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AMERICAN
LEGION
AUXILIARY

DEPARTMENT of NEBRASKA
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FEBRUARY 2026 DEPARTMENT NEWSLETTER

UNIT PRESIDENTS

It is important that you share this newsletter at your meetings and inform others that all Newsletters are available on the Nebraska Website (nebraskalegionaux.net). Thank you!!

FROM YOUR DEPARTMENT PRESIDENT

SIRRING UP MEMBERS – **SUM = SUCCESS**

The American Legion Auxiliary recently held its Midyear Educational Conference, and what a wonderful time it was. Members from across the state gathered for a meaningful mix of education, fellowship, and inspiration while remaining focused on our mission of serving veterans, military members, and their families.

It's hard to believe that I'm on the downhill slide of my presidency. I have truly enjoyed meeting everyone throughout the state and learning how we are supporting veterans.

Looking ahead, district conventions are just around the corner and will provide even more opportunities for members to connect, exchange ideas, and energize their local units. It will be fun to hear what everyone is doing to stir up their members.

Membership remains a top priority, and with continued teamwork and dedication, we are hopeful to once again achieve the Merit Medallion this year.

One of the most touching moments of my presidency was the opportunity to present a Quilt of Valor to 102-year-old World War II veteran James Black at the Norfolk Veterans Home. The presentation was especially meaningful, as my father was also a World War II veteran. This was truly an honor of a lifetime, I love our veterans, and I am thankful for what they mean to our country.

The Midyear Convention and the honor of presenting the Quilt of Valor served as a powerful reminder of why we do what we do—honoring service, strengthening our Auxiliary, and continuing our unwavering support of those who have given so much for our freedom.

Ruth Hietbrink

Department President



**FROM THE OFFICE
SECRETARY NOTES
Roxanne Hiatt**

Greetings. Some upcoming things to be mindful of are:

- **Always ongoing - Membership.** Please work it in your Units and get all those renewals sent in. If we do not reach the 85% membership by March 15, we are out of the running for the National Merit Medallion Award. Please help.
- **Girls State** applications need to be in to Department by March 1. Please call if you have any questions.
- **Americanism Essays** should be judged in your Units and into Americanism Chair Cie Kauth by March 15 for Department judging.
- **Department Scholarship** Applications are due into headquarters by March 15. Units, we can't stress enough how important it is to review these applications before you forward them to Department. One omission of a requirement or a signature and it will cost the applicant the opportunity to have their application judged. Take the time to check it over, please.
- Honorary Junior Department President Erica Fuchs has invited everyone to attend **Junior Conference** in Arlington on April 11, 2026.

District Conventions will begin this month of February. We need to have a list of your new/current District Officers – President, Vice President, Secretary/Treasurer or Secretary and Treasurer - into the office as soon as possible after your convention. We need name (with correct spelling), address, phone number and email address on each person.

The next newsletter in March will have the **Unit Reporting Forms**.

Do them, please, and send them back to headquarters by the due date. These forms are so important. Thanks for all you do for your Units and the American Legion Auxiliary.



**INTERIM DEPARTMENT TREASURER
Vicki Ozenbaugh**

Slowly I have been completing the on-line payments to Units. If your Unit has a balance over \$5, a check should be in the mail soon! The next task will be filing the 990's.

One perk about this job is I get to see the totals of the donations to our various programs. You all are amazing. Most donations come in during the fall, but Units can donate anytime during the year. If your Unit has not donated or would like to donate more, you are able to do this whenever you would like to.

So here are the numbers from August 1, 2025 through January 28, 2026

SCHOLARSHIPS	AMOUNT
Little Red Schoolhouse	\$ 4,265.21
Career Technical	\$ 1,290.00
Past Presidents	\$ 992.00
DEPARTMENT PRESIDENT'S PROJECT	\$ 7,269.41
DEPARTMENT JUNIOR PRESIDENT	\$ 2,877.00
PERMANENT MEMBER	\$ 1,453.56
POPPY REVENUE	\$ 5,140.82
GOLD STAR	\$ 365.00
WOMEN VETERANS	\$ 1,647.00
AUXILIARY EMERGENCY FUND	\$ 9,484.99
GIFTS FOR YANKS	\$18,198.00

VETERANS AFFAIRS	
Special Gifts	\$15,114.13
Dollar Days	\$ 9,025.00
ASSESSMENTS PER MEMBERSHIP	
Gift Shop	\$ 4,827.63
Home Assessment	\$ 1,647.00

Pretty amazing totals! Keep doing what you do best! Working and promoting for our Veterans, current military, their families, and our communities!

