

An Affiliate Chapter of the Military Officers Association of America

Save the Dates
2025

<u>BOD Mtgs.</u>	<u>Chapter Mtgs.</u>
July 15	May 30 (Picnic)
October 14	August 16
	November 15

2026

<u>BOD Mtgs.</u>	<u>Chapter Mtgs.</u>
January 15	February 21
April 14	May 30

Chapter Picnic - May 30, 2026

The Western North Carolina Military Officers Association (WNC-MOAA) is an affiliate Chapter of National MOAA, is nonprofit and politically nonpartisan.

The mission of WNC-MOAA is stated in the bylaws and referenced in the newsletter and website.

Chapter Meetings are held on Saturdays (Feb, May, Aug, Nov)

May Meeting (Picnic):
Mills River Park
 124 Town Center Dr
 Mills River, NC
 Dress Code: Picnic Casual

Registration information for the [May 25th](#) is the last page of this newsletter.

Spouses and guests are welcomed to all Chapter meetings!



From the President's Desk:
Spring Forward with Purpose and Pride

Dear Members,

Spring has returned to the Blue Ridge, bringing color, energy, and a renewed sense of purpose to our Chapter. Thank you for being part of MOAA's Western North Carolina Chapter. Your support fuels everything we do - locally and nationally.

WNC-MOAA remains deeply committed to service. This spring, we're once again recognizing outstanding cadets at 14 area high schools through our **JROTC Leadership Awards**. We're continuing to assist **resident veterans of the Veterans Restoration Quarters (VRQ)**, displaced by Hurricane Helene who are now staying at the Quality Inn. And just last month, some members participated or supported the **April 2025 Blue Ridge Honor Flight** as an honored veteran, guardians, and Honor Flight staff - thank you for representing our Chapter with such heart.

We have an exciting calendar ahead. Mark your schedule and join us if you can:

- ◆ **May 30 – WNC-MOAA Chapter Meeting & Picnic**, 11:30 AM, Willow Oak Shelter, Mills River Park - see last page of this newsletter
- ◆ **June 14 – Haywood County Veterans & Community Gathering**, Noon–6 PM, Waynesville American Legion
- ◆ **June 26 – French Broad Chocolate Factory Private Tour**, Asheville, 1 PM (RSVP by June 17)
- ◆ **June 27 – Smoky Mountain Satellite Meeting**, Lunchtime, Maggie Valley (specific location) - TBD
- ◆ **July 18 – Hands-On Falconry Experience**, Weaverville (RSVP by June 15)
- ◆ **August 16 – Chapter Meeting**
- ◆ **September 27 – Blue Ridge Honor Flight Welcome Home Celebration**, Asheville Airport

Inside this newsletter, you'll also find timely and important information:

- ◆ A breakdown of when veterans can **salute out of uniform**, including during the National Anthem and Pledge of Allegiance
- ◆ A guide to **REAL ID requirements** and what forms of identification are TSA-approved - especially the often-overlooked **Veteran Health Identification Card (VHIC)**
- ◆ Details on the next **Blue Ridge Honor Flight** on **September 27**, now accepting applications for WWII,

(Continued on page 2)

From the President's Desk: (Continued from page 1)

Korea, and Vietnam veterans, **Gold Star Family members**, and **Guardians**

We're proud to announce that WNC-MOAA was once again recognized with **MOAA's 5-Star Level of Excellence Award**, as well as **5-Star Harris Communications Awards** for both our newsletters and our website. These accolades are a reflection of your support, the hard work of our board, and the commitment of many dedicated volunteers.

There's always room for more hands and voices - whether through our chapter committees or our satellite groups in Smoky Mountain, Black Mountain, and Woodfin. If you'd like to get involved, I encourage you to reach out. Together, we're building a stronger community of camaraderie, service, and advocacy.

I hope to see many of you at the picnic - and the events to follow!

'Never Stop Serving'

Steve Watkins

President, WNC-MOAA Chapter



Veterans and the Hand Salute: What You're Authorized to Do

You may have seen fellow veterans rendering a hand salute during the **Pledge of Allegiance** or **National Anthem** - even when not in uniform - and wondered if it's authorized. The answer is **yes** - and it's a powerful gesture of respect that Congress formally authorized in recent years.

Prior to 2008, military tradition limited the hand salute to those in uniform. Veterans and service members not in uniform were expected to place their hand over their heart. That changed with two key pieces of legislation:

Legal Authorization

- ⇒ **2008 National Defense Authorization Act (Public Law 110-181, Section 595):** Authorized veterans and active duty military not in uniform to render the military-style hand salute **during the playing of the National Anthem.**
- ⇒ **2009 National Defense Authorization Act (Public Law 111-84, Section 594):** Expanded the authorization to include **saluting during the Pledge of Allegiance.**

When Can Veterans Salute Out of Uniform?

Veterans may **render a hand salute** in the following circumstances, even when wearing civilian attire:

- ◇ During the **National Anthem**, whether it is played or sung.
- ◇ During the **Pledge of Allegiance.**
- ◇ During **military ceremonies**, such as retreats or pass-in-review.
- ◇ At **funerals, parades, and wreath-laying ceremonies.**
- ◇ When the **American flag is raised, lowered, or passes by**

This salute is not required - it's optional and entirely up to the individual veteran. Many veterans still choose to place their hand over their heart, especially if their physical condition prevents a proper salute. Either is considered a sign of respect.

A Salute That Still Means Everything

While uniforms may no longer be part of our daily lives, the bond and commitment we share as veterans continue. The hand salute remains one of the most visible and meaningful ways to show our enduring respect for the flag, the country, and those who serve.

So the next time you're at a ball game, a ceremony, or a chapter event and the anthem plays - **know that you are authorized to render the salute you've earned.**



Advocacy is Not Just a One-Day Event

The Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) has a longstanding tradition of advocating for the rights and

benefits of service members, retirees, veterans, and their families. What started as "Storm the Hill," an annual effort where members met face-to-face with lawmakers in Washington, has evolved into "Advocacy in Action" (AiA). This updated campaign combines in-person meetings, virtual outreach, and grassroots efforts to broaden MOAA's reach and adapt to changing times. Whether advocating for health care improvements, military pay, or survivor benefits, AiA empowers every MOAA member to make a difference. By "taking action," MOAA helps ensure that the concerns of our military community remain at the forefront of national priorities.

