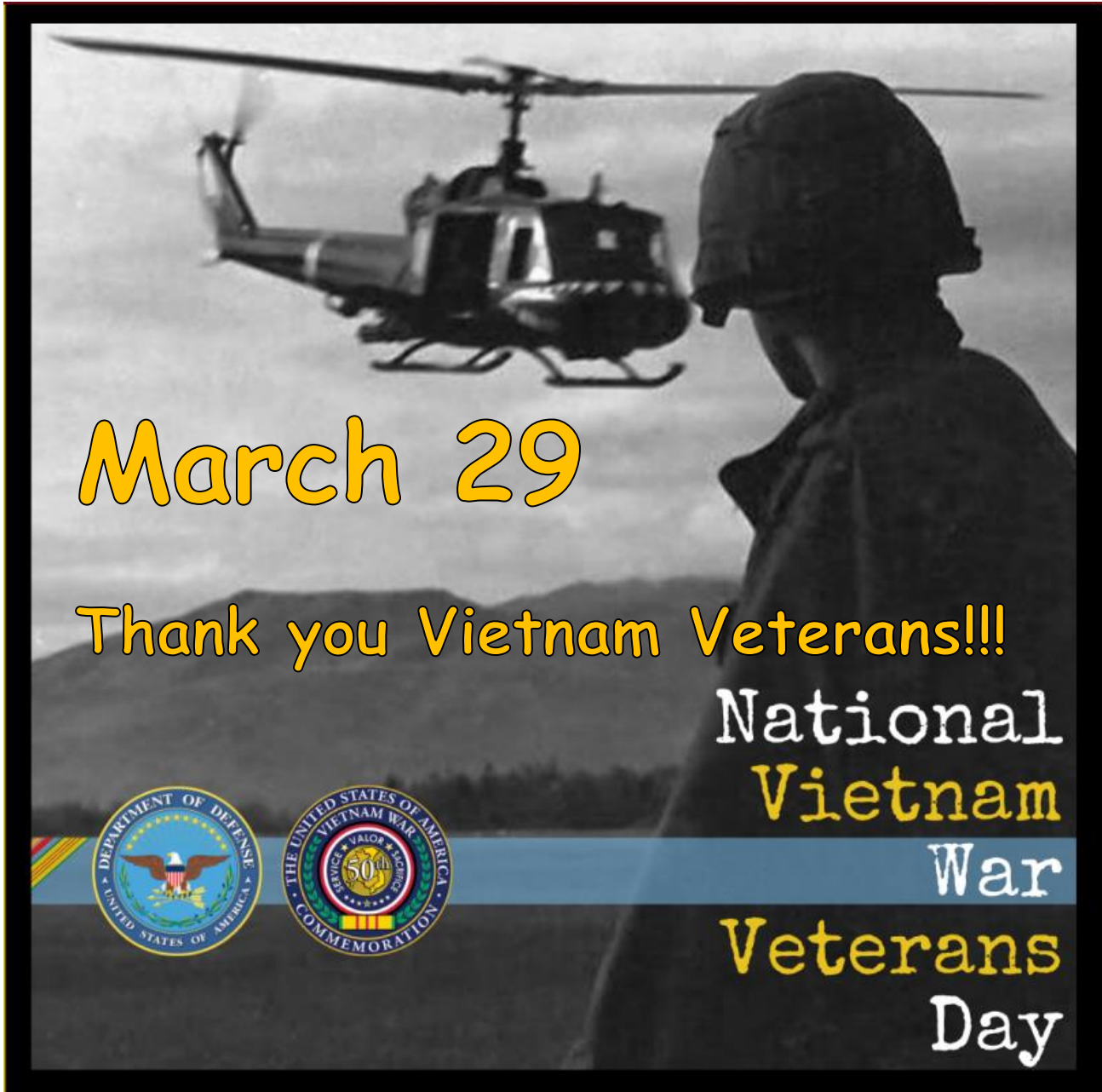


GREATER ROME UTICA CHAPTER

# GRUC MOAA

2023 SPRING NEWSLETTER



MILITARY OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

P.O. BOX 36 ROME, NY 13442-0036

[www.GRUCMOAA.org](http://www.GRUCMOAA.org)

## Cover Story – National Vietnam War Veterans Day

Before the remaining U.S. Marines departed the United States embassy in Saigon in April 1975, on March 29, 1973, the last American combat troops withdrew from Vietnam.

Nearly 44 years after the United States withdrew its last forces from Vietnam, in March 2017, Congress passed and the president signed the Vietnam War Veterans Recognition Act, which designated March 29 as a National Day of Remembrance and honor to all who served during the Vietnam War.

For many veterans, this day of honor and gratitude is understandably decades overdue.

Yet on this day, the nation looks inward to honor a generation of veterans whose homecoming never was. It is an opportunity for many to receive a proper commendation and recognition of their actions carried out far from United States soil.

What began as an initial commitment of military advisors sent by President Eisenhower to South Vietnam escalated in the ensuing decade to a force that at its peak, in 1969, under the Johnson Administration, reached more than 543,000 American service members.

From 1964 to 1975, an estimated 2.7 million American personnel were committed to stopping North Vietnamese aggression into South Vietnam, and with it, containing the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. A staggering toll and a complicated legacy were left behind.

Fifty-eight thousand service members were killed in action, with an estimated 300,000 wounded. The North Vietnamese and Vietcong suffered casualties as high as 851,000, yet far more civilians died in the crossfire and collateral damage.