A reminder to Districts, Counties, and Veterans facilities. If you have Jacki O'Neill on your accounts, please have her removed. Your bank statements still need to be submitted monthly to Department.



AMERICANISM **Cie Kauth, Chair**

Hello everyone, I hope everyone is doing well.

I would like to start with talking about the upcoming Essays that will be coming up. I would like to remind everyone to use the rubric for judging the essays, and the cover sheet is completely filled out and readable. Also before you send me the original to make a copy for yourself just in case you want to use the kids essay for something. The essay needs to be submitted by March 1 (post marked March 1).

Another thing I would like to address is that I had my second Americanism zoom meeting and we talked about military family day on the last Saturday in April and what are some things that the Units/Post are thinking about doing for that day, like a picnic or something that celebrates military families. And we also talked about the Nations 250th Birthday and what kind of fun thing that everyone will be doing to celebrate with the community, some ideas that was said was getting a group of people and ringing church bells, parades, BBQs and other family fun activities.

Americanism Trivia:

- The Youngest person to sign the constitution was a lawyer from New Jersey who was he?
Answer: Jonathan Dayton.
- Since the Constitution was first written, there have been _____ amendments, including _____ amendments known as the Bill of Rights. Answer: 27 and 10.



AUXILIARY EMERGENCY FUND (AEF) **Vicki Ozenbaugh, Chair**

Just wanted to let you know that Nebraska is in fourth place Nationally for Total Annual Contributions to the AEF and second place (behind Minnesota) in the Northwestern Division as of December 31, 2025. Way to go and let's keep going!

I hope members are planning to attend their District Conventions (see schedule in this newsletter). Plan to take a little extra \$\$\$ as I will have a new "fun" activity to play to raise our AEF balance. As of January 28, total contributions are \$16,754.40 (President Ruth's total \$7,269.41 and National AEF \$9,484.99).

Thank you for your part in Members Helping Members!



EDUCATION
Cindy Moore, Chair

SCHOLARSHIPS

Reminder: Both Department and National scholarships are due to Units by March 1, 2026. Information about both scholarships were in the Department December newsletter and in *The Star* newspaper. Applications can be found online.

Each American Legion Auxiliary Unit may submit ONLY ONE student per scholarship. **The completed application (including requested documents) must be submitted to and received by Department Headquarters on or before March 15, 2026.** A scoring rubric has been created to assist Units with choosing scholarship candidates for Department scholarships. One is included in this newsletter for you. If you have any questions, contact Education Chair, Cindy Moore at 402-672-2040.



LEGISLATIVE
Loree Hendrickson, Chair

Hello again, Members of the American Legion Auxiliary! As I am writing this article, Nebraska's veterans' groups are getting ready to attend the annual Legislative Day at the Nebraska State Capitol. This is always an interesting experience and makes me proud to be a part of the American Legion Family. I look forward to reporting on the coalition's efforts at Nebraska's Department Convention in June.

In early March, some of Nebraska's American Legion Family will have a presence at the Washington Legislative Conference in our nation's capital. It will be interesting to meet with Nebraska's Congressional Delegation and let them know of The American Legion's position on several bills pending before Congress. You can find information about these bills at www.legion.org/legislative.

For those of you who attended the Department of Nebraska Mid-Year Conference in Norfolk this past January, you heard me say that Nebraska is still facing a poppy shortage. In an effort to change this, enclosed in this newsletter is a draft letter which I would encourage you and your Unit members to send to your Nebraska State Senator. This is just a proposed draft; please feel free to edit it or even start from scratch to fit what it is that you wish to say.

