

Birth and Growth

For nearly every soldier in World War I who endured the dangers and hardships of camp, ship and battlefield, there was a woman serving at home to help make America's victory possible—a wife, mother, sister, daughter or other relative. After the war had been won and the members of the Armed Forces banded together in The American Legion to carry forward their services to country in peacetime, it was only natural that women of veterans' families should desire to continue serving with them. The result was the formation of the American Legion Auxiliary, the largest and most influential women's patriotic serving organization.

The establishment of an Auxiliary to The American Legion was provided for by the first National Convention of The American Legion in 1919. By the Legion's 1920 National Convention, 1,342 local units of the Auxiliary had formed, and intensive organizational efforts were authorized.

The first National Convention of the Auxiliary was held in Kansas City, Mo., in 1921. The name "American Legion Auxiliary" was adopted and the first national officers were elected.

Over the years the Auxiliary has grown to include not only the women of families from World War I, but also those of families from World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, Lebanon/Grenada, Panama and the Persian Gulf (Desert Storm). Local, state and national levels of organization of the Auxiliary parallel those of The American Legion.

Purpose

The American Legion Auxiliary has only one great purpose—"to contribute to the accomplishment of the aims and purposes of The American Legion." Except for the addition of those words, the Preamble to its National Constitution is the same as the American Legion. Always following the policies of The American Legion, The Auxiliary's activities are designed to carry out the parts of The American Legion's program which can best be accomplished by women.

The Auxiliary Member

Women eligible for membership in the American Legion Auxiliary fall under the following three classifications:

1. Mother, wife, daughter, sister, granddaughter or great-granddaughter of members of The American Legion;
2. Mother, wife, daughter, sister, granddaughter or great-granddaughter of men and women who were in the U.S. Armed Forces during any of the following periods: April 6, 1917 to Nov. 11, 1918; Dec. 7, 1941 to Dec. 31, 1946; June 25, 1950 to Jan. 31, 1955; Dec. 22, 1961 to May 7, 1975; Aug. 24, 1982 to July 31, 1984; Dec. 20, 1989 to Jan. 31, 1990, and Aug. 2, 1990 to the date of cessation of hostilities as determined by the Government of the United States; all dates inclusive, or who being citizens of the United States at the time of their entry therein, served on active duty in the Armed Forces of any of the governments associated with the United States during any of said periods and died in the line of duty or after honorable discharge; and
3. American Legion upon establishment of eligibility, women may become members of a local unit of the Auxiliary by paying their dues and, as such, are also members of their Department and National Organization. Senior membership is composed of members over the age of 18 (wives under the age of 19 are classed as Senior

members) and Junior members consist of that group under the age of 18.

The Unit

The basic organization of the American Legion Auxiliary is the local Unit. All Auxiliary members must hold membership in a local Unit. It is through the local units that the Department and National programs are carried out and through which the Auxiliary applies its resource for service to The American Legion.

Ten new Senior members are required to form an Auxiliary Unit. The unit must take the name, number and location of The American Legion Post to which it is attached and these appear on the Unit charter. When a Post changes its name and number, the Unit attached to that Post must also change its name and number to correspond with those of the Post. The cancellation or revocation of a Post charter does not invalidate the charter of the Auxiliary Unit. The Unit may continue to operate bearing the name and number of the Post to which it was attached, its status then becoming that of a "widow" Unit. The Unit should always remember that it is an Auxiliary to its Post and its first purpose should be to assist with the programs of its Post Officers of an American Legion Auxiliary Unit correspond to those of an American Legion Post: President, Vice President, Chaplin, Historian, Secretary, Treasurer and Sergeant-at-Arms. Annual dues are paid to the Unit, which then forwards Department and National dues to the Department Headquarters.

National Headquarters

National Headquarters of the American Legion Auxiliary is located in Indianapolis, Ind., on The American Legion Mall. Housed on the third and fourth floors of the state-owned building at 777 North Meridian St. and located across the Mall from the National President, National Secretary, National Treasurer and the National Headquarters staff.

The National Secretary and her staff work with National Committees and Departments and handle details of all National meetings. Records of Unit Charters, membership applications and permanent files are maintained by staff members.

The National Treasurer and her staff handle disbursements and income. The National News Editor/Public Relations Director and her staff compile and produce the bimonthly magazine, which is sent to all Senior members, and are responsible for the publication of various programs brochures and the year-end Report to the Membership.

