



A CAPSULE HISTORY OF THE FIRST 90 YEARS

THE BEGINNING YEARS

In eight short years, from 1921 to 1929, the American Legion Auxiliary grew from 11,000 members to over 200,000 members. It was a period of growth for the organization, of new programs for the veterans, and of concern for growing pacifism. It was a time when the Auxiliary was needed in America to spearhead the drive of concern for the veterans and to keep the country alert to the dangers of isolationism. When American veterans banded together in The American Legion to carry on a peacetime program of service to the nation, it was only natural for the women of their families to join them. The women who had served so faithfully during the trying days of the war wanted to continue to serve. The Auxiliary is the result of that desire.



Subsequent to the formation of The American Legion, a number of women's organizations wanted to become the affiliated women's organization of the Legion. A special committee was appointed by the temporary National organization of the Legion to consider these requests.

After careful consideration, the committee determined that a new organization should be made up of the women most closely associated with the men of the Legion. These women would serve with the Legion "in peace as they had in war." The committee had determined that the best way for the Legion to secure an effective auxiliary would be to build a new organization from the ground up. The auxiliary could then carry forward the phases of Legion activities more suitably performed by women.

When the first National Convention of The American Legion was held on November 11-12, 1919, the special committee reported these facts to the convention. The report was approved by the convention, and the following Article was written into the Constitution of The American Legion:

ARTICLE XIII AUXILIARY

Section 1. The American Legion recognizes an auxiliary organization, to be known as the Women's Auxiliary to The American Legion.

Section 2. Membership in the Auxiliary shall be limited to the mothers, wives, daughters and sisters of the members of The American Legion, and to the mothers, wives, daughters and sisters of all men and women who were in the military or naval service of the United States between April 6, 1917, and November 11, 1920.

Section 3. The Auxiliary shall be governed in each Department of The American Legion by such rules and regulations as may be prescribed by the National Executive Committee and thereafter approved by such Department of the American Legion.

Less than one year later, 1,342 local units of the Women's Auxiliary to The American Legion had been organized. They were scattered over 45 states. Eleven thousand members had paid a national per capita tax to the National Headquarters of The American Legion. However, no departments had been organized within the 45 states. All this had been accomplished by the time the second National Convention of the Legion was held in Cleveland, Ohio in September, 1920.

After the Cleveland convention, National Commander, John G. Emery, issued a directive stating that no department of the Auxiliary could be formed until a number of units had been organized that equaled fifty percent of the number of Legion posts in the department. Thus, the 'Department' organization began in 1920.

Ms. Pauline Curnick was employed by the National headquarters of the Legion to be in charge of the organization of Auxiliary units. She worked as a clerk under the direction of Russell Creviston, the Legion's Director of Organization.

Minnesota was the first department to qualify for a charter, and the first Department Convention was held in Minneapolis on November 18, 1920. By the summer of 1921, enough departments had been organized to permit the National Commander, John G. Emery, to call a National Convention of the Women's Auxiliary to be held concurrently with the Legion's third National Convention in Kansas City, Missouri.

The Auxiliary's first convention convened on November 1, 1921, with delegates from nearly every state and territory answering roll call. Departments had been chartered in 42 states and the territory of Hawaii. There were 3,653 Units, with an enrollment of 131,000 members. During the year following the Legion's second National Convention, the Auxiliary grew from 1,342 units to 3,653 units.

In Kansas City's Grand Avenue Temple, National Commander Emery called the first session of the Auxiliary's convention to order. Dr. Helen Hughes Hielscher of Minnesota was elected Temporary Chairman of the convention. A National Constitution and Bylaws modeled after that of the Legion, was adopted. The preamble of the Legion constitution was adopted, with the insertion of the phrase, "to participate in and contribute to the accomplishment of the aims and purposes of The American Legion."

