



# VETERANS BULLETIN

A Monthly Publication of the Brevard Veterans Memorial Center



## ON THE COVER: Ampitheater Grand Opening & Ribbon Cutting

After 9 years of fundraising and planning, and 16 months of construction, more than 300 attended the Grand Opening and Ribbon Cutting

Read more on page 14



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MAY 2026

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Business Card: \$50 per year  
 Quarter Page Color: \$100 per year  
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The Veterans Bulletin is a monthly publication prepared and distributed in both print and electronic forms by the BVMC. 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 30 April 2026:  
[List of Board 2025-2026](#)

As of 30 April 2026:  
[BVMC Committee Departments 2025-2026](#)

As of 1 December 2025:  
[BVMC Org Chart 2025-2026](#)



### Mission Statement

The Brevard Veterans Memorial Center (BVMC) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. BVMC'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. 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.

**Brevard Veterans Memorial Center, Inc.**  
 400 South Sykes Creek Parkway  
 Merritt Island, FL 32952-3547  
 Office 321-453-1776  
 DAV Service Office 321-452-1774



# President's Report

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

I have waited 80 years to join the Octogenarian group, and I finally did it this month! I was 80 on April 20 and anyone who visited the Veterans Memorial Center that day could not miss it because of the display my wife, Susan, had placed out front. Thank you Susan, you have one coming up so payback is.....

With April being the month of the military child, the American Veteran Empowerment Team (AVET) sponsored an event at the avenues Viera for a 5K Kids Dash on Saturday April 11. Several vendors were set up to honor the kids, including the BVMC with uniforms they could try on and play Navy. The founders of AVET Garren and Kim Cone are wonderful people who support Veterans in every way they can! Go to their website and see all they do. Bravo Zulu Garren and Kim!

The Space Coast Enlistment Ceremony conducted at Viera High Football Stadium on April 17 was an overwhelming success. Commander Space Launch Delta 45, Col Chatman swore in 241 new enlistees from the space coast, mostly from JROTC units. This is an annual event hosted by the Brevard School Board, MOAACC, and several other veteran organizations. It was an impressive ceremony.

The Amphitheater ribbon cutting was held on April 23 and was well attended by veterans and the community. The emcee was performed by Larry Lallo, president of the Merritt Island Redevelopment Agency (MIRA) and the program was put on by MIRA with assistance from the County Parks and Recreation Department, Veterans Memorial Center, and Accelerate Brevard: Chamber of Innovation. The county still needs to complete is the hiring of a Company or Firm to manage the Amphitheater, book events, schedule concerts, etc. We also have yet to complete our new lease agreement with Parks and Recreation to cover the Amphitheater and the rest of the park improvements.

Our next big event is the Back Brevard Heroes: Heroes Fest on Sunday, May 3rd. The event will be held in our parking lot, plaza, and Grey Hall. Vendors, food tent, jaws of lift exhibit, bounce houses, K-9 demonstration and much more! The park will be open to the public. The BVMC and Dave Boyd's family will be paying our respects to Dave during a celebration of life in the Grey Hall on Monday, May 4th from 2-4 pm. Hope to see everyone there. From 22-24 May, Rolling Thunder Chapter 1 will host the Florida wide RIDE FOR FREEDOM. See the flyer and article/posters for more information. It will include an impressive B-52 aircraft flyover at the Mall/BVMC on Sunday, May 24, 1100-1230.

The Navy League and Propeller Club will sponsor a Merchant Marine Program at Rusty's at the port starting at 1000. RADM Wayne Justice will be memorialized during the program. At 1030 those who wish to tour the port will leave from Grills Dockside. Dinner will be at Rusty's following the port tour. There will be several Memorial Day celebrations including at the BVMC from 0930-1100 in the plaza. Cape Canaveral National Cemetery also has a program from 0900-1000 to be held in the flag assembly area. Cocoa Memorial Day Parade and Ceremony will be held at Cocoa Village and Riverfront Park.

It is scholarship time, so do not forget about scholarships available at the BVMC, Civilian Military Foundation, MOAACC and many other veteran organizations.

There are several events coming up this summer using the Amphitheater, so stay tuned to our schedule. Check out our calendar of events in this Bulletin.

God bless the USA, especially on our 250th celebration as a nation. Bless our fallen heroes, MIAs, POWs, and our armed forces.

Dean - Go Navy beat Army!

## BVMC CONTACTS

### President

Dean Schaaf  
dschaaf@brevard.net  
321-794-4371

### Vice President

Don Pearsall  
djp32927@gmail.com  
321-313-2444

### Secretary

Kristi Blanchard  
brevardvmc@gmail.com  
321-453-1776 ext. 1

### Treasurer

Dave Clayton  
bvmctreasurer@gmail.com  
321-453-1776 ext. 5

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**Vice  
President's  
Report**  
**Don Pearsall**  
**USA(Fmr)**

Today's Trivia: What is the significance of the naval expression of "Sacred Twenty"? Answer at the end.

The Medal of Honor event was extraordinary.

Another productive month has passed as we approach our springtime. We ordered two canopies with the new logos to replace the ones that have seen many days of service. The EZ up company has many new options, materials and structure improvements.

We also had repairs to both golf carts, so we should see additional service from them. I am in the process of finding newer models that will eventually replace them. Many auto dealers, with large lots, that use customer transport carts, turn them over every few years so I will try and obtain one of these as a donation.

I'm sure everyone has heard the term "The car was driven by a little old lady just for church" Well, this has happened to us this past week. A gentleman approached us with a car donation from his elderly mom who wanted it to be given to a veteran. The car is a 2004 Toyota Avalon, but don't let the age fool you. This car only has 53,300 original miles on it. It is absolutely in showroom condition, pristine inside and out. In fact, some of the manufacturer's stickers are on components under the hood. We will attempt to find a veteran in need or eventually sell it and donate the money to our VERF (Veteran Emergency Relief Fund) here at the BVMC.

