



THE VETERANS MEMORIAL CENTER

# COUNCIL COURIER

Space Coast Honors Non-Profit of the Year 2024

JANUARY 2025



A Publication of the Brevard Veterans Council & Veterans Memorial Center



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### Gold Star Family Christmas Tree

On December 1, 2024, we celebrated the trimming of the Brevard Gold Star Family Christmas Tree, a tradition in Brevard for 12 years.  
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# Wreaths Across America Ceremony

*This year, WAA distributed 3.43 million wreaths to over 4,100 locations across the United States*

*Read more on page 8.*

JANUARY 2025

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\*December Courier Correction:  
 On pg 14 under the Women Veterans Outreach and Support Article – the last 3 paragraphs should be attributed to Donn Weaver; the picture and Donn’s article represent Their Voice of Hope only, not the VMC Committee.

The Courier is a monthly publication prepared and distributed in both print and electronic forms by the VMC/BVC. It reports the ongoing projects by the many committees and departments.

Articles for submission and request for advertisement must be sent to the address listed below. The deadline is the 25th of each month.

Please send submissions to:  
 brevardvmc@gmail.com

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## Our Organization

As of 20 December 2024:  
[List of Board 2024-2025](#)

As of 30 October 2024:  
[BVMC Committee Departments 2024-2025](#)

As of 28 July 2024:  
[BVC VMC Org Chart 2024-2025](#)



### Mission Statement

**Brevard Veterans Council:** The Brevard Veterans Council (BVC) is a 501(c)19 veterans organization. BVC’s mission is to work in conjunction with area veterans, local government, and other veterans’ organizations to support and promote the interests and welfare of Brevard County veterans and their families.

**Veterans Memorial Center:** The Veterans Memorial Center (VMC) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. VMC’s mission is to maintain and operate a premier facility to educate the public and provide a vibrant memorial to the service and sacrifice of all military veterans and their families through a museum, memorial plaza, library, and veterans park.

**Brevard Veterans Council, Inc. & Veterans Memorial Center, Inc.**  
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 Merritt Island, FL 32952-3547  
 Office 321-453-1776  
 DAV Service Office 321-452-1774



# VMC President's Report

**LCDR Dean Schaaf, USN (Ret)**

I want to wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year and hope you all have a great holiday season with friends and family! Susan and I will celebrate Christmas in Florida with Charles and Christina and head to Allen, Texas to spend time with our daughter Ashely and our two grandchildren, Penny and Piper!

We ended the year with Merritt Island's 2nd annual Holiday Illuminations event at the Veterans Memorial Center Plaza and parking lot to light our Christmas tree. We had thirty vendors turn out to promote a Christmas Market with six food trucks and the ever popular rock band HOT PINK. Inside the Museum we had our fifth annual Gold Star Family Christmas tree on display. See CAMI's article in this edition for more information.

Remember, the Cocoa Beach Regional Chamber of Commerce held their annual Space Coast HONORS awards program in September and the Veterans Memorial Center was honored as the Non-Profit Business of the Year for 2024. That is a testament to all of our volunteers that make the BVMC such a wonderful place. We could not do it without all of your efforts. Bravo Zulu (Navy talk for a job well done).

Ten thousand six hundred wreaths were placed on Veteran's graves on December 14th during the Wreaths Across America event at the Cape Canaveral National Cemetery. Wreaths were also placed at Pinecrest Cemetery in Cocoa on December 15, honoring Medal of Honor recipient Emory Bennet and all deceased veterans, Gold Star Families, and First Responders. Kudos to Dorothy Walsh for organizing this event.

January is a slow month for events being held at the BVMC, but there is much to look forward to in 2025. Our next two big events are a car show fundraiser held by Back Brevard Heros and our annual celebration of the Last Naval Battle of the Revolutionary War that was fought four hundred miles off the coast of Cape Canaveral.

One milestone that the center reached this year is the long awaited addition of an amphitheater to our amazing park. Ivey's Construction is well underway on the project that will add many upgrades to our park. The length of construction is right at 365 days, but we are confident that the construction can be completed in a shorter time. Our challenge is to have it ready for Veterans Day 2025!

We close out this year in good standing as an organization and I want to thank all who volunteer and sacrifice to make the BVMC the premier park that it is becoming. I am proud to be your President.

God bless our fallen heroes, MIAs, and POWs and God bless our armed forces.

Dean

NAVY beat ARMY and took the Commander-in-Chief's Trophy!  
Navy leads 63 - 55 - 7 in the series!

## VMC/BVC CONTACTS

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[WEBSITE](#)  
[YOUTUBE](#)





## Council Report

**Don Pearsall,  
Chairman  
USA (Fmr)**

It is surprising how fast this year went. We are moving right along to becoming one organization. Now, I'm not wishing for me to be out of a job, but we all realize it is for the best. Our Treasurer Dave Clayton has been working preparing the official paperwork with the IRS, Sunbiz, and the county. Assistant chairman Jim Carleton is busy with the governess committee merging and drafting some changes to our bylaws. Next comes to approval stage. The board of directors, then the general membership get to review the bylaw changes, the transition plan, and how they may affect the future election cycles. Many may not know, or understand the transition plan, so I am planning to have a question and answer period at the January general membership meeting to address any questions or concerns our membership has.

Excluding any legal issues that may arise, we should be able to be one organization earlier than expected. Mary Ellen Donner the current Director of Brevard County Parks and Recreation is retiring and Ian Golden is replacing her, so he is also present at the meetings. We wish to thank Mary Ellen for all the great work she has done for the VMC over the years. Dean, Dave and I will be the negotiators for any new contract issues, although at this point there seems to be none, or very few. When the BVC dissolves, all their committees will be under the direction of the new Brevard Veterans Memorial Center, along with any assets we now have.

Another note, Myself, Dean and Donn have been meeting weekly with Ivey Construction the general contractor for the new amphitheater. The meetings include their progress and the plans for the following weeks activities. We are happy to meet with them so we are in the loop of information. As always Excomm is always available to address any questions or issues you may have.

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## Chaplain's Corner

**Chaplain Chip  
Hanson  
USMC (Fmr)**

2024 is finally in the rear-view mirror.

Remember to keep in contact with all your Local, State and National leaders. (a lot) express your opinion through social media, letters to the editor in your newspaper and other outlets. Keep in constant contact with all your local, State and National Representatives. It is very important that any changes you want or need must be done through legal and peaceful ways.