*Written by Brandon Black, Gary Sinise Foundation*

**To all who served during the Vietnam War, especially our GRUC MOAA members:**

**“Welcome home and thank you for your service and sacrifices made while in the uniform of the United States”.**

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**Dial 988 then press 1**

**Veterans CRISIS HOTLINE**

**CHAT at [veteranscrisisline.net/chat](https://veteranscrisisline.net/chat)  
TEXT at 838255**

*The Greater Rome Utica (GRUC) Chapter has provided Officer's Club quality social events since receiving our charter in 1972. Our mission is to work for the benefit of all uniformed service members, their families, and their survivors. We believe the best way to achieve our mission is to advocate at the local, state, and federal levels for a strong national defense while providing needed support for the community where we live. Website - <https://grucmoaa.org/>.*

*GRUC supports the National Legislative Agenda formulated by MOAA. GRUC routinely invites members of Congress, House of Representatives, NY State Senate, NY State Assembly, and local elected officials to attend sponsored events to speak to our membership on issues of national, state, and local concern. GRUC also supports the NY State Council of Chapters in advocating on behalf of our veterans and the issues affecting them.*

## GRUC MOAA Officers and Board of Directors

### OFFICERS

President	CPT Gregory Bertolini, USA
Vice President	CW4 William Hamelin, USA
Secretary	CDR Robert Piper, USN
Treasurer	LTC Joseph Maurer, USA

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Past President: LTC Joseph Maurer, USA	MAJ Edwin Herr, USAF
Chaplain: MAJ James Martinez, USAF	CPT John 'Jack' Hosp, USMC
COL William R. Gray, Jr., USAF	1LT Steve Peek, USAF
LTC Lawrence Calabrese, USAR	Spouse Liaison: Cheryl 'Sherri' Skogland, AUX
CDR Stephen Mercurio, USN	

# OFFICER'S CALL – COMMANDER'S FAREWELL

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Greetings All!

I hope this issue of the GRUC Newsletter finds you well and preparing for spring weather to begin in earnest.

As many of you know, I'll be joining Karen in Boise, ID where she has accepted a new position. We're very excited about this move and are looking forward to new adventures. This change in our lives, has influenced my reminiscing about how much our chapter has changes since 2008. For chapters to have websites at that time was a novelty. Many chapters, like GRUC, had a web presence hosted by, and accessed through the MOAA website. The GRUC website was launched and is still circulating on the web. The site has been redesigned three times to remain contemporary with the needs of the chapter. GRUC partnered with MOAA again for an on-line membership portal which can be accessed from both the MOAA and GRUC websites.

In 2013, Bob Haley brought Wreaths Across America to Rome, NY. WAA is our premier fundraising activity. We can't thank Bob enough for researching WAA and bringing it to GRUC. Launched at Rome Cemetery, the event is now reaching six cemeteries and distributing over 1200 wreaths in 2022. Kudos to Joe Maurer for taking the reins of the WAA program. Joe begins soliciting sponsorships in May. Anyone interested in assisting can reach out to Joe.

Over the course of time our chapter has received nine consecutive Level of Excellence awards from MOAA. It was my pleasure to host the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration on August 17, 2022. With proclamations issued by Rep. Claudia Tenney (R-NY21), Sen. Joseph Griffo (R-53<sup>rd</sup> NY Senate District), and Assemblyperson Marianne Buttenschon (D-119<sup>th</sup> NY Assembly District) memorializing the 50<sup>th</sup>. Our chapter was visited by MOAA Board member CW04 Lelia Jackson, USMC(Ret). In our inaugural submissions, the chapter received a 5 star and 4-star Marvin J. Harris Communication Award for our newsletter and website, respectively.

GRUC support for the JROTC and NDCC units continues and has been increased to assist in funding field trips and JROTC competitions. These units are consistently recognized for the excellence the cadets achieve.

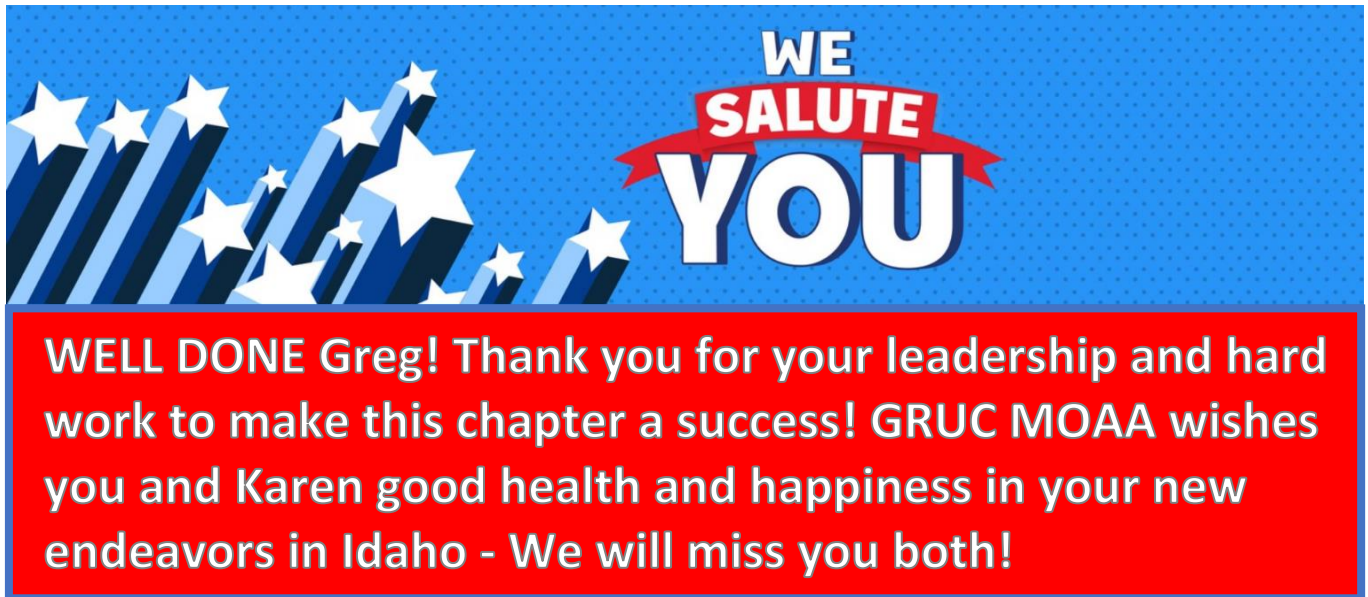
GRUC has also expanded support for other Veteran Service Organizations, relationships that are recognized by Assemblyperson Buttenschon.