Due to changes in the County Parks and Recreation guidelines regarding the use of the park, our park committee has been disbanded and all events that are planned and approved by the Executive Committee for the plaza will be sent to the Parks and Recreation Department for their approval. I have a copy of the 20-page event guidelines in our office for reference. Any questions concerning the amphitheater should be directed to Parks and Recreation until otherwise told. Also, we welcome Billy VanDorn to our events committee. He is the Chairman of the Board for Rolling Thunder FL Chapter 1, a major tenant organization of the BVMC. With his career in law enforcement, he will be an asset as one of the liaisons to outside groups like the 10-13 club, Back Brevard Heroes, BCSO, Fire Rescue and others.

We are currently trying to recruit more volunteers. I am happy to report that I interviewed seven since February, many of them are scheduled now. Speaking of volunteers, this is no longer a mom-and-pop operation. Can you imagine what it would be like without our awesome volunteers? We have dedicated department heads, but they can't do it all. If

I interview a potential volunteer, I just vet them, ask their skill sets, where they wish to volunteer, then turn them over to the appropriate department head for training and scheduling.

On behalf of the executive committee, I personally wish to thank each one of you for your dedication and hard work. Kristi will be sending out a survey to see if you're interested in planning a pool party / BBQ for the volunteers and their families later this summer, or in having a catered Volunteer Recognition Day dinner at the BVMC later this year. I already have a commitment from a caterer, so that is also in the works. I feel you volunteers give so much and the BVMC and should properly recognize that.

We have still not heard anything about the new lease for the BVMC, so Jim Carlton remains the Chairman of the Brevard Veterans Council. There are so many steps to secure the new lease that involves parks and recreation, the county attorneys, the Commissioners and us. Anywhere along the line it may get shifted to the back burner, but we will stay on top of it and keep you in the loop. GO Army, Beat Navy

-Trivia Answer-

" Sacred Twenty"

It refers to the US Navy's first 20 nurses who reported for their first duty station at the Wahington DC Naval Hospital in May 1908



**Chaplain's  
Corner**  
**Chaplain Chip  
Hanson**  
**USMC (Fmr)**

Memorial Day is a federal holiday in the United States, for remembering 1,498,240 men and women who died, and 40,031 still missing in action, while serving in our Country's Armed Forces. The holiday, which is currently observed every year on the last Monday of May, this year, will be held on May 25, 2020. The holiday was originally held on May 30 and marks the unofficial start of the summer season.

Memorial Day is not to be confused with Veterans Day - Memorial Day is a day of remembering the men and women who died while serving, whereas Veterans Day celebrates the service of all U.S. military veterans Army, Navy, Marines, Coastguard, Airforce, and now the SpecForce.

In 1868, General John A. Logan of the Grand Army of the Republic, an organization of Union veterans founded in Decatur, Illinois, established Decoration Day as a time for the nation to decorate the graves of the Union war dead with flowers. By the 20th century, various Union and Confederate memorial traditions, celebrated on different days, merged, and Memorial Day eventually extended to honor all Americans who died while in military service.

In 1915, following the Second Battle of Ypres, Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae, a physician with the Canadian Expeditionary Force, wrote the poem, "In Flanders Fields". Its opening lines refer to the fields of poppies that grew among the soldiers' graves in Flanders.

In 1918, inspired by the poem, YWCA worker Moina Michael attended a YWCA Overseas War Secretaries' conference wearing a silk poppy pinned to her coat and distributed over two dozen more to others present. In 1920, the National American Legion adopted it as their official symbol of remembrance.

On May 26, 1966, President Lyndon B. Johnson designated an "official" birthplace of the holiday by signing the presidential proclamation naming Waterloo, New York, as the holder of the title. This action followed House Concurrent Resolution 587, in which the 89th Congress had officially recognized that the patriotic tradition of observing Memorial Day had begun one hundred years prior in Waterloo, New York. The village credits druggist Henry C. Welles and county clerk John B. Murray as the founders of the holiday. Snopes and Live Science discredit the Waterloo account.

John 15:13 ESV "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."



## Secretary's Report

**Kristi Blanchard**  
USA (Fmr)

Fifty years ago, a historic shift in our nation's military began when Gerald Ford signed legislation opening the U.S. service academies to women. In the summer of 1976, the first women entered United States Military Academy at West Point—a bold step that reshaped leadership in the Armed Forces for generations to come. Just two years later, in 1978, I was proud to follow in their footsteps.

This April 19–22, I had the honor of returning to West Point for the Class of 1980's "Athena's Arena: A Shared Commitment to Duty, Honor, Country" conference—an inspiring gathering that celebrated five decades of women's service, leadership, and enduring impact.

Our time together began with the Torne Monument Hike along the Trail of the Fallen, a solemn tribute to first responders lost during September 11 attacks, as well as military members who have since given their lives. The weather was unrelenting—bitter cold, rain, and even hail—but somehow it felt fitting. The elements underscored the gravity of the sacrifice we were there to honor.

On Monday, we gathered for a deeply moving memorial service recognizing more than 60 women graduates who have died in combat or from illness in the years since. As each name was read aloud, a rose was brought forward in remembrance. There are now more than 6,500 women among the 34,000 living graduates of West Point—a powerful testament to how far we have come. Still, the ceremony was a poignant reminder of the cost of service and the bonds we share.

The conference also created meaningful opportunities to connect across generations. We welcomed cadets to dinners in the Mess Hall and at Eisenhower Hall, sharing stories, lessons, and encouragement. One of the most memorable sessions featured the first Black male First Captain from the Class of 1980 alongside six female First Captains from different eras. In a particularly powerful moment, the 2023 First Captain reflected that she had never felt like she didn't belong. That simple statement spoke volumes—it has taken nearly half a century to reach that point, and it was one of the most uplifting sentiments of the entire event.

I left West Point filled with pride and gratitude—pride in the trailblazers who opened the doors, and gratitude for the leaders who continue to walk through them today. Women graduates of the academies now serve not only in uniform, but also as CEOs, entrepreneurs, community leaders, and devoted mothers, continuing their commitment to service in countless ways.

Special thanks go to Superintendent LTG Steve Gilland and his wife, Betsy, both members of the Class of 1990, for ensuring access to the West Point campus—making this meaningful gathering possible.

As we celebrate Military Appreciation Month, let us stand together in recognition of the extraordinary contributions women have made—and continue to make—to our military and our nation.





