



American Legion Auxiliary

District 11 Newsletter

December 2025



New News:

I hope you all had a wonderful Thanksgiving Holiday. I do want to share a bit of news. I will be taking on a job at the York County Courthouse with our Veterans Service Officer Nick Wollenburg as his administrative assistant. So, I will be working with our local veterans daily. You can continue to contact me through email, text or phone. Doing anything for the Auxiliary is in the context of my job.

Our Flag is in!!! We now have our District 11 flag! I was a little disappointed with the font size at the top of the flag but it still looks great.



This is the time of year where we really need to help our Veterans and make them feel appreciated. Depression is one of the leading causes of death among our Veterans. So please "Be The One" if you know of one of our Veterans struggling with depression.

My theme for this year is along with our Legion's "Be The One" initiative. My focus is on our Veteran's PTSD and mental health issues.

Let's **BUILD** each other!

B – Be the One!

U – Unite and help each other achieve our goals!

I – Inspire and motivate one another!

L – Listen to each other!

D – Dedicate ourselves to helping each other!



My project for this year is to raise money for a program named JAVELAN.

Here is the article that was in the Crete News about my project.

By Hanna Christensen, scireporter@sewardindependent.com

The years after serving can be difficult. JAVELAN helps veterans and first responders find a new leash on life.

American Legion Auxiliary District 11 President Mary Beth Coffey designated raising money for JAVELAN as her 2025 project. District 11 encompasses Saline, Gage, Thayer, Fillmore, Jefferson and York counties.

According to the Military Veteran Project, about 22 veterans in the United States die by suicide each day. With accessible service dog services for veterans and first responders, JAVELAN is helping to reduce that number.

Around 2014, JAVELAN co-founder Bob Dean's wife, an Air Force veteran, wanted a service dog to help with her PTSD. However, it typically took two to five years to get a trained service dog and it cost upwards of \$25,000.

"That's very, very tough," Dean said. "That's a long time frame, and it's very difficult to wait that long, and most vets don't have \$25,000."

So, she found a local trainer who helped her train a dog herself. She was successful and was able to become much more independent and get off of several medications.

Her service dog made such a big difference in her life that the couple decided to try to help others the same way. At the time, the average cost to learn to train a dog was about \$3,000. They decided to start JAVELAN to fund that training for those who need it in 2018.

JAVELAN became part of the First Responders Foundation, which took over its administrative expenses, a couple of years ago.

"When this whole thing started, we wanted to help at least six people," Dean said. "That was in 2018. To date, we're just shy of 160 people that we've funded."

The only charge for JAVELAN is a \$25 application fee to cover a background check. The program does take people with criminal records, but wants to ensure they will use their dogs ethically. Apply for the program at javelan.org.

Service dogs can provide a variety of services. They can find help if their handler cannot get up; scent the onset of a diabetes crisis, cardiac event or seizure and alert their handler; open doors; retrieve dropped items; place themselves under their owner's head during a fall and stabilize people with stability issues as they walk.

They can also enter and clear rooms before their handler walks in, stand between their handler and any perceived threat and sit close to their handler when they notice signs of anxiety. JAVELAN is currently working to train a dog to push a woman's life alert button in the case of an emergency.

"You can't be upset and pet a dog at the same time," Dean said. "For a lot of people, starting down that spiral of PTSD, of anxiety and anxiousness, just to break that process is enough to pull them out before it gets too far."

The trainers spend dozens of hours teaching each first responder or veteran one-on-one. Handlers can train a dog under three that they already own or work with JAVELAN to adopt one.

Training typically takes about nine months and also covers service dog etiquette. JAVELAN hosts a class on dog health, such as potential problems to look out for and how to properly groom a dog, once a quarter.

About 75% of those who use JAVELAN's services applied for mental health reasons, and although trainers are not mental health technicians, they are trained on how to help people with their mental health.

Trainers and handlers often form friendships. Several of the trainers were dog handlers in the military, and some of them are graduates of JAVELAN.

