



Marching Forward - Newsletter

Department of Illinois VFW Auxiliary

Diane Ahrens, President

February 1, 2026



Happy New Year! Marching Forward in 2026!

Day One of 2026, Thoughts & looking forward to the next few months, the past few have been a lot of learning, stretching, loss, and honestly a little worn out. This time between Christmas and New Years gives me time to reflect and recharge. As most of my chairpersons know I am not a micro manager, I appreciate that everyone takes their responsibilities seriously and they are doing their best. For myself the past few months have been challenging, I was so very excited to have National Auxiliary President Lois Callahan join us in October, and to see how everyone worked together when I wasn't able to be there to make her visit fun and successful.



I lost three of my mature friends in October, a couple in their 90's and one was 102, crazy because when I drive anywhere near where they lived I think about them, in addition to the 4th anniversary of Roger's death, one year since Virginia lost her husband and I became her power of attorney and had to move her into memory care. That's the personal stuff, and every one of us has our own stuff we are going through.

Honestly, I have been at a low point questioning if I am doing my best, realizing we go into Auxiliaries and Posts not knowing their history and we are trying to make decisions to help them stay active, serving our veterans and communities.

So many Auxiliaries stay to themselves, and don't attend the District or Department meetings. I want to challenge Auxiliaries to have three members at their district meetings, VOD Banquets, whatever your district is hosting, invite two members to join you and go together. There is strength in numbers, and as you meet other members in the district you will strengthen your auxiliary. Those that work together in district truly make that District shine. VFW Auxiliary is a grassroots organization, it is important to know who your District officers are, if you have concerns, questions reach out, that is how we all learn. If there are struggles, send an email that gives us history and paper trail, so we aren't blindsided when we are asked to come and assist at the Department level. Often I write, save it for 24 hours then go back and try to simplify it, sometimes answers come just by writing things down and reflecting on what is truly important-Our Veterans.

Have you been reading Beth Costa-Bland's Auxiliary outreach information? When you connect with the local Rotary club, Church groups, Scouts, Library, Food Banks you are connecting with other service organizations. We can support them by providing time and help, as you make friends you may possibly also discover members for your auxiliary. Have you connected with your local schools, beta club, most colleges have a Veteran organization, if they aren't a combat veteran, they might be eligible for Auxiliary.

So broken crayons? We aren't throwing them away; we are coming up with projects to put them to use.

My favorite growing up was making "stain glass" if you google it or go on Pinterest you will find lots of other possibilities. Sometimes our Auxiliary has gotten into a slump, maybe you need a brainstorming session, come up with one project, that will involve the community, help veterans, and bring people together. Keep it simple, does your community host a farmers' market or festival where you can set up a bake sale, face painting and of course membership. Make it fun, maybe a photo booth, something to have people take time to stop by and learn more. Typically plan 3 months or more ahead, so you have plenty of time to make it a success.

Now is the time to be talking about officers for 2026-27, sharing, talking, helping members to see the importance of what the VFW & Auxiliary does, elections are in April and May, local and District.

Semper Fi

Looking forward to 2026!!

Diane Ahrens



January 2026

Treasurer's Notes

NEW MEMBERSHIP PROCESS IS NOW IN EFFECT

Just a few reminders:

- ☒ No application with a date prior to January 2026 will be accepted. If any are received, they will be returned to your auxiliary to be rewritten to the January version.
- ☒ Please fill out the application in full. This is the responsibility of the Auxiliary Treasurer to make sure everything is on the application before giving it to the investigating committee to review.
 - o Be sure that the new members complete Sections A, D or E, H and I on the application completely. (This includes a member who is rejoining the Auxiliary)
 - o Please review Article I, Sec 101 – Eligibility. Only the medals/ribbons shown on these pages are eligible for membership. It is not necessary to show medals such as Good Conduct Medal, WWII Victory Medal, etc.
 - o Transfer Members will complete Sections A, C, and I.
 - o Your Auxiliary will complete sections B, F, and G on all new, rejoin or transfer members
- ☒ If the new member pays by credit card:
 - o The Auxiliary Treasurer should review the “pending payments” on Malta to see if the application has been input (they will not show on your membership list until the payment is made). They have 30 days to pay their dues, or the Membership will be deleted, and they will have to reapply.
 - o The Treasurer has the ability when on the “pending payments” to send an email reminder as well a text message reminder.
 - o Once paid, the application will be removed from the “pending payment” and will show on your membership list.