## VMC Librarian Report

Hank Rhodes  
USN (Fmr)



The BVMC sustained a significant loss last month with the passing of Bill Ellis.

After serving an enlistment in the Navy Reserve, Bill was selected for officer training, ultimately choosing the Air Force over the Navy. His service was primarily in the Strategic Air Command, as a Missileer with the 91st Wing at Minot AFB and later as a Program Manager in California and Washington DC. His final

active duty assignment was the 6555th Aerospace Test Group at Cape Canaveral. He retired from the Air Force with the grade of Major.

Bill was a husband, a father, and a Master Mason. He earned a bachelor's degree at George Washington University and a master's from the University of North Dakota.

At the BVMC Library, Bill authored and edited many of our internal Standard Operating Procedures, with particular attention to the process of training new librarians so they could quickly become proficient members of the staff. He was a source of valuable insight and recommendations to the Department Head. He was especially interested in providing guidance to young people who used our resources for their research projects. His by-line appeared in this publication as the author of several book reviews and his presentation on America's Strategic Program was a highlight of our monthly Tuesday evening discussion series.

Bill did not allow mobility issues nor his hearing disability to hamper his effectiveness, but rather he met these challenges with courage and grace.

Bill Ellis will be greatly missed. His many contributions to the BVMC will endure.



## Book of the Month: *Once An Eagle* by Anton Myrer

Reviewed by Hank Rhodes

Sam Damon was one of the most accomplished American warriors of the twentieth century. A hero in both world wars, he was tactically brilliant and widely hailed as a model leader by the soldiers who served under him or alongside him.

Yet, one won't find Sam Damon's name mentioned in any history books, since he is the creation of author Anton Myrer, who was himself a Marine combat veteran of World War II.

In an epic narrative that takes the reader from an America attempting (and failing) to avoid involvement in World War I, to a nebulous conflict in an Asian country that strongly resembles Vietnam, Sam Damon fights the enemies of the United States. Conflict also ensues between Sam Damon and adversaries within the Army, most notably, Courtney Massengale, a cunning careerist concerned solely with his own well-being and advancement.

If any of us have had the privilege to serve with a Sam Damon during our time in the military, we have probably also had the misfortune of encountering a Courtney Massengale.

This novel covers almost fifty years of American history as Sam Damon advances from Private to Lieutenant General, and deals with a full range of professional and personal setbacks along the way.

This book has been compared to *The Red Badge of Courage* and other classics of military fiction. It is a worthy entry on that list and well worth the reader's time.

*Once An Eagle* is found in the VMC Library as "Fic-Myrer-01"

Note that while we intend to retain novels generally regarded as classics, such as "Once an Eagle," the Library Staff plans to reduce our fiction collection by approximately 80% in the near future to make room for new acquisitions.

# Park and Plaza Report

By Donn Weaver  
USA (Fmr.)

After nine years of planning and 16 months of Phase III Construction, the new Amphitheater and expanded Park are a reality and now in the hands of Brevard County Central Parks and Recreation (P/R) for scheduling and major maintenance. Many big events are coming. Check out the article and photos of the great Grand Opening and Ribbon Cutting Ceremony held on 23 April.

There are many details still pending on how the new Park will evolve in terms of the BVMC, but as we have been doing since the First Phase opened in 2016, BVMC will help with supporting this beautiful and unique Park!! We also are allotted 12 events per year including JROTC and our partners of many years. Thanks to the Park Committee for work over the past six months. The four of us now shift to specific roles:

**Doug Bisset:** Will provide support to Parks and Recreation for marking the Memorial Trees and installing Memorial Benches. Assist with future amphitheater programs to promote veterans that may be approved (like murals) that evolve from veteran organization fundraising.

**Billy VanDoren:** Shifted to the BVMC Events Committee, led by VP Pearsall, where he will work on internal BVMC events like Memorial Day as well as support our long term partners with their events - like Hero Fest, Last Naval Battle and 9/11 Commemoration.

**Jim DesJardin:** Liaison with JROTC and BPS for the events ranging from Raider Meets, Drill Competition and the Space Coast Military Enlistment Ceremony.

**Donn Weaver:** Support the ExComm and defined projects; continue to coordinate the monthly Vet event calendar (which is also on the [veteransmemorialcenter.org](http://veteransmemorialcenter.org) website) and raise funds from the veteran community to make the Park even better.

Special thanks to Ivey's Construction and their sub-contractors for a fantastic job which included lots of support for JROTC and others who used the Park during the construction. The \$8.2M from State, County and Tourist Development Council made it happen. Thank you. We are truly blessed to live in Brevard County where "Support to Veterans" is not just a phrase.



# Operation Overlord

By Jalaine Spears

As the first step of Operation Overlord, nearly 160,000 Allied troops descended on 5 beaches across a 50-mile stretch of France on 6 June 1944, now known as D-Day. They encountered the fiercest resistance on Omaha Beach, where the Germans unleashed torrents of gunfire from encampment ravines and on bluffs that overlooked the sandy bank.

On a quieter day 44 years later, geologists Earle McBride and Dane Picard scooped a sample of sand from the high tide point of Omaha Beach for closer examination. Among their findings, which were published in paper and magazines, were a significant number of "angular opaque grains that were magnetic." They eventually realized that these grains, ranging in size from .06 to 1.0 mm, were shrapnel shards that had been broken down into tiny pieces. They concluded that the shards made up 4% of the total sample.

They also found 30 slightly larger iron and glass beads, believed to be from hi-temp munition explosions in the sand and air. Beachgoers today still walk among these fleeting remnants of one of history's most important engagements, nature will sweep them away for good in time.

Come and see our D-day flag in the museum. It is gray and tattered but proudly waved on to encourage our valiant veterans. Come in and browse through the museum and see our artifacts and stop in the gift shop to check out our 250th anniversary items. Happy Memorial Day! Thanks Veterans!





# Space Coast Chapter Updates

By Jim "JC" Carlton  
USMC (Ret.)

The Space Coast Chapter of the Military Order of the Purple Heart 453, a Brevard Veterans Memorial Center tenant will be in Titusville to support an incredibly special event.