Last month, MOAA members from across the country gathered in our nation's capital to visit lawmakers and urge support for MOAA's 119th Congressional Priorities:

- Incentivize **Military Spouse Hiring** - Actions to combat stagnant, high rates of unemployment among military spouses must include measures to incentivize their hiring. [Cosponsor the Military Spouse Hiring Act](#) to add a military spouse target group to the Work Opportunity Tax Credit program.

Continue Unaccompanied Housing Improvements

-Transparency is key to supporting lawmaker oversight of this ongoing issue and addressing a \$137 billion maintenance backlog. [Ask Congress to require DoD to make reports on unaccompanied housing installation conditions publicly available.](#)

Improve Access to Health Care for Military Families

-Servicemembers and military families must have a better option for reporting and getting assistance with access-to-care problems within the Military Health System (MHS). MOAA asks Congress to establish a Digital Access Assistance System for MHS patients.

Ending the Wait for Toxic-Exposed Veterans - Pass legislation to [shorten how long millions of veterans must wait before receiving service-earned care and benefits.](#)

Support Veteran Caregivers - Champion/cosponsor the passage of the [Veteran Caregiver Reeducation, Reemployment, and Retirement Act.](#)

Your Opinion and Voice Count!

Every member is essential to our organization, even

though not all MOAA members could attend the AiA Capitol Hill event. Members, friends, and family (even non-MOAA Members) can utilize the [MOAA Legislative Action Center](#) to influence political decisions and support our advocacy objectives. Your involvement from any location helps enhance our collective impact on important legislative matters.

MOAA has made it easier for members to contact elected officials in North Carolina (NC) with just a click! Discover active legislative campaigns with ready-to-send letters for members to connect with NC elected officials on critical military, retiree, National Guard, Reserve, Survivors, and military families matters.

Legislative Action Center

It is essential to make your voice heard. Here is how.

- Start by visiting [MOAA.org](#).
- Go to the Advocacy section in the top menu.
- Click on Legislative Action Center. Follow the instructions provided for each legislation to write, call, or share your story.

Through Advocacy in Action, MOAA continues to demonstrate the power of collective voices united for a common cause. Our efforts show elected leaders that military service comes with promises that must be honored. Whether through emails, phone calls, personal meetings, or social media outreach, each member's participation strengthens MOAA's impact. **Advocacy is not a one-day event but an ongoing commitment** to protecting earned benefits and supporting those who serve, past and present.

When MOAA Speaks, Congress Listens

Learn more about MOAA's key advocacy issues and contact your elected officials using our messaging platform. (MOAA.org) [TAKE ACTION](#)

Compiled & Submitted by: Dr. Vivianne Cisneros Wersel

WNC-MOAA Federal Legislative Affairs

National MOAA Surviving Spouses Advisory Board

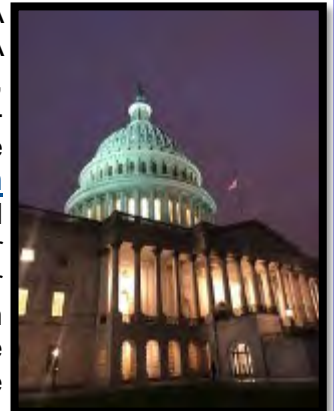


Photo: Vivianne Wersel



Help Shape the Future of WNC-MOAA - Join the Board!

Are you passionate about supporting veterans, building community, and keeping our chapter strong and active? We're currently seeking new members to join the **WNC-MOAA Board of Directors**, and this is your opportunity to get involved, make an impact, and help steer the chapter into the future.

Whether you've served on the Board before or are just curious about how it all works, we encourage you to step forward. **The time commitment is modest** - quarterly board meetings and regular chapter gatherings - yet the value of your contribution is immeasurable.

We currently have **immediate vacancies** for:

- ⇒ **US Marine Corps Representative** – Represents Marine Corps chapter members and brings forward USMC-related issues to the Board and membership.
- ⇒ **Chapter Chaplain** – Offers spiritual support and guidance to members and participates in chapter ceremonies and events.
- ⇒ **Asheville VA Hospital Liaison** – Represents WNC-MOAA with the Asheville VA and shares VA-

related updates and opportunities with the chapter.

⇒ **Black Mountain Satellite Representative** – Keeps in touch with members in the Black Mountain area who may not attend chapter meetings and helps keep them engaged.

We're also looking ahead and hoping to identify members interested in serving in one of our **elected officer positions**, including:

⇒ **President**

⇒ **First Vice President (Meetings/Events)** – Oversees the planning and execution of chapter meetings and events.

⇒ **Second Vice President (Membership)** – Leads efforts to recruit, welcome, and retain chapter members.

⇒ **Secretary**

New officers are officially sworn in at our November Chapter Meeting and begin their terms on January 1.

This is your chance to give back, lead with purpose, and collaborate with fellow officers and members who care deeply about our mission and our military community. If you're interested - or even just thinking about it - please reach out to president@wnc-moaa.org.

WNC-MOAA Earns Triple 5-Star Recognition from National MOAA

We're proud to announce that the Western North Carolina Chapter of MOAA has been awarded **three 5-Star Awards** from National MOAA in 2025:

- ⇒ 5-Star Level of Excellence (LOE) Award
- ⇒ 5-Star Col. Marvin J. Harris Communications Award for our Chapter Newsletter
- ⇒ 5-Star Harris Award for our Chapter Website

These awards represent the highest honors a MOAA chapter can receive and recognize our chapter's outstanding performance and communications efforts. The **LOE Award** reflects excellence across all facets of MOAA's mission - advocacy, member support, community involvement, and leadership. The **Harris Communications Awards**, named after Col. Marvin J. Harris, USAF (Ret), honor the best in member and community outreach through newsletters and websites.

We're grateful to all our members, volunteers, and board leaders who made these honors possible. Your support, creativity, and commitment continue to strengthen our chapter's impact in Western North Carolina.



Have You Visited Our Website and 'Liked' Our Facebook Page?

www.wnc-moaa.org & Facebook: [WNC-MOAA](https://www.facebook.com/WNC-MOAA)

The WNC-MOAA website is a comprehensive and valuable tool that you can use to make the most of your MOAA Membership. Some of the things you can find on our website include:

Events Calendar: Check out our "Events" page to view an updated calendar of upcoming MOAA events.

Newsletters: Access the latest issue of our award-winning Chapter Newsletter, as well as archived editions for reference.