Always remember that one voice may not make a difference on its own, but by joining together, ALA members can make a difference when we advocate for America's veterans.



MEMBERSHIP
Deb Albers, Chair

FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHT TO PARTY

We had a great Midyear Conference in Norfolk. We gave a couple of skits on Membership and continue to "Stir up Members." Nine Districts were above 80% membership with two very close to 80%. Our next Goal is 85% and District 3 is currently above 85% with District 12 and 2 close behind. Is your Unit working toward 100%?

I have had several Units tell me that they are at 100% and when I check ALAMIS, the Units are close, but lacking 1 or 2 members. Are you using the Membership Goal sheet that was distributed in the original Membership Packets (that should have been discarded)? **Please use the Membership Goal Sheet that was Distributed in the first Newsletter.**

In calling membership chairmen, I learn that some are holding memberships until all are paid. **PLEASE DO NOT DO THAT.** A Member thinks that her/his membership is paid when dues are paid and

have a **Membership Card** in hand. **Dues are not paid until they are submitted to Department or National and are entered in the ALAMIS system.** Members are delinquent as of December 31st and lose continuous membership and have a grace period until January. If you have paid your dues, it is your right to have your dues submitted in a timely manner.

I do want to commend the Units of Nebraska working very hard to maintain membership. Please plan to **Retain** all members from last year, **Rejoin** members who did not pay last year, and **Recruit** new members.

We currently (as of January 20) have 16 Units that are at or above 100%: **They are: Petersburg, Bloomington, Lebanon, Union, Plattsmouth, Greeley, Winside, Winnebago, Broadwater, Bruning, Clearwater, Cody, Colon, Nehawka, Newcastle, and Potter.**



GIRLS STATE **Vicki Ozenbaugh, Chair**

Have you selected your Girls State delegate and possible alternate? Remember, the deadline is March 1.

Some updates:

- Unit sponsored Snack Night will happen again. Only change is Units do not have to provide the actual snacks. This year we are asking for a \$30 donation to cover a floor. The first 40 Units to send their check to Department (earmarked Snack Night) will be accepted.
- Any donations after that will be used for the Mercy Meals Community Service Project.
- Units may make a separate donation to Mercy Meals as well.
- The sleeping mats Community Service Project will happen again, so plastic bags are being accepted. PLEASE make sure they are clean and empty of any receipts, items, etc.
- Volunteers for Wednesday, June 3, to help with the General Election are needed. We need 16-20 volunteers.
- Volunteer drivers are needed on Thursday, June 4, to take girls to office visits following the inauguration ceremony.
- Volunteers to help in the Girls State Store are welcome. Exact times will be determined later.

If you or your Unit would like to volunteer for any of the above, please call me (402-759-0411) or email me (ala.ozenbaugh@gmail.com). Thank you in advance for your willingness to help!

This year will see a change in the names of the floor towns. The decision was made to select prominent Nebraska women to name each floor. The county names will remain the same (using the National and Department Presidents' names). A committee was chosen who accepted suggestions and chose five of the eight names. The GS Staff then was poled to select the remaining three. The chosen list is:

- Eve **Bowring** – First woman to represent Nebraska in the Senate
- Mildred **Brown** – Advocate for educational and women's rights in Nebraska
- Susan **La Flesche Picotte** – First Indigenous woman to earn medical degree
- Minnie **Penny** – First President of Nebraska ALA; hero in Schoolhouse Blizzard 1888
- Elizabeth **Pittman** – First African American female lawyer in Nebraska, first African American judge and first female judge in Nebraska
- Kay **Orr** – Nebraska's first (and to date only) female governor; made national hist. as first gubernatorial race between two women
- Virginia **Smith** – First (and only to date) woman from Nebraska to hold seat in the House
- Evelyn **Sharp** – Nebraska's best known aviatrix, served in Army Air Forces, Ord Airfield named after her



POPPY

Justina Birkel, Chair

National Poppy Day is Friday May 22, but remember you can promote the Poppy every day. Poppy funds can also be collected throughout the year. During the Mid-Year Conference I set up a table about the Poppy program. I asked you to fill out a few questions. One was to tell me how your unit raises Poppy funds. Here are a few of the responses.