It was at this convention that the name of the organization was officially changed to the American Legion Auxiliary. The organization of the Auxiliary was completed in 1921 with the election of Ms. Edith Hobart of Cincinnati, Ohio, to lead the organization in its first year.

An important action was taken at this convention that has remained with the organization. The poppy was adopted as the memorial flower of the Auxiliary.

The Legion had elected to establish its National Headquarters in Indianapolis, Indiana. The Auxiliary followed the Legion and opted to establish its temporary National Headquarters in that city. In 1925, the first unit of both organizations moved into a new limestone building. The Auxiliary National Headquarters occupied the third and fourth floors of that building. Today, it is located, still on Meridian Street in Indianapolis, but, further north.

Ms. Pauline Curnick of Indianapolis joined National Headquarters as the first National Secretary, and Ms. M. Izetta McCoy of Topeka, Kansas, became the first National Treasurer. With the help of a staff of 13 employees, the National Secretary, and the National Treasurer, activities were launched in the fields of rehabilitation, child welfare, and Americanism.

In the year following the first convention, enrollment increased to 190,635 members in 5,375 units. Departments were organized in 48 states, the District of Columbia, Alaska, Hawaii, the Panama Canal Zone, and one in Mexico.

In October 1922, the second National Convention was held in New Orleans, Louisiana. Dr. Kate Waller Barrett of Alexandria, Virginia was elected National President. The first 'States' dinner was held at this convention for 1,300 people.

During Dr. Barrett's year, Auxiliary units did everything in their power for the hospitalized veterans. These services included visiting veterans in hospitals, providing comfort items to the veterans, and providing hospitality to relatives visiting the hospitalized veterans. Dr. Helen Hughes Hielscher, a leader in early rehabilitation work, sounded a call that was the beginning of the Legion's and Auxiliary's long campaign to obtain the best of care for the disabled veterans. This effort eventually resulted in the establishment of the Veterans Administration and the development of a system of modern Veterans Administration medical centers.

In its third year, Ms. Helen Bishop of Massachusetts was elected National President. During her term, the fight for disabled veterans and for the adjusted compensation bill ended with the enactment over the veto of President Calvin Coolidge. In 1924, Children's Billets were established to care for the orphans of veterans.

The Auxiliary had been vigorously fighting against radicalism and pacifism. Through the efforts of the Auxiliary, the first Women's Patriotic Conference on National Defense was held in Washington, DC, in February, 1925.

In the same year, strong nationwide support was given to the Legion's campaign to raise a \$5,000 endowment fund for rehabilitation and child welfare. The Auxiliary was given credit for helping the drive to succeed.

The organization continued to grow in 1926, and disabled veterans made four million poppies. The Auxiliary distributed these, and this represented significant progress in rehabilitation work.

The pilgrimage to France for the 1927 National Convention took more than 27,000 Legion and Auxiliary members to Europe. With the Leviathan as flagship, the American veterans and female family members crossed the Atlantic in peacetime. The Salvation Army's "Doughnut

Girl” in World War I, Irene McIntyre Walbridge of New Hampshire, was elected National President.

Under the leadership of National President, Ms. Lucy Ficklen of Georgia, the first Department ‘Presidents and Secretaries’ Conference was held in November, 1928, in Indianapolis, IN. This conference has proved to be so valuable that it has been held each year since that time.

At this time, the Auxiliary became a major force behind the pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Widows to France. This pilgrimage was made at government expense. With the passage of the Naval Construction Bill, an important victory was won for national security. And the veterans were not forgotten at Christmas in 1928, as 50,000 hospitalized veterans received gifts from the Auxiliary.

A new tradition was established at the ninth annual National Convention of the Auxiliary when the National President was presented with the stand of Auxiliary National Colors under which she had served.

THE DEPRESSION YEARS

By 1929, the Great Depression blanketed the country. The threatening conditions tightened the ties of comradeship among veterans and their families. This need to join together resulted in new membership records for both the Legion and the Auxiliary.