Photo Gallery of Events: Browse photos from our luncheons, special meetings, conventions, and more! If you've attended a WNC-MOAA event, you might just spot yourself in one of the albums.

Facebook: Follow us at WNC-MOAA on Facebook to view photo albums, like and share posts, and stay informed on chapter news and events.

Please note: By attending a WNC-MOAA event, you grant permission for your photographic image to be captured and used in our publications, including our website, newsletters, and social media platforms.



Experience the Thrill of Falconry – July 18 in Weaverville!

Step into the ancient art of falconry with a 2-hour, hands-on experience on Friday, July 18 at 2:00 PM in Weaverville, NC, hosted by Curtis Wright Outfitters. This unforgettable outing offers the rare opportunity to interact directly with trained birds of prey under the guidance of a licensed falconer.

Your Experience Includes:

- ◆ A guided introduction to the history and tradition of falconry
- ◆ Meet and learn about several species of raptors, such as hawks, falcons, and owls
- ◆ Instruction on safely handling the birds, including how to call a raptor to your gloved hand
- ◆ The highlight: walk through the woods and fly the birds in a natural setting
- ◆ Amazing photo opportunities and plenty of time for questions

This is an immersive experience suitable for all ages and a perfect outing for anyone curious about wildlife, conservation, or outdoor adventure.

Cost: Up to \$125 per person – group discounts may apply based on number of participants.

Location: Weaverville, NC (specific directions will be provided)

Transportation: Carpooling may be coordinated depending on interest

RSVP by June 15 to president@wnc-moaa.org to secure your spot or express interest.

Don't miss this chance to experience the power and elegance of birds of prey up close and personal!

Winter WNC-MOAA General Membership Luncheon Recap

Our February General Membership Meeting was a special one, marking our first gathering in the newly remodeled Post 5206 Hedrick-Rhodes VFW building, now home to the Henderson County Veterans Center. Members enjoyed a delicious buffet lunch catered by Mike B's Catering. The West Henderson High School JROTC provided an impressive Color Guard presentation to open the meeting. We were honored to have two guest speakers: James Gough, who shared an inspiring overview of the Henderson County Wall of Honor project, and Brent Embry, the new Henderson County Veterans Service Officer (VSO), who introduced himself and highlighted the services he offers to local veterans and their families. It was a great kickoff to the year in a refreshed and meaningful setting.



Upcoming Changes to VA's Secure Sign-In: What You Need to Know

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is implementing a significant update to its secure sign-in process that will affect how Veterans, their families, and caregivers access VA online tools and benefits. Starting in 2025, users will no longer be able to sign in using ID.me or DS Logon credentials. Instead, the VA is transitioning all users to **Login.gov**, a more streamlined, secure, and federally backed authentication platform.

Why the Change?

This shift is part of the VA's broader effort to improve cybersecurity, enhance user experience, and align with federal government standards. Login.gov is already used by over 40 million users across multiple federal agencies. It offers two-factor authentication, heightened privacy protections, and a single sign-in that can be used across various government websites - eliminating the need to remember multiple usernames and passwords.

What Does This Mean for You?

By September 2025, you'll need to create or transition to a Login.gov account to continue accessing VA services online, including:

- VA.gov for health care and benefits
- My HealtheVet for health records and prescription refills
- VA/DoD eBenefits

If you currently use **ID.me**, **DS Logon**, or **My HealtheVet credentials**, you will be prompted over the coming months to switch to Login.gov. After the transition deadline, older sign-in options will be retired.

How to Prepare

1. **Create a Login.gov Account Now:** Visit <https://www.login.gov> and sign up using an email address and secure password.
2. **Enable Two-Factor Authentication:** Choose a second verification method such as a text message or authenticator app.
3. **Link Your Login.gov Account:** When signing into a VA service, select "Login.gov" and follow prompts to link it to your existing VA profile.
4. **Stay Updated:** The VA will continue to provide reminders and guidance throughout the transition period.

Need Help?

If you need assistance setting up or using your Login.gov account, VA support is available online and by phone. You can also visit your local VA facility for in-person help.



Spring 2025

State Legislature Update

As I sit writing this update, we are finally getting some rain locally, which is damping down the tree pollen some and it finally feels a lot like spring here in WNC. A lot has been happening in Raleigh at the state legislature, and even more will be ongoing in the coming weeks. To give you a quick synopsis, the State Senate has finalized their draft state budget and sent it over to the State House. The State House is crafting their own version of the budget and when complete there will be a meeting of the two legislative bodies to come up with a compromised or single budget for the State General Assembly to vote on and send to the Governor. At this point, we know it will change, but the senate version has a small raise for the state workers, educators & law enforcement, cuts vacant positions as well as some filled positions and prepares for hurricane relief. So, a work in progress that will evolve. No specifics on veteran budget items currently.

The deadline for submitting new bills has passed and the next significant deadline is 8 May. That is when the 'Crossover List' is created. It captures any bill that has been passed by either house into one long list and becomes a priority of effort list that the 'other house' must

review the bills listed. There are exceptions of course, but these become the bills that have a chance of being passed or moving to a vote. The rest are mostly retired or need some significant push to get them revitalized. Budget items are exceptions, but the bills get culled down from thousands to hundreds. Between now and 8 May, all the various committees are working the bills they must get them ready for a House or Senate vote to make the Crossover list.

So, where are we with our three top priorities: Updating Veteran Property Tax Exemptions, Supporting Veteran In-State Housing/Care Programs and Occupational Certification Portability & Economic Opportunities for Military/Veterans/Spouses. The main or top priority is updating property tax exemptions. This one has had lots of twists and turns. Multiple bills, in both the House & Senate. The original most promising House bill, HB118, has been totally revised to only adjust the exemption from \$45K to \$61K for 100% disabled. A small improvement, but not what the original verbiage had promised and most of us hoping for. A separate bill, HB 341 has been filed and made the deadline, the Disability Veterans Tax Relief Bill is an updated and revised version of the original HB 118, which provides a property tax reduction based on the veteran's disability rating, but does stair step the amount of exemption. **Please support this bill getting out of committee and onto the crossover list as the best or most advantageous bill on property taxes.** There is another House bill that supports the full property tax exclusion for

100% disabled veterans that is also under consideration, and it is HB 683. It provides a better exclusion, but only for 100% disabled. On the Senate side, SB660, Honoring Sacrifice, NC Veterans Relief Act, increases the exemption and does include primary vehicle of a 100% disabled veteran. Multiple nuances outlined.

