

“At the end of the day, it is not about what you have or even what you’ve accomplished...it’s about who you’ve lifted up, who you’ve made better. It’s about what you’ve given back.” - Denzel Washington

Happy spring to you all as I am writing my last ‘Message’ article as your American Legion Auxiliary Department President. As my year draws to a close, reflecting on what a wonderful experience this has been brings a smile to my face and fills my heart with gratitude.

For many years, my personal philosophy has been to give back wherever I feel led. God led me to the Department of North Dakota to serve in this role, and I hope I have represented the organization positively while helping move it forward. It is my sincere hope that this organization will continue to thrive in its mission, thinking creatively, and finding new ways to grow and expand our role within the American Legion Family.

What a fulfilling and blessed year this has been so far. I have shed many happy tears over the past few years as I stepped into Department leadership roles. Those tears often came unexpectedly, and through them, I came to know that this was a role God placed me in at exactly the right time.

I would like to take this time to reflect on the year so far. From being installed last June to being ratified at the 2025 National Convention, to Fall and Spring District meetings, to the Winter Conference, to meetings and events I was invited to take part in during my term, to the relationships that were built and are now deeply cherished, and to the articles and information shared on behalf of our organization - I am incredibly grateful to have been a part of every single moment.

Thank you for the support of my President Projects, participating in the York American Legion Family Day, and stepping into leadership roles that help move our organization forward. Thank you for the words of encouragement, the support, the camaraderie, the team spirit, the positive energy, and for so much that goes unsaid, yet has made this year more amazing than I could have imagined. I truly see us as a team, and I am deeply grateful to everyone who has been part of that team this year - supporting one another, encouraging one another, and continuing to promote our organization.

We recently concluded our Spring District meetings, and I enjoyed traveling across the state to participate in each one. During these meetings, I discussed the Department of North Dakota’s plans to develop a one-to-five-year strategic plan. I reviewed the former 2014-2019 National Strategic Plan and asked for insight on additional ideas we could incorporate into our upcoming North Dakota strategic plan to ensure growth and longevity of our organization for years to come.

At each meeting, I also posed a simple yet powerful question: “What is your why?” The responses were varied, heartfelt, and deeply meaningful. Hearing those personal reflections was by favorite part of the meetings and a strong reminder of why our work matters so much.

As a proud, long-time member of the York ALA, I was thrilled to see the National organization encourage units to “open their doors” for an American Legion Family Day. I wanted to do just that, open the doors of our local Posts and Units, and Saturday, April 25, turned out to be one of the best days of my life. Approximately one hundred people were in attendance to support the American Legion Family. The day included a large raffle to raise funds for my President’s Projects, a free meal, a great band, and shared fellowship between the York Post and Unit. We also honored our veterans with presentations, including “Welcome Home” coins for Vietnam-era veterans and “Thank You for Your Service” coins presented to all veterans in attendance.

I was honored and excited to present continuous years of membership certificates to members of the York unit. What a truly blessed day it was, spent with friends, family, and fellow American Legion Family members. Thank you to everyone who helped support the event in any way. In addition to celebrating American Legion Family Day, we were also proud to recognize America’s 250<sup>th</sup> birthday, the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the York Post and the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the York Unit.

Over the course of this year, I have communicated with National and Department levels to determine a way to recognize and present continuous years-of-membership certificates to our members. With so many factors involved, particularly regarding membership rosters, it is not something that can be implemented Department-wide at this time. However, it is my hope that this can be achieved in the future. In the meantime, I encourage units to present continuous years-of-membership honors to your long-time members at your unit meetings. It truly makes a difference when members are recognized in this meaningful way. Providing a special certificate shows each member that they matter, and it becomes a cherished keepsake for both the member and their family.

The next big event on our calendar is the 2026 Department Convention, which will be held June 26-28 at the Ramada by Wyndham in Fargo. I encourage each of you to attend and support both your current and future leaders. During the convention, we will present the most up-to-date draft revisions to our Constitution, Bylaws, and Standing Rules for a vote. We are also honored to welcome Shareen Johnson, Northwestern Division National Vice President from Wyoming, who will provide both inspiration and insight. I am confident that great memories will be created over this memorable weekend.

As I reflect on the big items I encouraged over the year, here are a few reminders:

- Please become familiar with our Department website at [www.ndala.org](http://www.ndala.org). The website is frequently updated and has information and links to a wide variety of items.
- Please sign up and take 10 ALA Academy training sessions through the national ALA Academy website ([www.legion-aux.org/ala-academy](http://www.legion-aux.org/ala-academy)) to receive a certification of completion that will be presented to you at the convention.
- Please share your unit's activities on our ND American Legion Auxiliary Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/ndamericanlegionauxiliary/](http://www.facebook.com/ndamericanlegionauxiliary/)
- Continue working toward 100% membership. Remember, individuals who sign up ten new members and Districts and units achieving 100% membership by June 15th will be entered into a drawing for a prize that will be drawn at the Department Convention in Fargo.

As I write this, our membership has surpassed 86%! We have thirty-three units that have reached 100% membership so far. Keep doing what you are doing to support membership!

Thank you to everyone who has donated to my President's Projects: The Honor Flight Network for Eastern/Western North Dakota and the NDSU Bison Strides Equine Assisted Activities and Therapies Program for Veterans and their Families. Additional donations are always welcomed and may be sent to the Department Office at 1801 23<sup>rd</sup> Ave. N., Fargo, ND 5801-1047.

If you have any photos from this past year that you would be willing to share, I am hoping to put together a slideshow and would love to include a variety of photos from throughout the year. Our Department Historian, Carrie Heinz, is also seeking additional photos to include in the President's scrapbook. Your shared memories help preserve this year's story and are genuinely appreciated.

I am so thankful for each of you and feel truly blessed to have served as your Department President. I will be forever grateful for this opportunity of a lifetime. Please remember that everything you do on behalf of this organization truly matters. Thank you for your continued loyalty, dedication, and commitment. It is an incredible honor to be part of the North Dakota American Legion Family. This has been one of the best years of my life, and I close with a grateful heart.

Thank you and may God bless each of you.

Candace Berg