Under a new plan, each department in the organization provided gifts for all the veterans’ hospitals in its state, regardless of the home state of the patient. Nearly 60,000 veterans received gifts from the Auxiliary under this new system.

As the Depression grew worse, aid to unemployed veterans became the first concern of the Legion and the Auxiliary. The organizations worked together for a bill to authorize loans up to fifty percent on Adjusted Compensation certificates. The World War I “bonus” was not paid to veterans in cash, but in twenty-year insurance certificates called Adjusted Compensation certificates. The White House blocked the bill: the President vetoed it. The fight continued, and 996,302 unemployed veterans were placed in jobs.

Economic conditions brought a reverse in membership figures. For the first time, the Auxiliary saw a decline in membership, as 9,622 members dropped from the organization. By the end of 1932, there were only 402,441 members. The Depression had made it impossible for many members to pay their dues.

In 1934, a campaign was launched to make good books available to more Americans. The Community Service committee, established in 1926, carried out this program for the benefit of millions.

The battle of the Adjusted Compensation certificates continued into 1936. When President Franklin D. Roosevelt vetoed the bill, Congress overrode the veto, and it passed. The Legion

and the Auxiliary won the battle. They were also victorious in their fight for increased national defense spending, for more than \$1 billion was appropriated to strengthen the Army and Navy.

In 1937, the Legion and the Auxiliary held their annual conventions in New York City, the largest and most spectacular convention in the history of the organization. Two and one-half million spectators lined the streets of New York City when the 150,000 Legionnaires marched up Fifth Avenue. The gigantic parade lasted 18 hours.

When world peace was threatened in the late 1930s, the Legion and Auxiliary continued their demands for a stronger national defense. Although World War I had occurred twenty years earlier, the needs of the disabled veterans of that war were increasing in 1937 and 1938. In that Auxiliary year, the first Area Rehabilitation conferences were held, with a short course of instruction given by veteran's hospitals in fifteen states.

In 1938, the Auxiliary began to grow again, and membership reached a high of 460,919. The half-million mark was in sight. The largest Christmas program for veterans took place in 1938, with gifts from the Auxiliary sent to 94,654 hospitalized veterans and to 25,293 families of veterans. The program cost \$236,902 – not a small sum as the country struggled out of the Depression.

The year 1939 was a year of beginnings, and Kansas and Nebraska shared honors for a first in the Girls State program. This was the year the VA Hospital Gift Shops program began spreading quickly to all departments, becoming a part of the rehabilitation program. Congress suddenly adopted national defense measures, advocated by the Auxiliary for years.

THE WORLD WAR II YEARS

The threat of war loomed on the horizon in 1940, and many changes took place in the decade that followed. In response to anticipated needs of the nation, the Legion's birthday, March 15, 1941, was designated "Registration Day," and Auxiliary members were to register for voluntary service in any emergency that might arise. Approximately 25 percent of all Auxiliary members registered. Members took civil defense courses and campaigned for funds for the new USO, and they collected aluminum, a needed wartime material. A vigorous Americanism campaign was launched, and membership exceeded the half-million mark, a goal the Auxiliary had promoted for several years.

On Sunday morning, December 7, 1941, 9,326 units pledged the support of 523,000 members of the Auxiliary to the Commander-In-Chief of the United States. Just two months after Ms. Mary Murrill of Massachusetts had taken office, the United States was again at war.

Auxiliary members in Hawaii distinguished themselves by their service of caring for the thousands of victims of the attack at Pearl Harbor. The newly-formed Emergency Voluntary Service committee provided tens of thousands of Auxiliary members who gave valuable service to the Red Cross, the USO, Civil Defense, Selective Service Boards, Army and Navy relief, and dozens of other agencies that emerged overnight.

Six blood units were purchased and presented to the Red Cross. A book unit and mobile library went to the troops in India via the Red Cross, bearing the name of the Auxiliary, and blood for the wounded soldiers was donated by the gallon.

