

Hippety Hoppety, we have hopped right into April. This year is just flying by. April is the month where it finally starts to feel like spring (at least where I live). Spring is the time where we see nature waking up and new growth. It is a time where we are venturing outside to tend to our yards, maybe play in the sun and soak up that much missed vitamin D.

In the ALA year we are fast approaching reporting time. If you haven't yet please be sure to reach out to the Units in your Departments and remind them about your deadlines for when reports are due to you (based on your Department's deadlines) so you can get your report submitted on time. We should all be striving for 100% reporting.

We will be talking about reports at our quarterly Zoom call on April 3 so please be sure to register and attend. Reporting is important for so many reasons. Reports illustrate the impact we have as members of the ALA. That impact is shared with Congress and helps the American Legion with its legislative efforts to better serve our veterans. Reports also are a great way to share ideas. I can't tell you how many times I've heard about something another Unit is doing or has done that has triggered an idea. The more we share, the better we can become.

In this issue, you will find other information about service to veterans outside the VA, the Fischer House and a message from our National Chair.

Happy reading.



Dates to Remember:

- 4/1—April Fool's Day
- 4/3—Q3 Zoom Call
- 4/5—Gold Star Spouse Day
- 4/9—National Former POW Recognition Day
- 4/14—Air Force Reserve Birthday
- 4/15 **Purple Up Day**
- 4/22—Earth Day
- 4/23—Army Reserve Birthday
- 4/30—Military Brat Day

Month of The Military Child



Of course you can always contact me if you have questions or concerns. My contact information is below:

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Monthly Message from:

National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Chair, Coral May Grout



April 2025

We had a lot of information covered at our April 3rd Zoom meeting. If you were unable to participate, I hope someone from your Department was able to take your place. If not, please have a conversation with your Division VA&R Chair.

Reporting season is already here! Please be sure to gather your information, including photographs (good quality, not copied from Facebook) and report! We need 100% reporting for our most important program!

Our reports are read by Congress, so it important that we provide them with as much information as possible. It's who we are (ALA), what we do (support veterans and military), and you know why it matters!

Coral

Having a Robust VA&R Program Outside of the VA

Let me tell you a story about a little Unit. Lets call it Any Unit. Any Unit is located in the southern corner of its state. The closest VA is across state lines, about 2 1/5 hours away. The VA that it supports (primarily because it is the VA that most veterans in that area are attached to) is an 8 hour drive away and the other VA located in that state is a 4 hour drive away. Any Unit wants to have a thriving VA &R Program, but how can it accomplish this goal being so far away geographically from any VA? Any Unit's members put their heads together and came up with a plan. The Unit's members decided that it would do its best to support the VA that most of its local veterans are attached to, and that it would support its veterans at home. Lets look at how that is accomplished.

Any Unit used to collect cookies once a year for the VA and its members would take them to the Winter meeting and deliver them to the VAVS Representative to be delivered to the VA. This worked, sort of. But when Any Unit learned that the courier who travels between the VA and the Community Based Outreach Clinic (CBOC), its members hatched a plan. Now they collect cookies year round and when they have a box ready to go, the cookies get delivered to the CBOC and are couriered up to the VA. Any Unit has also reached out and partnered with community members who enjoy baking to be able to provide the cookies. This community partnership gives both organizations an opportunity for service, and it promotes the mission of the American Legion Auxiliary within the community.

Speaking of cookies, Any Unit gathers together and puts together cookie/treat bags that are delivered to senior veterans on Veterans Day. They are personally delivered by senior and junior members of the unit. (This is an easy and fun way to involved our junior members.) Nursing home residents particularly enjoy seeing people and receiving the treats. Any Unit will gather together and assemble cards for veterans at both their local nursing home, the VA and the Veterans Home for Veterans Day, Christmas and Valentines Day.

Any Unit also chooses to provide assistance to veterans who are either on fixed incomes, living in income assisted housing or who are residents of the local assisted living center or nursing home. Any Unit will reach out to its Post leadership to see if the Post is aware of veterans who are in need of assistance with Thanksgiving or Christmas dinners, or even gifts for the family. It will also provide gift cards to the local grocery store for veterans who are living in income assisted housing. These grocery gift cards don't carry a surcharge and they can be used for anything in the store that the veteran might need—from groceries to prescription medications. These gift cards are most often distributed to all veterans living in the local income assisted housing twice a year.