"Both of them will tell you that they do this not only because they want to help people – that's the big reason – but the small reason is that it helps them, too," Dean said. "It gives them a purpose and a meaning and a reason to get up in the morning."

If someone who has graduated from the program develops another health issue or needs a new dog after one passes, JAVELAN will train them again at no charge.

JAVELAN needs trainers who understand disabilities and how to train dogs. To apply, call the First Responders Foundation at (402) 218-1234.

"All the trainers all work together like one team, and that gives me a warm fuzzy as much as seeing someone graduate and climb out of the basement and back into the community, so I can't say enough for our trainers," Dean said. "My wife and I had an idea that something needs to happen, and it's the trainers that are making it happen."

Dean, who is a veteran himself, loves witnessing people's success stories. He has seen vets go from almost never leaving their homes to thriving in the community thanks largely to JAVELAN.

He hopes to spread JAVELAN throughout the country one day. Right now, it serves the Council Bluffs and Nebraska area, and there is a new chapter in Asheville, North Carolina.

Coffey said she enjoys donating to this program because it enables veterans to live higher-quality lives.

"My sole goal is to make them feel like they're able to contribute to their lives again," she said. "It's hard for them when they come back and try to get into their old lives after they've seen and done so much; it's hard for them to cope, sometimes, and they might have injuries or pain or something, and these dogs help them with that, too."

Coffey's father and two sons served overseas, so she has seen the importance of supporting veterans firsthand. Serving affects everyone in different ways, and her eldest son has lost two comrades to suicide in the past six months.

Coffey said she likes that the program will serve people in her area and that all the money collected will go toward fulfilling its mission.

"It's important to know who our veterans are and say, 'thank you,' and this is the time of year to do it, because we wouldn't be here without them," she said.

I will be raffling off a couple things to make money for a donation to this program. The 1st prize is an Eagle lawn Decoration and a Patriotic picture of bird houses and cardinals. The 2nd Prize is a Patriotic picture of dogs in the back of an old pickup and flag and a patriotic table centerpiece. I will also take straight donations for this project if you do not want any raffle tickets. I will try to display these at County meetings that I am available to attend please let me know if you have any questions or if you know anyone that would benefit from a service dog and need more information.

Important Dates:

December 7, 2025	Pearl Harbor Day
December 13, 2025	U. S. National Guard Birthday & National Wreaths Across America
December 20, 2025	Space Force Birthday
December 25, 2025	Christmas

Department Mid Year Conference – Will be January 16th – 19th 2026, in Norfolk at the Norfolk Lodge & Suites their phone # is (402) 379-3833 Use this number to get the discounted rate. Make sure you state the American Legion Auxiliary. The rate is \$110 per night before tax.

District 11 Convention – will be March 21st in Beatrice beginning @ 10am

Congratulations to the NW Division on holding 1st place and Nebraska is number 1 in the Division!
We are 3rd nationally but not far behind second place is Wisconsin.

Please read National Chairmen Tracy Kinnick's Message.

Whoa  Central Division Eagles are soaring the skies as they have moved into 2nd  place in membership! Keep up the great work!

As we move into the Holiday season this is a great time to show your appreciation to your membership. When sending out notices for renewal make it personal, show them that they matter, include upcoming events.

This time of year brings many activities for our Legion Family, make sure to include information about your unit meetings, membership and why it matters, be friendly and welcoming. This is a great way to connect with your communities to share who you are.

Please spread the word from National Headquarters: The application process for 2026-2027 national committee appointments is open through Jan. 1! National committee chairs and members are appointed annually and confirmed by the National Executive Committee to serve on a wide variety of ALA committees for you to explore. All members are eligible to apply. Learn more by reading the ALA blog at www.ALAforVeterans.org/blog

Wishing you a safe and fun Thanksgiving!

Tracy Kinnick
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National Membership Chair
Department National Security Chair
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316-655-5122

Let's talk Dues Ladies,

Let's try to get those dues in please. Our organization cannot run without them. Please be getting them in as early as you can. Please, don't hold to dues that have been paid, get them sent in as soon as you receive them. If you need help calling or texting people in your Unit let me know. We have 15 Units that are doing awesome getting their dues in and are at the 75% mark or above. We have 17 Units that are doing well getting their dues in and are at the 50% mark or above. We have 3 Units that are still below the 50% mark lets be working on getting that raised up for the next goal!