The Mayor of Titusville, Andrew Conners, will provide a proclamation declaring Titusville a Purple Heart City, the second in Brevard County along with Palm Bay. The first was started by the Mayor of Palm Bay, Rob Medina and MOPH 543 Commander Keith Van Buren.

This historic event is in conjunction with the United States Armed Forces Day and the Disabled American Veterans Chapter 109 monthly Veteran's Appreciation Day. The patriotic experience hosted by DAV 109 is scheduled for May 16, 2026, beginning at 10:00, ending at 1500. The Purple Heart Proclamation program begins at 1100 hours at the DAV Chapter Facility, 435 N. Singleton Ave., Titusville.

We will recognize our active-duty members and all area veterans with food, VA aid, special activities and a wonderful day of camaraderie. Please consider coming to Titusville and supporting this event aimed at bringing appreciation and awareness to our 70,000+ veterans in Brevard County.

## Photos from April 8 General Meeting



# BVMC Scholarship Open

By Jay Longway  
(USMC Fmr.)

The [BVMC 2026 Educational Scholarship Program](#) application deadline is approaching! The scholarship is now available for graduating Brevard County seniors who plan to continue their education at a college, university, or technical/trade school. The deadline is June 26th.

Students may download the application directly from the BVMC website or pick up a printed copy in the BVMC Library or Museum. Scholarships will be awarded to applicants who meet all stated requirements and demonstrate strong academic achievement, complete documentation, and financial need. We are proud to support the next generation as they pursue their academic and career goals.

**ROLLING THUNDER XXXVIII**  
NATIONWIDE MAY 24, 2026  
RIDE FOR FREEDOM  
FLAME OF FREEDOM  
CONTINUE THE MISSION

Brevard Veterans Memorial Center (BVMC)  
and new \$8 million Amphitheater  
400 S Sykes Creek Parkway | Merritt Island, FL 32952

**FRIDAY, MAY 22**  
8 AM BVMC Kickstands Up (KSU) Ride to Mike Erdman Toyota OPENING WEEKEND CEREMONY  
5 PM FISHUPS and SANDBAR Ride registration begins.  
6 PM GOLD STAR FAMILY DINNER CATERED COMPLIMENTARY BY TEXAS ROADHOUSE  
7 PM FISHUPS ride to SANDBAR  
7:15 PM SANDBAR KSU Ride to BVMC  
8 PM CANDLELIGHT VIGIL AT BVMC with the "FLAME OF FREEDOM"

**SATURDAY MAY 23**  
BVMC Amphitheater THUNDER ALLEY Numerous vendors all day. Ride registration location.  
AM Possible flag raising ceremonies and more. Monitor RTFL.org "RFF Events".  
5:30 PM CONCERT BEGINS; VINTAGE, THE BAND, SHEEPDOGS

**SUNDAY, MAY 24**  
7-1030 AM BVMC - MALL PARKING LOT  
10:30 AM RIDE FOR FREEDOM BRIEFING  
11 AM RIDE FOR FREEDOM KSU with B52H Flyover! See RTFL.org for route.

ARMSTRONG  
NORDEN LEACOX  
ERDMAN AUTOMOTIVE  
MED:FAST Urgent Care Centers  
Bj's  
HOSTED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:

\$20 BIKE REGISTRATION, \$30 CO-RIDER  
Ride Registration available at ALL events

# Local Recognition of MIHS Cadets at the March 2026 Medal of Honor Event

By Jennifer Gaube

I am writing to recognize and commend four exceptional cadets from the Merritt Island High School JROTC program for their remarkable display of honor, respect, and selfless service on March 14, 2026.

The cadets are from the Merritt Island High School JROTC program. Under the leadership of MAJ Spangler and MSG Spry-Sapp.

C/CPT Halena Tubiolo  
C/CPT Nevaeh Collins  
C/2LT Levi Gaube  
C/SGT Jakob Billias

It was a busy day at the Brevard Veterans Memorial in Merritt Island. Multiple events were taking place, including a 5K Medal of Honor Run, a car show, the JROTC Color Guard & Drill District Meet, and a Celebration of Life for a fallen veteran. During the JROTC meet, a request was made for cadets who would be willing to assist with performing an Honor Guard Ceremony for the Celebration of Life.

Without hesitation, four cadets from the Merritt Island High School JROTC program immediately stepped forward and accepted the responsibility. They understood that volunteering could mean missing the awards ceremony where they would learn whether they had qualified for the State Championships. Despite this possibility, their only response was, "Yes. Where do you need us?"

These cadets, only 16-17 years old and having never performed at this type of ceremony before, took on the responsibility of honoring a fallen veteran with incredible maturity and respect. They approached every step, every fold of the flag, and every movement with dedication and reverence.

Before the ceremony, they took the time to carefully practice ensuring they performed it with the dignity and precision it deserved. Their focus was not on recognition or competition, but on honoring the veteran, his wife, and his family with the highest level of respect.

Their actions demonstrated the true meaning of service, leadership, and character. In that moment, these young cadets represented the very best of their school, their JROTC program, and their community.

It was truly an honor to witness their commitment and the pride with which they carried out such an important responsibility. These cadets deserve recognition for stepping forward when it mattered most and honoring a fallen veteran with such dignity.

# America's Boating Club Cocoa Beach

By Cdr. Sandy Schoonmaker

Brevard Veteran's Memorial Center has been the home for America's Boating Club Cocoa Beach for over 30 years. Founded in 1967, the club incorporated under the legal name of Cocoa Beach Power Squadron, updating the name in 2004 to include "Sail and Power Squadron".

In 2020, at the advice of the national organization, the club began doing business under the current name, America's Boating Club Cocoa Beach. Currently the club is over one hundred members strong.

The club is governed by a board of directors that meets at the BVMC on the fourth Tuesday of each month. With no meeting rooms available, they meet in the museum in the space in front of the cannon. Setting up tables and chairs, the group conducts the meeting in an orderly fashion, respectful of the cannon pointing at them.