As in the song Auld Lang Syne (the song we sing every New year) states, time goes by.

"Auld Lang Syne" was originally a Scottish poem that was later set to music. The phrase "auld lang syne" translates literally to "old long since" in English and means something akin to "times gone by."

Should old acquaintance be forgot, and never brought to mind?  
Should old acquaintance be forgot, and old lang syne?

CHORUS: For auld lang syne, my dear, for auld lang syne,  
we'll take a cup of kindness yet, for auld lang syne.

And surely, you'll buy your pint cup! and surely, I'll buy mine!  
And we'll take a cup o' kindness yet, for auld lang syne.

CHORUS

We two have run about the slopes, and picked the daisies fine;  
But we've wandered many a weary foot, since auld lang syne.

CHORUS

We two have paddled in the stream, from morning sun till dine;  
But seas between us broad have roared since auld lang syne.

CHORUS

And there's a hand my trusty friend! And give me a hand o' thine!  
And we'll take a right good-will draught, for auld lang syne.

"For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope." Jeremiah 29:11

HAPPY NEW YEAR  
Chaplain Chip Hanson





# Secretary's Report

## Kristi Blanchard USA (Fmr)

Happy New Year! Taking a moment to say specifically to women veterans, if you have stayed away from the VA in the past, I encourage you to give it another try as I've seen a tremendous improvement in the last two years in their support of women specific services. In that spirit, please see the information below about the upcoming virtual event being hosted by the VA for women veterans.

Here's the link to sign-up: <https://events.gcc.teams.microsoft.com/event/bbf82b54-e14d-4af1-8f30-3e6a74b376a7@e95f1b23-abaf-45ee-821d-b7ab251ab3bf>

Working together with The Fire Watch to end veteran suicide, we'll do an event in February to train more individuals about suicide prevention. So, for those who prefer face-to-face, this is your opportunity to help us become a Veteran Safe Place.

Please give of your time in the new year for veteran causes. We are in need of volunteers at the VMC and our many partners also need volunteers. It can be a few hours or hundreds of hours, but the key is being present. I would like to thank all of you who support our veterans throughout the year through your support of the Brevard Veteran's Memorial Center. In the picture, there's a sample of the many cell phones donated that are recycled to benefit veterans.



Look forward to seeing you in 2025!



Join us for the **Women Veterans Virtual Learning Lounge: Live Whole Health**, an empowering and informative online event dedicated to supporting the health and well-being of women Veterans. This virtual gathering will provide valuable insights into the comprehensive VA healthcare services available for women Veterans. Attendees will better understand the VA Whole Health approach, which emphasizes personalized, proactive, and patient-driven care.

The event will occur on Thursday, January 16, 2024, from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. **To register today, please click [here](#). Don't delay—space is limited!**

**Event Highlights:**

- **VA Health Care Services:** Discover the range of health care services tailored to meet the unique needs of women Veterans, ensuring they receive the highest quality of care and support.
- **VA Whole Health:** Learn about the VA Whole Health model, a holistic approach to health that focuses on what matters most to each Veteran and promotes overall well-being and resilience.
- **Applying for VA Medical Benefits:** Get step-by-step guidance on how to apply for VA's comprehensive medical benefits package, designed to provide robust support and coverage.

Choosing VA means getting everything you need in one spot. See why more than 90 percent of Veterans trust the VA for their health care. Even if you don't need care today, you may need it tomorrow, the next day, or 30 years from now. And once you're in, you have access for life.

**VA is here for you.**

- Get information on VA care, benefits, and services: 1-800-MyVA411 (1-800-698-2411)
- Veterans Crisis Line: 988 and press 1, Chat or Text 838255
- Vet Centers: 1-877-927-8387
- Homeless Veteran Resources: 1-877-424-3838 or Chat
- Women Veterans Call Center: 855-VAWomen (1-855-829-6636)
- VISN 8 Clinical Contact Center – 24/7/365 Virtual Urgent & Emergent Care: 1-877-741-3400



## VMC Librarian Report

Hank Rhodes  
USN (Fmr)

In keeping with January as a time of new beginnings, we are commemorating the American Revolution this month, as that conflict encompasses the inception of our great nation.

It is worth noting that between the initial battle at Lexington (Massachusetts) and the climatic Siege of Yorktown (Virginia), six and a half years elapsed. At no point in that long expanse of time was the American victory assured. Indeed, every triumph was matched by a defeat.

Throughout the struggle, but especially at the lowest ebb of the patriot's fortunes, they were no doubt painfully aware that a lost war would cost them their well-being, their freedom, and possibly their lives. Even after the victory at Yorktown, another two years elapsed before American independence was recognized when the Treaty of Paris formally ended the war.

The tenacity that shepherded the United States into existence is a wonder for the ages. We are forever in debt to those who fought on to victory.

Going forward into 2025, the Library team will continue to provide the highest level of service to our varied customer base.

Specific goals:

- Revitalize the Veterans History Project
- Reinitiate the Discussion Group series on the last Tuesday of the month.
- Repeat selected presentations at alternate times as the need arises.
- Continue improvements to catalog organization.
- Improve dissemination of the photo archive.
- Complete a major project of revising Standard Operating Procedures for continuous improvement.

See you in 2025, fellow patriots!

## Book Report: "None Braver: U.S. Air Force Pararescuemen in the War on Terrorism" by Michael Hirsch

### Book Report by Jim Pirotti

"Leave no man behind!" is the motto of the Air Force's elite para-rescue unit. That phrase says it all!

These are the men and women who commit themselves to sacrificing their lives to save others if necessary. There is no greater effort to be made on or off the field of battle.

The training that pararescuemen receive is often as good or better than some emergency trauma units in big hospitals. Motivated beyond belief, the physical and mental challenges are as grueling and demanding as any to be found in the military, including many foreign and partner nations.

The services pararescuemen render are provided by need and necessity, not politics or other factors. They are renegades within the service but receive their due respect from all ranks and ratings for the way they perform their duties. This is because "It's their biscuits that these folks are going to pull out of the fire, and they know it".

