

# THE PATRIOT

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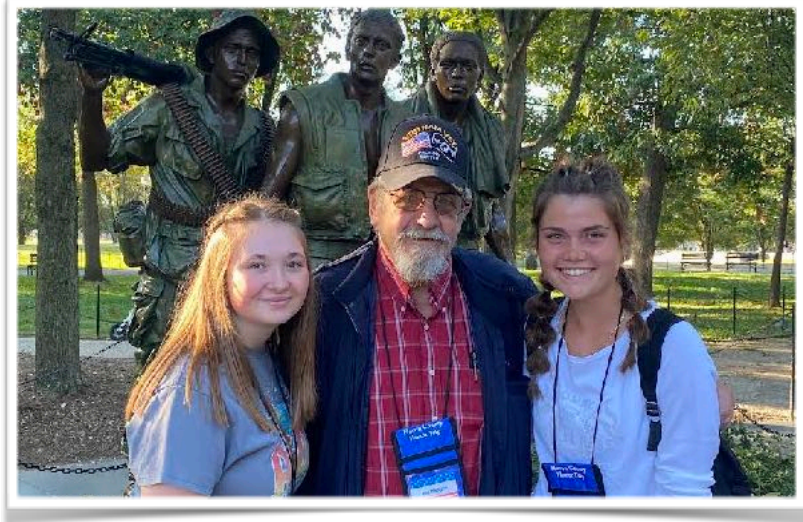
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Willard High School students Madison Hall and Natalie Rothharr stand with Vietnam veteran Jim Pisegna at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. during the 2022 Huron County Honor Trip. (SUBMITTED PHOTO BY TIFFANY NUHFER)

## Students share Honor Trip memories

WILLARD — One of Tamia Barnett’s favorite parts of the 2022 Huron County Honor Trip was hearing veterans tell “their old ship stories.”

“There were a lot of them who were willing to talk. It was definitely inspirational,” she said.

Veterans had the opportunity to share stories during the bus trip as they visited memorials in Washington, D.C., Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Va., and the Flight 93 National Memorial in Pennsylvania. Students from Norwalk and Willard high schools also went on the Honor Trip. From Norwalk were: freshman Dylan Pigman; junior Alaina Balduff; seniors Lana Oglesby, Kathryn Ott, and Sophia Ott; and social studies teacher Derek Pigman. From Willard were: sophomores Tamia Barnett, Macie Kirk, and Molly Reiderman; junior Madison Hall; seniors Kasmeine Diaz, Natalie Rothhaar, and Casey

Sallee; and agriscience teacher Tiffany Nuhfer.

“We really see the importance of the patriotism of the connection (among the veterans and students) and showing appreciation to those who served,” Nuhfer said.

*THE PATRIOT* interviewed the Willard High School students about their Honor Trip experiences and why they wanted to participate.

Sallee has veterans on his grandmother’s side of the family.

“My great-grandpa was (in) World War II, my great uncle was (in) Vietnam. ... They were all too old for me to really get to know and hear about their stories and stuff. So I just wanted to see if I could connect with my family, without really connecting with them, by being with veterans,” he said.

“What blew my mind was we learned about all this in class and I’ve always had my own image of how it all went and then you have these people who lived through the history that you learned. It was kinda mind-blowing. It’s so much more gruesome.”

Before the Honor Trip, Sallee was taught to thank veterans for their service and be respectful, but don’t ask them about what they experienced.

“More often than not, veterans enjoy talking about their experiences,” he said. “This is how history stays alive, by the stories being told. It opened me up to be like, it’s OK to talk to them about it because they need to get that closure because war — it just does stuff to people; it’s terrible.”

The moment that hit Sallee the hardest was “watching the tears flowing” of a local veteran who had the privilege of laying a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The two connected with each other during the Honor Trip.

“Watching him salute (the wreath), it was just crazy to watch. I was kinda speechless,” Sallee said.

Afterward, the veteran “had a certain energy” about him and was thankful, Sallee said. “He was super honored by it. It was special to watch.”