It's easy to be proud of the achievements of our chapter and membership. We provide significant support to other veteran and community organizations. That support is reflected in the level of sponsorships we receive for the WAA program.

In closing, my only ask of members is to support the elected Officers and Board of Directors through active engagement. It's said many hands make light work. It's my hope that your hands reach out and help ease the load carried by the 10 remaining Officers and Board Members.

Fair winds and following seas. God Bless you all.

Gregory A. Bertolini, CPT MP USA (Ret)





# AROUND THE OFFICERS' MESS

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## The State of the Chapter – We need your help!!!!

We are asking for volunteers to join the Board of Directors and Officers of GRUC to keep this chapter viable and to continue the good works that GRUC has previously and would like to continue to provide to our communities.

There are vacancies in the President and Secretary/Newsletter Editor positions. Both Greg and Rob are in process of moving out of state and will be vacating these two positions. It's expected Greg will be departing on April 10<sup>th</sup>.

Efforts to fill them at the annual Election of Chapter Officers had no volunteers. **These positions need to be filled if GRUC MOAA is to continue our mission.** Please consider volunteering for one of these positions:

- President** shall be to serve as Chapter executive officer; preside at meetings of the Chapter and Board of Directors; appoint special committees; communicate to chapter members or the Board of Directors information or proposals that would help achieve the purposes of the Chapter; be the point of contact for the New York State Council of Chapters and MOAA correspondence.
- Secretary** shall prepare the bi-annual chapter newsletter.

The next Board meeting will be held on Friday April 7th at 0900 at Spresso's in the Community Bank building.

**Please respond to Greg no later than Thursday April 6th to be considered for one of the open positions.**

The Board will review the nominations and vote on candidates at the April 7th Board meeting.

## GRUC Member Authors New Book

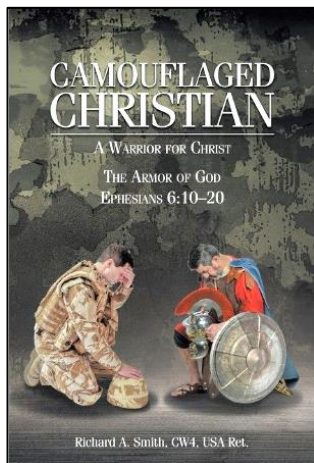
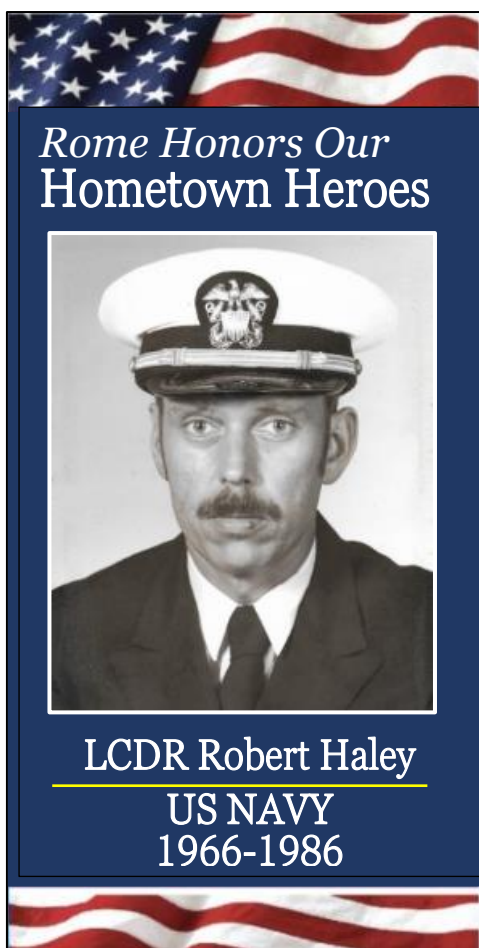


Photo 1. GRUC Richard Smith has authored a new book, *Camouflaged Christian*.

In his 24 years serving in the Army, GRUC member Richard A. Smith, CW4 USA Retired, learned that a deeper faith in God was needed to help get through the difficult challenges – not only of a soldier, but of life. He shares his spiritual journey as a soldier in his new book “Camouflaged Christian”.

You can get a copy of the book from his website at <https://camouflagedchristian.com/>, a local bookstore, or by contacting him directly through GRUC MOAA. BZ Richard!

## GRUC Remembers Haley with Hometown Heroes Banner



The Mohawk Valley Hometown Heroes banner program — which honors the area’s veterans, both living or deceased, as well as active military members and originated locally in Boonville in 2018 — made its debut in Utica last year.

The Mohawk Valley Hometown Heroes banner program began in 2022, when Mischael McKenna, a member of the Oneida Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, formed a committee with Trena DeFranco, Regent of the Oneida Chapter NSDAR; Tom Buono, of the Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 944 and Joe Fraccola of the Military Order of the Purple Heart Chapter 490. In its inaugural year in Utica, approximately 200 banners were hung along the Memorial Parkway in Utica.

This year the **program has expanded into Rome** as well as the town and village of New Hartford and the village of Whitesboro.

GRUC MOAA has sponsored a banner for our deceased President, Bob Haley, which will be hung along Route 825 on Griffiss Technology and Business Park this summer.