The Twenty-Second National Convention in Kansas City was attended by delegates only, and the traditional social events were suspended. Convention action abolished four national standing committees: Music; Emblems, Trophies and Awards; Employment; and Education of Orphans of Veterans.

In 1942, the Auxiliary began a campaign to enlist women in the Armed Forces who would relieve men to serve in combat duty. The successful campaign led to the enlistment of 913 of the Auxiliary's own members. The National Executive Committee authorized the disbursement of \$50,000 to pay for the cost of nurses' training for the women who had been unable to afford the training. The women of the Auxiliary were engaged in nearly every form of war effort activity.

The first women to be eligible for membership through World War II service were enrolled in the Auxiliary in 1943. Action of the Legion's 1942 National Convention gave eligibility to some of the World War II service personnel. Among the first to be eligible were widows and the families of the wounded who had been discharged because of disability. The majority of World War II service-connected women would not become eligible for membership until victory brought honorable discharges to the armed services personnel and the returning veterans were enrolled in the Legion.

Absorbed in wartime activities, units tended to neglect membership and 4,520 members were lost. The Child Welfare program took on new problems because of the disruption of family life, and the two organizations spent over \$2 million in 1943 helping half a million children.

In 1943, the Legion initiated action that would benefit the veterans of this global war. Nicknamed the "GI Bill of Rights," this bill was drafted by a committee of Legion rehabilitation experts appointed by National Commander Warren H. Atherton. The Auxiliary began an all-out campaign for the bill, taking the message into cities and towns across America. The effort resulted in the passage of the "Servicemen's Readjustment of 1944" through both Houses of Congress without a dissenting vote. It was signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on June 22, 1944.

Continued wartime activities occupied the energies of the Auxiliary, and in the fall of 1944, the Liberty Ship "SS Moina Michael" was launched in Savannah, Georgia. The ship was named in honor of the woman who had originated the idea of wearing poppies as a tribute to the war dead and whose work had contributed greatly to the development of the Auxiliary Memorial Poppy program.

The National President, Mrs. Helen Lee Gilbert of Connecticut, was attending the United Nation's Conference on International Organizations as Associate Consultant to the American delegation when the word came from Europe that Germany had surrendered. Peace in the Pacific followed soon afterwards, and the post-war work began.

The sudden dawn of peace brought new demands for the services of America's largest patriotic organization of women. The men and women who had won the war were coming home, and thousands of them were disabled. Widows and children of those who would never return would require the Auxiliary's compassionate aid.

A five-point program was designed to strengthen the loyalty of Americans to democracy. This program encouraged active Americanism in the home, the unit, in youth and adult groups, and in the community. Enrollment in the Auxiliary climbed to 750,000 members – a gain of 150,000 members in one year.

The years passed and membership grew – the result of the eligibility of World War II service-connected men and women. Girls State programs were held in every department, and the first Girls Nation was held on the campus of American University in Washington, DC, in August 1947. During this year, under the direction of National President Ms. Dorothy Pearl of Michigan, the National President's Scholarships grew from five to ten, and a project was endorsed to raise half a million dollars for heart disease research. In 1947, Pan American study was made a year-round activity.

Housing for war veterans and their families, rehabilitation of a new generation of disabled veterans, care of needy children, and concern for the prevention of another global conflict were the primary concerns of 1948. The Legion, backed by the Auxiliary, pushed for universal military training. More than 30,000 letters and 1,600 telegrams were sent to congresswomen urging passage of such a bill.

The *National News*, the official publication of the Auxiliary, took on a more important role and was sent to every senior member. At the winter meeting of the National Executive Committee, \$50,000 was presented to the Legion for the expansion of its rehabilitation program.

A station wagon was purchased to use at the US Marine Hospital in Carville, Louisiana, replacing one previously provided by the Legion. There was increased public awareness of the Auxiliary through 12,000 radio broadcasts, and 13 broadcasts went out over the new medium of television. With the National Convention in Philadelphia in 1949, the World War II period of the Auxiliary ended.

