



2026 -2027

American Legion Auxiliary
Department of Florida
VA&R PEP - Program Engagement Plan

“SOP – Standing Operating Procedures”

“C.O” - Dara Oliver – Chair

“XO’s” - Dorothy Walsh & Lois Halliday – Committee Members

Department President Linda Knoblach-Harkness is embracing a Military theme which is perfect for the (VA&R) Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation committee which is one of our pillar programs. Please use hashtag #M.A.S.H. = *Mission Auxiliary Serving Heroes* for all your social media posts so that everything is grouped together. Preparedness is the key - have your “rucksacks ready” and filled for your Mission of serving and caring for our Veterans, promote our programs, events and services that assist and enhance the lives of Veterans, their families, their caregivers and their survivors, ensuring the best quality of life possible and continuing to honor their memory.

DATA / INTEL:

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs there are 1.3 – 1.5 million Veterans in Florida and 172,000 are female. Nearly half of all these Veterans are over 65 years old and 23.5 Million people live within in Department.

AOR – AREA OF RESPONCIBILITY:

It is the purpose to support Veterans in healing and therapeutic rehabilitation through arts, crafts, sports, outdoor activities and hobbies.
Auxiliary Members can:

- Volunteer at local VA facilities, including state VAMC’s, Hospitals & OPC in your area.
- Donate to and volunteer at National Creative Arts Festival specifically held in Florida.
- Collaborate with organizations that support Veterans and their families, such as Honor Flight Network Inc., Wreaths Across America, Quilts of Valor, Ashley’s Cottage/House, HerSpace Shelter, Honor HER Foundation and the Military & Veteran Caregiver Network.
- Have an emphasis on Female Veteran’s needs.
- Encourage Be The One training, awareness and support wearing swag on the 1st of every month.
- Look in your community for opportunities to support Veterans, their caregivers, their families and their survivors.

OPERATING SYSTEMS:

VAMC (VA Medical Centers), VA Hospitals, OCP (Outpatient Clinics) – Utilize Units or individuals to volunteer to assist with Veterans as well as help to get donations of necessary items. Check with the ALA Reps at these facilities or Department Chair to coordinate what the needs are. Learn who is considered a caregiver. This will help you identify caregivers in your community and maybe even as a caregiver yourself. Caregivers should consider joining their online peer support community. Recruit Auxiliary members as volunteers for the VA Center for Development and Community Engagement at VA healthcare facilities. If you see a need in your community that is not being addressed, contact your local VA. Familiarize yourself with the service of the VA caregiver support program Volunteer at your local VA facility for events such as Bingo, baby showers, etc. Don't forget to include all American Legion Family members in your VA events. Coordinate a supply drive for the needs of hospitalized veterans by gathering items such as socks, underwear, toiletries, etc. Don't forget your state VA facilities, such as state Veterans' homes. The Veterans who reside there have needs that we may fill as well.

Local Creative Arts Festival – Your Unit can host a local Creative Arts Fest and provide art supplies, volunteers, hospitality items or a venue to hold it.

National Creative Arts Festival – Units can donate towards the National Festival with monetary donations at any time during the year and all donations go directly to National headquarters. Funds are used for supplies for Veterans costuming, arts & crafts as well as hospitality room items. Volunteers can offer their assistance wherever it is hosted.

National Creative Arts Fest Held in Florida – Units can donate directly to Department Headquarters on the remittance form for the Festivals hosted by the Department of FL ALA. Members can volunteer for all areas by reaching out to the Department VA&R Chair.