Quite a few bills supporting veterans will make the crossover list, although I don't have room to here to highlight them. There isn't a separate bill for our priority #2, but it would be covered under the budget and so that isn't necessarily a surprise. On our priority list (#3), HB 66, Interstate Medical Licensure Compact has passed the House and has passed the first reading in the Senate. HB90, Define Armed Forces/Conforming Changes passed the House and passed the first reading in the Senate. This renames Ft. Bragg and recognizes Space Force. HB 230(SB155), Social Work Interstate Licensure Compact has passed the House and the second reading in the Senate. The SB189 Physician Assistant Licensure Compact has passed the Senate and is in House for review. More to follow in the next newsletter.



Patricia Ann Vinson, LTC USA (Ret)
State Legislative Affairs Team

North Henderson JROTC Shines on the National Stage

The North Henderson High School Air Force JROTC Unit delivered a standout performance at this year's **USAF Academy National Invitational Drill Meet**, earning national recognition for both precision and excellence. Competing against top programs from across the country, the North Henderson cadets demonstrated remarkable discipline, skill, and teamwork - bringing home an impressive array of awards:

- ◆ **1st Place Armed Exhibition**
- ◆ **1st Place Armed Inspection**
- ◆ **1st Place Unarmed Special Exhibition**
- ◆ **2nd Place Armed Regulation**
- ◆ **2nd Place Unarmed Exhibition**
- ◆ **2nd Place Unarmed Inspection**
- ◆ **2nd Place Unarmed Special Exhibition**
- ◆ **3rd Place Unarmed Special Exhibition**

The team's extraordinary effort culminated in winning the coveted **Sweepstakes Award – Best Overall Armed Team** - a historic first for any East Coast school in the event's 42-year history.

These outstanding results reflect months of intense preparation and strong leadership by **Colonel Erik Rundquist, USAF (Ret.)**, the unit's Senior Aerospace Science Instructor. In addition to competing, cadets had the opportunity to tour the U.S. Air Force Academy and engage with military

personnel, gaining firsthand insight into service and leadership.



WNC-MOAA was proud to support the North Henderson JROTC with a cash donation, helping cover registration fees for this national competition. "Your support played a key role in getting us to Colorado Springs," said Col Rundquist. "We're deeply grateful."

Next up, the unit is planning a meaningful educational trip to explore major WWII battlefields across the Western Front. To help make this journey possible, they are currently seeking corporate sponsors and community partners.

Congratulations to the cadets of North Henderson JROTC on their incredible success - and thank you for representing Western North Carolina with honor and excellence!

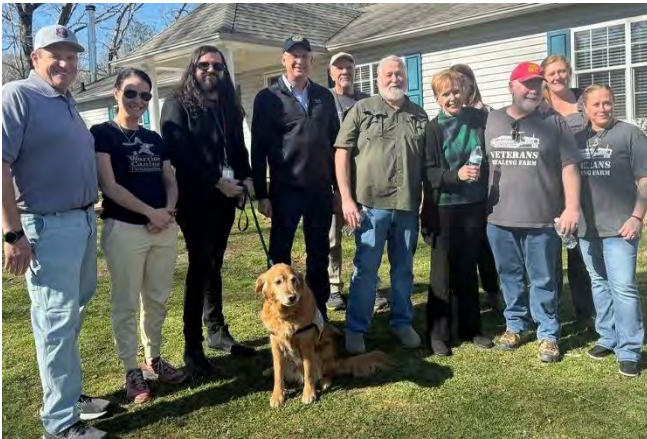


Secretary of Veterans Affairs Visits Veterans Healing Farm, Affirms Commitment to WNC Veterans

On March 18, 2025, the Veterans Healing Farm in Mills River, NC, welcomed Secretary of Veterans Affairs Doug Collins for a special visit and candid conversation with a small group of local veteran organization leaders. WNC-MOAA was honored to be among the select few invited to this meaningful gathering.

The visit included a warm welcome from VHF Executive Director Al Yeck, a guided tour of the farm, and an informal roundtable discussion with the Secretary. Collins, who grew up in Gainesville, Georgia, and spent part of his youth working on a family farm, struck a down-to-earth and sincere tone as he spoke about his commitment to improving the lives of veterans - especially those in underserved rural areas like Western North Carolina.

Several key veteran-serving organizations were also in attendance, including Veterans Treatment Court, Warrior Canine Connection, Blue Ridge Honor Flight, Brothers and Sisters Like These, and the Gold Star Family Foundation. Their presence reinforced the collaborative spirit that defines the work being done across our region to support veterans and their families.



During the Q&A session, WNC-MOAA raised concerns about how the VA intends to maintain health care access for veterans in WNC amid anticipated reductions in VA staffing. Secretary Collins addressed the concern directly, acknowledging that some staffing cuts are inevitable but emphasized that his top priority is *not* to reduce health care services to veterans. Instead, he expressed a desire to streamline VA operations by eliminating excessive layers of bureaucracy - what he described as "multiple levels of staffing between VA facilities, CBOCs, and central leadership."

He cited the addition of 50,000 employees to the VA over the past several years, noting that many of those positions are not directly tied to providing care. Despite this growth, Collins pointed out that key service metrics - especially those involving health care delivery - have not improved proportionally. His plan, he shared, is to remove unnecessary administrative layers while protecting and enhancing front-line services.

The Secretary's remarks resonated with those in attendance, and his sincere, no-nonsense approach was appreciated. The visit underscored the value of organizations like Veterans Healing Farm and WNC-MOAA, which help elevate the voices and concerns of local veterans to the highest levels of leadership.



WNC-MOAA Shirts and Caps!

We're excited to announce that WNC-MOAA shirts and caps are available! Show your Chapter Pride with these stylish pieces, featuring the embroidered WNC-MOAA logo. We expect to have a limited supply at our May 30th chapter picnic, so make sure to check them out!



Shirts: These classic grey shirts are available in assorted sizes, with the WNC-MOAA logo embroidered on the left chest. *Price - \$35.00.*

Caps: Choose between tan or grey, both with the embroidered WNC-MOAA logo. *Price - \$27.00.*



To order your gear and represent WNC-MOAA, visit <https://my.cheddarup.com/c/wnc-moaa-gear> to place your order today!