## Wreaths Across America After Action Report

Joe Mauer

Our 11<sup>th</sup> presentation of Wreaths Across America in Rome, NY was an outstanding success. Overall, the Chapter raised \$6,312 by sponsoring 1,262 wreaths for our 2022 program. With a few of our major sponsors reducing their contribution amounts, we fell just short of our \$7,000 minimum fundraising objective by \$688; however, we had good responses from new business sponsors which limited our shortfall.



*Photo 2: Rome firemen place a wreath at Chief Reilly's grave at St. Peter's Cemetery in 2022*

Overall, we have great support from the community because people and business owners identify with the Wreaths Across America mission:

“REMEMBER – HONOR - TEACH” – remember the fallen, honor those serving, and teach the next generation the value and high cost of freedom. As a Chapter, our focus is on the TEACH part of reaching young people. That’s why 90% of the money we raise is directed to organizations that promote the development of patriotism, leadership, and civic action among the youth of our community.

Every Chapter member can help by identifying a prospective sponsor. All that’s needed is for you to forward Joe the name of a business and a personal contact who we can approach to invite participation in our program. We do all the rest!

Wreaths Across America in Rome, NY will be appearing in local cemeteries this year on December 16<sup>th</sup>.

We’re not selling wreaths; we’re promoting a mission – please join us!

### **WINNER!!! “Dinner for two at Chesterfield’s Tavolo”**

In the Fall 2022 Newsletter, we ran a raffle for a \$50 dinner for two at Chesterfield’s Tavolo. Bill and Lori Hamelin were the winners (only 3 raffle entries were received).



## GRUC Member Poster Child for Honor Flight



Photo 3: GRUC MOAA member Jim Tille at Syracuse Honor Flight #16 reception.

Jim Tille is featured on the Syracuse Honor Flight Website at <https://honorflightsyracuse.org/>.

The picture to the left is the second photo that will come up on the website at the top of the page where the large photos are presented. You just need to wait a few seconds for the photos to cycle to Jim's.

Honor Flight Mission #18 will be on 04/22/23 with 80 veterans invited.

## GRUC Membership

Bill Hamelin

55 current members with 6 members overdue. If you are overdue for 2023, please get your payment into Bill Hamelin via the GRUC MOAA postbox address soonest.

WELCOME ABOARD !

John Clendenin, LTC, USMC (Ret)  
Gary Howard, COL, US Army (Ret)  
Michael P. Kenny, Col, USAF (Ret)



None since last newsletter

A 2023 membership form is enclosed on the next page. You can also join/renew online and use a credit card for payment by visiting the GRUC web page below:

[https://grucmoaa.org/html/join\\_gruc.html](https://grucmoaa.org/html/join_gruc.html)

If you aren't a National MOAA member, it's highly recommended that you become a member. A "free" membership is available!

If you are a national MOAA member, please provide your national membership number to Bill Hamelin. Please go to the MOAA website at:

[https://www.moaa.org/joinmoaatoday?qclid=Cj0KCCQjwtsCqBhDEARIsAE7RYh1XwTugFhVa6dTm2qmiToIZFx1ytbkhnKNBquhb2rfwR7x2\\_rKAR4aAjkWEALw\\_wcB](https://www.moaa.org/joinmoaatoday?qclid=Cj0KCCQjwtsCqBhDEARIsAE7RYh1XwTugFhVa6dTm2qmiToIZFx1ytbkhnKNBquhb2rfwR7x2_rKAR4aAjkWEALw_wcB)

Any questions regarding GRUC membership, please contact Bill at 315-725-3362 or [billh6369@zimbracloud.com](mailto:billh6369@zimbracloud.com).

## GRUC-MOAA DUES STATEMENT

Please renew your 2023 membership by November 1, 2022 by sending your check, payable to **GRUCMOAA, to GRUCMOAA Treasurer, P.O. Box 36, Rome, New York 13442-0036**

**\*Indicates required information**

**\*Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **\*Rank:** \_\_\_\_\_

**\*Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_ Service Branch: \_\_\_\_\_

**\*Primary Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Alternate Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse First Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse Last Name (if different): \_\_\_\_\_

**\*Your Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

**\*National MOAA Member Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**\*Dues Enclosed:** \_\_\_\_\_ Life Member ***MUST provide Birth Date:*** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ \$20.00 Regular Membership

\_\_\_\_\_ \$10.00 Active Duty/Guard/Reserve Membership

\_\_\_\_\_ \$10.00 Auxiliary Membership

Widow/Widower of a member or qualifying individual

\_\_\_\_\_ \$5.00 Auxiliary Non-Attendee Membership

(Non-Attendee Status is for our homebound, nursing home members, or members living more than 50 miles away).

**\*2023 Dues Enclosed:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_ **<or> Life Membership Dues:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Prior Year Dues Enclosed:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**\*Total Dues Enclosed:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**\*Check Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**GRUCMOAA CHAPTER LIFE MEMBERSHIP FEE STRUCTURE:**

Age (in 2022)	Membership Fee
50 and under:	\$300
51 to 55:	\$282
56 to 60:	\$265
61 to 65:	\$242
66 to 70:	\$213
71 to 75:	\$184
76 to 80:	\$153
81 to 85:	\$118
86 and over:	FREE!

## Treasurer's Report

Joe Maurer

Balances as of March 1, 2023

Checking	\$ 6,653.60
<u>Savings</u>	<u>\$ 4,776.16</u>
Total	\$11,429.76

We're still waiting to receive an additional \$3023.33 from WAA.

Expenses included:

- NYS CoC Dues
- PO Box annual rental
- Vietnam Veterans of America Post 944 \$500.00 Donation for their June 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Patriot Run. They were very grateful for MOAA's continued support to this event.

