



MICHIGAN AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY GIRLS STATE

The idea for “ALA Girls State”: was first considered in 1937. Since 1948 it has been a regular part of our American Legion Auxiliary’s better citizenship activity in all 50 of our United States.

We think ALA Girls State is **T-N-T . . . Tremendous National Training.**

Michigan’s program began in 1940 - 1941, under the guidance of Mrs. Dorothy Pearl and Mrs. Edna Alber, at the University of Michigan, with 200 girls participating. Both of these “Grande Dames” are now deceased, but they live on in our program as Alber/Pearl County. The program is for girls completing their junior year of high school. Michigan is one of the few states which continued our program throughout the war years. We are celebrating our 77th Anniversary in 2017, on the campus of Michigan State University.

When the program began, the emphasis was on teaching young women to be better, more responsible homemakers, with classes in sewing, cooking, organizing, and some government and parliamentary procedures thrown in (because Mrs. Pearl authored a Parliamentary Procedure Manual)!

After W.W.II, priorities shifted, and our leaders felt it was necessary for our young women to become more aware of what was going on in our government. Therefore, our program shifted to a hands-on practice in running city, county, and state government.

The political arena of ALA Girls State includes cities and counties, which comprise the STATE, American Legion Auxiliary GIRLS STATE!

The teaching at ALA Girls State is the responsibility of our Government Staff which is led by Alan Vanderberg, who in the real world of Michigan government, serves as the Ottawa County Administrator. This will be his 32nd year with ALA Girls State. The Government Staff includes, a practicing Michigan attorney, Jack Felton, who will be celebrating his 35th year with ALA Girls State. Joining them are approximately 20 other experienced staff members who have degrees in some area of Political Science or Law. Mr. Vanderberg and his staff guide the citizens through the political and judicial process of running ALA Girls State.

Delegates are arbitrarily assigned to one of two political parties, Nationalist or Federalist, and to one of the 12 cities. These 12 cities and 4 counties are named after Past Department Presidents of the American Legion Auxiliary Department of Michigan.

Each city has a counselor. These counselors are college students and all former ALA Girl State Citizens.

Each of the four counties has a Government Advisor assigned to it. These County Advisors are part of the government staff and also assist the city counselors with the development of their city government program.

One of the required activities for all ALA Girls State Citizens is the daily American Flag raising and retreat ceremonies.

Each delegate is required to sign a "Loyalty Pledge," which states she will respect and salute the American Flag and take part in all ceremonies. If anyone's culture prohibits them from repeating the Pledge of Allegiance we ask that they respect those around them by remaining silent and standing with their arms by their side.

The American Legion Auxiliary volunteers provide all of the administrative and clerical needs, and also medical personnel who are available 24/7 during the entire session.

The first city meetings are held following registration on the opening day, where the citizens have an opportunity to settle in, meet each other and tell a little about themselves.

In addition to having access to important information and mandatory forms on our webpage, ALA Girls State Citizens will also receive a second packet which is distributed by their City Counselor upon arrival. This packet includes a "Government Manual", which contains information on the offices for which they may run, the type of government found in Michigan, the executive, legislative and judicial branches of our state government, and information from the Michigan State Bar Association. They are given a little time to study this manual, and then they take their "Bar Exam". This exam actually consists of questions taken from the Michigan State Bar Exam. No one may run for any Judicial Office unless she passes this exam.

At the first county meeting each ALA Girls State Citizen receives a profile. This contains a description of each city in their county – the type of government it has (City Manager, Manager/Council, etc.), whether it is a farming community, college town, metropolis, etc., and a full set of problems regarding its people, crimes, finances, infrastructure, etc. The same is true for each of the counties.

City officials are elected on Monday, and they begin their work solving their city's problems.

To run for the office of Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of State or Supreme Court Justice of Michigan American Legion Auxiliary Girls State, candidates must secure a petition and get the required number of signatures by the deadline. These petition signatures are verified just as they are in real government. No one may sign more than one petition for any office.