Wreaths Across America – A Record-Breaking Year Thanks to You!

2024 was an exceptional year for Wreaths Across America – and the reason it was so successful is because of the thousands of dedicated volunteers like us! The Western North Carolina Chapter of MOAA was proud to once again be part of this national effort to **Remember, Honor, and Teach**.

Thanks to the collective efforts of over 7,400 sponsorship groups across the country – including 1,169 new groups – more than 3 million veterans’ wreaths were sponsored and placed at over 4,000 locations (including Black Mountain, Forest Lawn, Green Hill, Highlands, and Rutherford County) by more than 3 million volunteers. It was truly a demonstration of unity, respect, and remembrance.

As part of this impact, WNC-MOAA received a **Certificate of Appreciation** recognizing our chapter’s commitment to the mission. The heartfelt thanks from Karen Worcester, Executive Director, and Julie Bright, Director of Locations & Groups, highlights the value of our chapter's contribution to the national cause.

Wreaths Across America does far more than place wreaths each December. Through programs like the TEACH curriculum for youth, the Mobile Education Exhibit, the Gold Star Family History & Hospitality House, veteran outreach initiatives, and Wreaths Across America Radio, this organization is creating year-round opportunities for remembrance and education.

To every WNC-MOAA member, family, and supporter who helped sponsor a wreath, participated in the ceremony, or shared the mission with others – **Thank You!** Your efforts are making a lasting difference.

We look forward to continuing our support in 2025 and hope to grow our impact even further. **Let’s keep the mission alive.**





★ **MOAA** ★
MEMBERSHIP

★ **U.S. AIR FORCE** ★
★ **U.S. NAVY** ★
★ **U.S. ARMY** ★
U.S. MARINE CORPS
★ **U.S. SPACE FORCE** ★
★ **U.S. COAST GUARD** ★
★ **NOAA** ★
U.S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE



Purpose of the Western North Carolina Chapter, Military Officers Association of America, Inc.

The purposes of the Chapter shall be to promote the purposes of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA); foster fraternal relations among retired, active duty, and former officers of the uniformed services and their reserve components; protect the rights and interests of active duty, retired, and reserve component personnel of the uniformed services and their dependents and survivors; provide useful services for members and their dependents and survivors; and serve the community and the nation.

Ref: WNC-MOAA bylaws updated, amended, and approved November 20th, 2021 can be found on our website at

<https://wnc-moaa.org/chapterbylaws/>





**CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION
2024**

Presented To:

Western North Carolina MOAA Chapter

Thank you for your hard work and dedication to the
REMEMBER - HONOR - TEACH mission.
Your unwavering support is greatly appreciated!



KAREN WORCESTER
Executive Director



JULIE BRIGHT
Director of Locations & Groups



Blue Ridge Honor Flight – Next Flight: September 27, 2025 - Calling All Veterans, Gold Star Families, and Guardians



Do you know a **WWII, Korean War, or Vietnam War veteran** who hasn't yet experienced an Honor Flight? Or are you a veteran from one of these eras who would like to take part? The next Blue Ridge Honor Flight departs for Washington, D.C., on **Saturday, September 27, 2025** - and applications are open.



WNC-MOAA Member Ron Leslie & his son Kevin - April 2025 BRHF

Veterans Apply at:

www.blueridgehonorflight.com/apply/veteran/

This no-cost, one-day trip honors veterans with visits to the WWII, Korean War, and Vietnam War memorials, Arlington National Cemetery, and other iconic landmarks. *It is a day of reflection, camaraderie, and long-overdue appreciation.*

Honoring Gold Star Families

Blue Ridge Honor Flight is also proud to welcome **Gold Star Family members** - those who lost a loved one in WWII, Korea, or Vietnam. These families help carry forward the memory of their fallen heroes.

Gold Star Family applications are also available under the **"Applications"** dropdown:
www.blueridgehonorflight.com/apply/Gold-Star-Family/

Guardians Needed - A Critical Role

Honor Flight **Guardians** are volunteers who accompany and assist veterans throughout the trip, ensuring their safety, comfort, and enjoyment. Guardians provide physical support, help with mobility (including wheelchairs and stairs), offer companionship, and act as liaisons between veterans and Honor Flight staff.

Guardian Responsibilities Include:

- **Assistance:** Helping veterans with mobility - pushing wheelchairs, transfers, navigating stairs, etc.
- **Companionship:** Providing emotional support and meaningful connection throughout the day
- **Communication:** Coordinating with veterans, fellow Guardians, and staff
- **Safety:** Prioritizing the veteran's well-being at all times
- **Physical Fitness:** Being capable of walking long distances, lifting, and pushing wheelchairs
- **Time Commitment:** Being available for the full trip - including pre-flight briefings and the return

Being a Guardian is a deeply rewarding experience and a powerful way to give back. If you're interested in playing this vital role, **I encourage you to apply.**

Guardian applications can be found under the same dropdown menu at:
www.blueridgehonorflight.com/apply/guardian/

Upcoming Events - Everyone is Welcome

30 May 2025 - WNC-MOAA Chapter Meeting/Picnic, 11:30am-3:30pm, Willow Oak Shelter, Mills River Park

14 June 2025 - Haywood County Veterans & Community Gathering, 12-6pm, Waynesville American Legion

26 June 2025 - French Broad Chocolate Factory Private Tour - Asheville - 1pm (RSVP required - president@wnc-moaa.org)

27 June 2025 - Smoky Mtn Satellite Mtg - Maggie Valley - Lunch time - Location - TBD

18 July 2025 - Falconry Chapter Outing - Weaverville - 2-4pm, (RSVP required - president@wnc-moaa.org)

16 August 2025 - Chapter Mtg - details to follow

27 September 2025 - Blue Ridge Honor Flight Welcome Home celebration



Surviving Spouse Corner

VA Announces Major Survivor Benefits Reforms to Support Veterans' Families

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently unveiled a transformative package of reforms aimed at expanding and simplifying benefits for the survivors of deceased veterans. These updates, announced on May 6, 2025, mark one of the most significant changes to survivor benefits in VA history, and they underscore the VA's commitment to caring for those who carry the legacy of military service.

Key Highlights of the Reforms:

- **Automatic Monthly Payments for Survivors:** Beginning this summer, surviving spouses and children who previously received VA Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) will now automatically receive monthly payments when eligible for benefits

such as Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance (DEA) or the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA).

