



## The 12.5 Million Hours Challenge

# ILLUSTRATING THE VIBRANCY OF TODAY'S DAR

The DAR has always been focused on service, but 125 years after it was founded, the organization is more engaged and active in volunteer service than ever before. Daughters across the country are giving millions of hours of service—from veterans' causes to literacy partnerships, from children's welfare to animal rescue programs, and from homeless causes to in-the-trenches preservation work—all with the goal of enhancing their communities. The organization's mission isn't merely uplifting words on a banner; it's a living and breathing mission made possible by the compassionate hands of busy and devoted Daughters over more than a century. Their laudable endeavors have made a difference for their fellow citizens in the past and are having a demonstrable impact on their neighbors today, and their unwavering and untiring devotion to service makes the future better for every American.

By Lena Anthony

BREN LANDON

When the DAR started tallying how many hours members spent in community service as part of DAR President General Lynn Young's Celebrate America! initiative, created in honor of the National Society's 125th Anniversary, the organization knew it would be a big number. But even the most ambitious estimates were vastly exceeded. The initial goal of the program was 3 million hours during Mrs. Young's three-year term. After members accumulated more than 4 million hours of community service in the first year alone, the goal was raised to 10 million hours. This past June, members hit that goal—and aren't slowing down.

Now Mrs. Young is challenging DAR members to contribute an additional 2.5 million hours of community service, for a grand total of 12.5 million hours.

One early example of the organization's commitment to community service is the 1898 formation of the DAR Hospital Corps, which certified more than 1,000 nurses for service during the Spanish-American War. Beginning in the 1920s, the DAR had a major presence on Ellis Island, where members distributed the *DAR Manual for Citizenship* as well as needed supplies to immigrants.

For today's service projects to qualify under Celebrate America! requirements, they must provide a benefit outside of one's immediate family and outside of the organization.

"Many projects focus on historic preservation, education and patriotism, because that's what so many of our members are passionate about, but the other part of DAR is God, Home and Country,

and that encompasses all aspects of caring for others," Mrs. Turbyfill said. "It comes down to recognizing a need in the community and acting on it."

In Hawaii, where one in six adults struggles with reading and writing, the Aloha DAR Chapter, Honolulu, routinely partners with Hawaii Literacy, an organization that offers one-on-one tutoring and other services to adults and families working to improve their literacy.

Members of the Deborah Avery Putnam DAR Chapter, Plainfield, Conn., contribute to the upkeep of the town's historic Hammett Cemetery, which had become badly overgrown. On designated cleanup days, members and their families clear brush, remove trees, eliminate poison ivy and identify tombstones for repair.

Meanwhile, in Florida, the Commodore John Barry DAR Chapter,



Opposite page: DAR members hold cards and flags that they passed out to Honor Flight veterans arriving in Washington, D.C., to view the National World War II Memorial. • This page, clockwise from left: Kathryn Wilkerson, regent of Hannah Cole DAR Chapter, Boonville, Mo., acts as an Honor Flight guardian for a veteran. • Tomahawk DAR Chapter, Prairie Village, Kan., donates stuffed lambs to a nonprofit group in New Mexico that cares for Navajo children. • Members of Aloha DAR Chapter, Honolulu, routinely work with Hawaii Literacy to encourage a love of reading.



"To reach this goal we need everyone working together," said LeAnn Turbyfill, national chair of the Celebrate America! Committee. "It matters not if it's one hour or 100 hours, the important thing is that by working together, as a national organization, all of us are making a difference." For more information, visit [www.dar.org/celebrateamerica](http://www.dar.org/celebrateamerica).

### Improving Communities

The spirit behind the program dates to 1890, when Eugenia Washington, one of the four DAR Founders, called for "a patriotic society founded on service."







Melbourne Beach, has been involved in efforts to rehabilitate the local Indian River Lagoon following the loss of the mangrove and oyster populations. Members make oyster larvae to settle in the lagoon, as well as comb the beaches and riverbeds picking up mangrove seedlings and rooting them to be planted at a later date.

Kathy Wilkerson, regent of Hannah Cole DAR Chapter, Boonville, Mo., is one of many Daughters involved with Honor Flight, an organization that flies military veterans to

Washington, D.C., to visit war memorials at no cost to them. In June 2015, Ms. Wilkerson served as an Honor Flight guardian for a veteran on his trip to the nation's capital.

Leesa Ruderman, a member of the Carrollton Manor DAR Chapter, Frederick, Md., and her teenage son Evan started volunteering at Days End Farm, grooming and handling the horses and cleaning their stalls. "We leave there and can barely stand from exhaustion, but our hearts are full," she said.

Other service projects take advantage of members' talents. Alana Speckman, Eleanor Boston and Jackie Gillespie, members of the Battle Creek DAR Chapter, Battle Creek, Mich., partnered with the local artists' guild to design and paint three historical murals inside the township's hall. Jacquie Beveridge, a massage therapist and former regent of the Oregon Dunes DAR Chapter,

Florence, Ore., attends Veterans Stand Down events and provides massage therapy to veterans, many of whom are homeless.

A group of members from the Tomahawk DAR Chapter, Prairie Village, Kan., gets together once a year to sew and assemble stuffed lambs, which are donated to a nonprofit in New Mexico that cares for Navajo children removed from crisis situations. The group, led by Sandy Wurth and Martha Wright, has donated 115 stuffed lambs.