Your 4th Quarter Audits for the period of Oct 2025 – Dec 2025 are due to the Department no later than February 28, 2026. If there is an error or question on the audit, you will

receive an email or phone call from the Department Assistant Treasurer, Theresa (Terry) Escobedo.

If you have any questions, please let me know.

Linda Lorenz

Department Treasurer

Notes from the Secretary

I hope everyone stays warm and healthy. Seems like everyone who calls me has been sick lately. I want you all to be healthy, so I can see you at the February Council meeting and VOD Banquet.

We are approaching that time of year that we need to talk about election of officers. I am going to give you a few points to remember.

1. We are not the VFW, we don't nominate one month and elect the next.
2. We hold election of Officers in **April. (page 8 Booklet of Instruction)** has how to do it.
3. After election of officers we have Installation of Officers at May meeting.
4. New officers take office after Department Convention or July 1.

I will be emailing out the packet that has everything you need in it before April 1st. I am going to email it to the President, Secretary, and Treasurer. You need to check your spam file. It will contain order forms for the Program Book. It will have Installation forms to use for Department. It also has delegate forms for District, Department, and National. National delegates need to be entered on MALTA. With all delegates, it is EXTREMELY IMPORTANT to put those who attend Convention as delegates. If your commander's wife doesn't attend meetings, yet you know she attends conventions, make her a delegate. You don't have to pay her expenses, just because she is a delegate. That is up to your Auxiliary. It just helps the Department with delegates needed if we have all auxiliaries represented. Those delegate forms that say you owe money, even if no one from your auxiliary attends, you are still responsible for paying the Delegate Fees to DEPARTMENT.

If you have an email address listed on your MALTA, please make sure it is correct. That is what we use to mail information. I have heard from many people that say I don't use email. Then put down a member's address that will print emails and bring them to the meeting. I have heard this from Presidents, Secretaries and Treasurers. You need someone to get this information for your Auxiliary. It's how we get all the important information to your members. Thank you for your help. If you have any questions about elections, feel free to call me. I am always here to help you.

Rhonda Borkgren

Department Secretary

Americanism & Patriotism – A Note of Appreciation

I want to take a moment to thank our Auxiliaries across the state for your continued dedication to Americanism and patriotism. Through meetings, community events, youth education, and recognition of our veterans, you are keeping patriotic values strong in your communities.

Every report submitted helps tell the story of the important work being done at the local level, and I truly appreciate the effort that goes into sharing those activities. As we continue the year and look ahead to State Convention, I encourage everyone to keep reporting, stay engaged, and take pride in the impact you are making.

Thank you for all you do in service to our veterans, our communities, and our country.

In patriotism and service,

Tara Skipper

Department Americanism Chair & Patriotic Instructor

Buddy®Poppy/National Home

Carol Shutts

Buddy®Poppy

Another year is almost over. Have you done what you had planned to do with your programs? You do not have much time left.

National Ambassador Sandra is looking for creative ways we have educated our community and how we partnered with our VFW in joint Poppy drives and how we split the proceeds. I have received a few pictures, I would like to have more to send her, if you do not have pictures send me an email explaining what you did.

National Home

Have you sent a donation to the Home in support of their store? This is a joint project of our Commander-in-Chief Carol Whitmore and National President Lois. The Store will be in with the Gift shop and open to the families to get snacks and drinks.

We know what the Home does for our veterans but others do not. Let us get the word out as our veterans and their families need a place to readjust their lives after their service to our country. It is hard to ask for help, that is where we come in to let them know about the Home.

The goal this year was to use your imagination to help bring awareness to our veterans and their families about the Home, if you did, please send me an email explaining it.

How Your Post or Auxiliary Can Get Involved

🔗 Educate your members and community: Share information about the National Home in newsletters, social media, and local events.

🔗 Promote programs: Let families in your community know about eligibility for housing, educational support, and career-training programs.

🔗 Encourage Life Memberships: Life or Associate Life Memberships in the National Home helps grow a committed support network.

🔗 Provide financial support to fund our program

VFW National Home websites

<https://vfwnationalhome.org>

<https://vfwnationalhome.org/promotional>

<https://vfwnationalhome.org/new/blog>

There is a lot of information regarding the home and what all it does for our veterans and their

families. Take the time to look!!

FYI on Awards

DEPARTMENT AWARDS For Auxiliaries 2025-2026

1. An Award to the Auxiliary Chairman with the most outstanding activity and/or event using the VFW “Buddy”® Poppy to educate their community about the VFW “Buddy”® Poppy.

