

The VFW's website disseminates information and provides an easy way for members to connect with one another. Videos are a big draw, as are listings of service projects that members can join.

"There is definitely a social networking aspect to it that appeals to younger members who want to stay in touch, but often from home. And, one reason younger members find the VFW attractive is our focus on service to communities, the nation, active and veteran members and their families."

The VFW understands that it has had to make changes to become attractive to the new generation and remain vital to the older ones. "Our programs are being redesigned to meet the needs of both new and long-time members," says Newberry. "But our primary focus remains the same—helping those who deserve it most."

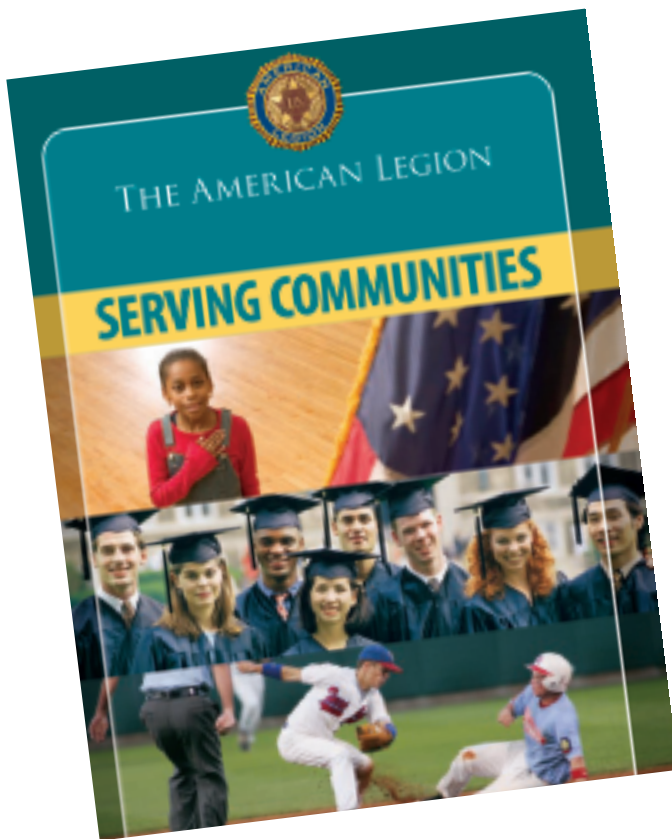
Each year the VFW and its Auxiliaries donate more than 13 million volunteer hours of community service. VFW members work with youth groups, volunteer at food drives and visit ailing veterans. The VFW's Citizenship Education program promotes American history, citizenship, civic responsibility and patriotism. And, VFW's Youth Scholarship programs provide more than \$3.5 million in scholarships.

The organization's motto sums up its special multi-faceted mission—The VFW is there to honor the dead by helping the living. For more information, visit [www.vfw.org](http://www.vfw.org).

## American Legion

At the American Legion, emphasis on service continues to expand as more younger members and their families become active with the organization.

The American Legion was chartered by Congress in 1919 as a patriotic, war-time veterans organization devoted to helping people. Today, the not-for-profit community service organization numbers nearly 3 million members worldwide, making it the



largest wartime veterans organization in the world.

And today's members represent a cross-section of American society, with representatives from all walks of life, says Braxton Bridgers, state adjutant of Alabama's American Legion.

In recent years, says Bridgers, he's noticed an increase in the number of younger veterans—primarily because of the increasing number of veterans, and a heightened awareness of organizations that serve veterans.

One area where American Legion members have increased service is in assisting the families of deployed service members, says Bridgers. "The American Legion post and members are available to assist the families through community service projects—be it helping with car repair or mowing the grass—something they cannot take care of because of physical or financial hardships." This particularly affects younger soldiers and their families, he says, as they may not be as financially secure as older service members.

"Sometimes, there's a delay in getting pay set up when a soldier is activated, or getting benefits on track," says Bridgers. "We're here to offer advice or to help connect the service members or family members with the right person in the military or veterans system who can help them."

The American Legion operates a Family Support Network, which is ready to provide immediate assistance to service personnel and families whose lives have been directly affected by Operation Iraqi Freedom and America's war on terror.

The American Legion has a nationwide toll-free telephone number, 800-504-4098, for service members and their family members to call for assistance. Applicants can apply online by visiting [www.legion.org/veterans/fsn](http://www.legion.org/veterans/fsn) and clicking the assistance form at the top of the page. Calls are referred to The American Legion department, or state, in which the call originated. Departments relay the collected information to a local American Legion post. The local post then contacts the service member or family to see how assistance can be provided locally. Since the creation of the Family Support Network during the first Persian Gulf War, thousands of posts have responded to meet these families' needs.

The American Legion also sponsors many popular programs for youth across America, including baseball and the high-school level Boys State, a program which provides government instruction for high school students. Participants learn how the government works and get to participate in the process. Activities include legislative sessions, court proceedings, law enforcement presentations, assemblies, bands, chorus and recreational programs.

The American Legion Auxiliary Sponsors Girls State for high school girls.

One of the organization's newest and highly popular programs is the American Legion Legacy Run. The event gathers hundreds of motorcycle riders from across the county who ride throughout the U.S. for several days to raise money to provide a college education for the children of American servicemen and women who died defending our country. This year, hundreds of riders traveled through seven states for five days to make money. They traveled from Indianapolis to Phoenix for the 90th Annual American Legion National Convention.

Two more ways the American Legion helps service members and their families is through Operation Grateful Heart and Heroes to Hometowns, both of which connect service members or family members with national, state and local support systems and resources when needed. For more information, visit [www.legion.org](http://www.legion.org). **R&NG**