Honor Flight – Utilize Poppy funds to support important aspects of Honor Flight activities. Consider volunteering as a guardian an honor flight although there are associated costs involved you can use poppy funds.) Participate in welcome-home events, coordinate the creation and delivery of cards and letters to Honor Flight for mail call. Donate snacks for Veterans flights or meals at the airport. Coordinate with local hubs to see what the needs are. For information www.honorflight.org

Units & Members can volunteer or donate to any of the 11 Hubs in the State:

Honor Flight Central Florida (Heart of Florida): departs Orlando ~ MCO & Sanford ~SFB

Honor Flight of West Central Florida (Nature Coast): departs St. Pete/Clearwater ~ PIE or Tampa TPA

Southeast Florida Honor Flight: departs Palm Beach International ~ PBI

Space Coast Honor Flight: departs Melbourne Airport ~ MLB

Villages Honor Flight: departs Orlando ~ MCO

Southwest Florida Honor Flight: departs Punta Gorda Airport ~ PGD

Honor Flight Tallahassee: departs Tallahassee International ~ TLH

Honor Flight of South Florida: departs Fort Lauderdale ~ FLL

Collier-Lee Honor Flight: departs Southwest FL International ~ RSW

First Coast Honor Flight: departs Jacksonville International ~ JAX

Honor Flight of Emerald Coast (Northwest): departs Pensacola International Airport ~ PNS

Wreaths Across America – Consider sponsoring wreaths across America, take part in local wreath placements at National Cemeteries. Volunteer after the event to clean up old wreaths and debris. <https://www.wreathsacrossamerica.org>

Be The One – The #1 issue facing the Veteran community is suicide. Take the free training from Columbia University at <https://www.legion.org> or dial 988 and press 1 so that we can Change Lives & Saving Lives.

Job Fairs / Stand-Downs / Health Fairs – Host or seek out Legions, Chamber of Commerce, local VA's and health care professionals to offer services to Veterans in your area.

Fisher House – The home away from home for Veterans families to stay completely free of charge while they are receiving treatment at a VA Medical Center. There are 7 located in Florida www.fisherhouse.org Units can donate food, toiletries and other needs for families as well as schedule a time to come to the Fisher House and cook a meal.

Quilts of Valor – Nominate a Service Member or living Veteran, make a quilt or donate sewing supplies to quilters, visit Quilts of Valor Foundation at www.qovf.org

Homeless Shelters specific to Female Veterans – Units can help with donations of goods and services to these homeless shelters that also help the Veterans children HerSpace Shelter in Jacksonville Beach, <https://forwomenvets.org>
Honor HER Foundation in Pensacola <https://www.honorher.org>

Ashley's Cottage in Fruitland Park and Ashley's House in Eustis,
<https://villagersforVeterans.org>

Service to Veterans – Providing care to our Veterans is our priority but Units & members can also support Veteran caregivers, family members, and survivors. Ideas could include but aren't limited to; provide a spa day or caregiver day for community veteran caregivers. Offer to sit with a Veteran while the caregiver runs errands or offer to run errands for a caregiver. Prepare information for units concerning the needs of caregiver support. Transportation of Veterans to appointments or running errands. Contact an American Legion Service Officer at your post and offer to be on the list of people to call when a veteran's family needs help. Units can purchase school supplies, host a baby shower, or send care packages to Veterans' children who are headed to college or volunteer at shelters, food banks, or programs that support homeless Veterans. *Remember to track your service hours monthly.*

CITATIONS / COMMENDATIONS:

Deadlines and Submission Requirements ~

All award submissions must include a narrative (either a PDF or Microsoft Word document) explaining why the unit should receive the award. Submit details of all work completed, volunteers, hours, money donated, in-kind donations and any pertinent details, photos, shared social media and PR that was publicized.

Department VA&R Chairman Award ~ NCAF National Creative Arts Festival Award to the Unit that makes the largest donation in each membership grouping on the Donation Remittance Form to the *National Creative Arts Festival - HELD IN FL (1516)*

Female Veterans Award ~

to the Unit chair who initiates and completes the most outstanding program for assisting and caring for Female Veterans specifically.

Junior VA&R Award – To the Junior or Jr. Group reporting the most outstanding project, program or service benefiting Veterans.