Reports are due to the Department Chairman within 30 days of the activity and/or event. A report must be submitted by April 15, 2026

2. An Award to the Auxiliary Chairman with the most outstanding activity and/or event to recognize and celebrate the VFW National Home’s 100th Birthday. Reports are due to the Department Chairman within 30 days of the activity and/or event. A report must be submitted by April 15, 2026.

NATIONAL AWARDS

1. Auxiliary Award #1 – Entry forms must be submitted the Department Chairman by March 31, 2028 for Most outstanding activity and/or event with their VFW Post to educate their community about the VFW “Buddy”®Poppy. Department Chairman must have them to the National Ambassador by April 30, 2026 for judging. Forms are available in MALTA under Member Resources. Citations will be mailed directly to the winning Auxiliary from National and award monies will be deposited into the Auxiliary account after the 2026 VFW Auxiliary National Convention.

2. Auxiliary Award #2 – Entry forms must be submitted to the Department Chairman by March 31, 2026 for Most outstanding activity and/or event to create awareness and education of eligibility and who qualifies for help from the VFW National Home and promoting it within their Department to help veterans and their families. Department Chairman must have them to the National Ambassador by April 30, 2026 for judging. Forms are available in MALTA under Member Resources. Citations will be mailed directly to the winning

Auxiliary from National and award monies will be deposited into the Auxiliary account after the

2026 VFW Auxiliary National Convention.

Carol Shutts

Buddy®Poppy/National Home Chairman

Extension and Revitalization

” Leadership is not about being in charge: it’s about taking care of those in your charge.” Simon Sinek

District Presidents, when is the last time you checked in on your Auxiliaries? Your official visit? If that is the case it is time to check in again. Now is the time to see struggling Auxiliaries before we get to April Elections. Have your Auxiliaries.....

Completed the X Sheet?

Made all their Donations?

Audits filed and correct?

Returned audits corrected and sent in?

Annual Members paid?

If any of the above are not done your Auxiliary may be struggling. Can you as the District President help or is it time to call your Department President Diane or myself to provide additional support to these Auxiliaries? I will be looking over these questions too and

checking in with District Presidents to see what can be done with the faltering Auxiliaries. Do you have Auxiliaries that have accomplished all the above?? Have you reached out to Them to say Thank You for the work they do for our Veterans and their families? Let those Auxiliaries know that you see the work they are doing. Saying thank you can go a long way to keep Auxiliaries engaged.

Do you know the 7 Cs of Leadership? Communication, Commitment, Confidence, Courage, Collaboration, Character, Creativity and Consistency. When you utilize 7 C's you help build stronger Auxiliaries. Strong leaders empower others to be great!

Thank you, District Presidents, for what you do. Let's end this year strong!

Marvie Wisniewski

Department Chief of Staff

HISTORIAN & MEDIA RELATIONS PROGRAM

Rooted in our mission to honor and support all veterans. One of the most important ways we preserve that mission is through the Historian & Media Relations Program. This program ensures that the story of our service is recorded, remembered, and shared with future generations.

As historians of our Auxiliary, we focus on capturing the five Ws of every event: Who participated, What took place, Where it happened, When it occurred, and Why it mattered. These details form the foundation of our history and help paint a complete picture of the dedication our members show throughout the year.

To support this effort, we encourage every Auxiliary to take photos, record videos, and document activities whenever possible. Even small moments—packing care packages, greeting veterans, setting up for a ceremony—tell a powerful story. When we create short videos or reels for Facebook and Instagram, especially with music added, we help create lasting memories that resonate with our community.

Your Auxiliary can highlight a wide range of activities, including veteran outreach, patriotic ceremonies, community meals, fundraisers, school partnerships, and recognition of local heroes. Every act of service deserves to be remembered and shared.

We often say, “If it is not recorded, no one remembers it happened.” This simple truth reminds us that our history depends on the moments we capture today. By preserving our past, we strengthen our future and ensure that the legacy of our Auxiliary—and the veterans we serve—will never be forgotten.

Thank you for your continued dedication, compassion, and commitment to honoring those who have served our nation.

Thank you and have a nice day!

Adrian Narup

LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM FEBRUARY 2026



Kathryn Rowold
Chairman

As we enter the second month of a new year, we must continue to keep National President Lois Callahan’s mission of “keeping the wave of gratitude moving forward for our veterans and families.”

Veteran Stories

One way we can do this is by supporting and sharing the VFW’s effort of gathering real stories from veterans and military families through **VFW Voices of Service - Stories in Action**. The VFW is collecting real experiences from veterans, service members, and families to help strengthen legislative advocacy. These stories, submitted directly through an official form, help show Congress how policies affect real people.

