

American Legion Auxiliary News Release
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 31, 2008

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**Four Outstanding Women Honored with American Legion Auxiliary's
Public Spirit Award for Supporting Military, Veterans and their Families**

WASHINGTON, DC – The American Legion Auxiliary honored four outstanding women for their efforts to benefit our military, veterans and their families with its prestigious Public Spirit Awards during the organization's 27th annual Awareness Assembly in Washington D.C.

The Auxiliary's National President, Jan Pulvermacher-Ryan, presented the awards to Marian Chirichella, founder of the Angels of Mercy program; Karen Degner, coordinator for Military Families Connect; Karen Grimord, founder and president of the Landstuhl Hospital Care Project; and Elizabeth Johnston, president and founder of Mothers of Military Support (MOMS) at a special luncheon in their honor on March 31.

Chirichella, of Vienna, Virginia, founded Angels of Mercy to support wounded Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom (OIF/OEF) service members and their families, primarily out of Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Chirichella spent more than 15 years building her career with an international market research firm and started own company in 2001. But when she and her husband Jay volunteered at the hospital and saw how little support was available for combat veterans, they gave up their day jobs and used their years of professional project management experience to build the Angels of Mercy program.

Degner, of Plymouth, Wisconsin, leads the Military Families Connect information and referral service for families that share the common thread of being associated with the military. With the closest military base more than 100 miles away, southeastern Wisconsin families do not have the benefit of living with peers on a military installation. Through MFC, families form an alliance in a supportive environment regardless of duty, status or what branch their family member serves. The network of family members and friends of those serving in active and reserve components of the military meets monthly to socialize, exchange information, and hear from guest speakers.

Grimord, of Stafford, Virginia, learned that OIF/OEF patients often arrive at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center – the largest U.S. military hospital overseas – with no clothing other than hospital garments. With only a \$250 voucher for clothing and personal hygiene items, patients often find themselves in need of additional items. She founded the Landstuhl Hospital Care Project to support the medical center's pastoral services department and provide comfort for the wounded by contributing quality of life items service men and women need to convalesce. The project provides sweats, pajamas, boxers, socks, and seasonal coats for patients and sends sheets, blankets, pillows, and towels to Combat Support Hospitals.

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Johnston, of Kelso, Washington, was so frustrated over her own son's deployment and not knowing how to help him or support the troops, that she decided to enlist in the service herself. After being rejected by all four branches of the military for being too old – she was two years past the maximum enlistment age – a better inspiration hit. Knowing soldiers don't always have the facilities to take showers every day, she put her efforts and energy towards sending 100,000 care packages of personal items to help give service men and women stationed overseas some comfort of home. Mothers of Military Support (MOMS) offers a wide range of services in addition to comfort kits to military personnel and their families.

The American Legion Auxiliary's Public Spirit Award, established in 1983, recognizes outstanding individuals and organizations for contributions that positively impact our communities, especially those efforts that benefit our military, veterans and their families.

All of the recipients this year are American Legion Auxiliary members. Previous recipients of the Public Spirit Award include General Colin Powell (Ret.), Hillary Rodham Clinton, former President Ronald Reagan, Jeanne Kirkpatrick, Ann Landers, and Miss America 2000 Heather Renee French.

About the American Legion Auxiliary

Affiliated with The American Legion, the Auxiliary is a veterans' support organization with members in nearly 10,000 communities. The organization sponsors volunteer programs on the national and local levels, focusing on three major areas: veterans, young people and the community.