On the first Tuesday of each month the club holds monthly meetings in the Gray Hall. With no artillery in evidence, eight of these meetings focus on lighthearted socialization with snacks and speakers who cover a wide variety of interests. The average attendance of 40 members evidences the quality of the presentations.

The other four meetings feature a special dinner theme. The May meeting is Pizza Night, one of the two meetings that includes a round of Bingo. The other Bingo night is in conjunction with an eggnog/ appetizer party held in December, prior to the annual formal party at a chosen venue. In March a chili cook-off and in September a pot-luck Italian night round out the schedule. For these meetings the attendance exceeds 50 members.

To promote the mission of safe boating, the club teaches a public class that results in the Florida Boaters ID card required by any boater born after January 1, 1988. Two classes are taught annually at the Port Canaveral Yacht Club, while this summer for the first time the club will teach a class at the Satellite Beach Community Center.

And yes, the club members do own boats. Each month an event is planned when the boaters convene for a meal. The favorites include water-side restaurants where the non-boaters can join the event. Trips to the spoil islands are planned with invitations for the non-boaters to ride along.

The success of meetings, classes and events relies upon communication. To ensure that the members are well informed, a monthly newsletter is emailed to each member and posted on the club's website: [www.cbsps.org](http://www.cbsps.org).

The public is encouraged to visit the website that includes the history of the organization along with a listing of the officers, meeting schedules, class schedules and a contact for membership information. Boaters, prospective boaters and non-/boaters are welcome to attend a meeting to become better acquainted.

Cdr. Sandy Schoonmaker  
ABC Cocoa Beach



# Article on Orlando VA Healthcare System and Treating Trauma

Orlando, Fla. — For many Veterans, the effects of military sexual trauma (MST) can last long after their service ends. At the [Orlando VA Healthcare System \(OVAHCS\)](#), providers and survivors are working to ensure Veterans know help is available and that they are not alone.

MST refers to sexual assault or harassment experienced during military service and can affect anyone, regardless of background. “Something important to know about MST is that it can happen to anyone, regardless of their age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or branch of service,” stated Martha Strachan, MST coordinator at the Orlando VA. “It can occur at any time or place during military service.”

Strachan said her role focuses on connecting Veterans to care and increasing awareness of available services. “My primary role is to help connect survivors with healthcare services that are right for them,” Strachan said. “We also conduct outreach to reach Veterans who may not know these services exist.”

Nationally, about one in three women Veterans and one in 40 men report having experienced MST. At the Orlando VA, thousands of Veterans receive MST-related care each year. Despite that, many Veterans hesitate to come forward. Strachan emphasized that Veterans do not need proof or prior reporting to receive care.

“It’s important that survivors know that we believe them,” Strachan said. “A Veteran’s self-report is enough, and they do not have to have reported the event during their service.” Services include counseling, group therapy, and specialized treatment programs, all provided at no cost for MST-related conditions.

For many, group therapy is a key step in healing. Stephanie Clark, MST social worker, has expanded the program’s group offerings to better meet Veterans’ needs.

“When I started, there was only one group. Now we have five,” Clark shared. “The goal is to give veterans options and meet them where they are in their healing journey.”

Clark emphasized that one of the most powerful aspects of group therapy is connection.

“The main thing is they realize they’re not alone,” explains Clark. “That helps reduce the guilt and shame many carry.”

Air Force Veteran Veronica Temple shared how discovering the MST program changed her life.

“I had kept my silence for so long, and I was just tired of holding it in,” Temple remarked.

Temple first learned about the program after seeing information

during a VA visit. After reaching out, she began attending sessions and working through years of trauma.

“I started learning how to set boundaries, speak up for myself, and understand my triggers,” Temple explained. “I feel more like myself now.”

Temple said the program helped her rediscover parts of her identity she had lost.

“I started doing things I enjoy again,” Temple shared. “I learned that I matter.”

Temple now encourages other Veterans to take the first step.

“You have to be about the change that you want,” Temple advised. “When you start doing the work, you realize it’s worth it.”

With April recognized as Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month, Orlando VA leaders say it’s an important time to raise awareness and reach more Veterans.

“We want to bring this out of the darkness,” Clark stated. “Veterans don’t have to suffer in silence anymore.”

Strachan added that even Veterans who believe they are not eligible for VA care may still qualify for MST services. “We want them to reach out,” Strachan said. “You are not alone, and we’re here to help.”

Veterans seeking more information about MST services can contact MST Coordinator Martha Strachan at 407-646-5433. For additional details about upcoming events at the Orlando VA Healthcare System, [visit here](#).



**Photo:** Air Force Veteran Veronica Temple, who served from 1985 to 1990, now shares her story to raise awareness about military sexual trauma and encourage fellow veterans to seek care and begin their healing journey.

# Their Voice of Hope Updates

## By Dorothy Walsh

Hello, hard to believe the year is almost half over and we have been keeping our women Veterans quite busy with our monthly events; fishing, kayaking, crochet classes, yoga, healing through art, weekly walks and our monthly wellness classes with the Red Cross. A special thanks once again to Sandy Nicotra and her non-profit Paramount Training Group as well as Frog Bones for once again holding a gun safety, self-defense training for our women Veterans. Our big event for the month of April was working the concession stands at the Cocoa Beach Air Show. Our women Veterans and our volunteers are non-stop.

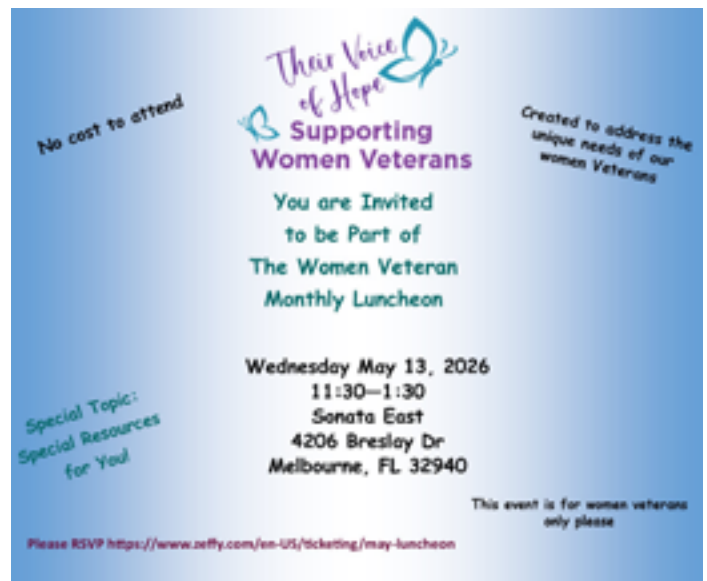
We have a lot of the same events happening in May, as well as our monthly luncheon at Sonata East. You can check out our monthly calendar on Facebook "Their Voice of Hope" or our website [theirvoiceofhope.com](http://theirvoiceofhope.com). If you're a woman Veteran and would like to be added to our mailing list, just go to this website and sign up <https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/join-other-women-veterans-at-their-voice-of-hope-events>.