Please share the link or QR code below with your Auxiliary members, VFW members as well as veterans and military families. Stories do not need to come from members only!

 **Story Bank submission link:**

<https://forms.gle/3R4toepnSpDFLpvU6>

Scan the QR code to
share your story.



Program Awards

A reminder that this year's Legislative Program awards go to the Auxiliary Chairman and District Chairman with the most outstanding activity and/or event to create thank-you notes and cards to veterans that include links to VFW Action Corps Weekly and/or the VFW Priority Goals—another way to increase our subscribers and action takers. Sending or handing out valentine's day cards to our veterans is the perfect opportunity to thank them AND include links to VFW Action Corps Weekly and/or the VFW Priority Goals.

Motivational Membership Drive Ideas for 2026

Motivating a new member drive for the VFW Auxiliary in 2026 focuses on connecting potential

volunteers with the mission of "Unwavering Support for Uncommon Heroes®". Effective drives

emphasize personal connection, diverse opportunities, and the power of a collective voice.

Core Motivational Strategies

- Focus on the "How" Over the "Do": Instead of asking "Do you want to volunteer?", ask "How would you like to contribute?". This shifts the focus to their unique talents, whether they prefer to write, mentor, cook, or speak.

- **Emphasize Strength in Numbers:** Remind prospective members that even if they cannot be active daily, their membership matters because numbers influence Congress. A larger membership base provides a louder voice when advocating for veteran legislation.
- **Highlight Family Legacy:** Connect with the deep personal "Why" of many members—honoring the service of family members, such as a spouse or parent, and ensuring their sacrifices are remembered.

Drive Execution Ideas

- **Interactive Visual Displays:** Use eye-catching themes at community events, such as billboard or other fun, bright displays printed with the Auxiliary's contact info and a QR code for easy mobile sign-ups.
- **Host an Information Session:** Organize a local "Family Fun Night" or a dedicated information session for the public to learn about programs like student scholarships and hospital service without the pressure of an immediate commitment.
- **Mentorship Recruitment:** Encourage current members to use the "buddy system". Having a mentor or friend attend the first few meetings together can make new recruits feel less overwhelmed.

Actionable Resources for Organizers

- **Member Resources:** Click here to use the downloadable recruitment tools, orientation checklists, and eligibility wheels.
- **Official Membership Drive Release:** Click here to utilize the Official Press Release Template to gain local media coverage for your recruitment drive.
- **Recognition and Incentives:** For 2026, many Departments offer performance-based awards, such as the Circle of Excellence, which recognizes Auxiliaries that achieve specific membership growth goals.

The "Why Join" Checklist

- Direct Service: Opportunities to help veterans with hospital costs, disaster relief, and VA benefits.
- Community Impact: Youth outreach, patriotic education, and student scholarship programs.
- Personal Benefits: Access to member-only discounts on insurance, dental plans, and travel.

Respectfully,

Alena Kim & Katie Makey

Co-chair membership for Illinois

?? VFW Auxiliary Scholarships Bulletin – Winter 2026

As we near the end of the 2025–2026 scholarship program, these points may feel like a repeat, but they're vital and deserve another mention

?? Young American Creative Patriotic Art Contest

Who: Students in grades 9–12

What: Submit original patriotic artwork through your local VFW Auxiliary. Artwork should reflect patriotism and creativity.

Awards: Department winners advance to National level for scholarships up to \$15,000.

Deadlines: March 31 to your local Auxiliary; April 15 to Department; May 5 Department winners to National

? Continuing Education Scholarship

Who: Eligible VFW Auxiliary members and their immediate family members (age 18+)

What: For those pursuing college, vocational, or continuing education.

Awards: Four \$1,000 scholarships awarded annually by National Headquarters.

Deadline: February 15 to National Headquarters; May 1 Scholarship Recipients notified.

Call to Action

Auxiliaries are encouraged to share this information and assist with applications. For complete eligibility requirements and forms, contact your Auxiliary Scholarship Chairman or refer to National guidelines.

Support Education – Make a Difference!

Help fund the Continuing Education Scholarship:

☑ Donate via MALTA under ‘Make A Gift’

☑ Or mail donations to VFW Auxiliary National Headquarters or Department Treasurer
Incentive: Auxiliaries donating \$25 or more by April 15, 2026 will be entered into a drawing for a prize at the Department Convention in June! I will get the final numbers from Linda Lorenz before the convention.