In addition, each of the political parties begin working at planning their party convention, and building their party's platform. Party conventions are held on Tuesday afternoon and can continue into the wee small hours of the evening. Each city has two "City Party Chairmen", one for each party. These chairmen comprise the "State Central Committee" and are responsible for making the rules for the convention, and for decorating the convention halls. One is elected by her peers to run the convention. These are the girls who really need to know parliamentary procedure.

At these conventions all candidates for state offices give their speeches. Party candidates for Governor, Lt. Governor, Secretary of State, Attorney General, and Supreme Court Justice are nominated, and the party's platform is finalized.

Elections for state officials are held on Wednesday evening. The electronic voting system is used, so citizens have the experience of voting using the same type of voting machines used by their parents. Citizens come to the polls one city at a time. They must be a "registered voter", and have a validated registration form before they may cast their vote. Registration for voting all happens at ALA Girls State. Once all of the citizens have voted, the Government Coordinator, the ALA Girls State Chairman, the Co-Chairman, and the person in charge of the polling booths tally the votes. All the citizens are gathered around 10pm for the announcement of the results and lots of fun.

On Thursday, the oath of office is administered to the Governor and the other state officials by a real Michigan Judge in an Inauguration Ceremony on the east steps of the State Capitol Building. Upon their return to MSU, a picnic lunch is served, and then their government goes to work.

A "Press Association" is formed early in the week. A reporter is selected to represent each ALA Girls State City, and their first meeting is on Sunday evening. They elect a "City Desk Editor" and have daily meetings to receive assignments for the day. In addition to covering news from their city, they are assigned to sit in on State Central Committee meetings, Special Interest Group meetings, Planning Commission meetings, meetings of the House of Representatives, Senate, City Council Meetings, etc. In 2015 we transformed our daily newspaper "*Politically Speaking*" that was published daily. We now report the news using the same digital tools that current radio, television and newspaper reporters are using. We have gone totally digital!

Delegates may take part in the Girls State Choir and/or try out for the talent show, which takes place on Friday evening. This program is followed by a Vespers service for all citizens. After they return they may have a farewell party in their city.

During the week, contests for art, poetry and short stories are open to all citizens. These must be done during the week of Girls State not before, and special guidelines are followed.

On Friday evening, 6 to 8 citizens are selected to be interviewed for selection to be one of Michigan's Girls State "Senators" to attend Girls Nation that is held in Washington, DC in July. This program is similar to Girls State, but is based on the federal level of government. Nominees are recommended by judicial and county advisors with some input from city counselors. Two delegates and two alternate delegates are selected. All nominees are announced at the Award Ceremony on Saturday and the Delegates and Alternates selected are presented to the citizens.

Our closing ceremony is held on Saturday afternoon. Awards are given for citizenship, and judicial excellence, as well as excellence in music, writing, and art.

The Governor is asked to give a report to the American Legion Auxiliary membership at an upcoming State Convention, or Fall Conference, and is invited to the next Girls State session to speak to the new citizens. The two ALA Girls Nation "Senators" are asked to return to the next Girls State session to also speak. Many of the Senators return as City counselors.

It is the hope of all the members of the American Legion Auxiliary that the young women who attend Michigan American Legion Auxiliary Girls State will become future leaders through their experiences in this program.

When Citizens return from their week at American Legion Auxiliary Girls State they are encouraged to contact their sponsor and thank them for the opportunity to attend. They may be invited to attend a meeting, or write a letter to report about their week at ALA Girls State.

Interested in joining the American Legion Auxiliary? Check out the Membership Opportunities folder on your CD for applications to the American Legion Auxiliary, American Legion and the Sons of the American Legion. Get your family to join our American Legion family!

The American Legion Auxiliary Michigan Girls State Committee hopes you enjoy your experiences at ALA Girls State!