- Set donation cans at local businesses
- Contact local businesses for donations
- Have a basket set out at unit fundraiser
- Have Junior members and young SAL members help

These are all great ways but just remember to follow the guidelines on what those funds can be used for. The guidelines are on the Nebraska ALA website under the Poppy tab or reach out and I can share them with you. If you have other ways that you promote the poppy and how you collect Poppy funds, please share. Some smaller towns struggle with this and I would like to share ideas that may help them collect funds to help our veterans.

It seems like Poppy making is a struggle in quite a few states. Spread the word and see if you know anyone that is interested in making poppies to help build up our inventory. Some states have 4-H groups or Scouts troops help make poppies. Minnesota is having Poppy Palooza's where they get together and have a day to make poppies. I know that Renee VanWinkle enjoys her time with the veterans at the Grand Island Veterans Medical Center when she goes in and helps veterans make poppies. She even taught one veteran that took their skills back to Hot Springs and is still making poppies there. Remember only veterans can get paid to make poppies.

I have had two Zoom meetings with the National Poppy Committee so far. I did finally get the monthly newsletters so look for them on Facebook and the Nebraska website.

Hopefully you have all taken Poppy Poster information to your schools. I am excited to see all of the results. Remember the Poppy Poster Deadline postmarked to me by **April 1**. Please make sure that you send only posters that meet the criteria in the Poppy Poster Rules. You can mail the winning entries from each division to: Justina Birkel, PO Box 64, North Loup NE 68859

There are also the Most Outstanding Unit Poppy Program award and the Best Department Poppy Program award for the Northwestern Division. Please make sure you do end of year reports and send me information so that I can brag about your awesome Poppy programs.



PRAYER BOOKS

Vicki Colson, Chaplain

A reminder to Unit members, with District Conventions coming up, you could be making Prayer Books to submit to your Districts meeting. The Prayer Book Rules can be found in your ABC Books. You can include prayers and devotional thoughts, prayer can be original or something that inspired you. List the authors name if known or type "Author unknown." Devotional thoughts could be scriptures from the bible, poems, or other articles. I am looking forward to reading the winning Prayer Books from the Districts.

You may send to me for Ruth's Prayer Book some of what you submit in your Prayer Books. The Prayer Books will be due and judge at the District and Department Conventions.

Don't forget the Gold Star Program in the ABC Book for when you have your Gold Star Remembrance. Thank you for what you do for our Veterans and families.

ATTENTION UNITS WITH JUNIOR FLAGS

It has been brought to our attention that the Department Junior Flags (which are stored at Headquarters) are not a matching set. The American flag and flag pole are full size (3 x 5 flag with fringe and a larger circumference of the pole). It should be a smaller flag (2 ½ x 4 flag with no fringe and a smaller pole). If your Unit has a set of Junior Flags, please check the American one. All Units might want to check their flag just in case the smaller one was taken from a convention. We would like to locate the one that matches the ALA Banner so the set that was purchased by a Past Honorary Department Junior President as her project is complete. Please contact Headquarters (402-466-1808) if you have it so the switch can be made. Thank you!



SAMPLE LETTER TO SENATORS

[Please personalize for your Senator and choose all or parts of this sample letter.]

Dear Senator _____

In the beloved Christmas movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*, the angel Clarence declares to the film's protagonist, George Bailey: "One man's life touches so many others. When he's not there, it leaves an awfully big hole."

Nebraska's veterans are currently facing an "awfully big hole" of their own. But this letter is not about funding – although that is always a consideration for our veterans. No, this letter discusses how, just as in our Christmas movie above, creating an alternate timeline for our hero can change the entire fabric of the plot.

So let's begin with the backstory. As you are probably aware, the red poppy was among the first plants to bloom in the devastated battlefields of France and Belgium after World War I. Seeing these blooms, Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae was inspired to write a poem entitled *In Flanders Field*, which gave voice to those soldiers buried at the battlefield by pleading with survivors to remember these veterans, even as a sea of red poppies was cropping up and beautifying the area.