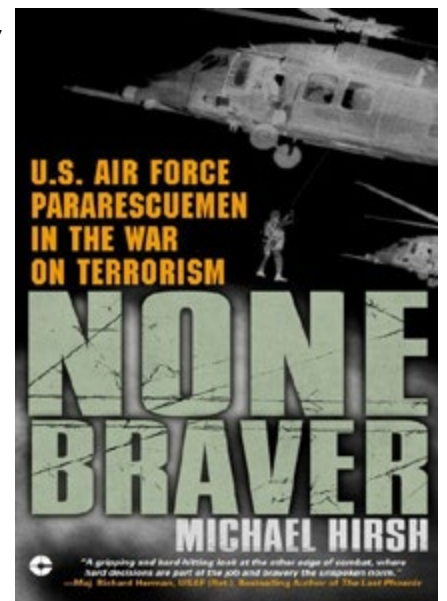
The author cites five different events and the details around them. Pararescuemen are human and each story brings a different perspective to how they perform their duties. When mistakes occur, they are noted and hopefully corrected.

As one example, the selection of a non-combat officer to command special force operations may not rank among the best decisions ever made but that is for the reader to decide.

The author is a journalist who embedded with the 71st Rescue Squadron, homebased at Moody AFB in Georgia, during a deployment to an undisclosed location in Central Asia.

This book provides a glimpse into a small but very significant component within the Air Force.

"None Braver" is found in the VMC Library as War On Terror-46.



# Park and Plaza Report

## By Donn Weaver

Hope you all enjoyed a very Merry Christmas and look forward, as do I, to a very special New Year. As the year ends there has been great news related to the Ivey-led construction project for the Amphitheater and many other upgrades in our Park, and that also links to our Memorial Tree and Bench Programs.

**PARK:** By the end of December major new road clearing, earth moving and fill dirt with over 100 truckloads had arrived. The BVMC leadership meets with Ivey's Construction and County Officials weekly in their onsite trailer so we can stay up to date and weigh in where appropriate on the progress and plans. Check out some pictures of the trailer and Park taken in late December. We are also working with the mall and partners that plan many Park events in the year ahead as we work around the construction site — about one third of the Park - and its impact on parking and staging for other events,

**TREES:** The project includes irrigation for limited sections of the Park including the area around the ponds that will include up to 35 memorial Florida live oak trees and the Merritt Island and Gold Star Family Community Christmas Tree. Once the irrigation is in, the trees can be planted, and we hope to have a dedication ceremony for all Memorial Tree donors next Fall when the project is completed. We have 23 Memorial Trees and signs already purchased.

**BENCHES:** We now have 13 of the “forever” benches around the Museum which are slated for the Park after the upgrades. Eight of them are directly linked to memorial trees and will be placed nearby. The other benches will go into the Park are around the Plaza for all to enjoy and read about those who are honored by the benches, trees and bricks. Two such benches are already in position at the Allied and Vietnam monuments in the Plaza.

**PLAZA:** The quarterly maintenance and repainting of sections of the Plaza made it special for our Veterans Day as well as for the 14 December Illumination Ceremonies. As noted, before, we can all be proud of our Memorial Plaza.

**BRICKS:** Six bricks were added to the Plaza in December, including one for the Gulf War Monument area and one for the Vietnam Helicopter area which “attaches” to the Dr. Richard Elmore Bench under the Huey Helicopter. More FIT students and friends of Professor Elmore (a Vietnam War Dust Off helicopter pilot and Dean Emeritus of the FIT Graduate Psychology Department who has trained hundreds of grad students) are expected to order bricks in that area.

We are still looking for one more member of the Plaza, Bricks, Trees, Benches Committee to join in these missions. The Committee now includes Wayne Fried, Doug Bisset, Dave Clayton, Dean Schaaf and Donn Weaver. Please contact any member if you are interested in helping in 2025.



### VMC Library Discussion Group Series

### "The Strategic Triad"

By Bill Ellis

Tuesday, January 28, 2025, 6:00-7:30pm



The strategic triad is a military force structure that consists of 3 types of nuclear delivery vehicles:

- **Intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs):** Launched from land
- **Submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs):** Launched from submarines
- **Nuclear-capable heavy bombers:** Launched from the air

There has been much discussion about the continuing cost-effectiveness of the strategic triad, which is a Cold War concept. With Russia resurgent and China rising as a peer competitor, these discussions are now more critical than at any time in recent decades.

During his US Air Force service, Bill was a missileer and a program manager in strategic systems.

This presentation is open to the public and will be held at  
 The Library, Brevard Veterans Memorial Center,  
 400 S Sykes Creek Pkwy, Merritt Island, FL



# Wreaths Across America: 2024 Ceremony at Cape Canaveral National Cemetery

By Donn Weaver

On a rainy Saturday in December, more than 2,500 people gathered to “Remember, Honor, and Teach” during the Wreaths Across America (WAA) Ceremony and Wreath Laying at Cape Canaveral National Cemetery (CCNC). Through yearlong fundraising efforts, WAA/CCNC successfully raised enough funds to purchase 10,400 wreaths from the Maine WAA headquarters, ensuring that every eligible in-ground gravesite was covered on December 14, 2024. This event marked the largest ceremony and public gathering at CCNC since its opening in 2016.

Major sponsors collaborated to cover the ceremony’s costs. The event was led by Bette Nelson, WAA CCNC Location Coordinator, and Donn Weaver, WAA Deputy. Sponsors and donors such as MOAACC’s Good Deeds Foundation, Rolling Thunder FL Chapter 1, AFTAC, Waste Management, American Legion Posts 285 and Aux 242, VFW Post 3991, and others were recognized alongside the CCNC team, led by Director Cindy VanBibber. More than 800 WAA volunteers also contributed to the event’s success.

This year, WAA distributed 3.43 million wreaths to over 4,100 locations across the United States, including 100,000 wreaths sent to France for the WWII Cemetery. WAA’s journey began in 1992 with the Morrill Worcester family of Maine, who donated wreaths to Arlington National Cemetery (ANC). In 2005, a photo of snow-covered wreaths at ANC went viral, sparking a surge in donations to support WAA’s mission. Since then, the program has expanded yearly, emphasizing its threefold mission: Remember every veteran by name, Honor their service and sacrifice (including their families), and Teach younger generations about their contributions.

The 2024 CCNC ceremony featured hundreds of children and young adults from organizations such as the Sea Cadets, Civil Air Patrol, Space Coast High School JROTC, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and others. The program included RADM Wayne Justice, USCG (Ret.), as the keynote speaker, along with Chaplain Chip Hanson, Rachel Smith singing the National Anthem, Linda Clark playing Taps, and remarks by VanBibber, Nelson, and Weaver.