Our big project right working with the Melbourne Liberty Bell Museum Board of Directors to update their Women in the Military Display. Our awesome team has been collecting items and making a spectacular photo collage of women who have and are still serving. Please see our flyer to see how you can become part of this historical project.

Also, on June 12, 2026 Their Voice of Hope has partnered with Sonata Viera and Sonata East at Viera to celebrate women Veterans Day. We will have fun, refreshments, games and mementoes to celebrate the occasion. Also it's a great opportunity to get your picture into the photo collage for the Liberty Bell Museum. We will be there to help you do it along with the materials - you just bring your picture or other items to use.

All of our events are of no cost to the Veteran thanks to the generosity of our awesome supporters.

Yours in Service  
Dorothy Walsh  
President/Founder



**Liberty Bell Museum Donations:**  
Please contact Dorothy Walsh at 321-426-6736 or email [events@theirvoiceofhope.com](mailto:events@theirvoiceofhope.com).

# Over 240 Celebrated at Viera HS Enlistment Ceremony as they Prepare to join Military

By Donn Weaver  
USA (Fmr.)

On 17 April, a warm and beautiful day, more than 3000 gathered at the Viera HS Football Stadium to welcome and celebrate over 240 graduating and recently graduated high school students. They had made the decision and been accepted into all branches of our uniformed military services. One by one their names and new service branches were read, while family friends and the crowd applauded their selfless decision.

The event was the Second Annual Space Coast Military Enlistment Ceremony sponsored by BPS, The Education and Citizenship Military Coalition of the Space Coast and supported by many veteran and community groups. Rep Mike Haridopolos offered comments and congratulations along with MC and BPS School Board Chair, Matt Susin; BPS Superintendent Dr. Mark Rendell, himself a veteran; and Space Launch 45 Delta Commander, Col Richard Chatman.

LTC Cynthia Watkins -Pishdad, USA, Ret sang the National Anthem as the BCSO Helicopter made a flyover and the Sons of the American Revolution of Brevard joined the Viera HS Army JROTC Color guard in a special America 250 presentation of the colors. The Naval Ordnance Test Unit Saluting Submarine Deck Gun Battery ended the festivities with a 10-round salute to the enlistees.

The enlistees were escorted into the stadium by over 200 JROTC cadets from all 14 BPS JROTC programs. A special motorcycle review by Rolling Thunder FL-1, American Legion Riders, Combat Vet Riders and Patriot Guard Riders saluted the enlistees with a roaring entry into the stadium.

Family, friends and veterans in the bleachers applauded every enlistee in a shared community event that all hoped the enlistees would never forget, Each Received an Enlistment Ceremony Challenge Coin from Col Chatman and funded by 8 Brevard veteran organizations.

It was their first of many, as the community showed in a very positive way how they (less than one percent of the American population who chooses to serve) are appreciated and respected. Many from the media were there to record and share the special event. Good luck to our newest enlistees into the best military service in the world.



# Making WWII Real to JROTC Cadets

By Donn Weaver  
USA (Fmr.)

Each year, for over 25 years, the three Air Force and one Space Force JROTC programs in Brevard County come together to stage a 14 KM ruck march in March to remember the sacrifices in WWII during the Bataan Death March.

This year the event was held at Space Coast High School and was joined by the Palm Bay USMC cadets. Almost 200 cadets marched and learned about the event and other sacrifices in WWII. Hats off to the JROTC Instructors who organize and the cadets who participate in this important way to never forget American military history and sacrifices.




**MAY 29, 2026** **DINNER**  
**5-7 PM**

at AMERICAN LEGION  
CHALLENGER 7 POST 348  
105 LINCOLN AVE  
CAPE CANAVERAL, FL 32920

**BBQ Pulled Pork Sandwich, Coleslaw,  
5-Bean Baked Beans,  
and homemade dessert!!**

**\$10  
DINE IN OR  
TAKE OUT**

**LIVE MUSIC  
6-9 PM**

**50/50 RAFFLE**

**Dinner and Raffle to benefit  
ALA Unit #344 VMC Merritt Island, FL**

# Veterans Connections Updates

By Don Pearsall, Founder /CEO

Lots going around our office this past month. We have aligned ourselves with AVETS to assist us with female veterans' issues, and of course NVHS with other veterans housing issues. It's great to see all the Brevard agency's helping veterans and cooperating with each other to complete the mission.

I recently attended the 5 K run for kids at the Avenues in Viera. Kim and Garren Cone did an awesome job of organizing their event and was proud to be a part of it. I spoke with a couple female veteran volunteers and learned how they assist female active military and veterans. Taking what I had learned, I spoke with Kim and Garren and decided that their operation was one that provided superior service and programs for our female veteran population. Many times a woman calls into our office and are reluctant or uncomfortable to speak to a male veteran, it's great to have a resource for them to work with a female veteran.

In other news, we are almost ready to announce and roll out an agreement with a major space industry giant to provide veterans with scholarships for trade school vocational training with the possibility of adding a job placement service in the future.

Rather than sitting in a classroom all day, the program will utilize local certified, licensed craftsmen to individually teach one-on-one a veteran looking to make a career in that trade. It's a win-win situation. The craftsmen not only get paid, but also get an extra pair of hands while teaching our students.

