indicated that no action would be taken if letters were not signed and then only within the guidelines of the Unit and Department Constitution and By-Laws!

The full Conference was opened by Unit 29's all-female Color Guard. It was presided by President Ficklin with Maggie Montijo acting Secretary. There were nearly 300 Auxiliary members registered. After the opening prayer, ceremonies and roll call, the Auxiliary joined the Legion Conference for a "Fireside Chat" with the Legion's National Executive Director of Marketing, Dean Kessel. He discussed the "Be The One" initiative—its inception and progress. One of the important take-aways was the importance of intervention well before the act of suicide is contemplated. Making sure that veterans know they are not alone-- that there are resources for them when they first start to drift-- is where Be The One can be most effective.

Vice President Stacey Mayberry explained the coming year's membership challenges:

- Arizona vs. Alaska: First to reach 100 percent; bottle of local wine to the winner;
- Arizona vs. New Mexico: highest percent by March 5- \$25 to the winner;
- Arizona vs. President Ficklin: 100 percent by April 1 – if achieved President Ficklin --strictly a slacks-wearer-- will wear a pretty dress at Convention!

As the time of Conference, the Department of Arizona membership count was ahead of where they were last year at this time and everyone was excited to keep the momentum going! In concert with President Ficklin's education theme, opportunities for Department and National Scholarships were presented by Department Chairman Julie Vietri. Shannon Meade also made a lovely presentation about ALA Arizona Girls State program. She stressed the value of the program and ALA's commitment to patriotism and youth.

Western Division National Vice President Jan Cushing was honored at taco salad luncheon buffet with 120 attendees. She received many cards, donations and "love" gifts—which were generously donated to the National President's Spirit of Youth Scholarship fund.



***ALA Arizona Past Presidents- Fall Conference 2023***

*Back Row, Left to Right: Jane Shoemaker (2014-15), Cindy Queen (2018-19), Josephine Herrera (2015-16), Karen Smith (2013-14), Yolanda Bonilla (2017-18), Patricia Lugo (2019-21 COVID). Front Row, Left to Right: Ginger Cox (2005-06), Doris Theiss (2010-2011), Jennie Molina (2021-22), Jan Cushing (2016-17)*

Dolores Chavez, Second Vice President, presented the many facets of Arizona's VA&R program. The Department of Arizona supports three major VA Medical Centers, three State Homes, three Holiday Gift Shops, three Creative Arts Festivals in addition to various other Service to Veterans projects!

National Executive Committee (NEC) member and Past Department President Barbara White presented last year's national award winners with their Western Division Plaques:

- Karen Smith- Leadership
- Julie Vietri- Education
- Stephanie McMullen- Legislative
- Kathy Szakonyi– Citation 100 percent attendance as Tucson VAVS Representative

Past Department President White also received her 2022-2023 history and prayer books from Historian Dolores Chaves and Chaplain Marge Christianson. The following 2024-2025 Department candidate announcements were made:

- President: Stacey Mayberry
- Vice President: Dolores Chaves
- Second Vice President: Marge Christianson
- Historian: Lynda Griffin
- Chaplain: Kat Sticklin, Stephanie McMullen

Department Chaplain Lynda Griffin conducted the opening prayer at the Memorial Service held on Sunday. In honor of all those now in Post Everlasting, President Ficklin and Marge Christianson (on behalf of its Junior members) laid a wreath and lit candles along with the American Legion (TAL), Sons of the American Legion (SAL) and American Legion Riders (ALR) representatives. Department Music Chairman Alma Mattingly, led the inspirational choir which included both a trumpet and bugle. The Conference closed with a prayer from Chaplain Griffin and the Unit 29 Color Guard ceremoniously retiring the colors.

The Department of Arizona Auxiliary Chaplain, Lynda Griffin participated in the annual Pearl Harbor Remembrance Ceremony at Wesley Bolin Plaza in downtown Phoenix. The event was held on December 9 to also commemorate the ten-year anniversary of the placement of USS Arizona and USS Missouri gun barrels at the Plaza. After a “Run with

the Guns” Legion Riders’ motorcycle arrival, the traditional presentations of wreaths from many patriotic organizations, including the American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary and Sons of the American Legion, took place.

In December, the Department of Arizona hosted three Christmas Shops in conjunction with the Phoenix, Tucson and Prescott Veteran Affairs Medical Center locations.