At Christmas, Any Unit will adopt the veteran residents of the nursing home and provide them with gifts from their wishlists. The Unit involves the entire Legion family in this endeavor

as it brings the wishlist to the Post and asks members to help them provide a nice Christmas to the nursing home residents. The Legion family looks forward to this activity every year.

Any Unit will also help assemble care packages for homeless veterans, will send items to the Standdown, or will man a table at the standdown to provide baked goods, hats, mittens or scarves to the veterans who are there. At Christmas Any Unit participates in and helps with its local Wreaths Across America ceremony, and placing flags at the gravesides of veterans on Memorial Day.

Any Unit works with its Legion family and community members to raise awareness about suicide prevention and conveying the message that “Its ok to not be ok” by holding rallies and checking in with the veterans they know and love. Any Unit works with its community and Legion family to raise funds for veterans relief projects—funds that are used to provide temporary assistance or to help a veteran in an emergency.

Any Unit is a composite of several Units and can really be any unit in the American Legion Auxiliary. What makes a robust VA & R program outside of the VA is simple. It comes down to looking in our own back yard and finding ways to serve our veteran populations. Something as simple as a bag of treats with a thank you can make a person’s day. Providing gift cards to help offset the high cost of groceries or prescription medication can be the difference between eating or skipping a few meals. All of these little things that Any Unit can do make a big difference. It is like dropping a pebble in a pond of still water. That pebble creates a ripple that gets bigger as it goes out. Those ripples touch the lives of our veterans in ways we cannot imagine.

Fisher House Foundation

By Kristen Hensley, Central Division VA&R Chairman



Fisher House has served countless military and veteran families, giving them a place to stay near VA Medical Facilities, while their soldier or veteran received needed medical treatment or services. What is less known, is how this much needed foundation began, and what sparked a builder to fill this need for our nation's hero's families lodging obstacles.

In the mid-1970's, Pauline Trost, was doing a clinic visit at the National Naval medical Center in Bethesda and saw a helicopter land at the center's heliport. A sailor, with his wife and kids disembarked with their belongings. Pauline pondered where this family was going to stay, as most lodgings were expensive, and not something easily afforded on a sailor's salary alone. This haunted her for years.

Pauline's husband became the Chief of Naval Operations in 1986, and this sparked the ambition in pursuing her dream of providing affordable temporary housing for families of those being treated at the Bethesda VA Medical Facility. She reached out to the President of the Washington Area Naval Officers Wives clubbed to begin exploring how the group would feel about taking on this project to fill this need. They even considered finding unused buildings to convert to temporary shelters to house these families.

Pauline's husband received a phone call from Zachary Fisher, a local builder in 1990, who had previously provided generous assistance for families of service personnel that came about due to tragedy. He was reaching out, expressing a desire to expand his support and asked Pauline's husband for ideas on project he could take-on or contribute to, that would benefit personnel of all military services. Pauline's husband gave Mr. Fisher some ideas, one of them being Pauline's dream.

Zachary Fisher was intrigued by Pauline's dream and decided to discuss it further. To quote Mr. Fisher, he stated "I'm a builder, I have my own architect, we can do this." In another interview, he stated, "I'm a builder. This is what I do for a living. I can do this." This sparked the dream, and things moved quickly, navigating bureaucratic hurdles, identifying a site, and the time to design and build the facility. In 1991, the first Fisher House opened with President and Mrs. Bush joining Mr. & Mrs. Fisher and Admiral & Mrs. Trost at the dedication ceremony, thereby fulfilling this almost 2-decade old dream.

Since opening the first home in 1991, Fisher House Foundation has opened 98 more homes near VA Facilities bringing their total to 99 homes currently in operation. Military, veterans, and families stay free of charge, with private rooms, bathrooms, community kitchen and common areas. This foundation gives people a home away from home while their loved ones are receiving treatment, and other services in facilities far from where they live. They have so far served 534,000 families, providing 12.5 million plus days of lodging, and have saved these families over \$650 million dollars just in lodging expenses. Currently there are 3 more houses under construction: Arkansas (1), Illinois (1), and Michigan (1). There are 16 future homes that are currently being planned, one in each of the following: AL, AZ, CA, GA, Germany, IA, LA, MD, NY, NC, ND, OK, PR, PA, VT, and WI.



To find out ways you can help and get involved, please visit: <https://www.fisherhouse.org/get-involved/>