Wreaths were placed during the ceremony to honor veterans from all branches of the military. This year’s honorees included:

Doug Bisset, US Army  
 Jim Carleton, US Marine Corps  
 Dave Clayton, US Navy  
 Rick Kniseley, USAF  
 Capt. Trevor Schneider, US Space Force (Active Duty)  
 Dan McIntyre, US Coast Guard  
 LCDR Dimitri Wiener, USCG (Active Duty, representing Merchant Marines)  
 Steve Fritz, Rolling Thunder (POW/MIA Representative)  
 About 10 minutes before the 10:00 AM ceremony began, a hard,

cold rain stopped, and the sun emerged, shining for the next two hours as the ceremony and wreath-laying unfolded. Many attendees noted this as a symbolic reminder of the enduring effort to remember and honor veterans, extending beyond the five counties served by CCNC.

To learn more about WAA/CCNC, donate wreaths, or volunteer for future events, visit the WAA National website and link to CCNC at [www.wreathscrossamerica.org/FL0320P](http://www.wreathscrossamerica.org/FL0320P).

Additionally, the Trees and Benches Committee continues to support these missions. Members include Wayne Fried, Doug Bisset, Dave Clayton, Dean Schaaf, and Donn Weaver. If you are interested in assisting with the 2025 initiatives, please contact any committee member.



Wreath Layers prepare. All Wreath presenters were escorted by LTC Hans Hunt, USA Ret and member of the Sons of the American Revolution dressed in colonial attire.



Bette Nelson with WAA Ashley Furniture Driver who has been bringing wreaths from Maine for six years





# A Note from the Desk of BVC Vice-Chairman

Jim Carleton

A note for the Courier from the desk of the BVC Vice Chairman.

As you all know, the new year holds a lot of great things that will be coming our way. The amphitheater will be an outstanding addition to the park area. We will also be integrating the Brevard Veterans Council and the Veterans Memorial Center into a new organization called the Brevard Veterans Memorial Center, Inc., a 501 (c)(3) non-profit corporation. By the combination of the two groups, we will be eliminating the confusion that exists as to who is responsible and to who does what in the future.

To that end, the Governance Review Committee has been working on a new set of by-laws for the integrated organization. The work involved with this task is to capture the best and most important parts of the existing by-laws of each of the individual organizations into a single document. A draft has been created and a discussion of the go forward direction was evaluated at an early December EXCOMM meeting. EXCOMM 's interests and concerns were incorporated into the draft. This is an important step in the transformation of our organizations into a new, streamlined, and efficient operation for 2025 and beyond. The plan for the new by-laws is for the draft to be presented to the Board of Directors for their review in January and after their review and resolution of comments and concerns to be presented at a subsequent General Membership meeting. It will then be up to all of us to support the review and give our opinion to make the BVMC the most exceptional veterans support organization in the state, or better yet the country.

I see a bright future for the Brevard Veterans Memorial Center. Let's get engaged together in support of our veterans. Hope to see you all soon. Happy New Year, Semper Fi, JC



1989 article featuring Vietnam veterans raising funds for Merritt Island's Veterans Memorial Park. Pictured: Mario Rabaina, Jim Carleton, and Bobby Smith."

**321-507-0873**  
 1365 N. Courtenay Pkwy, Unit C,  
 Merritt Island FL 32953

# Brevard SAR Helps Students Remember the American Revolution

By Donn Weaver

All veteran organizations have missions that include supporting our youth. On 3 December the Brevard Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) presented a major textbook (1776) on the history of our battle against the British to Superintendent Mark Rendell and his staff at the Brevard Public Schools main building.

The 17 copies will be placed in every high school via the Social Studies Department Chairs. Doug Bisset (I) of SAR, MOAACC and VMC and Donn Weaver with those same memberships, represented all SAR members in this program. The event was publicized on BPS Facebook and in their Legacy Newsletter to parents and other school supporters. With the 250th anniversary of our Declaration of Independence coming up, the educators welcomed the addition of a major history book which reads like a novel.



# Brevard County Honors Veterans - WAA

By Don Pearsall

On Sunday, December 15th, a moving tribute and ceremony were held at Pinecrest Cemetery in Cocoa to honor the gravesite of Medal of Honor recipient Emory Bennett. The solemn event was hosted by Dorothy Walsh, President of Their Voice of Hope and head of the Brevard County Honors Veterans - Wreaths Across America (WAA) Program.

In addition to the National Cemetery in Scottsmoor, Brevard County is home to 83 private, municipal, or church-owned cemeteries where hundreds of veterans are interred. This year, Brevard County Honors Veterans coordinated ceremonies at 19 cemeteries and memorial gardens across the county. This effort, supported by the Brevard County Property Appraiser's Office, Brevard Federated Republican Women, American Legion Posts 200 and 22, VFW Post 8191, and several chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution, ensured that veterans were remembered and honored during the weekend of December 14-15.

Wreaths Across America has recognized Brevard County as having the largest contingent of Location Coordinators in the country. Each veteran in the Brevard-based program is honored twice a year: once on Memorial Day with American flags and again before Christmas with wreaths.

Their Voice of Hope, a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to assisting women veterans, plays a significant role in this effort. The organization's mission is expanding rapidly, reflecting the growing population of women in the military, who now make up 12% of active service members and eventually transition to civilian life as veterans. The Christmas Wreaths program is just one of Their Voice of Hope's many initiatives.

Additional programs offered include standard yoga, chair yoga for those with disabilities, healing through art, equine health and wellness, a buddy program, individual case management, monthly

luncheons, and other social gatherings. These programs foster camaraderie and provide critical support for women veterans, helping them build friendships and address shared experiences.

At Pinecrest Cemetery on Clearlake Road, flags and wreaths adorned the graves of veterans. This program, separate from the National Cemeteries initiative, was conducted with special permission from the National Wreaths Across America office to host a local ceremony on December 15th.

Wreaths Across America, a non-profit founded in 2007 by wreath producer Morrill Worcester, works with veterans and truckers to distribute wreaths for placement at National Cemeteries across the country. The organization's motto—Remember, Honor, Teach—was brought to life at this year's event, where youth participants learned the importance of placing wreaths, saying the veteran's name, and thanking them for their service.