- **Streamlined Application Process:** The VA is simplifying how survivors apply for benefits. Survivors now need to apply only once to be considered for multiple programs, significantly reducing paperwork and wait times.
- **Expanded Eligibility for Benefits:** The VA has expanded access to DIC for survivors of more veterans who died from service-connected disabilities. This includes updated presumptive conditions for certain exposures such as Agent Orange, burn pits, and other environmental hazards.
- **New Outreach and Support Tools:** To ensure families are

informed, the VA is enhancing its outreach by launching new online tools and assigning survivor advocates to help navigate available resources.

A Message from VA Leadership

"These reforms are long overdue," said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. "We're making it easier for survivors to access the benefits they've earned and deserve—benefits that honor the sacrifices made not only by veterans, but also by their families."

Why This Matters

For many families, these benefits represent a critical source of stability following the loss of a loved one who served. The changes aim to remove bureaucratic hurdles and ensure survivors don't miss out on vital support due to complex processes or outdated policies.

Veterans and their families are encouraged to visit www.va.gov/survivors for more information and to access the newly updated tools.

You're Invited – WNC-MOAA Chapter Picnic | May 30, 2025

Get ready for great food, fresh air, and fantastic fellowship! Join us *Friday, May 30th at 11:30 AM* at **Willow Oak Shelter, Mills River Park** for the Annual WNC-MOAA Chapter Picnic. Enjoy a mouthwatering barbecue lunch, reconnect with friends, and take a chance on some amazing raffle prizes - all while celebrating the strength of our chapter & the spirit of service that brings us together.

Bring a prospective member with you! This is a perfect opportunity to introduce friends or neighbors - especially those with military officer service - to our chapter in a relaxed and welcoming setting.

We're thrilled to have raffle donations from some local favorites including **Packa's Place, The Buzz, The Hair Gallery & Spa,** and **Mills River Brewing** - with more coming in every week!

RSVP by May 25 at wnc-moaa-2025-picnic.cheddarup.com. If you need transportation, let us know - we'll do our best to get you there. *Don't miss this chance to connect, celebrate, and grow our WNC-MOAA family!*



Smoky Mountain Satellite Update

On March 27, 2025, WNC-MOAA members from the Smoky Mountain Satellite gathered at WestBridge Vocational in Sylva, NC, for an informative and inspiring visit. WestBridge Vocational is a nonprofit organization that provides job training and employment support for individuals with physical or intellectual disabilities - including veterans - who are seeking meaningful work.

During the tour, members learned how WestBridge offers hands-on experience through its in-house manufacturing operation, which produces surgical drapes. This work environment not only builds practical skills but also serves as a stepping stone for clients who receive help with resume writing, job placement, and workplace readiness. The visit offered a powerful reminder of the importance of inclusive employment opportunities in our communities.

To learn more about WestBridge Vocational and how you can support their work, visit westbridgevoc.org.

The next Smoky Mountain Satellite meeting will be held 27 June 2025 at lunchtime in Maggie Valley - location - TBD.



WNC-MOAA members (donning our industrial clean gear) - Steve Watkins, Donna Culp, John Culp, Mike Rogers (WestBridge), T.R. Hoffman, John O'Donnell, and Chris Stuckey (WestBridge)

**EVERYONE IS WELCOME TO ATTEND
CONTACT JOHN O'DONNELL AT
johnod92071@gmail.com**

Are You REAL ID Ready? What You Need to Know Before You Fly

Beginning **May 7, 2025**, the **REAL ID Act** started to be enforced, requiring all travelers to present a **REAL ID-compliant** form of identification when flying domestically or entering certain federal facilities. With the deadline is here, it's important that all WNC-MOAA members - especially veterans and military families - check their identification now to avoid surprises at the airport.

TRAVEL TIP FOR VETERANS: USE YOUR VHIC

The **Veteran Health Identification Card (VHIC)** is a **TSA-accepted ID** for flying within the U.S. If you're enrolled in VA health care, you already qualify for one.

It's REAL ID compliant

It includes your photo and personal details

It's issued directly by the Department of Veterans Affairs

Don't have one or need a replacement? Request it online through va.gov or at your VA medical center. It's one of the easiest ways for veterans to be flight-ready by May 2025.



TSA-Approved Forms of Identification (as of May 2025)

According to the Transportation Security Administration, the following forms of ID are acceptable for airport screening:

- REAL ID - compliant driver's license or enhanced license
- U.S. passport or passport card
- DHS Trusted Traveler cards (Global Entry, NEXUS, SENTRI, FAST)
- **U.S. Department of Defense ID, including IDs issued to dependents - Note: Cards *must* have an expiration date - some older dependent IDs do not**
- **Veteran Health Identification Card (VHIC)**
- Permanent resident card
- Border crossing card
- State-issued Enhanced Driver's License
- Federally recognized, tribal-issued photo ID
- HSPD-12 PIV card
- Foreign government-issued passport
- Canadian provincial driver's license or Indian and Northern Affairs Canada card
- Transportation Worker Identification Credential
- USCIS Employment Authorization Card (I-766)
- U.S. Merchant Mariner Credential

Check Your Military ID: Is It Up to Date?

Some WNC-MOAA members have reported issues using older Department of Defense ID cards, particularly if their card lacks a visible expiration date. If your card is not a **Next Generation Uniformed Services ID Card**, you should consider updating it.

Find an ID Card Office here:

<https://idco.dmdc.osd.mil/idco/>

Learn more about the Next Gen ID card here:

<https://www.cac.mil/Next-Generation-Uniformed-Services-ID-Card>

Why This Matters

Whether you're traveling to visit family, want to get on a military base, or take part in an Honor Flight - having the correct ID matters. With a bit of preparation now, you'll avoid delays and headaches later.