The newest member of our Board of Directors, Ray Norman, will be an asset for the execution of the program. We hope to provide opportunities for veterans, regardless of age, opportunities to start or change a new career path. This new foundation will not affect the current mission of Veterans' Connections that provides financial and service support for veterans and their families.



- Home Thermostat
- Broken Air Conditioner
- Leaking Toilet

Not every Veteran or family member is college material. Tradesman are needed to keep the lights on, and the motors running.

**INTRODUCING The new Veterans Vocational Trade School Scholarship Program from Veterans' Connections**



Contact Veterans' Connections  
Phone / Text 321-313-2444  
for more information

★ ★ ★

**Mission 87**

*Sponsored by Mederi CAREtenders HOSPICE*



*Join Us For The Honor Flight Welcome Home Celebration*

**Saturday, May 16<sup>th</sup>**  
**8:30 - 10:30 p.m.**

Hosted By:

**Melbourne Orlando International Airport**  
1 Air Terminal Parkway, Melbourne FL 32901

- 8:00 P.M. | Doors Open**
- 8:30 P.M. | Red White & You Pre-Flight Party**
- 9:34 P.M. | Scheduled Flight Return**
- 10:00 P.M. | Veteran Walk of Honor**

FREE event! Live performance by Andrew Rickman & The No Pressure Band, plus food & beer (21+) trucks, and more!

*Let's give our heroes the welcome home they deserve!*



Learn more at: [MLBair.com/HonorFlight](http://MLBair.com/HonorFlight)

# Vision Realized: The Grand Opening of the Brevard County Memorial Veterans Amphitheater and Park

By Donn Weaver  
USA (Fmr.)

After nine years of fundraising and planning, and 16 months of construction, more than 300 attended the Grand Opening and Ribbon Cutting for the Brevard Veterans Memorial Center Amphitheater and expanded Park (VMP) on Merritt Island on 23 April. The event was organized by officials from the County, including the Merritt Island Redevelopment Agency (MIRA), as well as Accelerate Brevard and BVMC veterans. Festivities included the inaugural Flag Raising Ceremony at the new Amphitheater which has a special story.

MIRA's Executive Director, Larry Lallo, served as MC and the event included several speakers from the state, county, BCSO, Tourist Development and the BVMC who have supported the project for years. The Jazz Ensemble from the Space Coast Symphony Orchestra provided patriotic live music. The SCSO as well as BCSO are among community partners for the new facility, so expect many great concerts and events from them and others starting this year. Special thanks to Lisa Nicolas, MIRA Community Relations Officer who served as the primary organizer. Media coverage was outstanding, so much of the event can be seen online.

The \$8.2M project was Phase III of VMP expansion. Phase I was the initial VMP trails and non-electric facilities, as well as the Military Museum constructed in 2016. Rush Construction handled the completion of park pathways and bridges with phase II in 2019. The "Crown Jewel" Amphitheater, Concession and Restrooms Building, lighting, irrigation, more planting and a second main entrance with 100 new parking spaces, was built by Ivey's Construction with many sub-contractors doing a great job. They also supported the BVMC with JROTC and other special events, over the year plus, held in other sections of the 82-acre park.

Government at all levels - State, County and Tourist Development - raised the funds as the County Commissioners unanimously approved the visionary project in August 2024. Thank you to them and to our taxpayers who truly support veterans, as well as the community, which will now see many major events at the Amphitheater over the years ahead.

## Flag Raising:

Since the VMP already had an official flagpole at the Museum area of the Park, there were no official funds available for one at the amphitheater. To veterans it seemed mandatory to have one there. So, over six months more than \$4,500 was raised from 8 veteran organizations and through an Eagle Scout Project (Justin Gregoire of MI Post 243) for the lighted 30-foot pole

and patriotic pavers at the base. Teams from the FL Army National Guard, Rolling Thunder FL-1, for the first time, raised the American, POW/MIA and America 250 Flags at the Amphitheater as part of the ceremony.

The event ended with a cake cutting and plenty of community spirit, with many saying how blessed we are that the vision of more than a decade ago, was unwavering.



# Brevard Becomes a Purple Heart County

**By Donn Weaver**  
USA (Fmr.)

At the 7 April Brevard County Commissioners Meeting, the Military Order of Purple Heart Chapter 453 received the County Proclamation making Brevard a Purple Heart County. MOPH 453 Commander and Purple Heart recipient Keith Van Buren (center with proclamation) accepted the award and spoke on behalf of the Chapter.



Dave Clayton, BVMC Treasurer and Purple Heart recipient (far right) and Donn Weaver, BVMC Member (second on left) were among the members attending. About two thirds of Florida

# Easter Bunny Visits Vet Kids Early

**By Donn Weaver**  
USA (Fmr.)

On 28 April American Legion AUX Post 344 organized an Easter Egg Hunt for children of veterans facing hard times and it was held at Kiwanis Park on Merritt Island. Held for the past 7 years at the BVMC Park, the event was shifted to Kiwanis Park since the Veterans Memorial Park wasn't quite ready for the Grand Opening. Nearly 10 families and 20 children attended the event and received many gifts and a special easter bag, as well as the eggs they themselves scouted out. The MOAACC Good Deeds Foundation contributed \$300 to the event to help make it a success. Thanks AUX ladies!!!



# A Final Welcome Home: Reading the Names

**By Donn Weaver**  
USA (Fmr.)

On 27 March volunteers from the Support Committee of the Cape Canaveral National Cemetery read aloud all 796 names of Vietnam Veterans laid to rest at CCNC in 2025. This tradition began years ago by the VA, but will continue even after the 25th Anniversary of the Fall of Saigon at CCNC. With photos courtesy of SC/CCNC, pictured are the volunteers from Left to right: Meg Cox, Kenna McFall, Lynne Cowart, Helen Hanesworth, Priscilla Southworth, Donn Weaver, Peggy Moynihan, Sue Easterling, JB Kump, and Cathy Riley. Standing behind are Chip Hanson (Chaplain) and Tom Fitzgerald (MC).



There are more than 8,000 Vietnam era veterans and spouses buried at CCNC of the 19,500 total veterans. The number has grown each year. About 60 people attended the ceremony with many hearing the names of veterans they know.