The Phoenix Christmas Shop, coordinated by Chairman Christine Paulson from Unit 27, was held December 6 to 8. The shop was held at Post 1 since the VA location was under construction. Invitations to veterans went out through the VAMC and through local veteran support organizations. Department Legion Commander Steve Sperl and Adjutant Angel Juarez, Detachment of Arizona SAL Commander Chris Balsley and Department ALA Historian Marge Christianson attended the opening ceremony. Unit members from Units 27, 41, 62, 105 helped eighty-five veterans select gifts for themselves and their family members.

The Prescott Christmas Shop, coordinated by Chairman Patricia Aljets, was held on December 20. Department representatives TAL Commander Sperl, SAL Detachment Commander Balsley and ALA Historian Christianson, along with long-time volunteers Linda West, Mitsu Burns, Carmen Goswick and Sally Fine delivered individually wrapped gifts to the in-resident hospital patients. They received pajamas, socks, quilt of their choice, treats and sparkling cider along with a few minutes of visiting time. The group sang Christmas Carols in the Memory Care Unit. Later that afternoon, a party and gift assembly line was held for eighty-five Domiciliary residents. With donations from multiple organizations, each resident received a back-pack that they proceeded to fill with items



such as sweat clothes, socks, knitted caps, crocheted throws, popcorn and other treats. Then they enjoyed a buffet line of meats, cheeses, fruit, vegies, desserts and sodas. A volunteer rock band added fun and cheer to the afternoon.

Because of the lingering concerns over COVID, there was not a traditional Christmas Shop at the Tucson Veterans Medical Center. Instead, the Department of Arizona Auxiliary, led by Carla Neill, held a backpack/duffle bag “stuffing” event. Assisted by the Department of Arizona Legion Commander Sperl, 460 bags were filled with items like toiletries, hat, gloves, bibles, commissary gift cards and lap blankets which were later delivered to patients.

On January 6, the Department of Arizona Legion Family held its annual Open House. Officers and members from the Legion, Auxiliary, Sons and Riders from across the state attended the pot luck festivities. It was an honor to also have in attendance the American Legion Western Division National Vice Commander, Randy Edwards, and American Legion Auxiliary Western Division National Vice President, Jan Cushing.

On January 20, District 11’s Past Presidents Parley, led by Past District 11 President Corinne Thompson, held a Murder Masquerade Ball to raise funds for the Department’s Nurses scholarship fund. Many commented on how refreshing it was to be wearing a mask for fun, not disease control! Nearly one hundred members attended the fun, professionally orchestrated, costume event which raised nearly \$3,000 for the Department fund.

Over forty Auxiliary members from Arizona attended the National Mission Training session held on January 27 in Las Vegas, Nevada. Honorary Junior Western Division

National Vice President Leah Rosales led the Junior Event and noted how much she enjoyed the service dog presentation, songs and crafts.

The February remembrance of the Four Chaplains has special meaning in Arizona. Isadora Hurlburt Fox, widow of the Methodist Chaplain aboard the SS Dorchester, was a Unit President at Post 1 in Arizona. Mrs. Fox went on to serve as the American Legion Auxiliary National Chaplain in 1970-1971, contributing significantly to the organization.

Thanks to the sleuthing work of Unit 24 member Julie Ross, the February 2024 ALA Magazine included a photo of Arizona's first Miss Poppy from 1959. Peggy Chilton Closky is still an active member in the ALA in Arizona. Her mother, Maxine Chilton, served as the National ALA President 1972-1973.



*Peggy Chilton, age 11, Arizona Miss Poppy- 1959*

National President Lisa Williamson had her official Arizona visit March 20 to 24, 2024.