Management Information Services, located at an off-site facility on the north side of Indianapolis, receives and processes all membership dues and mailing lists. Considering the large membership of the organization, the staff of National Headquarters is relatively small. This is due largely to:

1. Volunteer coordination and implementation of all programs at each level.
2. Concentrated use of computers.
3. Ongoing assistance by the various program divisions of The American Legion National Headquarters.

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY PROGRAMS

Americanism

Americanism is an expression of the basic human need for freedom and acceptance of the responsibilities of citizenship. The goal of the Auxiliary's Americanism program is to educate every citizen on the fundamentals of American government, the Bill of Rights and the value of active, informed involvement in the home, Auxiliary organization and the community. Successful Americanism programs are cooperation donated to the Spirit of Youth Fund by individuals, organizations and members' estates benefit young people through such programs as the Americanism Youth Conference at Freedoms Foundation and the Spirit of Youth Scholarship programs.

Citizens Flag Alliance

The citizens Flag Alliance is an apolitical, nonpartisan confederation of organizations and individuals who wish to protect the United States flag from intentional physical desecration. Stressing education along with rallying public support, the Citizens Flag Alliance's goal is to pass a narrowly drawn Constitution Amendment making it illegal to publicly desecrate the flag. The American Legion Auxiliary joined this effort in 1994 because it believes the flag is unique our national symbols and it deserves respect, care and protection.

Auxiliary Emergency Fund

The Auxiliary Emergency Fund is an excellent example of the Auxiliary's dedication to "Women Helping Women." The fund, supported by memorials and contribution from Auxiliary Units and members, provides temporary emergency financial assistance to Auxiliary members who have exhausted all other personal and community resources. For members who find themselves suddenly single, deserted, divorced or widowed, with no skills to support themselves or their families, the Displaced Homemakers Fund provides immediate aid to help them acquire new skills through school or job training.

Cavalcade of Memories

Auxiliary members have a sense of obligation to preserve the history and traditions of their organization. As a result, the Cavalcade of Memories was established in 1972 at National Headquarters to house valuable historical keepsakes collected and contributed by the Department throughout the years. This Auxiliary memorabilia display in the museum and throughout the National headquarters office. In addition, many Departments and local Units also maintain their own archives.

Children and Youth

Emphasizing care and financial assistance to veterans' children, the Children and Youth program strives to improve conditions for all children by preserving the integrity of the family unit. The program takes a realistic approach to the needs of children by considering the physical, spiritual, emotional and educational aspects. As part of the program, the Auxiliary cooperates with many other public and private community agencies and organizations and supports essential legislation for children at the national, state and local levels. In some cases, direct financial assistance and services are provided to individual children or families of veterans. Auxiliary members also contribute to The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation, established in 1954 to fund special programs and medical projects that help protect children against physical and mental dangers, and promote public awareness of the needs of children.

Community Service

Auxiliary members help make our communities better places in which to live by studying community needs, recommending projects, raising funds and donating time to worthy causes. Special attention is given to selecting projects that are not duplicated by other organizations. Units also provide assistance to local programs of American Legion Posts and help other organizations that sponsor projects for the benefit of the community. These include blood drives, first-aid and CPR training, child safety programs, donations to shelters for the homeless, tree plantings, recycling programs and disaster and emergency preparedness programs.

Constitution and By-laws

Members are encouraged to become aware of the organization's policies and procedures, particularly as they relate to the rights and benefits of membership. On the national, state and local levels, the Constitution and By-laws should be reviewed annually with suggested changes submitted in writing. Care should be given to ensure clarity, simplicity and consistency to avoid misunderstandings or confusion.

Education

Believing that a solid educational foundation is the cornerstone of American freedom, the Auxiliary Education program promotes quality education for every child and supports students in their desire to continue their education beyond high school. Working with educators and local schools to develop and maintain an educational system that serves the needs all children, Auxiliary members and volunteers sponsor and support state and national education legislation, establish new scholarship opportunities and professional job requirements and encourage students to apply for scholarship opportunities and plan for college.

Girls State

Girls State is a non-partisan program that teaches young women responsible citizenship and love for God and country. Since its inception in 1937, countless young people have had the opportunity to learn first-hand how their state and local governments work. High school girls in their junior year spend an intensive week of study, working together as self-governing citizens at Auxiliary-sponsored Girls State programs throughout the country. Participants are educated about the intrinsic duties, privileges, rights and responsibilities of citizenship in a democracy and learn how their state government functions, preparing them for future roles as responsible adult citizens. Using criteria established by the Department (state level), local Units select and sponsor candidates recommended by local high schools. Girls State "citizens" are typically extraordinarily talented and accomplished young women who excel academically and are involved in a variety of extracurricular and community activities.