On 3/10, the Community Bank checking and savings account signature cards were revised to be Joe Maurer and Steve Mercurio. Greg was removed as a signatory.

# GRUC MOAA O'CLUB EVENTS

## GRUC MEETINGS/DINNERS

April	May	June	July	August	September
5	3	TBD	13	2	6
Vescio's Franklin Hotel	Stanwix Veterans & Mens Club	Burger Burn Hampton Inn	Lake Delta Yacht Club	Oneida Lake Brew House	El Jarocho
1700-2045	1700-2045	1700-1930	1700-2045	1700-2045	1700-2045

Based on member feedback, it was decided to discontinue the use of Sign-up Genius. Member events will be published via email.

**Please RSVP no later than one week before the event.**



**May 29**



**June 14**



**July 4**



**Sept 4**



**November 1**

# IN THE NEWS

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## Summer Road Construction in our Area

The NYSDOT will begin major road work (paving plus roadside safety) in April/May on NY 46 (Rome-New London Road) from Runnings intersection to NY 49 intersection in New London. Expect delays on this road over the summer.

Additionally, a new water main will be installed by the City of Rome along NY 26 (Turin Road) from about Potter Road north to the Lee town line. This work will result in be single lane work zones and begin in April/May. Expect significant delays on this road over the summer.

## National Parks Free Lifetime Pass

All U.S. veterans and Gold Star family members will be able to get a free lifetime entrance pass for federal parks and recreation sites nationwide starting November 2022.

The pass, an expansion on the annual free pass for currently serving troops and their families, grants free access to about 2,000 parks and lands.

<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2022/11/09/free-lifetime-national-parks-passes-are-coming-veterans-and-gold-star-families.html>

## DFAS Update - Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) Open Season

### **SBP-DIC OFFSET GONE!**

As of January 1, 2023 the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) offset has been fully eliminated. SBP payments will no longer be offset or reduced by any Dependent Indemnity Compensation (DIC) payments made by the VA to survivors. Spouses will receive full SBP (issued by DFAS) and full DIC (from the VA). Additional information is located here:

<https://www.dfas.mil/sbpdicnews>

The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2023 includes a Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) Open Season. The SBP Open Season began December 23, 2022 and ends on **January 1, 2024**.

The SBP Open Season allows for **retirees receiving retired pay, eligible members, or former members awaiting retired pay** who are **currently NOT enrolled** in SBP or RCSBP (Reserve Component Survivor Benefit Plan) to **enroll**. For a member who enrolls during the SBP Open Season, the law generally requires that the member will be responsible to pay retroactive SBP premium costs that would have been paid if the member had enrolled



at retirement (or enrolled at another earlier date, depending on the member's family circumstances).

The SBP Open Season also allows eligible members and former members who are **currently enrolled** in either SBP or RCSBP to **permanently discontinue** their SBP coverage. The law generally requires the covered beneficiaries to concur **in writing** with the election to discontinue. Previously paid premiums will not be refunded.

Please check our special focus webpage for news and information:

<https://www.dfas.mil/sbpopenseason23>

## Disability Claim Letters UPDATE

An update to VA.gov allows veterans to access their full disability benefit claim decision letters digitally, skipping the call to a VA representative and the wait for a paper copy to arrive in the mail.

The new service took effect January 17th. Nearly 280,000 veterans had downloaded their decision letters as of a February 23rd VA press release.

Veterans already were able to access their disability rating and other claims information digitally, but access to the full decision letter provides more information that could be used to appeal VA rulings. To access the letter, veterans must log into their VA.gov account; full details on the process are available at VA.gov.

"VA disability benefits can also open the door to other federal and state benefits, so quick and easy access to a decision means quicker access to the additional benefits Veterans deserve," VA Secretary Denis McDonough said in the press release.

The move also will free up VA call center representatives to address other veterans' issues, according to the release. More details on the VA claims process are available from VA.gov and at MOAA.org.

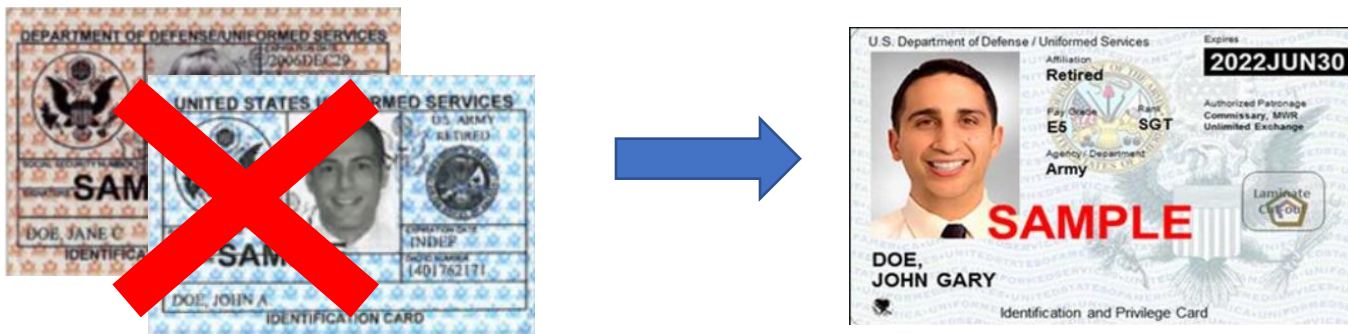
## Million Veteran Program

VA's Million Veteran Program (MVP) is a national research program looking at how genes, lifestyle, military experiences, and exposures affect health and wellness in Veterans.

Since launching in 2011, more than 930,000 Veterans have joined MVP. It's the largest research effort at VA to improve health care for Veterans and one of the largest research programs in the world studying genes and health. To learn more or join, visit [mvp.va.gov](http://mvp.va.gov) today.