THE COLD WAR YEARS

On the domestic front, the Auxiliary went into action against Communism in the United States. The emphasis on Americanism grew. Layton K. Hurst joined the staff and began work on improving and enlarging the radio script library at National Headquarters.

The 1950s arrived, and with the invasion of South Korea, the Auxiliary again raised its voice in support of the Legion's demand for military training for all young men. In September, 1950, President Harry S. Truman announced that the Armed Forces would be increased from 1.5 million to three million. That year a new high in membership was reached, with 975,000 members recorded. A new committee, Civil Defense, was appointed and was headed by Past National President Ms. Dorothy Pearl.

The 26th Women's Patriotic Conference on National Defense convened in Washington, DC, on January 24, 1950, and marked the last conference in which the Auxiliary would participate. The Auxiliary held the position that it could not take part in the adoption of policy resolutions since the Auxiliary followed the policies established by the Legion. The rehabilitation program was broadened, with personal gifts from the Auxiliary given to 185,000 veterans in hospitals on Christmas day, 1952.

The first Women's Forum on National Security was convened on January 24, 1953, in Washington, DC, under the direction of National President Ms. Eve Ashton of Utah. Seven hundred representatives from ten of the largest of America's national patriotic organizations attended this first meeting.

An all-time high of one million plus membership was reached in 1955. The first "Need a Lift?" booklet for students was published that year by the Legion.

The Washington, DC office was opened in 1956 under the leadership of Layton K. Hurst, Program Coordinator.

The 1950s were marked by the launching of Sputnik by the Russians, the rising to power of Fidel Castro in Cuba, and the ending of the Korean War.

THE TUMULTUOUS SIXTIES AND SEVENTIES

During the 1960s, our membership continued to decline, and it did not recover significantly until 1976. There were constant protests against the government because of our involvement in Vietnam. Young men were refusing to answer the call to military service, and patriotism took a dip until the late 1970s. Construction of the Berlin Wall, the Cuban Crises, and the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy created additional stress throughout the nation.

The National President, Ms. Opal Glynn, visited Saigon during her 1965-66 administrative year, and she was able to see firsthand the ravages of war on our military. In 1966, with the signing of the approval documentation by President Lyndon B. Johnson, Vietnam veterans became eligible for membership in the Legion. That same year, the Philippines established an Auxiliary department.

The year 1969 brought many firsts to the Auxiliary. It was the year the Auxiliary Emergency Fund was made possible by funding from the Helen Colby Small estate. This fund provides temporary financial assistance for members of the Auxiliary. The first voluntary insurance programs were offered to our members.

Granddaughters became eligible for membership in the Auxiliary during 1970. This change would help the membership grow again toward the goal of one million members. The 1970 National Convention in Portland, Oregon was full of tension for everyone involved, as confrontations with protesters marred the daily proceedings and created immense security

problems. Among all the turmoil, the first National Vice President of the Auxiliary was elected. Bertha Parker of Oklahoma was the first to hold the office.

During 1973, the first Vietnam POWs were released, and Auxiliary members wearing POW/MIA bracelets watched for their "special" POW to be among those coming home. That same year, the Cavalcade of Memories was established in National Headquarters, with three rooms set aside to display Auxiliary memorabilia.

Our nation endured painful events during 1974-75, with the resignation of both the President and Vice President of the United States and the fall of Vietnam to the Communists as our troops withdrew. Membership in the Auxiliary, however, continued to grow, and it reached the highest count in twenty years during our Bicentennial Celebration year, 1976.

The Legion and Auxiliary had raised funds for five years to purchase a replica of the Liberty Bell to ride on the American Freedom Train during America's 200-year celebration. Millions of Americans saw the results of that effort as the Freedom Train crisscrossed the United States.

Our Bicentennial was uniquely celebrated by a joint Boys and Girls Nation session in our nation's capital.