# Long Term BVMC Supporter Stages Great Easter Event in New Park

**By Donn Weaver**  
USA (Fmr.)



On the day before Easter, Georgianna Church of Merritt Island with 130 volunteers staged a very successful and well attended Easter Egg Hunt in the area around the new Amphitheater in the Veterans Memorial Park. More than 1,200 children attended, dragging their parents along for the fun. The Easter Bunny was very busy, as were six bounce houses, face painting, cotton candy and popcorn booths. It turned out this was the last event before the park was fully opened the next week, so the Church had to rent many items and bring generators, paid Parks and Rec, but still wanted to support the BVMC as they have done for over 7 years. They presented a sizable donation to BVMC President Dean Schaaf the next week, further cementing their role as one of our best partners with an engraved granite marker on our Plaza Wall. With Jen Helms as event chair, thank you, Georgianna Church from young and old!!!

# HELP WANTED

## ★ ELITE COLOR GUARD ★

Brevard Veterans Memorial Center



SERVING BREVARD'S VETERANS



### BE PART OF SOMETHING GREATER.

The Brevard Veterans Memorial Center is seeking dedicated veterans to join our Elite Color Guard. Honor our nation, serve your community, and represent Brevard's veterans with pride.



#### BEING A VETERAN NOT REQUIRED

*Must be a minimum of 18 years old.*



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*Referrals for college and civil service jobs.*



#### UNIFORMS & TRAINING PROVIDED

*We provide everything you need to succeed.*



### HONOR. SERVICE. COMMUNITY. JOIN OUR ELITE TEAM.



#### HONOR

Pay tribute to those who served before us.



#### SERVICE

Participate in local events, ceremonies, and parades.



#### COMMUNITY

Make a lasting impact in Brevard County.



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400 S. Sykes Creek Parkway  
Merritt Island, FL 32952



**BREVARDVETS.COM**



# Brevard VMC Vets Calendar

## May 2026 and Beyond

Contact BVMC for any additions or other information.

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

**PLEASE NOTE:** As of December, 2025, The Brevard Veterans Memorial Center can no longer book the pavilion or the Veterans Memorial Park. Please send your request to Terry Lane at [terry.lane@brevardparks.com](mailto:terry.lane@brevardparks.com) and/or call Central Area Parks and Recreation, 321-633-1874.

### MAY

**03 May – Hero Fest by Back Brevard Heroes** to honor all first responders. 1000- 1600. BVMC Plaza and Gray Hall. BBQ, displays, kid's games and much more to honor First Responders and families. Contact Back Brevard Heroes for more information. [bbh.org](http://bbh.org)

**03-10 May – Florida's 38th Annual "All Veterans Reunion"** at Wickham Park. Sponsored by Veterans Memorial Reunion Inc. Wall escort and set up 03 May. Wreath Laying Ceremony at the Vietnam and Global War on Terror Moving Walls. Register wreaths from 1530-1800. Ceremony starts at 1800. The full reunion features vendors, food, live music, beverages, moving walls, static displays and much more daily from 07-10 May into the evenings. Visit <https://travelingwall.us> and [VMRI.org](http://VMRI.org) web site for more information and to sign up as vendors.

**16 May – Space Coast Honor Flight #2** of 5 2026 visits by veterans to see their monuments and memorials in Wash DC. Starts at 0400 hours at Melbourne International Airport Main Terminal with Welcome home set 2030 hours same evening. Come out and honor these veterans, some from the Korean War era and their Guardians that will travel with them. Many veteran organizations and community groups support this amazing program. MOAACC Good Deeds funds FIT ROTC Cadets and Veterans in the VA sponsored FIT Psych PhD program to serve as guardians throughout the year. Contact [schf.org](http://schf.org) for more information and to sign up on the waiting list for both honorees and guardians.

**22-24 May – Florida wide RIDE FOR FREEDOM** presented by Rolling Thunder FL- 1.

– Friday 22May:

1700-1930 – Gold Star Family Dinner provided by Texas Roadhouse BVMC Gray Hall.

1900-2000 – Ride in from Fishlips and Sandbar to BVMC Plaza and Park

2000-2100. – Flame of Freedom Walk

-- Saturday 23 May

0900- 2000 – Thunder Alley all day at BVMC Park and Amphitheater with special flag raising , vendors, music, food trucks and much more.

1730 - 2130. – Concerts with VINTAGE, THE BAND, SHEEPDOGS

-- Sunday 24 May

0700 - 1030. – Register for Freedom Ride at BVMC Plaza and Mall Parking Lot. Briefing at 1030.

1100- 1230. – Ride for Freedom KSU with B52H Flyover! Check [RTFL1.org](http://RTFL1.org) for route and more information about this three day event which is planned at the new BVMC Park for several more years over Memorial Day Weekend.

**23 May - - Merchant Marine Day** - Navy League and Propeller Club Cape Canaveral - Rusty's at the Port - 1000 program - 1030 Boat tour of port, lay wreath - 1200 lunch at Rusty's

**25 May – BVMC Memorial Day Ceremony** BVMC Plaza 0930-1100. See Poster in late April. .

For more events, [visit our website!](https://veteransmemorialcenter.org/upcoming-veterans-events/)

BECOME A BOOSTER TODAY and help defray the cost of producing our newsletter.  
Only \$10.00 per name, per year.



# Boosters

Adair, Mark and Karen Croft, IMO  
MSGT Edmond Adair, USAF, RET Aug, 2027

Bateman, Skip & Ruth July, 2026

Bisset, M Doug Sept, 2026

Carleton, Jim March, 2027

Clark, Garrett Nov, 2026

Clayton, David & Anne July, 2026

Fleet Reserve Branch 263 July, 2026

Florida State University College of Social  
Work, August, 2026

Herring, Dennis & Betty October, 2030

Kanis, Jussara & Michael Nov, 2027

Longway, J.P & Donna Dec, 2028

McKinney, Shaun & Adora Sept, 2026

Muckler, Bill, CAPT. USMC May, 2028

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Norman, Ray April, 2027

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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 BVMC along with your check.

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

Single Name per year- \$10.00 / Double Names - \$20.00

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