## Remember - New ID Cards

DoD plans to phase out and cancel the existing ID cards in 2026.



**The Next Generation Uniformed Services ID (Nex Gen USID) card** is a replacement for the previous version of United States military IDs for retired servicemembers, dependents, spouses, and others who need an official ID to access installations, services, and vehicles controlled by the Department of Defense. The Next Generation USID card will incorporate an updated design and security features to deter counterfeiting and fraud and will be printed on a plastic cardstock.

GRUC Bill Hamelin says, “If you currently have a Military Retiree/Dependent ID card that “DOES NOT EXPIRE” and states “INDEFINITE”, you will still need to apply for a new ID card replacement within 4 years (the end of 2026).

## VA to Cover New Drug for Early-Stage Alzheimer’s Disease (MOAA News)

The Department of Veterans Affairs has agreed to cover a new biologic treatment for some veteran patients with Alzheimer's disease, according to an announcement Monday from the manufacturer.

The VA will cover Leqembi, a monoclonal antibody therapy made by pharmaceutical companies Eisai and Biogen, for veterans in the disease's early stages, making the department the first and largest health program in the country to endorse the treatment.

Full story - <https://www.moaa.org/content/publications-and-media/news-articles/2023-news-articles/health-care-and-earned-benefits/va-to-cover-new-drug-for-early-stage-alzheimers-disease/>

## Top Enlisted Leaders Agree on Need to Change Perception of Military Service (MOAA News)

Senior enlisted leaders from the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, and Space Force didn't shy away from the problems facing servicemembers and families in recent testimony before two congressional subcommittees. And while offering solutions and updates on a series of quality-of-life issues, they all pointed to a larger concern: The need for a national dialogue on the value of military service.



Photo 4: Senior Enlisted Leaders testify during a House Armed Services Subcommittee on March 9th.

Congress, media, and society as a whole play an important role in answering this challenge. How we speak about military service matters when it comes to combating a “Perfect Storm” of a recruiting crisis, and though there are thousands of positive experiences shared, they continue to be overshadowed by negative “clickbait” stories.

As retirees, veterans, and survivors, MOAA members serve as “influencers” for all those considering military service – not just members of your own family. Recounting your positive experiences may motivate and drive those who will follow in your footsteps.

Full story - <https://www.moaa.org/content/publications-and-media/news-articles/2023-news-articles/advocacy/top-enlisted-leaders-agree-on-need-to-change-perception-of-military-service/>

## MOAA Priorities for 2023 (MOAA News)

- Compensation and Service-Earned Benefits
- Military Housing
- Health Care for Currently Serving and Retirees
- Health Care and Benefits for Veterans
- Service Families
- Survivors
- Guard and Reserve

Full story - <https://www.moaa.org/content/publications-and-media/news-articles/2023-news-articles/advocacy/moaas-legislative-priorities-118th-Congress/>

## New District 22 Congressional Rep Brandon Williams, (R)



*Photo 5: Representative Brandon Williams*

**Utica District Office**  
421 Broad Street  
Utica, NY 13501  
Phone: (315) 732-0713

Brandon was born in Dallas, Texas and attended Pepperdine University in California where he received a BA in Liberal Arts.

In August of 1990, during the build up to the first Gulf War, Brandon volunteered to serve as a nuclear submarine officer for the Navy. He graduated from college in December 1990 and reported to Officer Candidate School in March 1991. Transitioning into the nuclear engineering training was a very steep learning curve, one which he successfully accomplished against significant odds.

During his military service, he made six strategic-deterrent patrols in the Pacific aboard the USS Georgia, serving as the Strategic Missile Officer.

Early in his military service he fell in love and married Stephanie McRee (Williams), daughter of a senior Army officer and Vietnam Veteran (Col. McRee was awarded three Bronze Stars with Valor). Stephanie grew up on Army bases and experienced first-hand the threat of Communism while her father was stationed in Germany on the front lines of the Cold War.

Following his Navy service, Brandon attended the renowned Wharton School in Philadelphia, earning an MBA double majoring in in Operations & Information Management and Finance.

Brandon's military career and entrepreneurial career have taken him and his family around this country, but they landed in Central New York in 2010. Together, Brandon and Stephanie started an agribusiness in the Finger Lakes region and participated in attracting tourist and economic development to our community.

Brandon is also a pioneer in innovation, founding a software company that now helps large industrial manufacturers modernize their production plants, secure their critical infrastructure from cyber-attacks, and paves the way for reduced emissions through advances in artificial intelligence.

Today, Brandon humbly represents the people of New York's 22nd District in Congress. Brandon is an entrepreneur, a husband of thirty years, the father of two adult children, and a Veteran of the U.S. Navy.

For the 118th Congress, Congressman Williams will serve on these three House committees:

1. **Transportation and Infrastructure**

Subcommittees:

- Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials
- Water Resources and Environment

2. **Science, Space, and Technology**

Subcommittee:

- Chairman of the Subcommittee on Energy

3. **Education and the Workforce**

Subcommittees:

- Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education
- Higher Education and Workforce Investment

If you desire to stay current with Congressman Williams progress and support for his Congressional District, you can sign up for his Newsletter at:

<https://brandonwilliams.house.gov/forms/emailsignup/>



## New Director at Rome VA Clinic



Photo 6: Dr. Kenney, New Rome VA Director

The Syracuse VA Medical Center has announced the appointment of Dr. Michael P. Kenney as the new director of the Donald J. Mitchell Department of Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic. Outgoing Director, Dr. Hughes, will be farewelled on March 23<sup>rd</sup> at a Bon Voyage party where Bill Hamelin will present Dr. Hughes a GRUC MOAA certificate of appreciation for his support to our veterans.