Unit Awards:

There is a Drawing for the following:

85% Award by TAL Birthday, March 15th, 2026 – one \$85 award
(Our Department needs to reach this Goal to be considered for the Merit Medallion Award at National)
100% Award by President Ruthie's Birthday, June 10, 2026 – 2 \$100 awards.

National Awards –

- Family 3 – Member recruiter who recruits 3 New Legion members, 3 New Auxiliary members, and 3 New Sal Members and dues paid by June 1, 2026.
- Recruit/Rejoin 10- Members who recruit and/or rejoin 10 junior or senior Auxiliary members for the 2026 year. Rejoins must not have paid membership dues since 2022 or earlier.
- Unit Award- 100% Unit Award.

*Just for fun Award- Identify four songs used in the captions of Membership Articles in the Star, ABC book, or newsletters with the word Party in them. Email me by January 1, 2026. The first 5 will receive a gift from me. From Deb Albers in November Newsletter.

Poppies – the Department is low on Poppies so if anyone would like to learn how to make them please contact Roxanne at the Department Office and she could point you in the right direction.

Deadlines – Make sure you are paying attention to the deadlines for the Scholarship, Essay Contest, Poster Contest and Girls State. Contact your schools in your area and make sure they have the information they need and know the deadlines.

The Department is still looking for a Department Treasurer so if you are looking for job, please contact the Department office @ 402-466-1808. The Oct/Nov STAR has an Ad for the position as well as on the Nebraska ALA website.

Attached – is the schedule of the VA & R days that are left if you are interested in helping out.

The next "Let's Get to Know Each Other" night is the 4th Thursday in January (Jan 22nd). This is in Dakin NE at the Road Runner in Downtown Dakin. This is just a fun night to get together and get to know each other better. It's nothing official at all just for fun. You are all invited to join.

Christmas brings family and friends together. It helps us to appreciate the love in our lives that we often take for granted. May the true meaning of the holiday season fill our hearts and homes with many blessings throughout this new year.

I hope you all have a very Blessed and Merry Christmas and the Happiest New Year!

Mary Beth Coffey
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VETERANS AFFAIRS & REHABILITATION (VA & R)
Amanda Washburn, Chair

UPDATED 2025 SCHEDULE FOR THE GIFT SHOP & GIFTS FOR YANKS EVENTS

ALA VETERANS MEDICAL CENTER GIFT SHOPS

Shopping	Mon., Dec. 8	9:30 AM	at Walmart setup follows
Setup	Mon., Dec. 8		Grand Island VA Medical Center
Gift Shop	Tues., Dec. 9	9:00 AM prep	10:00 AM Open for Veterans
Set up	Mon., Dec. 15	10:00 AM	Omaha VA Medical Center
Delivery	Dec. 16 & 17	10:00 AM	
Gift Shop	Thurs., Dec. 18	10:00 AM	Papillion Community Living Center (PCLC)

AMERICAN LEGION FAMILY GIFT FOR YANKS WHO GAVE

Tues., Dec. 2	10:00 AM 2:30 PM	Grand Island VA Medical Center – 2 nd Floor Rec Central NE Veterans Home, Kearney
Wed., Dec. 3	10:00 AM 10:00 AM	Omaha VA Medical Center Lincoln Regional Center – Building 5
Sun., Dec. 7	2:00 PM MT	Western NE Veterans Home, Scottsbluff
Mon., Dec. 8	1:00 PM 2:30 PM	Eastern Nebraska Veterans Home Papillion Community Living Center
Fri., Dec. 12	2:00 PM	Norfolk Veterans Home, Norfolk Norfolk Regional Center
Sat., Dec. 13	2:00 PM MT	Hot Springs SD VAMC

Gift cards for Cheyenne WY VAMC sent to Bonita Dickinson to deliver to the facility at convenience