Dorothy Walsh (above left) President of Their Voice of Hope Looks on with Lacey Homan Col. Retired as wreaths are placed



# From Community Advocacy for Merritt Island (CAMI)

By VMC President Dean Schaaf

Merritt Island was aglow with festive cheer on December 14, 2024, during the 2nd Annual Holiday Illumination Celebration at the Brevard Veteran's Memorial Center. The event was hosted by Community Advocacy for Merritt Island (CAMI) and the Brevard Veteran's Memorial Center (BVMC), with sponsorship from Triangle Auto and Tire, Launch Credit Union, and 4Ever Young Anti-Aging Solutions. This Florida-style winter festival was a highlight of the local holiday season on Merritt Island.

An estimated 1,500 attendees enjoyed an afternoon and evening filled with activities, entertainment, shopping, food, and holiday spirit. The event featured live music by local artists, including HOT PINK and the Jefferson Middle School Jazz Band, while strolling carolers serenaded attendees with holiday classics. Over 500 books were distributed during three storytelling sessions with Mrs. Claus, delighting children and families alike.

The evening's most heartwarming moment came when Vice Admiral Gerry Unruh counted down to light the Merritt Island Christmas Tree, illuminating the sky over Merritt Island, symbolizing community joy and unity.

The 2nd Annual Holiday Illumination Celebration captured the spirit of the season, bringing residents and visitors together for an unforgettable experience. Merritt Island eagerly anticipates continuing this beloved tradition in the years to come. For more information, visit [www.CA4MI.com](http://www.CA4MI.com) or [communityadvocacymi@gmail.com](mailto:communityadvocacymi@gmail.com)





# AUSA Space Coast Chapter Updates



**By Vincent (Kip) Mathias  
President, Space Coast  
Chapter of AUSA**

Brevard VMC Community:

The AUSA Space Coast Chapter Executive Committee would like to wish all of you a very Happy New Year. We hope you had a safe and pleasant holiday with family and friends. Here is an update of our current and planned activities, and if you have any ideas you would like for us to do, please feel free to share them with us as we are here to serve our community of members.

We are assisting EAA Chapter 724 with reaching out to Gold Star families, disabled veterans and the families of those veterans who have lost their battle with depression specific for a free introduction to aviation. This opportunity is extended to the families of law enforcement and first responders who have sacrificed as well. EAA Chapter 724's wonderful event is on Saturday February 22, 2025, for children who are eight through the age of seventeen. This includes a presentation of aviation procedures and an opportunity to fly for FREE around Merritt Island and Port Canaveral. This is a way to honor these children who have also sacrificed along with their parents in the service to their nation and their communities. EAA Chapter 724 has flown over 9,800 children. The National EAA organization has flown 2.3 million children over the last thirty years. There is a flyer posted in this Council Courier with details on this February 22nd event.

On June 12, 2025 (Thursday) at approximately 12:00 p.m. (lunchtime) we are collaborating with Kennedy Space Center (KSC) to celebrate the Army's 250th Birthday! This is a unique opportunity for us to bring AUSA Space Coast Chapter members out to KSC to have a ceremony to do the initial honors of guest speakers, cake cutting and sing the Army Song. Afterwards, we can take 80 members and their guest on a 2-3 hour behind the scenes tour of Kennedy Space Center. In order to attend either the Army Celebration and/or the tour, you can send your and your guest's name, date of birth and country of citizenship to me at [pressc@ausa.org](mailto:pressc@ausa.org).

We are continuing our efforts to bring experts to talk more about topics affecting our Army and its transformation to remain the world's premier land fighting force. If you haven't yet checked out the December Issue of Army Magazine, it has some great articles pertaining to Army Space Operations, Aviation transformation ideas, and how Fires can be effective for use within the Space domain. We're working with the Greater Palm

Bay Chamber of Commerce to bring more Army speakers to their monthly Space Coast Alliance for Technology and Innovation (SCATI) breakfasts as well as their Space Coast Symposium for 22 August 2023.

Our next General Membership Meeting (Brevard County) is scheduled for Friday, 21 February 2025 and will be a lunch and learn event. Our scheduled guest speaker is Colonel (Retired) Kevin Vizzarri, Senior Vice President, Business Development with AVT Simulation. Kevin will be sharing the current status of issues affecting Army Aviation and its transformation efforts. The event will be held at the Brevard Veterans Memorial Center, 400 S Sykes Creek Parkway, Merritt Island, FL 32952. This event is free for all AUSA Space Coast Chapter Members but ask for you to RSVP at [pressc@ausa.org](mailto:pressc@ausa.org) no later than 14 February 2025 so we can have an accurate headcount.

We also have another General Membership Meeting (Volusia County - Daytona Beach) for Friday, 21 March 2025, which will also be a lunch and learn event with Major General (Retired) Michael S. Repass. General Repass has been involved in providing advisory services to Ukraine and Taiwan and will provide us with his insight into the current international security environment. At this time, the location is to be determined but block the date and time now.

We have been doing a lot of activities in the Daytona Beach area. We re-connected to the Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University (ERAU) Army ROTC program and LTC Jerry Reitano. We are looking forward to initiating a sub-chapter in Daytona Beach and build with our Association Members with the Army Aviation Association of America (AAAA). We also have been talking with the Daytona Beach Recruiting Company led by CPT Ardrienna (Anna) Laird, and recently had an opportunity to join with the Sunshine and First Militia Chapters at an event where we discussed with the recruiting stations in each of our geographical footprints how the AUSA Chapters can help them in their recruiting goals. We appreciate CPT Laird reaching out to us and providing us with the opportunity to serve our Army Recruiters.

As always, our Chapter needs your support! If you have some time and can help us continue to communicate to our communities what our Army needs, please join our Executive Committee. I am open to all members to hear your inputs and receive your feedback at [pressc@ausa.org](mailto:pressc@ausa.org) or 321-591-9826 (please leave a message and call back number if I cannot answer when you call).

Thank you for your membership and your support of our Army's future and current soldiers, and our veterans who have sacrificed for our beloved United States of America.

# Veterans Administration

From the VISN 8 - VA Sunshine Healthcare Network email sent on December 19, 2024



VA is committed to making it as easy as possible for Veterans to manage their benefits and health care online while protecting their identities and data. In 2025, to streamline Veterans' sign-in options, VA will transition to two modern, secure sign-in options: a Login.gov or ID.me account.