Dr. Kenney served in the Air Force and will retire as a colonel in July 2023 after 23 years of active military service. His Air Force career includes service as a prior enlisted aircraft avionics technician at Griffiss Air Force Base in the 1990s. After an internal medicine residency in Binghamton, Kenney transitioned back to active duty serving as an internist stationed at various bases around the world at both clinic and hospital-based settings. His most recent and final military position was that of senior Flight

Surgeon and Chief of Aeromedical services at Hancock Field in Syracuse, leading the way for the health and preventative medical needs of the entire Wing population with a particular focus on the flying community.

Kenney earned his undergraduate degree at Utica College, and his medical degree at the Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine. He and his family live in Fayetteville in Onondaga County.

## Get your SHOTS here!

**FLU SHOTS:** It is never too late to receive your flu shot. Many times, your flu shot will be administered during a scheduled visit to your primary care team. You can check with your team through Secure Messaging in Myhealthvet or call the clinic (315-334-7100) and make an appointment.

**Covid Shots/Boosters:** If you need to get a COVID vaccination or booster, please send a Secure Message through Myhealthvet or call 315-425-4488 to schedule an appointment.



## Clinic Renovations coming:

Major renovations and improvements to the VA clinic are continuing to take place. An elevator shortcut corridor will eventually be constructed so they are facing the main entry doors rather than having to walk a long distance through the clinic. The 2<sup>nd</sup> floor area is undergoing major renovations so additional space can be utilized to increase care for veterans. In addition, new heating, ventilation, and air conditioning units will be installed. Completion is scheduled for some time late in 2023. Once the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor is completed most offices will be re-located to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor while the 1<sup>st</sup> floor area is renovated and updated.

**The Myhealthvet office has returned to room 1233!**

In the future, Cardiology, ENT, ECHO, GYN, and perhaps some limited general surgery will be available. The installation of the CATSCAN machine has been delayed. All these efforts and improvements are being made to enhance veteran care and reduce travel.

## GRUC MOAA Assists Veterans at the Clinic

Chapter members CMDR Stephen Mercurio, USN (RET), CW4 William J. Hamelin Jr, USA, (RET), and LTCOL Joseph Maurer, USA, (RET) work in a daily capacity at the Rome, NY, Donald J. Mitchell, VA clinic. **From October 2022 to February 2023, we assisted 2,238 veterans and provided 502 volunteer hours at the clinic. Over the last 11 years of our chapters support in this area we have assisted 7,894 veterans and provided 8,445 volunteer hours. These volunteer efforts have saved the VA \$140,152.70 in costs thus far.**

GRUC-MOAA volunteers receive specialized training with the MyHealthvet and Ebenefits programs to assist veterans with enrollment and usage of these programs. Each year they must complete the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPPA), Information Security, and Myhealthvet training through the VA Talent Management System (TMS).



Our volunteers provide the required in-person authentications and can now use VA Video Connect services and telephone services to authenticate veterans remotely. We now contact veterans through email, telephone, and texting with information regarding registering for a “Myhealthvet” account.

In addition, our volunteers have provided in-depth training classes to the Rome VA clinic staff on Myhealthvet and Ebenefits so they can fully understand what these programs can provide for the veterans but also how the staff/providers can use this system to be more effective and efficient.

**All MHV Advanced accounts have been eliminated by the VA. If you had an Advanced account and desire to upgrade, please give Bill, Steve, or Joe a call at 315-334-7118 for assistance on how to best accomplish this.**



## NEW Services available at the Rome VA Clinic!!!

	Audiology (315-425-2437)	Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, & Friday
	Ears, Nose, and Throat (ENT)	1 <sup>st</sup> Friday of the Month
	Cardiology	Tuesdays
	Podiatry	Monday – Friday
	Womens’ Health Gynecology	3 <sup>rd</sup> Thursday of the month
	Massage Therapy	Wednesday & Thursday
	Acupuncture	Mondays and Tuesdays
	Ultrasound	Tuesdays and Thursdays
	Ortho and spine	4 <sup>th</sup> Monday of the month
	Chiropractor	Mondays and Fridays
	Optometry	Monday – Friday

**Audiology and Podiatry** support is now available at the clinic twice a week, an appointment is required. Please call 315-425-2437 (Audiology) to set up an appointment. To order additional batteries and other accessories, call 1-303-273-6200 and select option 2.

**Women’s Veteran Health Clinic:** The Rome VA clinic has established a robust and excellent woman veteran clinic that is now in full operation. It is conducted by PA Debora

Cardinal. Female veterans can request assignment for treatment through this clinic or they can remain with their current primary care provider. Any questions regarding the clinic or registering to utilize it can be made at 315-334-7100 extn: 57318.

**VA Red Coat Ambassador program:** The VA Red Coat Ambassador program is a special volunteer program instituted at the Syracuse VA Medical Center and its associated Primary Care clinics. This program allows volunteers to assist veterans with specialized computer programs, such as Myhealthvet and Ebenefits and act as an informal ombudsman, assisting veterans by providing answers to a myriad of questions and ensuring the veteran contacts the proper resource for any assistance they might need. Any issues faced by the veteran that cannot be resolved by the Red Coat Ambassador, can then be escalated to the immediate attention of the Clinic Nurse Manager for resolution. This methodology has greatly reduced the frustration and delay sometimes encountered by veterans navigating through the VA.