When American professor Moina Michael read McCrae's poem, she was so moved that she wrote her own response, *We Shall Keep the Faith*, pledging that there would always be people to "cherish the poppy red." After the war was over, Professor Michael returned to the University of Georgia, where she taught a class of disabled servicemen, soon realizing they were in desperate need of financial and occupational support. Thus, she conceived of using poppies as a fundraiser; and in 1921, her efforts resulted in the poppy being adopted by the American Legion Auxiliary (ALA) as a symbol of remembrance for veterans.

Fast forward to the early 2000s when then-ALA Department of Nebraska President Lynne Wild received a letter from an incarcerated individual, stating that he was a veteran and wondering whether he could be allowed to make paper poppy flowers during his imprisonment. President Wild visited the prison and taught this gentleman and others how to make the poppies which are distributed on National Poppy Day and throughout the year to honor and remember our veterans.

This program quickly became successful, culminating in the Nebraska prison population producing upwards of one million poppies per year. As a result, Nebraska became the "go-to" state across our nation for obtaining poppies. Sadly, that came to a screeching halt in 2023, as the Nebraska Department of Corrections issued a directive to stop the making of poppies within the prison system. After some inquiries, Corrections reversed course and stated that inmates would be allowed to begin making poppies again, and the ALA cheered this development.

To date, though, there has been no uptick in the amount of poppies being produced by the prison population, which means that not only is Nebraska still short of poppies to honor our veterans, but the entire country is suffering from the shortage caused when one million poppies are removed from production.

Our research indicates that while Corrections is once again allowing inmates to make poppies, these individuals can only do so when they are gathered together as a veterans group; and unfortunately, this veterans group is not being allowed to meet. The ripple effect, of course, is that no poppies are being produced from within Nebraska's prisons.

To once again quote the angel Clarence, "One man's life touches so many others. When he's not there, it leaves an awfully big hole." Our big hole is that we are quickly reaching a point where we are unable to bring awareness to Colonel McCrea's plea to honor our veterans and Professor Michael's directive to "keep the faith" with our nation's heroes.

We are, therefore, asking you, Senator _____, to do all you can to encourage the Executive branch of Nebraska's government to fully reinstate the poppy program so that the American Legion Family and other veterans' organizations can continue to honor the brave men and women who have served our country so nobly.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely

American Legion Auxiliary
Unit # _____



JUST FOR FUN!

A reminder that Department Headquarters will be closed on Monday, February 16, for President's Day. Just for fun, how much do you know about our US Presidents. Try you luck!

Which President played saxophone in a high school jazz trio?

- a. William Clinton
- b. Ronald Reagan
- c. Gerald R. Ford
- d. Harry S. Truman

Who was the 35th American President?

- a. Dwight D. Eisenhower
- b. Lyndon B. Johnson
- c. Richard Nixon
- d. John F. Kennedy

What is the most common presidential first name?

- a. John
- b. Andrew
- c. James
- d. William

Which president had pet elephants?

- a. Millard Fillmore
- b. James Buchanan
- c. Martin Van Buren
- d. John Quincy Adams

Whose presidential campaign slogan was "A chicken in every pot, a car in every garage"?

- a. Ronald Reagan
- b. Herbert C. Hoover
- c. William Clinton
- d. Woodrow Wilson

Which president had the most children?

- a. Theodore Roosevelt
- b. Benjamin Harrison
- c. John Tyler
- d. Rutherford B. Hayes