After this transition, Veterans, beneficiaries, and caregivers looking to access VA's online services (e.g., [VA.gov](https://www.va.gov), the [VA: Health and Benefits mobile app](#), and other VA online services) will need to sign in with either a Login.gov or ID.me account. Veterans and other beneficiaries will no longer be able to use usernames and passwords for My HealtheVet after January 31, 2025, or DS Logon after September 30, 2025.

VA will provide information and support throughout this transition. Veterans can begin this transition now by visiting [www.va.gov/sign-in-changes](https://www.va.gov/sign-in-changes) to learn how to create a verified Login.gov or ID.me account. The process takes about 10 minutes. Importantly, Veterans who do not transition before these deadlines will be able to resume accessing their data, benefits, and services online as soon as they create a Login.gov or ID.me account.

This transition only impacts account-based online services. Many VA webpages are accessible without signing in—such as finding information about VA locations, downloading VA forms, learning more about the PACT Act and how to file claims, and more.

## Why is VA transitioning to Login.gov or ID.me accounts?

- This transition is our response to Veterans' feedback to offer fewer sign-in account options and help reduce confusion and sign-in complexity.

- This change helps us continue to protect the security of Veterans' identities and data by ensuring that all Veterans use modern, secure accounts and have the added protection of multifactor authentication.
- Identity theft and related medical identity theft are serious issues that can cause severe financial hardship and disruption in medical care for Veterans and their families.
- In 2023, the [Federal Trade Commission \(FTC\)](#) received more than 1 million reports of identity theft. That same year, Veterans and military retirees also reported to the FTC \$350 million in losses to fraud.
- Federal policy requires VA to help all Veterans begin using a sign-in account that meets modern security standards, and that Veterans' sign-in experience is as simple as possible. gov and ID.me help us meet both these requirements.

## Actions to take—and who's affected

If you use an account to access any VA online services – including through VA's mobile app – and are not yet using Login.gov or ID.me, this change will impact you. Don't worry – there's still time to transition!

### If you:

- Already use a gov or ID.me account to access VA's online services or mobile app, you are all set and don't need to do anything additional.
- Currently use a DS Logon or My HealtheVet username and password to access VA's online services or mobile app, we encourage you to create a Login.gov or ID.me account sooner rather than later so you have time to get used to it before this change.
- Are planning to create a sign-in account for the first time this year to access VA's online services or mobile app, please create and use a Login.gov or ID.me account.
- Want to manage your VA benefits and services offline, that's not a problem. VA will continue to provide easy access to manage your VA benefits and health care in other ways, [including by phone or in-person](#).

## Learn more and get support

VA is dedicated to making sure you succeed in transitioning to a modern, secure account. We're here to support you and help you prepare.

[Learn how to create a Login.gov or ID.me account to manage VA benefits online.](#)

[Keep up to date with the latest information on the upcoming sign-in changes.](#)

Keep updated & let us know how we're doing. Sign Up to receive updates from Veterans Health. Having questions or problems? Please visit Subscriber Help for assistance.

# EAA Chapter 724 Update

By Shaun McKinney



Mike Wrazen, one of our the VMC Museum Docents won the raffle of a \$600.00 bottle of Horse Soldier Commander Select Bourbon. The bottle was signed by Mark Nutch and donated to the EAA Chapter 724 on Merritt Island to support them and their efforts to provide free aviation experiences and to honor the children of Gold Star, disabled veterans, and those veterans that lost their battle with depression and ended their own lives.

In the photo are Dwayne Waters President of EAA Chapter 724, Mike Wrazen VMC Museum Docent, and Shaun McKinney member of the VMC, EAA Chapter 724, and AUSA-Space Coast Chapter.

<https://chapters.eaa.org/ea724>

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/ausaspacecoastchapter/posts/?feedView=all>

Below is some information on Mark Hutch and as he led the Horse Soldiers very shortly after the September 11 attacks, per <https://oda-595.com/mark-nutsch>

As America's response to the attacks of September 11, 2001, then Captain Nutsch led a heroic U.S. Army Special Forces 12-man team of Green Berets, designated Operational Detachment Alpha - 595 on an impossible mission into Afghanistan. Inserted by special operations helicopter into Northern Afghanistan, working with their Central Intelligence Agency partners, they were to linkup with and unite the local Afghan armed resistance leadership factions against the Taliban and al Qaeda forces. Greatly outnumbered they spearheaded unconventional warfare operations, raised and equipped a militia army of thousands, while mounted on horseback, fighting alongside their Afghan allies and overcame seemingly insurmountable odds to achieve an unprecedented historic victory.

The "Campaign for Mazar-e Sharif" resulted in liberating the city of Mazar-e Shariff and the 6 Northern Afghanistan provinces

within a matter of weeks and is considered the catalyst for the collapse of the Taliban Regime. This is considered one of the most successful Unconventional Warfare campaigns in modern history, a victory that inspired our nation and the peoples of Afghanistan; changed the course of a country and the world.

Mark's team of Green Beret's became known as "The Horse Soldiers". They are the design inspiration of the "America's Response Monument," a tribute to our Special Operations Forces and Intelligence Community. Featured in multiple books, museums and as a guest speaker with Kepler Speaker's Bureau. Mark, the 595 team and their families are featured in the Emmy nominated documentary film "Legion of Brothers". Mark is portrayed by actor Chris Hemsworth in the 2018 feature film entitled "12 Strong".

He deployed repeatedly with multiple combat tours to the Middle East and former Soviet Asian states. Working with the National Labs as a program manager, he led diverse collaborative teams of contract aircrew and intel analysts and conducted ground-breaking manned aerial wide area counter-network surveillance efforts.

Mark, Bob, and their former SF teammates and business partners, now operate a veteran owned, craft distillery brand, American Freedom Distillery in St. Petersburg, FL featuring their premium award-winning, Horse Soldier Bourbon.

Source: <https://oda-595.com/mark-nutsch>



## ATLANTIC MUSIC CENTER

[www.atlanticmusiccenter.com](http://www.atlanticmusiccenter.com)

Brian Gatchell, Owner  
150 East Drive, Ste C | Melbourne, FL 32904  
321.725.5690



## Detachment 513 Marine Corps League

By Dennis Herring, Adjutant

I know. All the other services point to the Marine Corps and say "what makes them think they're so special". Well here's the thing. Our Corps is the smallest of all the branches and yet we have a definitive, glorious, traditional history know by nearly every American. Because of our small numbers and the very specialized training we endure, we consider every Marine to be a brother, a member of a fraternal organization much like a family. And then too, there is this "Once a Marine, Always a Marine" concept that seals the bond between each other for life.