Willard High School students Molly Reiderman (from left), Macie Kirk, Tamia Barnett, and Kasmeine Diaz reflect on those who fought for their freedom at Arlington National Cemetery during the 2022 Huron County Honor Trip. (SUBMITTED PHOTO BY TIFFANY NUHFER)



Willard High School senior Casey Sallee pays tribute to a Huron County veteran who gave the ultimate sacrifice with a dog tag left at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial under his name. (SUBMITTED PHOTO BY TIFFANY NUHFER)

Rothhaar shared why she wanted to participate.



“I wanted to be on the trip because I’ve already been to D.C. and I absolutely love it and I love working with veterans. We do a lot here at Willard. They’re always super humble, great people and they’re wonderful to work with, so I thought it was a great opportunity,” she said.

At the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall, Rothhaar assisted a wheelchair-bound veteran and his wife. The wife used an app with photos of the deceased veterans to find a high school friend of her husband.

“I didn’t want to look at him. If he was crying, I was going to start crying, but his wife was crying,” Rothhaar said.

Nuhfer paid tribute to the late Daniel Lykins, of Willard, at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall and left his dog tag there. Nuhfer, the FFA advisor, brought an etching and dog tag home. After she posted on social media, Lykins’ family reached out to her and that’s when she learned an amazing coincidence.



“I found out (Lykins) was born and raised in the home that my husband and I live in now,” she said. “That felt like a very meaningful moment.”

Diaz, a Willard senior, said a veteran’s wife was scared when her husband left to serve in the military and that she might not see him again.

“Life wasn’t normal for (the veteran’s wife) because she missed him so much. When he finally came back, he never said a word to her about his (service) time until this trip and she was crying on the bus when she heard it,” Diaz said. “She said it was finally nice to hear him say something about it because he had to go through it by himself for all those years and never tell anyone.”



## Veterans Barbecue coming Memorial Weekend

NORWALK — The Veterans Barbecue, sponsored by the Huron County Veteran Service Office, is returning.

Veterans and their spouses are invited to the Expo Building at the Huron County Fairgrounds on Friday, May 27 from 11 a.m. to p.m.

We hope to see you there.



## Louis Stokes VA serves wide age range of veterans

*EDITOR'S NOTE: This is Part 1 of a series about area VA centers and clinics.*

CLEVELAND — The Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center serves a variety of ages of veterans — from those who recently left the military to those who are in their 90s.



This is the main entrance of the Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center. Drivers with the Huron County Veteran Service Office drop off veterans here for their appointments. *(PHOTO BY CARY ASHBY/HCVSO)*

Outreach coordinator Devin Wilgus discussed with *THE PATRIOT* the issues facing older and younger veterans.

“From Vietnam-era veterans, I know we get a lot of, ‘I was boots on the ground or I was a Blue Water vet. Am I eligible for benefits?’ That’s a new topic within the last couple years because if you were a Brown Water vet and you were really boots on the ground, you were exposed to a lot of things and the government has been taking care of you,” he said.

“Now they’ve opened it up to Blue Waters. So these veterans who were off the shore on the ships, even though they weren’t boots on the ground, they were still exposed to all that stuff. So Congress has recognized that and now we are taking care of those veterans.”

The Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 covers service connection for veterans who served in the offshore waters of the Republic of Vietnam between Jan. 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975. It was signed into law on June 25, 2019.

Veterans Affairs is doing its best to learn more about younger veterans and those “who are fresh out of the military,” said Wilgus, who served in the U.S. Air Force from 2015 through 2019.

“What we’re seeing with our veterans now is when they get out, they want to kind of take time for themselves, but they need to understand the VA is here to take care of them and their health,” he said.

Service members deployed in the Middle East breathed in chemicals via “burn pits” used to dispose of materials.

“It’s harming their lungs and just their entire body,” said Wilgus, who says burn pits are the modern equivalent of Agent Orange from the Vietnam War. “We are doing research and trying to figure out how to best help these veterans.”

After Louis Stokes officials have determined a veteran is eligible for benefits, there are several options. He or she can be directed to a county veteran service office or they can file claims through various in-house departments.

“It depends on that veteran’s unique story,” Wilgus said.

Appointments at the Huron County Veteran Service Office can be made by calling 419-668-4150.