Her visit began with the three-hour car ride with Department President Ficklin across the spring-blooming desert of Arizona to Yuma. National Executive Committee-member (NEC) Barbara White, Second Vice President Dolores Chaves, Historian Marge Christianson, District 3 President Dawn Davidson and member Linda West made similar treks. While in Yuma, President Williamson toured and visited the residents of the new State Home. Local members Winnie Moir, Barbara Whitney and Carol Rebenecker shared their stories of the importance of the new facility. The American Legion family at Post 56, led by Kim and Woody Woodward, hosted a beautiful dinner with shrimp, chicken salad, charcuterie skewer appetizers, salad bar, made-to-order Seafood Newburg or Chicken Marsala and sampler cheesecake for dessert. Among the one hundred guests were Department Legion Family Officers Andy Jaime, Alternate TAL National Executive Committee; Billy Ellis, Past TAL Department Commander; and Chris Balsey, SAL Detachment Leader. The American Legion Department of Arizona presented President Williamson with a check for \$1000 for her special project. Also attending were Officers from the local Marine Corps Air Station and veterans from the State Home. President Williamson made an inspiring presentation about Be The One—including the importance of ALR: ASK, LISTEN and REACH OUT. The following morning, after some confusion about where to meet for breakfast, the group visited the Territorial Prison State Historic Park. While touring the old-west landmark, President Williamson good-naturedly posed for the required “Prison photos” as both warden and prisoner.

The following morning, at the invitation of Past Department President Patricia Lugo, President Williamson and her husband Darryl, attended the 21st Piestewa Fallen Heroes

Memorial Sunrise Service. This patriotic event, which is dedicated to remembering all Arizona Fallen Military Heroes and their Gold Star families, is named in honor of Arizona native Army Specialist Lori Ann Piestewa. Piestewa, mother of two, was the first known Native American woman to die in combat in the U.S. military. Also attending the event were Department NEC White, Department President Ficklin, Department Vice President Mayberry and Department Historian Christianson and many members of Unit 41, including Lugo, who annually volunteers at the event. Among those honored were Jessica Lynch and the other members of Piestewa's convoy who were held prisoners after being struck by enemy Iraqi forces. Williamson's unrehearsed presentation to the hundreds of onlookers was heartfelt, touching and humbling. She said "I'm a Blue Star mom, hope to never be a Gold Star mom. I can only imagine your pain, your anguish.... let's remember, it is service, not self in helping our fellow human beings". The shy words of Piestewa's son, who was only four when she was killed, were both heartbreaking and inspirational.

Following the service, the group assembled at Post 117 for brunch and fellowship. Williamson's "mom", Past WDNVP Ginger Cox orchestrated a lovely feast!

That evening, the Post family at Ficklin's home Unit, held a lovely dinner of pulled pork and chicken, baked potato with all the trimmings, homemade coleslaw and cheesecake. Members in attendance learned more about "Be The One" and presented many gifts and donations for Williamson's special project--Spirit of Youth Scholarships. Among the notable donations, the Department of Arizona presented her with a check for \$500 and Unit 41 presented a \$1,000 donation. President Williamson was honored to present an SAL youth a Good Deed Award for his efforts to comfort a veteran. During her visit, President

Williamson touched the hearts of many Arizonans in and out of the American Legion Family.

On March 30, the Department of Arizona Finance Committee met to review the 2024-2025 budget. It was decided not to ask for an increase in mandates at this time since it was unclear what the new salary requirements would be for the new secretary, if the National Organization had plans to raise the National mandate portion or if Units would be ready to manage another increase so soon after the National increase last year. There was also discussion of much needed new furniture for the office!

In April, President Ficklin and SAL Detachment Commander Balsley held a joint Homecoming/Fundraising celebration at Post 26. Amid multiple standing ovations, Ficklin received many gifts, hugs and donations from members in attendance. The street tacos were a fun meal choice, but nothing compared to the ice cream machine and toppings table! Every topping imaginable (including gummy worms!) was available.

Sadly, the Department of Arizona Auxiliary received the resignation of long-standing Secretary/Treasurer Barbara Matteson in April. Ms. Matteson served as Department President 2007-2008 and had since held the position of Secretary/Treasurer. The Department had big shoes to fill with her departure.

On May 18, the Junior Program held an all-day Department Junior member event including 2024-2025 Honorary Department Junior Officer elections. Elected were Johnna Norman as President, Jocelynn Messer as Vice President, while Isabella Ward was appointed as Secretary. Activities included a trivia game about ALA programs, a speaker about the Patch Program, games, pizza and root beer floats. A fun time was had by all.