The American Cancer Society received a one million-dollar donation from the Legion and Auxiliary in 1976 as a result of a yearlong fundraising campaign. That same year, the American Kor-Asian Foundation Open-Heart program became a part of the Children and Youth program. Units were asked to contribute funds for airfare to bring children of South Korea to the United States for open-heart surgery.

With the continued energy crisis in the United States, the Auxiliary focused its attention on solutions by establishing the Energy Conservation committee during the 1976-77 administrative year. Changes to the National Headquarters staff occurred during that same year when Ms. Peggy Sappenfield was appointed to the position of National Treasurer following the retirement of Ms. Myner Freeman.

National President Viola Moltzen (1977-78) was seen on national television as she presented a check in the amount of \$261,000 from Auxiliary members to Jerry Lewis for the fight against muscular dystrophy. Special Olympics was added as a regular emphasis in the Children and Youth program during 1978.

Mrs. Miriam Junge from the Department of Ohio was appointed National Secretary of the Auxiliary in 1978 by National President Maxine Bigalow upon the retirement of Ms. Doris Anderson.

The Auxiliary has continued to fulfill its purpose by working hand-in-hand with the Legion. The basic programs of Americanism, Children and Youth, National Security, Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation, Girls State and Legislative continue to be as important as they were in the 1920s. Committees have been added and dropped, and titles have been changed, but the same basic ideals upon which America was founded remain in the hearts of the women of the Auxiliary.

The Auxiliary is still striving to keep unsullied the idealism that has guided the nation, and to bring to the citizens of America a fuller realization of the responsibility of citizenship.

FOSTERING TRADITION AND NUTURING CHANGE IN THE EIGHTIES AND NINETIES

The Auxiliary faced a new era of challenge as it entered its 60th year of service. In 1982, the Auxiliary Awareness Assembly was established to inform members about national and international issues pertaining to defense, security, veterans, women and the elderly. The Awareness Assembly replaced the disbanded Women's Forum on National Security. In support of women, the Past Presidents Parley awarded \$69,000 in nursing scholarships that same year.

United States service personnel served in Grenada and in Lebanon between August 24, 1982, and July 31, 1984. Our armed forces fought for several reasons: to support democratic reform in the small Caribbean nations, to provide development and defense aid, and to allow peace to take place. Membership eligibility was expanded to include the great-granddaughters of the armed forces of this war period.

The "Friends of Our Little Brothers" orphanage in Mexico was visited in 1984 by National President, Anna Gear. This orphanage at one time housed nearly 1,200 children. The children relied on their land for food, but an inadequate supply of water hampered their ability to produce the necessary food to survive. The Auxiliary donated funds to be used for irrigation wells, which brought in a steady supply of water and ensured an adequate amount of food for the children.

A program supporting children closer to home came in the form of an educational comic book called "The Secret of Animal Island". The comic book illustrated safety tips for children. In 1987, it set Auxiliary records for public response, and 1.5 million copies were distributed worldwide.

In November 1989, Auxiliary members watched with joy as the Berlin Wall, the symbol of Soviet domination for many Americans, fell in November. Also, in 1989, the Supreme Court ruled in *Texas vs. Johnson* that flag burning was protected as free speech, thus overturning state flag-protection laws. This ruling devastated veterans' organizations across the country.

Through the years, other conflicts required the assistance of the United States. In 1989, Iraq invaded Kuwait, necessitating United States' intervention. On December 20, 1989, the military set its campaign in motion. Known as "Operation Desert Storm," the war was short with relatively few American casualties. Auxiliary membership extended to include female family members of Desert Storm veterans.

The Family Support Network was launched in 1990 for Operation Desert Storm. The network was a national emergency assistance program in which military families called a toll-free telephone number staffed by Auxiliary and Legion members to request help. More than 34,000 telephone calls for assistance were received.