**MyHealthyVet:** Myhealthvet allows veterans the ability to access, interact, view, or even save, their medical information, which includes lab test results, prescription ordering and tracking, medical imaging, communicating with their primary care team (and other clinics) and making in-person and video connect appointments. It also accepts veteran input on a variety of health-related items like weight, blood pressure, medical treatment from outside the VA and OTC medications. **NOTE: Myhealthvet may require a 2<sup>nd</sup> level authentication process to access your Myhealthvet (MHV) account. This will depend on which method you utilize to “log” in to Myhealthvet. Currently, this is not required if you sign in using Option 2.**

**Ebenefits:** Ebenefits is a program that is undergoing a phase out/transition. Currently it allows veterans to access their disability information, make an application for benefits, track compensation exam results, apply for VA loan certificate, track compensation payments, appeals, and many others. VA is trying to simplify access for veterans to various veterans' information and Ebenefits and is transitioning over to: **VA.GOV**

**Optical services through the VA:** Do You Wear Glasses? Need a new set of frames & lenses....do you get your glasses from the VA? They provide them for you at (normally) no cost. There is an extra charge for tinted glasses. If you are enrolled in the VA you are eligible through the VA.

- Fort Drum Optometry Clinic will also provide one free pair of glasses each year. You can walk into the clinic and present your eyeglass prescription (must be within the last year). The Optometry Clinic is located at 10501 Euphrates River Valley Rd., Fort Drum, NY. You will have to pick them up at Ft. Drum, no delivery.
- The Navy also has a program where they will provide you with one free pair of glasses each year. It does not matter what Military Service a person served in either. The Customer

Service Line is available: 757-887-7600, option 1. Here's the link to the Navy Optical site for that process:

<https://www.med.navy.mil/Naval-Medical-Logistics-Command/Naval-Ophthalmic-Support-and-Training-Activity/Ordering/how-to-order-retiree/>

**Hearing services through the VA:** Fort Drum Medical will provide hearing aids to retirees and spouse at COST. Link to Ft. Drum:

<http://www.drum.amedd.army.mil/ContactUs/SitePages/Contact%20Us.aspx>

**Veteran use of urgent care facilities approved:** As part of the VA MISSION ACT of 2018, Veterans who have received medical care from the VA, or VA sponsored community providers, anytime during the last 24 months are now eligible to utilize URGENT CARE. If you are in Priority Group 1~5, the first 3 visits in a year are free, and after that there is a \$30 co-pay for each visit. Priority Groups 6~8 will incur co-payments of \$30 for each visit. WELL NOW Locations are available throughout NY state (and US). If the veteran encounters problems, call 866-620-2071 for assistance.

Local URGENT CARE facilities are:

- Utica:
  - Primary Urgent Care, 1904 Genesee St., 315-804-6800
  - Well Now Urgent Care facility located at 230 N. Genesee St., 315-271-2394.
- Rome:
  - Well Now Urgent Care facility at 103 West Dominick St., Suite 10
- Other locations: <https://vaurgentcarelocator.triwest.com/Locator/Care>

**Visit a partnering (Community Care Network) location** – Veterans can now visit a participating retail pharmacy or urgent care network and verify eligibility using this VA facility locator:

<http://www.va.gov/find-locations>

or by calling 1-877-881-7618. Included are most CVS, Walmart, Costco, Wegmans, Safeway and Kroger pharmacies. Present your government issued ID care (driver's license or VA ID card) and request that your vaccination documentation be forwarded to your VA provider.



# VETERANS INFORMATION

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**FILE a VA Claim:** If you need to file a VA compensation claim, and live in Oneida County, please contact the Oneida County Veterans Service Office located within the Rome VA clinic. Representatives Joseph Perrone, Dan Gowey, and Aaron Conklin are available to assist veterans through this complex process. If you have any questions regarding a medical condition that was incurred through military service, primary or secondary injuries, and wondering if filing a claim would be proper, please call or stop by their office and they will be happy to assist. Please inform your spouses, that if you, as the veteran, die from a service-connected injury, they may be entitled to Dependent Indemnity Compensation (DIC) payments. They can also call or stop by for a quick determination if they qualify for these monthly payments.

Contact Information is: 315-798-5830, or [jperrone@ocgov.net](mailto:jperrone@ocgov.net)

**LEGAL ASSISTANCE:** Military retirees, don't forget you can obtain, at no cost to you, wills, healthcare proxy/living wills, and Power of Attorneys from the Ft. Drum Legal office, located at Clark Hall, 10720 Mt. Belvedere Blvd., Ft. Drum, NY 13602. The number to make an appointment is: 315-772-5261.

**DOD TRAVEL INFORMATION:** Space A travel is back to pre-pandemic levels effective 4/26/22, although some COVID restrictions may still apply.

The Department of Defense has established an official DOD sponsored/sanctioned web page that retirees can access for reduced prices with air flights, hotels, etc. The American Forces Travel page is located at this address:

<https://www.americanforcetravel.com/>

After you select your hotel, flight, etc., and before it lets you proceed further, it will ask for some information to verify your eligibility (through ID.ME). Once your eligibility has been approved it will allow you to proceed. DOD has a contract through Priceline to provide discounts for military personnel and retirees.

## GRUC-MOAA Merchandise

**Polo Shirts:** High quality short sleeved shirts provided by A&P Master Images on Water St. Utica, NY. [MasterYourImage.com](http://MasterYourImage.com). Made to order in quantities as low as 1 shirt.

Three options:

1. Shirt with embroidered GRUCMOAA Logo. Logo on left breast.
2. Shirt with embroidered GRUCMOAA Logo on left, Member Name, Rank, Branch, and Status on right.
3. Shirt with embroidered GRUCMOAA Logo on left, embroidered American Flag on left sleeve, Member Name, Rank, Branch, and Status on right.



Sample Option 3) Costs less than \$35.00:

### **Sample for decals, static cling, and magnet:**

2.5" x 5" Vinyl Decals (apply to outside of surface):

\$3.00 each

2.5" x 5" Static Cling Decals (apply to inside of surface): \$3.00 each

2" x 3.5" Business Card sized magnet: \$1.00 each



**Challenge Coins:** \$8.00 each

Sample Front and Back of the coin:

