

Hello Auxiliary Units of Arizona!

Bring some fun back into volunteering!

It's my pleasure to introduce myself, JoJo "JoAnn" Baldwin. I am eligible for membership through my husband, David Baldwin, who served 11 honorable years in the U.S. Air Force. For the past three years, we have served together on the Honor/Color Guard at Post 27 in Apache Junction, Arizona. I serve as the Adjutant, Supply Officer, and a member of the flag posting team and assistant Chaplain. I remain deeply dedicated to supporting my local unit, post, and district. Over the past four years with the American Legion Auxiliary, I have served as the Community Service Chairman of Apache Unit 27, and as 2nd Vice President Veteran Affairs and Rehabilitation (VA&R). I currently serve as the Vice President and Membership Chairman.

Throughout my time in the Auxiliary, I have focused on driving impactful outreach – partnering with local community organizations to maximize resources, coordinating supply drives, supporting veterans facing economic hardship, and strengthening our broader military family. However, this heartfelt mission is never accomplished alone. My leadership experience has taught me that true success takes a "VILLAGE" – built on strong partnerships, genuine collaboration, and creative, out-of-the-box thinking. We undertake this dedicated volunteer work for God and Country! What better theme could our Department of Arizona President, Marg Christianson pick: **ENGAGING OUR YOUTH!** I challenge every local unit's Community Service Chairman to join me in restoring the values of "COOL," "ACCEPTABLE," and "DUTY" to the hearts of our youth, reinforcing the core principle of **SERVICE NOT SELF**.

If you join me in this challenge, my committee and I will productively lead "US" into innovative, collaborative partnerships – such as teaming up with our local public libraries. Public libraries offer free, highly relevant resources for veterans, the youth and families. For example, Unit 27 recently participated in an initiative already hosted by the Apache Junction Public Library called *America's Future*, celebrating the U.S. 250th Semiquincentennial Anniversary. The library provided all materials and public relations support at zero cost to our unit. This project consisted of several tiles/canvases in red, white and blue tiles coming together to create the American Flag. In this collaborative partnership several tiles/canvases were created by Army of Torches (AOT), ALA Unit 27, the local youth and families of Pinal County. See photos.

A characteristic of successfully working your program begins with understanding your community which for some can also mean knowing your audience. Yes we understand that we are here to serve the veterans. How about we dig deeper into the community that makes up that veteran's life. My childhood did not consist of supportive loving parents. I bring this to

your attention, if you truly understand your veterans, you will know that the American Legion has a huge heart for at-risk children – including those with deceased, missing, or disabled parents who have served our great country. When I was scared, or in need of guidance and resource, I sought out my public library as a safe haven and this very day, I do the same. A similar dynamic occurs within veterans' families. They utilize their local libraries to learn how to feed their families through gardening education and free seed programs, to foster personal growth and career transition through unemployment assistance, free resume courses and job postings, and to check out mobile hotspots for free internet access so their children can complete their homework.

Therefore, let us leverage our local libraries to ***engage our youth!*** Here is a link to Arizona State Library Directory: <http://azlibrary.gov/services/library-directory?hl=en-US>. Please begin your research by requesting an appointment with the Library's Director or head librarian in your local area. Many public libraries receive federal funding and grants that the staff uses to build programs and resources tailored to their local communities, which naturally includes veterans. For example, as Unit 27, Community Service Chairman, I repurposed pamphlets purchased by a library staff member through a federal grant designed specifically to serve the veterans – covering topics such as PTSD, transitioning from military service to civilian life, insomnia, and more. These resources were made available at Post 27's first Veteran Stand Down at no cost to our unit or post. Interview your library staff to learn how can partner, collaborate, or share resources, or assist with community events. All of these initiatives count as community service to veterans and their families, and offers easy inexpensive ways to engage our youth and impact local communities. Bring back **FUN** in our volunteering!