The increasing homeless population in the United States prompted Auxiliary members to step in and help in the 1990s. In 1992, Auxiliary members gathered in Washington, DC and built the "All Woman" house as part of Habitat for Humanity International's Jimmy Carter Work project.

Continuing to support homeless veterans, National President Linda Boone led a group of concerned community and service groups to form a "Far From Home" chapter in Indianapolis which established a transitional living program for homeless veterans. Auxiliary members also successfully collected over one million pounds of food and donated this food to assist homeless veterans across the country.

Change at National Headquarters came in 1993 with the retirement of Ms. Miriam Junge of the Department of Ohio from the position of National Secretary. After serving fifteen years in this capacity, she was succeeded January 1, 1994, by Ms. Peggy Sappenfield. Sappenfield's appointment came following a successful seventeen years as the Auxiliary's National Treasurer. The successor to the position of National Treasurer was Ms. Marta Hedding of Indianapolis, who assumed the position on July 18, 1994.

National President Helen Holcomb of Odessa, Texas, introduced Teen Court to Auxiliary members in 1994. Teen Court, an alternative to the formal juvenile justice system, allows young offenders to be tried and sentenced by a jury of their peers. Auxiliary members initiated 17 Teen Courts across the country.

In an effort to overturn the Supreme Court's 1989 decision legalizing flag desecration under the First Amendment, the Citizens Flag Alliance was formed in 1994 with the sole purpose of protecting the American flag. This alliance is an apolitical, non-partisan, confederation of organizations and individuals who wished to pass a constitutional amendment to protect the American flag from physical desecration. Nearly 115 organizations and 35 million people joined the Legion and Auxiliary in this effort. This was a special emphasis for National President Linda Newsom. In 1995, the constitutional amendment was narrowly defeated in the Senate by three votes. With renewed patriotism by support of those volunteering to serve in the military and emphasis on the flag amendment, membership grew.

At the National Convention in Indianapolis in September 1995, the Auxiliary celebrated its 75th year of service to God and Country. Membership eligibility was extended to include grandmothers.

Auxiliary members, under the encouragement of National President, Syble Deshotel, increased their presence in local communities with special attention placed on domestic abuse issues, assistance for the elderly and disabled, and improved care for veterans.

Some of this improved care was provided by Auxiliary volunteers working in the Fisher Houses. The Fisher Houses are comfort homes that provide temporary lodging for family members of military personnel and veterans who receive medical treatment at military or VA Medical Centers. Zachary and Elizabeth Fisher donated \$1.5 million to this project, and Auxiliary members honored them with the Public Spirit Award at the 15th Awareness Assembly session.

American troops were again called to service in 1995 to keep peace in Bosnia. Nearly 60,000 American troops joined United Nations forces on a peace-keeping mission. Auxiliary members again became active with the Family Support Network to provide much needed assistance to family members of these overseas service personnel.

In 1996, members were challenged to strengthen the values upon which our nation was founded. All Auxiliary youth-related programs were emphasized, specifically, youth scholarship monies and participation in “Make a Difference Day”, existing Auxiliary Junior programs, Freedoms Foundation, and the National Junior meeting.

National President, Barbara Kranig, put an emphasis on strengthening the family: food for the hungry, domestic violence, and adequate education for young people, in addition to the hallmark veterans programs. Mrs. Kranig also challenged members of the Auxiliary to be good neighbors and find ways to meet the needs appropriate to their own communities. One way to accomplish this was through the Auxiliary’s two-pronged commitment to the President’s Summit for America’s Future – a commitment which extended five years.

In 1998, members were introduced to the Children’s Miracle Network and the USO. National President, Virginia Hobbs, encouraged members to contribute to the World War II Memorial. The request for WWII Memorial funds continued into the administration of National President Elizabeth “Lib” Stewart. Even after the defeat of the Flag Protection Amendment, members were encouraged to contact their congressmen and encourage their dedication and support.