Junior Activities

Auxiliary membership for girls under the age of 18 serves as a training ground to prepare them for active adult Senior membership. Programs reflect and support the work of the Auxiliary, instill the ideas of the organization and are an important step in the transition from childhood to the responsibilities of adulthood.

Leadership

Comprehensive training courses and materials are offered in every Auxiliary Department and by the National Organization. Courses focus on fundamental management and communication skills and outline basic responsibilities and leadership opportunities of the Auxiliary. Units and Departments frequently conduct Leadership Workshops with motivational speakers to increase enthusiasm for their programs.

Membership

This program concentrates on ongoing recruiting to ensure the future growth and prosperity of the organization. Unit members work diligently to publicize and promote the benefits, objectives and activities of the Auxiliary and seek out active involvement in Unit activities. units, Divisions and Departments work together toward reaching their individual and organizational membership goals.

National Security

Maintaining a strong national defense and educating members on vital national security issues are priority concerns to Auxiliary members. In cooperation and coordination with The American Legion, members are briefed on a wide range of topics at local and national meetings and through publications and bulletins. Topics include: national and civil defense; crime prevention; emergency and disaster preparedness; and environmental protection. Understanding the issues helps lay the groundwork for community-wide mobilization and support of various National Security activities. Activities on the National level include the annual Awareness Assembly, a legislative forum held in Washington, D.C.; the family Support Network for service families of Operation Desert Storm; the "Trees for Tomorrow" program; and local and worldwide support of USO activities.

Past Presidents Parlay

Members who have served as Unit, Department or National presidents are valuable resource to the organization. Their leadership experience is put to good use by offering guidance and counsel on activities or problems requiring special support or emphasis. Committee members maintain a scholarship fund for nurses, contribute to the "women in Military Service" memorial, and support hospitalized women veterans.

Poppy

The Poppy program is the oldest and most widely recognized Auxiliary program. Each year around Memorial Day, Auxiliary volunteers distribute millions of bright red crepe paper poppies in exchange for contribution to assist disabled and hospitalized veterans. This program provides multiple benefits to the veterans and the community. Hospitalized veterans who make the flowers are able to earn a small wage which helps to supplement their incomes and makes them feel more self-sufficient. The physical and mental activity involved also provides therapeutic benefits. Donations are used exclusively to assist and support veterans and their families. The poppy also remains the community of past sacrifices and continuing needs of veterans. Auxiliary members endeavor to explain the true meaning of this little flower to all those who receive it. The poppy has become a nationally known and recognized symbol of sacrifice and is worn and used by members to honor the men and women who served and died for their country in all wars.

Public Relations

The Public Relations program works to maintain goodwill within the organization and the general public and promotes the Auxiliary's many worthwhile programs, events, activities and accomplishments through the media. Continued community support and awareness of Auxiliary programs are ensured by doing things well and increasing public awareness of the efforts and results. Good publicity augments and supports the Auxiliary's membership recruiting efforts by attracting eligible women and motivating them to become active members. The American Legion Auxiliary National News, a bimonthly publication, is a major communications vehicle and is a primary source of information between the local Unit members and the national leadership.

Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation

Members are committed to restoring veterans and their families to normal functions-physically, mentally, socially and vocationally-by providing service and financial assistance. Hospital, Field Service and Home Service volunteers furnish emotional support and companionship while attending to the hospitalized, handicapped and homebound veterans' physical comforts. Gift shops and holiday parties have become an essential part of the VA&R program. Members work with legislators and congressmen to pass legislation increasing government benefits and assistance for veterans. Essential equipment and supplies are purchased by members to upgrade and facilitate the level of care in veterans' facilities. Members also provide job assistance, transportation, food, clothing and medicine to thousands of needy, handicapped and homeless veterans.

Eight and forty

The Eight and Forty-officially, La Boutique des Huit Chapeaux et Quarante Femmes-is a subsidiary organization of the American Legion Auxiliary. Membership is limited to women who have been members of the Auxiliary for at least three years and have performed outstanding service within the parent organization. Special projects of the Eight and Forty are the combating of tuberculosis, cystic fibrosis, lung and other respiratory diseases among children.