For more info and updates, visit TSA's official ID guidance page: <https://www.tsa.gov/travel/security-screening/identification>

Treasurer's Report submitted by Doug Abbotts

FY 2025 CASH FLOW REPORT - 5/7/2025

	1st Qtr	2nd Qtr	3rd Qtr	4th Qtr	YTD	Budget	Diff
Membership Dues	\$2,200.00	\$175.00			\$2,375.00	\$4,200.00	(\$1,825.00)
Miscellaneous Income					\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Donations					\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
VA Donations					\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Chapter Meetings Income	\$1,290.00				\$1,290.00	\$0.00	\$1,290.00
Badges	\$15.00				\$15.00	\$0.00	\$15.00
Surviving Spouse Dues	\$10.00				\$10.00	\$200.00	(\$190.00)
NCCOC	\$207.00				\$207.00	\$0.00	\$207.00
MOAA HQ	\$49.36				\$49.36	\$0.00	\$0.00
Meeting Raffles Wreaths/America					\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Total Income	3,771.36	175.00	0.00	0.00	3,946.36	4,400.00	
EXPENSES							
NCCOC Dues	207.00				207.00	228.00	21.00
BCVC	50.00				50.00	50.00	0.00
Recruiting & Retention					0.00	1,000.00	1,000.00
Web/Digital Services	160.00				160.00	350.00	0.00
Liability Insurance					0.00	538.00	0.00
IRS tax filing	50.00				50.00	50.00	0.00
USPS/Shipping	200.00				200.00	350.00	150.00
Administrative Supplies	81.62				81.62	300.00	218.38
JROTC Awards	128.96	41.58			170.54	150.00	(20.54)
Speaker Gifts					0.00	200.00	200.00
Badges	25.61				25.61	0.00	(25.61)
Donations	500.00				500.00	0.00	(500.00)
Meetings Expenses/Raffles	2,166.30	129.38			2,295.68	0.00	
Smoky Mtn Satellite Support					0.00	0.00	
Woodfin Satellite Support					0.00	0.00	
President's Travel					0.00	500.00	500.00
Wreaths/America expense					0.00		
Total Expenses	3,569.49	170.96	0.00	0.00	3,740.45	3,716.00	1,543.23
NET INCOME (Loss)					\$205.91		
(RESERVE) BANK BALANCE				5/7/25	\$14,978.60		

From the Treasurer -

As my grandmother used to say, "spring has sprung". The flowers and trees are in bloom and the pollen is plentiful.

It is also the time to close the books on the first quarter of financials for the chapter. We are in the black but still waiting on a few members to pay their dues for 2025. If you need to get current, use our on line portal called Cheddar Up to make a credit or debit card payment without a service fee thanks to our friends at MOAA HQ. The link is in this newsletter and on our WNC MOAA website.



You can also use Cheddar to pay for the picnic lunch being held at the Mills River Park on May 30. The Board voted to lower the lunch to \$20. for each meal. Now is a good time to invite a prospective member who served as fellow officer to enjoy lunch with you. Chef Mike will be smoking beef brisket and chicken with all the southern fixings he is famous for. The park has great parking close to the shelter and a scenic walking trail along Mills River. *Deadline to pay for lunch is May 25.* See you there! Doug Abbotts - WNC-MOAA Treasurer

Hails and Farewells

Hails

No Updates to Share



Farewells

No Updates to Share

TAPS

LTC Len Baker, USA

COL Ed Cottrell, USAF



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at every stage.**

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'NEVER STOP SERVING' ... CHAPTER INVOLVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES



We Honor Veterans - Since November 2014, WNC-MOAA, in partnership with Four Seasons Hospice, has honored **over 1,000** veterans with special pinning ceremonies to salute veterans in hospice care and thank them for their service. To learn more and get involved, contact **Steve Watkins, 608-225-0594** or steve.watkins.email@gmail.com



**Veterans
Restoration
Quarters
(VRQ)**

VRQ - The Chapter continues to serve our area's homeless veterans by providing a lunch prep/serve crew on the 4th Wednesday of every month at the Veterans Restoration Quarters (VRQ). We also provide the 5th Wednesday lunch crew in applicable months. The VRQ is a converted motel that provides shelter, counseling, and vocational training for the area's homeless veterans. Chapter members arrive at 9:30 to prepare for the lunch meal then, at 12:00, serve the meal to the residents of the Veteran's Restoration Quarters. The Chapter is very proud to have been serving our area's veterans with this effort since 2015. If you would be interested in joining our crew, please contact the Chapter's VRQ volunteer coordinator, **Jeff Snyder, at jsnyder243@aol.com**.



Blue Ridge Honor Flight transports American veterans to Washington, DC two times each year to "visit memorials dedicated to honor their service and the sacrifices of themselves and their friends." There are opportunities to donate, as well as learn more about applying as an honoree, guardian, or volunteer. For more information, contact **Steve Watkins at 608-225-0594** or steve.watkins.email@gmail.com or www.blueridgehonorflight.com

Next flight: September 27, 2025

JROTC

JROTC is active in 18 high schools throughout WNC. Our Chapter provides support to these units in a number of ways, to include presentation of the annual MOAA Leadership awards for a rising Senior in each unit. Chapter members present the awards on behalf of the Chapter at unit award ceremonies held in the spring. For more information about supporting the award presentations, and other information about supporting JROTC, contact Jeff Snyder at 757-570-1472 or jsnyder243@aol.com



Established in 2013, the Veterans Healing Farm's mission is "To enhance the mental, emotional, and physical well-being of our nation's Veterans and their families." This is accomplished through the creation of a safe, peaceful environment that fosters healing and camaraderie. Programs focus on brain health and includes Agri therapy (organic farming, beekeeping, medicinal herbs) as well as a variety of other therapies/ therapeutic activities, workshops, and live events. **To learn more: <https://www.veteranshealingfarm.org/about>**



Veteran Smiles Foundation is dedicated to helping veterans find their dental home all across North Carolina. Continuing the relationship with ECU Dental School of Medicine as established with the Sylva Community Service Learning Center (CSLC). Because of the success of the Sylva program Vet-Smiles programs are now partnering with the other CSLCs in Brunswick County, Robeson County, Lillington, Ahoskie, Elizabeth City, Davidson County, and Spruce Pine to reach more NC veterans. WNC-MOAA will continue its partnership with the Sylva clinic and coordinate efforts with VSF and NC Serves to continue to help identify veterans in need of dental care and a dental home for continuity of care. For more information, contact, **David McCracken, 984-233-3350, <https://vetsmiles.org/>**



The mission of the **Veterans History Museum of the Carolinas** is to honor our nation's veterans, to educate the public about our country's military history and the contribution of our servicemen and women, and to preserve important and unique historic artifacts. The Museum reflects a love of country and gratitude to those who serve it by remembering and celebrating their service. A world-class museum and great destination for visitors. For more information: **WNC-MOAA Museum POC: Duke Woodhull dukewoodhull@gmail.com** or go to: <https://theveteransmuseum.org/>



CAMARADERIE WITH A PURPOSE



Join the WNC-MOAA Chapter

Pay Chapter Dues or Make Donations

If you like paying for things electronically and don't like writing checks, you can now pay for your WNC-MOAA Chapter items online.