Next, it's a matter of getting familiar with the veteran's military career — if he or she were injured during their time of service and if related things have gotten worse over time.

“It's really about opening their book and learning about them,” Wilgus said.

# Veterans in the community



Vietnam War veteran Donn Rospert, of Bellevue, (foreground) speaks during the National Vietnam War Veterans Day ceremony March 28 at the Bellevue Fallen Soldiers Memorial. In the background, area veterans in a rifle detail stand at the ready. (PHOTO BY CARY ASHBY/HCVSO)



U.S. Army veteran Dave Ditz receives a Quilt of Valor during the city of Bellevue Veterans Day program Nov. 11 at the Bellevue Fallen Soldiers Memorial. He retired from the Norwalk Police Department and currently is the chief deputy at the Huron County Sheriff's Office. Sheriff Todd Corbin, who served in the U.S. Marine Corps, also received a Quilt of Valor. (PHOTO BY CARY ASHBY/HCVSO)



Retired Maj. Gen. Deborah Ashenurst, director of the Ohio Department of Veterans Services, chats with Teen Leadership Corps class members at Edison High School before the Veterans Day assembly Nov. 11. From left are: Myah Whiley, Jillian McDonnell, Olivia Wilson, Summer Thom, and Lindsay Sneider. (PHOTO BY CARY ASHBY/HCVSO)

## Veterans enjoy trips to national museum

COLUMBUS — The National Veterans Memorial and Museum is full of symbolism.

Visitors will see many X's in the architecture of the circular building, which represent the military staying together.

"A circle never ends and our oath never ends," tour guide Dan Buckley, a U.S. Air Force veteran, told a recent group of Huron County veterans.

The floor is made of 2.6 million pieces of white oak, which symbolizes the number of veterans in the nation and the resilience of the military.

Located along the Scioto River near downtown Columbus, the National Veterans Memorial and Museum seeks to preserve, share and celebrate the personal experiences of America's veterans.

An exhibit covers the journey from enlisting in the armed forces to returning to civilian life. Parallel to it is a timeline display of milestones in the history of the United States military. The basement features a variety of temporary exhibits. Hanging in the Great Hall are two-sided banners with black-and-white photographs of veterans as they looked during their military service and afterward.

The Huron County Veteran Service Commission has made a generous donation to the museum for free admission and guided tours through December 2022. Any Huron County veteran, surviving spouse, Gold Star family, and a guest are eligible.

The trips are on the second Wednesday of every month. A Huron County Veteran Service Office van leaves the office at 7:30 a.m. and returns about 4 p.m. To reserve a spot or request more information, call the office at 419-668-4150. All reservations, which are on a first-come first-serve basis, must be made at least one week before the trip.



Monroeville resident Merle Enzor, a U.S. Army veteran, stands with the Blue Star displaying his service information at the National Veterans Memorial and Museum in Columbus. That information helps the museum maintain accurate statistics. (PHOTO BY CARY ASHBY/HCVSO)

## HCVSO offers transportation

NORWALK — The Huron County Veteran Service Office continues to offer transportation for any medical appointment or other services, such as errands to the post office or grocery store.

At least 48 hours before your appointment, call 419-668-4150. You also may request transportation online at [huroncountyvets.com](http://huroncountyvets.com). Under the "services" tab, click on "transportation."

Be ready to provide the following: Your full name; phone number; date, time and location of your appointment; and the last four numbers of your Social Security number. If you request a ride for errands, you will need to list all the stops our driver will need to make.

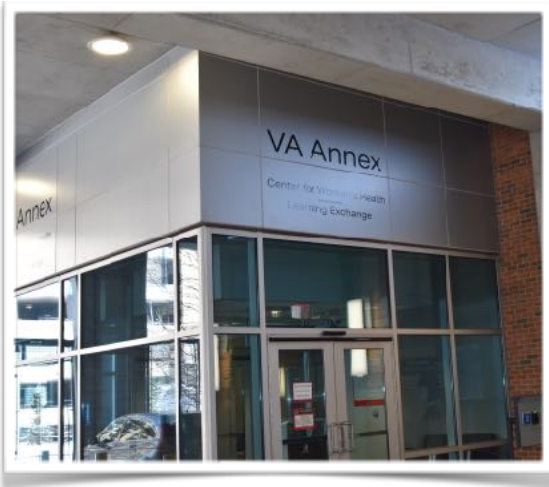
Ryan Wolfe or Cary Ashby, of the transportation department, will call you the day before your appointment to confirm your ride.