Recently, our Marine Corps League members celebrated the birthday of Corporal George Allen. Corporal Allen was 100 years old. Imagine that! All that this Marine has been... all the history that he has lived..., all the trials and tribulations of a life well lived and at the celebration of his centennial year, active duty, Marine Corps League members, and Marines from previous enlistments came come to honor this milestone accomplishment. Why? Because our brother was "once a Marine, always a Marine".

We all, every Marine, raise our glasses in toast to this momentous accomplishment and we wish the very best to George in the future. SEMPER FIDELIS Marine. We will be here for your 101st!



## VMC Color Guard

By Don Pearsall

Our color Guard has been busy since September. We had the dedication ceremony at the new Middle school located at Stadium Parkway in Viera, then the dedication of the new Veterans Memorial Park in Cape Canaveral. After that, we had two celebrations of life at our own center. From there we presented colors at the Veterans Day parade on Merritt Island, then we had duty at our own Veterans Day Program. The following day we were invited to participate in a Veterans Day Tribute at a local Merritt Island church.

Finally, now a break which we give us time to hone our skills and work in other aspects of honors such as funeral guards, flag folding and marching. Anyone wishing to be a part of this team please call Don Pearsall at (321) 313-2444.



## Veterans Helping Veterans: VMC and MOAACC Come Through

By Donn Weaver

Over the Holidays NVHS provided two-night Christmas hotel rooms, food and gifts for the kids to Brevard Veterans and their families who were at grave risk. The Florida Chapter of US Army OCS provided \$2200 to help that mission. FLOCSAA is based at VMC, and most members are also members of MOAACC.

So, once again, veterans teamed up to help other veterans. Pictured is Rob McCall, OCSAA FL State Commander and VMC/MOAACC Member and Donn Weaver, Vice Commander presenting the money on 05 Dec, in time for the holidays, to NVHS Community Outreach Coordinator Kasey Corson. Talk about a good feeling.



## Gold Star Family Christmas Tree: A Community Unites to Never Forget

By Donn Weaver

On December 1, 2024, we celebrated the trimming of the Brevard Gold Star Family Christmas Tree, a tradition in Brevard for 12 years. Initially displayed at Merritt Square Mall during the holidays, the tree has been showcased at the Military Museum in the Veterans Memorial Center (VMC) since 2020. While the mall drew more visitors, the museum setting offers a reflective space to focus on its profound meaning.

Special thanks to Rolling Thunder FL-1 for donating the original tree nine years ago; VFW 10131 in Cape Canaveral for contributing new ornaments two years ago; American Legion AUX Unit 344 for a handmade Gold Star ornament; and MOPH Chapter 453 for funding this year's new tree after the original required replacement. The current tree honors 27 Brevard fallen military members, each represented by a personalized wooden Gold Star featuring their name, service branch, and photo. These service members, who made the ultimate sacrifice from WWII to the War on Terror, remind us of the ancient Greek saying: "A soldier never dies, unless he is forgotten."

Thank you to the VMC for hosting this meaningful display. Looking ahead, we hope to expand this tradition with a Community Outdoor Christmas Tree in the VMC Park, continuing the Gold Star family mission indoors and outdoors.



Pictured after the tree was adorned are Don and Dorothy Pearsall (l) and Jeanne and Donn Weaver





## Bok Tower Gardens

BIG KID ADVENTURE SERIES

951 KIWANIS ISLAND PARK ROAD, MERRITT ISLAND, FL 32952

**TUESDAY, JANUARY 14, 2025 | 8:00 AM - 6:00 PM**

**\$30.00 PER PERSON (FEE DOES NOT INCLUDE COST OF FOOD OR DRINKS)**

Bok Tower Gardens and the El Retiro Mansion located in Lake Wales, Polk County Florida.

Nestled in the heart of seven and a half lush acres at Bok Tower Gardens is a 20-room Mediterranean-style mansion that transports visitors back in time to the 1930's, a distinctive period in American history.

Originally named "El Retiro," meaning "retreat" in Spanish, the home was built for Charles Austin Buck, a Bethlehem Steele executive. To preserve this architectural, cultural, and historic landmark, El Retiro was added to the Natural Register of Historic Places in 1985. Also, Blue Palmetto Café and gift shop on site.

For more information or to register, please call Delinda Griffiths (321)633-1874.



## Valentine's Day Luncheon Cruise

BIG KID ADVENTURE SERIES

951 KIWANIS ISLAND PARK ROAD, MERRITT ISLAND, FL 32952

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2025 | 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM**

**\$85.00 PER PERSON (FEE INCLUDES FULL MEAL WITH CRUISE)**

Spend Valentine's Day aboard the "Barbara Lee" for a 3-hour luncheon cruise on the St. John's River.

Boarding for the Valentine's Day Cruise begins at 10:30a.m. A full meal from appetizer to dessert will be served with seven different entrée selections. A full cash bar will also be available (*not included*). Lunch will be served on the top deck which has stairs to access. We suggest wearing comfortable shoes and a light jacket. Cruise the St. Johns River and enjoy one of Florida's natural treasures.

For more information or to make reservations, please call Delinda Griffiths (321)633-1874.



Brevard County Parks and Recreation  
Central Area Operations  
840 Forrest Avenue, Cocoa, FL 32922  
www.brevardparks.com



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### YOUNG EAGLES FLIGHT RALLY

Sponsored by EAA Chapter 724, Merritt Island Airport

**For Children and Grandchildren (8 Through 17 Years Old) of:**

#### Military:

- Gold Star Families
- Critically Wounded Service Personnel
- Those Who Lost Their Battle With Depression

#### Law Enforcement & First Responders:

- Killed in the Line of Duty
- Critically Wounded in the Line of Duty
- Those Who Lost Their Battle With Depression

**Cost: Free Flight and Aviation Intro**  
**Date: February, 22, 2025**

**FAA Approved Aircraft & Licensed Pilots**  
**Each Seat on Each Aircraft is Insured**

**Location: Merritt Island Airport**  
**900 Airport Rd.**  
**Merritt Island, FL 32952**  
**"Follow The Signs at the Gate"**

Bring your camera!