The 77th session of Arizona Girls State took place at the University of Arizona's Tucson campus June 2 to June 9, 2024. The one-day longer session, which enabled more leisure/social time, was considered a successful experiment. The staff of twenty-five consisted of twenty-four ALA members—seven were former ALA AZ Girls State citizens, five professional educators, two lady Legionnaires and three Registered Nurses. Attendance, while up from recent “COVID lows”, remains lower than pre-COVID sessions. This year's State consisted of 189 citizens living in nine cities residing in three counties. In addition to the standard government curriculum, Blue Star certificates were given to those with immediate family members serving, a community service project to collect books for First Responders was completed and a talent show was conducted.

On June 13, the Department of Arizona Executive Committee met virtually to discuss the finance committee's recommendation for the replacement of the Department Secretary/Treasurer. After extensive internal advertising for the job opening and two rounds of interviews, the hiring and finance committees recommended that current President Ficklin be offered the position with what was deemed a competitive salary/benefits package. After some discussion, the Executive Committee voted to approve the recommendation. Within days of the formal offer, President Ficklin accepted the offer and will begin her new responsibilities July 1, 2024.

The Department of Arizona American Legion Auxiliary 103rd Convention was held June 20-24, 2024 with 328 registered ALA members. Because membership goals were met, President Ficklin, as promised, wore a beautiful formal gown (humorously with tennis shoes) at the opening session.

In keeping with tradition, each program chairman presented a short explanation of their program's contribution, any resolutions or recommendations and presented awards as applicable.

The Finance team presented the 2024-2025 budgets. The approved budgets included the increase in the Secretary/Treasurer salary, the new National mandate rates as well as new Department office furniture. There was also a discussion regarding the filing of IRS annual forms by the Arizona Department and Districts. Between some changes in Department procedures and the illness and resignation of the Department Secretary, the Department and three Districts fell seriously behind in their IRS reporting. All were in the process of being rectified. The Finance team presented six finance Resolutions changing the Policy and Procedures of the Department. All were "housekeeping" items related to account signers, bank authorization requirements, budget standardization, unit reimbursement process, account reconciliation and electronic payment procedures. All were passed.

The Department UD&R team was pleased to announce two new Units. Unit 123, Seligman, was a previously dissolved Unit that a past District President revived. Unit 145, North Peoria, was from a relatively new Post. Both of the Units have hit the ground running and were an inspiration to all. Unfortunately, two other Units, Unit 130 (Concho) and Unit 76 (Show Low) were, or would be, imminently closed. Unit 105, Phoenix, was placed on probation with the expectation that their internal conflict and lack of protocol issues be rectified by the next Fall Conference or that Charter would be at risk of revocation. Unit 87, which was sent a certified letter in November regarding delinquency of mandates, had become current and was reported in good standing.

The Leadership team noted that over 200 Arizona Auxiliary members participated in Leadership training the past year. Over concern about the number of trainers going forward, they presented a resolution for a three-year trial “Leadership Trainer Selection” process. The concept was to encourage members, perhaps unknown to the Leadership team, to self-identify their interest in becoming a leadership trainer. The resolution was passed with a recommendation that the program be evaluated at the end of the 2026-2027 year. Unit 39 past Unit President Erica Bailey was announced as Unit member of the year for the Department of Arizona.

President Ficklin recognized member Deb Munchbach for her Herculean efforts in updating and maintaining the Department website. Information availability to Units has never been more accessible or timely, thanks to Ms. Munchbach’s dedication!

A resolution updating the Junior Activities policies to accurately reflect the National Program changes was presented and passed. Junior member Paisley Pittman, Unit 140, was recognized by the Department SAL Detachment Commander Balsley for her efforts to collect funds for the Child Welfare Foundation.

The ALA Arizona Girls State team presented their efforts to increase participation while also reducing the financial burden on Units. The ALA Arizona Girls State Foundation was approved by the IRS as a 501c3 -- enabling more grant opportunities. Efforts to recruit participation from more schools was underway with the caveat that these new schools secure the funding for their participants. Plans have also begun to conduct some aspects of the American Legion’s Arizona Boys State session in conjunction with the ALA Arizona’s Girls State Program, which may produce some economies of scale. Promotion



of store sales, alumni association, year-books and Friends of Girls State to raise funds also continue through the updated [www.alaazgirlsstate.com](http://www.alaazgirlsstate.com) website.

The Department Past Presidents Parley luncheon, hosted by Past Department President Cindy Queen, held an Italian style luncheon in honor of the Past Department Presidents and their cause to provide scholarships to nurses and other health care workers. Four healthcare scholarships, for a total of \$2,200, were awarded by the Department of Arizona this past year.