## Telehealth is option for helping Louis Stokes VA patients

CLEVELAND — The pandemic and its restrictions have had a minimal impact on the number of veterans being helped at the Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center.

In 2021, the medical center served more than 111,000 veterans. Outreach coordinator Devin Wilgus told *THE PATRIOT* that the pandemic and Covid-19 restrictions haven't impacted the number of patients much, with "only a slight decline" of 1,000 compared to two years ago.



This entrance for the Center for Women's Health is in the parking deck of the Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center. Another entrance is off Wade Park, the street name that many veterans have used as a nickname for the medical center. (PHOTO BY CARY ASHBY/HCVSO)

More veterans are using telehealth as an option for their doctor's appointments.

While there are veterans who prefer in-person care, Wilgus said there also are those who enjoy the flexibility of using their computers or phones.

"It's amazing that we're doing that. That's here to stay. That is a wonderful avenue to have," he said. "The veterans save time and money and energy (by) not going to and from their appointments. They can log on from anywhere and just be there ... instead of having to maybe go get gas and then drive an hour."

Some of the challenges of telehealth are veterans who don't have internet access, and those who have difficulty with online access because they live in rural areas. If a veteran needs assistance with video-connected care, call the Huron County Veteran Service Office at 419-668-4150.

"Sometimes you need to be in person," Wilgus said.

The pandemic has caused Louis Stokes VA employees to think critically about how to safely offer services to veterans.

"Our mission is not going to stop; we are here to help our veterans no matter what. So whatever we have to do, that's what we're going to do," Wilgus said.

## 'Connecting with veterans is near and dear to me'

NORWALK — Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose is the only veteran in statewide elected office.

"I wear that proudly," he said during his March 29 visit to the Huron County Veteran Service Office.

While in Norwalk, LaRose met several local veterans, members of the Huron County Veteran Service Commission, HCVSO staff members and Huron County Commissioner Harry Brady. LaRose said he tries to speak to veterans throughout the state and go to veteran service offices as often as he can.

"Connecting with veterans is near and dear to me," he said. "I have a special love for my brothers and sisters (who) served in the Vietnam War."

LaRose enlisted in the U.S. Army with the 101st Airborne and for six years, served as a Green Beret in the Special Forces.

His numerous military commendations and honors include the Bronze Star. He continues to serve as a reservist and said he looks forward to the weekends when he's referred to as SFC LaRose and not "Secretary of State LaRose."



Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose (right) chats with Thom Price, who represents the Disabled American Veterans on the Huron County Veteran Service Commission, after accepting a challenge coin. LaRose visited the Huron County Veteran Service Office on March 29. (PHOTO BY CARY ASHBY/HCVSO)

# Korean War veteran honored

NORWALK — John Churchill took a moment to collect himself after being honored by the Huron County Veteran Service Commission.



Korean War veteran John Churchill, 89, of Norwalk, stands with his daughter, Lisa Albright. (PHOTO BY CARY ASHBY/HCVSO)

Churchill was drafted into the U.S. Army after he graduated from Norwalk High School. He served from February 1953 through February 1955 on active duty, plus six more years in the U.S. Army Reserves. Churchill was stationed in Korea for one year.

"In 1962, I got my discharge," said the 89-year-old Korean War veteran.

In the Army, Churchill was a teletype repairman. Teletypes assisted with communication between units and headquarters.

"I worked in the shop (and) repaired teletypes. (I) kept them running," Churchill said.

Lisa Albright, of Norwalk, watched with pride as her father received Korean War ribbons during the Feb. 2 commission meeting.

After the brief ceremony, Albright said her father didn't tell her much about his time in the Army when she was a child. However, Churchill said he has shared more "in the last several years," which has helped him process his experience.