Thank you for all you do to support our scholarship programs. Together, we’re making a difference for students and families. If you have questions or ideas, I’d love to hear from you!

Barb Sweger

Department Scholarship Chairman / deptilyouth@yahoo.com / 815-481-8288

Veterans & Family Support

Greetings! I hope everyone had a safe Christmas and New Year; and that it was filled with loved ones and cheer! As we enter the winter blues don’t let them get you down. As cold as it is outside warm your hearts and spirit with support for our Veterans, Service Members and families. One easy way to do that is hosting a potluck, dinner or community food drive to help ensure our veterans and families have a nice warm meal. You all have worked hard this year and nourishing your souls with a good meal and friendship is a way to bring loved ones together to celebrate your hard work and our veterans all the same.

Another way is hosting a craft night or learning a new hobby such as a sour dough class, guitar lessons, seed starting, crocheting, etc. These types of events are a good way to engage with the community and our veterans and family members. It's a way to still get out yet stay warm.

Please continue to support mental wellness as we navigate the next few months. Winter is still here and as cold and dreary as it is outside, don't let that in. As our National Ambassador Mrs. Annie O'Connor states in her newsletter for Veterans and Family Support, we still need to recognize the importance of mental health and collaborate with local mental health organizations to direct our Veterans to resources such as workshops, support groups, and wellness resources. These initiatives create avenues for Veterans, Service members, and their families to talk openly about their experiences and seek help when needed. Always have that #988 (then press 1) number on hand, To all of you thank you for your time, strength, patience and resilience this year. You have helped carry burdens of those members be it a veteran, service member or family member this year and have still found ways to support our organization. You all are an essential part of our mission, and we could not do what we do without you.

Please take note of what you have accomplished this year and if you have not turned in your reports, please do so as the time is vastly approaching.

Respectfully,

Jennifer Hunter

Veterans & Family Support Chairman

YOUTH ACTIVITIES

Our deadline is almost here for our ILLUSTRATING AMERICA contest!

Entries to Auxiliaries must be received by March 31, 2026

Entries to Department must be received by April 15, 2026

We invite all elementary, middle, and junior high students to participate in the Illustration America Contest! This is a fantastic opportunity to highlight their creativity, share their vision of America, and compete for exciting prizes. Whether they are passionate about drawing, painting, or coloring, this contest is the

perfect platform to express themselves. Don't miss out—join the fun and let their imagination shine!

Official entry forms, details, and rules can be found on MALTA under Member

Resources.

The October Patriotic Book challenge is still on!!

Finding available places to donate our beloved patriotic books is becoming difficult. Our Illinois Challenge is to add patriotic books to the freestanding little libraries in your area. Donate a Patriotic book, or two to the Little Free Libraries in your communities. Snap a picture of the box and send it to me, don't forget to add the town. Email to MAGICKMASTER@aol.com. Littlefreelibrary.org has listing of many sites and your Town Hall also is a useful resource to locate them. All pics will be sent to our National Ambassador as our Departments' Special Project. We can show them that Illinois is truly invested in our Youth and Communities.

Don't forget to acknowledge the youth in your area. R.A.P. cards and Youth Acts of Kindness certificates are that extra recognition that will reinforce Patriotism. SPECIAL NOTE We continue to work on our VFWAUXIL.ORG reporting. While all your reports are being reviewed promptly, your Dashboard does not reflect your approved projects. If you have received a confirmation email, your report has been acknowledged and is being counted.

As always, reach out any time with your questions and comments and remember to report all you do with our youth.

Cathie Cook

(708) 932-8551

magickmaster@aol.com

20314 Harding Av

Olympia Fields, IL 60461

2025-2026 Fundraising Report 1/13/2026

I am very pleased with the results of the Veterans Day Lottery Raffle.

Gross receipts were \$10,000

Ticket printing cost \$86.00

Winner payouts \$4000.00

The total profit is \$5914.00.

A very successful fundraiser.

A big thank you to everyone for all your support.

The 2nd lottery Raffle Fundraiser for the 2025-2026 year is the
Memorial Day Lottery Raffle

Drawing dates will be all 31 days in May 2026.

I still have packets of 10 tickets each that are available,
for someone wanting tickets to sell or need more

Tickets are \$10.00 each like the previous drawing

I will be at COA in February, I will have tickets with me.

I will collect sold tickets and money also.

Please contact me at (618)708-2609 or
email at mypawkids@yahoo.com for tickets.

I'm excited that we have a 2nd Lottery Raffle Fundraiser this year.

I will see you all in February with tickets in hand.

Thanks You

Laurie