District Convention Schedule

District 1	Saturday, March 28, 2026 Ruth Hietbrink - President Valentine Post 90 256 N Main St, Valentine, NE Sunday, March 15, 2026 Ruth Hietbrink - President Elkhorn Valley Bank 404 S. 25th St, Norfolk Saturday, March 14, 2026 Ruth Hietbrink - President Bancroft Village Hall 502 Main St, Bancroft Saturday, March 21, 2026 Lori Reimers - Historian Sidney Post 17 922 Illinois St, Sidney Saturday, March 21, 2026 Vicki Colson - Chaplain Lincoln County Fairgrounds 5015 Rodeo Road Ave, North Platte Saturday, March 7, 2026 Vicki Cyboron - Vice President Kearney Post 52 1223 Central Ave, Kearney Saturday, March 14, 2026 Vicki Cyboron - Vice President Valparaiso Post 371 430 W. 2nd St, Valparaiso		District 8	Saturday, February 7, 2026 Vicki Cyboron - Vice President Springfield Post 143 13640 Pflug Rd, Springfield Saturday, March 21, 2026 Amanda Washburn - PDP Palisade Post 318 114 N. Main St, Palisade Saturday, February 21, 2026 Vicki Cyboron - Vice President Clay Center Post 87 108 N. Alexander, Clay Center Saturday, March 21, 2026 Vicki Cyboron - Vice President Beatrice Post 27 701 Dorsey St, Beatrice Saturday, March 14, 2026 Lori Reimers - Historian Seward Civic Center 616 Bradford St, Seward Saturday, March 7, 2026 Amanda Washburn - PDP Falls City Post 102 721 Harlan St, Falls City Tuesday, February 10, 2026 Lincoln Elks Lodge 80 5910 S. 58th St, Lincoln
District 2			District 9	
District 3			District 10	
District 4			District 11	
District 5			District 12	
District 6			District 13	
District 7			District 15	



Scholarship

[illegible]

Unit Scholarship Committee-

Simply fill in the name of the scholarship that you are judging at the top of the page. For example, write in "Nebraska Memorial", "Healthcare Professional", or "Career and Technical Education". Please review the scholarship applications and rate them using the scoring rubric above. It will make the task of evaluating applications much less daunting. For example, if candidate A meets all of the requirements, but candidate B is missing two, then you can easily eliminate B from the pool of potential recipients. Score and rank the candidates who have ALL the required documents. More weight has been placed on the narrative, community service and letters of recommendation rather than supplying the required documents.

Select one winner for each scholarship to submit to Department on or before March 15.

All applications and evaluations are CONFIDENTIAL and are not to be shared outside of this committee.

-Cindy Moore, Dept. of NE Education Chairman



District # _____ Unit # _____

Unit Town _____

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY – DEPARTMENT OF NEBRASKA

150 NW 40 Unit B, Lincoln NE 68528 - Phone 402-466-1808 – Email nealasec@gmail.com or nealatreas@gmail.com

NOTE: This form determines the information that will be printed on the renewal notices your Unit Members receive.

2027 UNIT DUES DATA FORM – RETURN BY APRIL 15, 2026

Standing Rule Q – Membership #2 was amended to increase the Nebraska dues portion by \$2 beginning with the 2024 year. In addition, at the 2022 National ALA Convention an amendment was approved to increase the National dues portion by \$6 beginning in 2024. When setting your Unit Members' dues, you will need to vote on the portion your Unit will keep. Junior dues are NOT affected by the dues increases noted. Only Senior dues.

All Senior dues collected must be \$30.25 or more to cover the Department and National portions.

National Portion of Dues	\$ 18.00
Department Portion of Dues	<u>\$ 12.25</u>
Total SENIOR DUES to be mailed to Department	\$ 30.25
Unit Portion of SENIOR DUES (stays in Unit)	\$ _____
Total 2027 SENIOR DUES per Unit Member	\$ _____ (not SLM, VIM, PUFL)

National Portion of Dues	\$ 2.50
Department Portion of Dues	<u>\$ 1.25</u>
Total JUNIOR DUES to be mailed to Department	\$ 3.75
Unit Portion of JUNIOR DUES (stays in Unit)	\$ _____
Total 2027 JUNIOR DUES per Unit Member	\$ _____ (not PUFL)

The Remit To/Membership Chairman information is necessary, so membership dues are submitted to the correct person as well as to have on file who is responsible for receiving and processing dues for each member.

2027 Remit to/Membership Chair: _____ Member ID# _____

Address Unit membership payments sent to: _____
PO Box or Physical Address

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Signature : _____ Title _____

If you have any questions, please email nealasec@gmail.com, nealatreas@gmail.com or call 402-466-1808.