You can do the following all online: you can PAY your Annual Membership Dues; make a DONATION to the Chapter's Operating Expenses; and you can even PAY for Chapter Activities (i.e. Quarterly General Membership Meetings).

Go to <https://my.cheddarup.com/c/wnc-moaa-join/>

- Select your '**Member Dues**' or '**Surviving Spouse Member**' option.
- Select if you need an optional '**Replacement Name Badge**'
- Select if you want to make an optional '**Donation**' if you would like to donate to the Chapter's Operating Expenses.
- Select the length of membership you would like (example - selecting a 3 years membership will protect you from any dues increase during those 3 years).
- Complete the contact information.



WNC-MOAA Board of Directors and Officers 2024 - 2025

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Legislative Affairs - State Patricia Vinson, LTC, USA (Ret)

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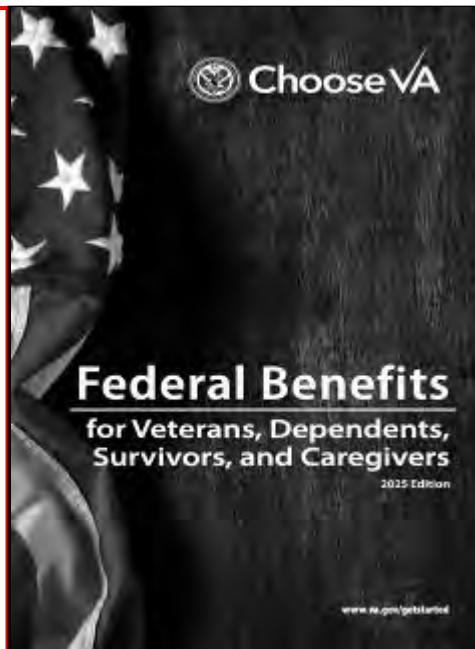
Spouses Activity Group (SAG) VACANT



New number. Same support.
Dial 988 then Press 1

Please Share The New Phone Option For The Veterans Crisis Line: Dial 988 & Press 1

<https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>



To download your copy go to:

[2025-Federal-Benefits-for-Veterans-Dependents-and-Survivors.pdf](#)

TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS



<https://www.taps.org/mission>

TAPS 24/7 National Military Survivor Helpline is always available toll-free with loving support and resources at 800-959-TAPS (8277)



MOAA:

Call the **Member Service Center** at:
(800) 234-6622 or (703) 549-2311
e-mail msc@moaa.org

WNC-MOAA:

Use the Join Form in this newsletter to change address, update contact information, join, or renew.

Mail checks to:

PO Box 1984, Hendersonville, NC 28793
or go to

<https://www.wnc-moaa.org/>

For an electronic version of this newsletter go to the WNC-MOAA website



The Western North Carolina Chapter of MOAA is a 5-Star Levels of Excellence Chapter. The Levels of Excellence (LOE) Awards is one of MOAA's most prestigious awards earned by state councils and chapters.

The Western North Carolina Chapter of MOAA is a MOAA 5-Star the Harris Communications Award in both the "Print" and "Digital" categories!!

THE LARGER OUR NUMBERS, THE GREATER YOUR VOICE.

Why WNC-MOAA chapter membership matters.



WNC-MOAA CHAPTER & MOAA MEMBERSHIP ENROLLMENT FORM (2025)

Name _____
 Rank _____ Branch of Service _____
 Active Retired Former Reserve National Guard Surviving Spouse

Address _____
 City _____ State _____ ZIP _____
 Date of birth _____ Email _____ Phone _____

(To ensure deliverability of MOAA communications, please provide a personal email address.)

Are you a MOAA member? Yes No Unknown

MOAA Member Number (if known) _____

Spouse's information

Spouse's name _____
 Spouse's email _____ Spouse's phone _____

Is your spouse a MOAA member or eligible to be a MOAA member? Yes No

Your Chapter interest: Attending Social Events Board of Directors Member Recruiting
 Legislative Affairs Newsletter Editing Public Affairs Spouse's Programs

Not a MOAA national member yet? Check here to receive a BASIC Membership at no cost to you.

And, for only \$4 a month, you can upgrade to PREMIUM membership, giving you immediate access to a full spectrum of career and financial resources, exclusive publications, college scholarships for dependents, and countless discounts on products and travel. Visit moaa.org/join to learn more.

How did you hear about MOAA Chapter involvement? _____

Are you a member of any other MOAA Chapter(s)? Yes No
 If yes, which one(s)? _____

To complete enrollment:

- **Fill in this form** on your computer and email it to membership@wnc-moaa.org as an attachment **or**

- **Print it** and fill it and mail it to:

WNC-MOAA, P.O. Box 1984, Hendersonville, NC 28793 **or**
 Scan it and e-mail it to membership@wnc-moaa.org

- Go to wnc-moaa.org for more information about our Chapter.

You will be opted in to receive e-communications from MOAA and your local chapter. You will be able to opt out of any further e-communications at any time. MOAA will not sell or share personal information.

Western North Carolina Chapter membership of MOAA

Chapter Dues are due
January 1
(No Later Than March 1)

Member

- \$35 - New Member (includes Spouse)
- \$35 - Renew

Surviving Spouse

- \$10 - New or Renew

Name Badges

(Badges are Magnet type only)

- All Badges - \$15 each
- Badge Name(s): _____

If you have any questions, please contact Steve Watkins at: membership@wnc-moaa.org or call/text 608-225-0594

Clear Form

2nd ANNUAL WNC-MOAA CHAPTER SUMMER PICNIC

Join us for our second annual Western North Carolina Military Officer's Association of America Chapter Summer Picnic!

We're planning a fantastic time filled with delicious barbecue, music and fun for all.

Date: May 30, 2025

Time: 11:30am – 3:30 pm

**Location: Willow Oak Shelter,
Mills River Park, 124 Town Center Dr,
Mills River**

\$20/per person

<https://wnc-moaa-2025-picnic.cheddarup.com>

RSVP by Sunday, May 25th

WNC-MOAA QR Code



**Great Raffle
Prizes**