



American Legion Auxiliary Media Fact Sheet

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY POPPY PROGRAM

The poppy has become a nationally known and recognized symbol of sacrifice and is worn by Americans to honor those who served and died for their country.

The poppy distribution program provides disabled veterans with an income and rehabilitation activity, and reminds Americans of the sacrifices of their veterans over the years. Donations received by Auxiliary volunteers for the poppies are used exclusively to assist and support veterans and their families.

Each year, American Legion Auxiliary volunteers distribute millions of red crepe paper poppies in exchange for financial contributions to assist disabled and hospitalized veterans. The paper poppies are each handmade by veterans who benefit from the proceeds which augment fixed benefits and help with daily living expenses, contributing to a greater feeling of self-sufficiency. The physical and mental activity provides many therapeutic benefits for the veteran.

In 1923, the poppy became the official flower of The American Legion Family in memory of the soldiers who fought on the battlefields during World War I. The poppy gained its prominence as a lasting symbol of our military's sacrifice in the famous wartime poem "In Flanders Fields" written on the battlefield by Lt. Col. John McCrae, M.D. during WWI. It begins:

'In Flanders Fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses row on row..."

The image of the poppy as a memorial flower to the war dead can be traced to a single individual, Ms. Moina Michael, who, in November 1918, bought a bouquet of poppies and handed them to businessmen where she worked. She asked them to wear the poppy as a tribute to the fallen.

Today, more than 5 million poppies are made each year by disabled veterans, generating nearly \$2 million in contributions.

The American Legion Auxiliary was founded in 1919, and is the world's largest patriotic women's service organization. With a membership of over 850,000, local ALA units have a strong presence in more than 9,500 communities nationwide. The ALA's mission to *serve veterans, their families and their communities* is carried out through its hundreds of outreach programs delivered by its members, volunteers and National Headquarters.