Female Veteran Member History Award ~ an award to a Florida Female Veteran Member that completes a "Members Remember History Project" prior to February. Submission must be made to the ALAFL Historian and complete criteria as stated in the History PEP.

Caregiver Citation ~ to Caregivers that report over 250 hours (to honor the Semi-Quincentennial of our Nations Birthday) from July 4, 2026 – April 30, 2027.

DEPARTMENT & NATIONAL VA&R AWARDS

Marie Ray Award (Previous known as the Dorothy Smith Award) - Revolving Trophy to be awarded annually to the Unit that "reports the Best All Around VA&R Program or Project." To be awarded annually to the Unit that reports the "Best All Around VA&R Program or Project" that includes the following: 1.) Cover page with the Name of the award

2.) Unit Name and number

3.) Unit location

4.) Name of the Unit President and name of Unit VA&R Chair

5.) Monetary contributions must be made through Department Headquarters to at least one VA hospital, at least one Fisher House and to The National Creative Arts Festival.

6.) The Unit must participate in and/or donate to a homeless Veteran program or project.

Entry must be in narrative form, double spaced, 8 ½" x 11" paper, not to exceed 1,000 words and include a cover page and placed in a report cover.

All Department of Florida entries must be received by the Department Chairperson no later than thirty (30) days prior to Department Convention.

Theresa Gilleo Award - To the Unit that has the most Creative Veteran's Event between July 2026 – April 2027 This should be an actual event which involves Veterans in some capacity. To be considered for the award please use a blue or red binder including the following:

Title page: 1. Include full name and number of Unit 2. Name of Unit President 3. Name of VA&R Chairman 4. Names of Unit members involved (include their officer positions if applicable) and 5. Name, date and location of the event

Inside pages: 6. A brief narrative (50 – 100 words) describing the event, include the number of Veterans involved 7. Picture evidence and 8. Flyers

All Department of Florida entries must be received by the Department Chairperson no later than thirty (30) days prior to Department Convention. (May 26, 2027)

All National Entries must be submitted via electronic form by 5 PM EST on June 1st ~ you will receive confirmation when your award has been submitted.

Most Outstanding Unit VA&R Program in the Southern Division National Award – Follow Specs on www.ALAforVeterans.org or submit on National Awards Formstack link:

<https://www.legion-aux.org/National-Awards-Form>

James H. Parke Scholarship for students that volunteer at a VA Facility

Awarded annually by Veterans Affairs and supported by the American Legion Auxiliary

To apply <https://www.volunteer.va.gov> This substantial scholarship is awarded annually by Veterans Affairs to a student volunteer. The American Legion Auxiliary contributes \$2,000 annually to this scholarship fund. To be eligible, candidates must have completed 100 hours of regularly scheduled V.A.V.S. volunteer service during the calendar year prior to September 1; be a student in the 10th grade or above; and have not reached their 19th birthday. The Medical Center director nominates a candidate for the award by submission of the nomination form to the president of the fund by November 1 of each calendar year. Nominations received after that date will not be considered. The nomination form should be completed to reflect the volunteer service and background of the candidate and include age, years of volunteering, number of volunteer hours, areas of service and affiliated/supporting organizations, if any. See www.va.gov for information on V.A.V.S., James H. Parke Scholarship. The national winner receives a plaque and a letter of commitment. This presentation is usually made at the Annual Meeting of the V.A.V.S. National Advisory Committee. Check the Unit Guide, website and National website for specific requirements for all awards.

SUPPORT REINFORCEMENTS:

ALAFL VA&R Department Facebook Page

American Legion Auxiliary Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation (VA&R)

VA Caregiver Support – <https://www.caregiver.va.gov>

Military and Veteran Caregiver Peer Support Network <http://www.taps.org/MVCNAwards>

DEBRIEFING:

End-of-Year Reports are due

Units to Districts April 15, 2027

Districts to Department May 1, 2027

Dara Oliver, VA&R Chair – 2nd Vice Pres.

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