THE NEW CENTURY AND BEYOND

The next century began as members found innovative methods to support the programs of the Auxiliary. In 2001, under the guidance of National President Kris West, the Auxiliary partnered with the Department of Veterans Affairs to continue rehabilitation work for veterans. The Auxiliary became a host sponsor for the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, and continues that support through members’ yearly donations and time. Many national events have been highlighted with displays and performances of award winning participants.

After terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and New York City, members, under the direction of National President Sherri McLaughlin, donated over \$100,000 for relief efforts.

Also in the new millennium, the Auxiliary members supported the Legion in their quest to help active duty members through the Family Support Network. National President, Carol Van Kirk, found a need for seriously wounded military members. She promoted a campaign to raise funds for custom-made computer carts to help in their recovery while in VA Polytrauma centers.

The recognition of children and youth, in every community, who go above and beyond to help in a crisis, to save a life, culminated in unit nominated ‘Youth Hero’ awards.

As we entered a new millennium, the Auxiliary, acting on National President JoAnn Cronin’s vision in planning for the future of the organization, formalized and moved forward in earnest

with the start of strategic planning under the leadership of National President Jan Pulvermacher-Ryan.

Another emphasis for President Pulvermacher-Ryan was scholarships. She began an endowment fund called “Educating Children of Warriors” for the children of military personnel.

In 2008, the National Headquarters moved its headquarters out of the downtown corridor to its present, larger site.

Many firsts occurred as we ended the first decade of the new millennium. During President Desiree’ Stoy’s term, the call to Service Corps Vista Grant program became a reality. Additional support was given to the Auxiliary through the helping hands of “Vista Volunteers” at both the national and department levels. The grants were obtained through our relationship with the Corporation for National and Community Service.

For the first time in our history, an Honorary Past National President was named. Miriam Junge, not only excelled in the position of National Secretary, but she continued to contribute to the well-being of the organization. She stepped in to manage the National Headquarters when needed, and she was instrumental in many aspects of strategic planning. She was honored at the 2009 convention.

History was made as members elected the organization’s first Hispanic president at the 2009 National Convention. Rita Navarrate’ led the organization through our 90th year celebration. It was during her year that members began their in-kind support of Ride2Recovery, a program to support severely wounded veterans ride bicycles during planned rides as a form of therapy. She became our first sitting president to reach the mass of membership via social networking, Facebook and Twitter.

As we began another decade, National President, Carlene Ashworth, encouraged members to use the ‘Power of One’ to make a difference in each community. She emphasized getting back to the grass roots programs of the Auxiliary with concentration on active duty personnel, veterans, and their families. This was, also, the year of a record number of natural disasters. Auxiliary members rose to the challenge, donating record number of dollars through the Auxiliary Emergency Fund to assist fellow members.

Honoring Their Service, Faces of Freedom continued the impact each member makes when serving our troops and veterans as National President, Kris Nelson, encouraged members to wear a button recognizing a veteran of choice. She reorganized mission training and established programs into PODs. PODs comprised like-programs into one unit, making it easier for members to identify and plan work in an area of interest. As 2011 came to an end, so did the war in Iraq for the US. Support of troops in Afghanistan and around the world continued in the work of the Auxiliary.

In 2012, the name for the Awareness Assembly was changed to the Washington Conference to reflect the multi-faceted information presented.

The creation of the American Legion Auxiliary was the most appropriate and progressive action the Legion has ever undertaken. This body of women, affiliated by blood and marriage to those who served and those who gave their lives for their country, has worked side-by-side with the Legion. Its own activities of service for over 90 years have equaled, and in many cases, exceeded its parent organization.

The Auxiliary's unselfish programs, in concert with those of the Legion, are legendary. These programs are dedicated to the men and women who suffered for their country, and they benefit the children whose fathers gave their lives for America. An enormous expenditure of thought and energy has been required to make these programs successful. The women of the Auxiliary have responded with devotion to service seldom equaled and never surpassed by any other organization.