**Parents or Guardians Must Register Online Starting Feb 8, 2025:**

<https://youngeaglesday.org/?12312> The Young Eagles Coordinator is: Don White, 321-266-7410

The permission forms must be signed in ink and brought to the event by the parent or legal guardian. Photocopies cannot be accepted. Your Child's name and flight will be entered into <https://www.eaa.org/eaayouth/free-ye-flights/eaayoung-eagles-logbook> so that they may review it for many years.

#### Background:

Began in 1992, with 2.3 million children flown to date. Originally conceived to introduce 1.0 million children to aviation before the Wright Brothers 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of flight. It has continued on after 31 years. Past Honorary National Chairpersons have been: General Chuck Yeager, Actor and Aviator Harrison Ford, And Captain "Sully" Sullenberger of the "Miracle on the Hudson" fame.

*Also: All participating families are formally invited to the Brevard County Military Museum, 400 S. Sykes Creek Parkway, Merritt Island, FL 32952. The Director is Mr. Donn Weaver, 757-871-6576, VP VMC and Gold Star Coordinator.*

Support by Association of the United States Army, Space Coast Chapter:

<https://www.usa.org/chapters/space-coast-chapter>

<https://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=usa%20space%20coast>



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- Business Card: \$50 per year
- Quarter Page Color: \$150 per year
- Half Page Color: \$250 per year

Our emailed newsletter reaches hundreds, including vet organizations, government officials, 500 VMC members and more.

Ads are in support of the VMC, a 501(c)3 organization, and may be tax deductible. Funds will be used to improve the Courier and expand circulation in 2023 and beyond.



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Also read it at [www.seniorscenemag.com](http://www.seniorscenemag.com)

**Pick up your FREE copy at the places you visit most!**



# Vietnam War Exhibit & Education Center



## Brevard County's

**“Newest”**

## Military Exhibit

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**“Across from Grills Restaurant”**



**2475 Jen Drive #5, Melbourne, FL.**

**vietnamwarexhibit.com – Fb: Vietnam War Exhibit**





# Unofficial Brevard VMC Vets Calendar January 2025 and Beyond

Contact VMC for any additions or other information.

NOTE: Some events change in between our monthly mailing of the VMC Calendar. Keep up to date with those changes using our web link: <https://veteransmemorialcenter.org/upcoming-veterans-events/>

The VMC museum and library will be closed on New Year's Eve (Dec 31, 2024) and New Year's Day (Jan 1, 2025).

## JANUARY

**1-3 Jan - Kirk Clear, 3802 Maidencane Ct, Melbourne** in the Pineda Crossing subdivision, located behind the Home Depot on Wickham Rd. Open from 1800 - 2230 until January 3, 2025 with a collection box with proceeds to the BREVARDS VETERANS MEMORIAL CENTER!! [https://youtu.be/t0K\\_bIMyQj0](https://youtu.be/t0K_bIMyQj0)

**10-11 Jan – Palm Bay JROTC Air Rifle Commanders Cup Match**, PM Friday; 0800-1200 Saturday at Palm Bay Jr/Sr HS.

**26 Jan – Salute to Service Opening Ceremony** at the Challenge Cup National Softball Tournament, Space Coast Stadium in Viera 1500- 1730. Features honoring veterans and first responders as a weeklong tournament of slow pitch softball teams from across the country begins. Sponsored by USSSA, FAVOB, BCSO and many more. Vendor tents welcome. Opening game between FHP/BCSO/Brevard Fire combined Team and PSFB Veterans and Active-Duty Military. Special BCSO flyover, Rolling Thunder Bike Parade on warning track, ceremonial first pitch and much more. Contact Donn Weaver, VMC, 757-871-6576 for more information.

**28 Jan -- BVMC Library Discussion Series. 1800 - 1930.** The presentation will be: "The Strategic Triad" by Bill Ellis. There has been much discussion about the continuing cost-effectiveness of the strategic triad, which is a Cold War concept. With Russia resurgent and China rising as a peer competitor, these discussions are now more critical than at any time in recent decades. During his US Air Force service, Bill was a missileer and a program manager in strategic systems.

## FEBRUARY

**Feb (Date TBD) – Free Eighth Annual Every Day** is Veterans Day Event at Space Coast Center for Collaboration 1100 Rockledge Ave, US Rte 1, Rockledge. Celebrate veterans with food, drinks and many informational booths. Sponsored by

One Senior Place. Call 321-251-6771 to register as a vendor or RSVP for attendance.

**01 Feb – County wide JROTC Air Rifle Run and Shoot Competition** at VMC Memorial Park. 0700-1200. Hosted by Satellite HS JROTC.

**02 Feb – Annual Ceremony to Commemorate** the Immortal Four Chaplains of WWII. VMC Plaza 1400-1500. Marine Corps League and VMC Sponsors and Presenters.

**15 Feb – Annual Commemoration of the WWII Bataan Death March** at VMC Park 0700-1100. Air Force and Space Force JROTC units only come together for a long ruck March to remember this tragic chapter in American military history and reflect on the sacrifice of our prisoners of war.

**22 Feb – Young Eagles Flight Rally for kids and grandkids** 8-12 from Gold Star, Wounded Veteran and similar First Responder Families 0900-1200. Merritt Island Airport S. Courtney Road entrance with signs to the EAA Hangar. EAA organization and pilots are the Sponsors. Free Flights for the kids selected in FAA approved aircraft. Parents or Guardians must register online starting 08 Feb. Contact Donn Weaver 757-871-6576 for more information. Registration details will be announced in early February.

**22 Feb – Back Brevard Heroes Car Show Fundraiser** 1000-1500 in the UHaul and Mall Parking Spaces of Merritt Square Mall. More details and registration info in January.

**22 Feb – JROTC District Drill Meet** at VMC Park 0700-1200. See many teams compete in Color Guard, Squad and Platoon drills.

**22 Feb – USAF JROTC Statewide Drill** meet for Air/Space Force programs at Melbourne HS 0800-1300.

For events beyond November please visit the [VMC online event calendar](#).



BECOME A BOOSTER TODAY and help defray the cost of producing our newsletter.  
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# Boosters

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Bateman, Skip & Ruth July, 2026

Bisset, M Doug Sept, 2025

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If you feel your name is missing and that you paid for Booster sponsorship this year, please contact the Treasurer. Thank you for your forbearance and understanding. Fill in your names and send to the BVC along with your check.

Please make your check payable to: Brevard Veterans Council (Boosters).

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Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_