The membership team presented many awards to successful Unit and District membership teams. As of thirty days prior to Department Convention, there were twenty-seven Units and one District that hit or exceeded the one hundred percent mark. Arizona membership reported Arizona overall membership at 108 percent of goal with 15,405 members—up from last year’s awesome numbers and currently in second place nationally!

The Poppy team reported that while they did not have any submissions for Little Miss Poppy, they forwarded three poppy posters on the Western Division Poppy Chairman. The many poppy displays were enjoyed by all throughout the Department Convention.

The Children and Youth team reported that \$67,461 was spent within the program, 7,668 hours were logged, and an estimated 1,845 children served. Overall, the Department of Arizona gave out two Youth Hero Awards and fifty Good Deed Awards.

The Community Service team reported \$64,863 spent, 58,277 miles driven and a total of 40,459 volunteer hours.

The Special Projects team reported that the President's Special Project, ALA Arizona Girls State, raised \$52,000 and were not done yet!

Several televised Public Relations efforts which helped promote the Arizona American Legion Family were noted. In July, Unit 117 in Phoenix started their effort to sign holiday cards for troops—the previous year they recruited multiple Units' members and members of the public to sign and send 16,117 signed cards to troops overseas. The CBS local affiliate "Arizona Family TV" came to Post 117 and interviewed Unit President Christine Rodriguez about this huge and touching effort. A wonderful Public Relations win! In September, "Arizona Family TV" covered the story of Arizona Unit 105's support of a local teenager who was recovering from an historic heart and liver transplant. This was the first pediatric heart and liver transplant in Arizona—with only two dozen across the country! The Department of Arizona Auxiliary was proud of the Unit's effort that raised awareness to this historic event and gave \$6,500 to the family. On September 24, 2024, Ira H. Hayes American Legion Family 84 presented colors at the nationally televised Arizona Cardinals vs. the Dallas Cowboys National Football League game at State Farm Stadium in Glendale, Arizona! Among those presenting the colors was Dual Legion and Auxiliary member Kim Crawford Skelton. This was a great public relations win for the Department of Arizona Legion and Auxiliary.

The education team reported that during the 2023-2024 school year, Units reported awarding thirty-two Unit scholarships, totaling \$23,610. In 2023-2024, eleven applications for the Children of Warriors National Presidents' Scholarship, three applications for the Non-traditional Student Scholarship, and one for the Spirit of Youth Scholarship were received by the Department. A Department winner was selected and forwarded to the

Western Division Education Chairman for each of these scholarships. Each applicant received a letter thanking them for their application and informing them of the outcome. The Non-traditional Scholarship and the Spirit of Youth winners from Arizona were selected as winners at the National level! In addition, the Arizona Girls State nominee for the Samsung Scholarship was selected as a national semi-final winner of a \$5000 scholarship.

Western Division National Vice President Cushing reported that she had visited three Western Division Departments, had a zoom meeting scheduled for the Department of Utah and a visit scheduled in Idaho coming up in July. Among the highlights of visits were aa Welcome Home celebration for Honor Flight veterans at the Anchorage airport where many of the veterans received a Quilt of Valor; a celebration of Alaska's Unit 1 one-hundred-year anniversary; California's Department Executive Committee Meeting which included a baby shower for military families from a nearby base, a banquet and dancing; and generous donations of \$465 from Arizona members for the National President's Special Project- Spirit of Youth Scholarship.

Department of Arizona officer elections for the 2024-2025 year were uncontested. Officers automatically elected were Rose Ficklin, National Executive Committee; Stacey Mayberry, President; Dolores Chaves, Vice President; Marge Christianson, Second Vice President; Lynda Griffin, Historian and Stephanie McMullen, Chaplain. Three paid and seventeen unpaid Delegates, as well as seventeen alternates for the 2024 National Convention in New Orleans were elected by ballot.

The American Legion Auxiliary Department of Arizona faced many opportunities and challenges this past administrative year. Each was met with strength, optimism and ultimately success. Putting the pandemic behind them, every member of the Department of Arizona contributed to these accomplishments. Together each has lived up to the historic example of all those members who came before them. Indeed, each has made history themselves!

God bless the United States of America.

*Margaret Christianson*

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Marge Christianson, 2023-2024 Historian, Department of Arizona

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