"The lamb in the Navajo society is symbolic because the group for centuries has depended upon sheep for food and livelihood," Mrs. Wright said. "The lambs we send offer a connection between their centuries-old traditions and their current culture."

### Strengthening the DAR

In addition to providing an immediate benefit to the communities served, Celebrate America! helps to recognize and strengthen the work being done by existing DAR committees, such as Literacy Promotion, DAR Project Patriot and DAR Service to Veterans.

JeanEllen Melton, the national chair of the Literacy Promotion Committee, estimates that literacy-related work performed by Daughters accounts for between 250,000 and 350,000 hours of service each year. Since the initiative started, Mrs. Melton has noticed a shift

to a wider range of populations served by members' literacy promotion initiatives.

"Celebrate America! has prompted our members to reach out into their communities and look for new opportunities to partner with organizations like homeless shelters, domestic abuse shelters, jails and prisons," she said.

One such organization benefiting from DAR members' involvement is the Free Minds Book Club and Writing Workshop, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit that empowers imprisoned and formerly incarcerated youth through reading and writing. What started with a \$7,250 DAR Special Projects Grant from the National Society, sponsored by Eleanor Wilson DAR Chapter, Washington, D.C., has grown into a multichapter partnership that includes volunteering at monthly Write Nights, hosting fundraisers and book drives, and even taking a group of formerly incarcerated youth on a tour of the U.S. Capitol.

"Members of DAR bring so much to the table," said Tara Libert, co-founder and executive director of Free Minds. "Besides the fact that they continue to invest in our young men, they also stand as a symbol of the importance of education and literacy for all. DAR is also unique because of the connection they facilitate among all of the chapters nationwide. We have seen firsthand that after one chapter connects with us, they quickly spread the word among other chapters to garner additional support. From book drives to fundraisers, we have benefited enormously from the ripple effect of numerous DAR chapters joining together to make a real difference in their community."

Members of the Mary Katharine Goddard DAR Chapter, Omaha, Neb., are helping to further the work of the DAR Service for Veterans Committee by responding to various needs of the more than 900 homeless veterans living in the Omaha area. The chapter regularly

collects and donates coats, gloves, hats and sweatshirts to local homeless shelters, and individual members also are involved in crocheting waterproof sleeping mats made of plastic shopping bags. The mats, which measure 3 feet by 6 feet, require 1,000 shopping bags each and take 90 hours to make.

DAR members have a long history of involvement with the Department of Veterans Affairs, but Sabrina Clark, director of VA Voluntary Service (VAVS), has seen an increase over the past two years in both the number of DAR members who volunteer with VAVS and the total number of hours served.

"This is quite significant," Clark said. "Many organizations face an aging membership, and those who are active are typically engaged in multiple organizations with often competing priorities. It is tremendous that the DAR has found a way to maintain the momentum to serve our veterans through VAVS."

### Inspiring New Service

Celebrate America! aims to inspire new ideas for service through events such as Celebrate America Night at the 124th DAR Continental Congress,

where 600 children's books were collected for the Blue Star Families' Books on Bases program, and hundreds of notes were written to military personnel. DAR members are also gearing up for the National DAR Day of Service on October 11, 2015, a day set aside for chapters to complete meaningful service work in their local communities to celebrate the founding of the DAR on that date in 1890.

The Celebrate America! initiative has also inspired others to consider joining the DAR, as they see today's DAR being engaged in meaningful service work and want to be a part of it. Mrs. Turbyfill said new member applications have risen since the start of the initiative. "These are not just sisters and aunts of existing members, but new women who are excited about what they're seeing in their communities," she said.

Adds Clark: "Celebrate America! speaks volumes about the DAR and its mission. A call to service like this sets an expectation for members to actually be engaged. It focuses them to go beyond simply being a member in name only. It allows them to see that the DAR is about action." 🇺🇸



**Clockwise from top left:** The first two photos show Texas Daughters participating in the Houston Astros Salute to Veterans at Minute Maid Park on Veterans Day 2013. The event honored the nation's military and veterans, especially those who served in World War II, and was spearheaded by Astros employee and DAR member Twila Ilgen. • Members of the Mary Katharine Goddard DAR Chapter, Omaha, Neb., crochet waterproof sleeping mats made of plastic shopping bags to give to the city's homeless veterans. One of the recipients, who is now living in an apartment, hung his on the wall like art to remind him where he came from. • Leesa Ruderman, a member of Carrollton Manor DAR Chapter, Frederick, Md., and her son Evan volunteer at Days End Farm Horse Rescue in nearby Woodbine, Md.



**Clockwise from top left:** Members of the Manor House DAR Chapter, Washington, D.C., volunteer with the Free Minds Book Club and Writing Workshop, which empowers imprisoned and formerly incarcerated youth through reading and writing. • Following the loss of its mangrove and oyster populations, the Indian River Lagoon is being rehabilitated with the help of members of the Commodore John Barry DAR Chapter, Melbourne Beach, Fla. • Daughters from the Deborah Avery Putnam DAR Chapter, Plainfield, Conn., work to maintain the town's historic Hammett Cemetery.

TEXAS VETERANS EVENT: STEVE YOUNG