THE SOUTHEASTERN MICHIGAN EAGLE

31 January 2026

Volume IX, Issue 1

We're unveiling a new look! Like the American bald eagle, a symbol of strength, vision, and renewal, this refresh reflects our commitment to rising higher together, to Never Stop Serving. The eagle's story reminds us that involvement and collective effort lead to strength and camaraderie. Our updated look is an invitation to every member to engage more deeply, lend their voice, and help shape the future of our organization. Together, we soar higher.

The bald eagle was chosen as the national bird of the United States due to its majestic appearance, strength, and symbolism of governmental power. It is native to North America and was seen as a fitting representation of the newly formed nation.
The selection process began after the Declaration of Independence, when Congress tasked Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin with designing an official seal. Several committees failed to produce an acceptable design. In 1782, Charles Thompson, Secretary of Congress, incorporated elements from previous designs, with the bald eagle as the dominant feature. The eagle's fierce demeanor was considered appropriate for the young, battle-worn nation. The design (shown below), which included an olive branch and arrows in the eagle's talons to represent peace and war, became the official emblem in 1787. While not universally accepted, with Benjamin Franklin notably criticizing the choice, the bald eagle has remained the national bird and symbol of the United States.

Under the Eagle's Wing...a Message from the President

Happy New Year!

As we begin a new year, I want to extend my warmest wishes to each of you for a healthy, happy, and productive 2026.

I want to offer special recognition to CDR Roy Yaple, USN (Ret.), who has graciously stepped up to serve as Chapter Vice President while continuing his outstanding work as Membership Chair. Roy's commitment, energy, and steady leadership play a vital role in sustaining and growing our Chapter. I also want to thank LTC Larry Powell, USA (Ret.) for his exceptional work producing our newsletter. Larry's efforts ensure our members remain informed, engaged, and connected — and the quality of his work reflects great credit on our Chapter.

Please join me in welcoming our new members LCDR Michael Powers, USCG (Ret.), CAPT Michael Johnson, USN (Ret.), and Rachel Bayles, a former LTJG, USCG.

This year, we submitted our applications for MOAA's Chapter Level of Excellence Award, as well as Communications Awards for both our newsletter and website. These submissions reflect the hard work and professionalism of everyone who contributes to our Chapter's success.

One example of our commitment to "Never Stop Serving" is the recent service academy candidate interviews we conducted on behalf of Congressman Shri Thanedar (MI-13). Joining me in that event were CAPT Ventz Potochnik, USN (Ret.), CAPT Michael Johnson, USN (Ret.) and LTC Larry Powell, USA (Ret.). Thank you all for your support of this effort.

As we look ahead to 2026, we need your help to continue building momentum. We are seeking volunteers for leadership and support roles — large and small. If you've ever considered getting more involved, now is a great time to step forward. Your experience, ideas, and enthusiasm can make a meaningful difference.

We also welcome your suggestions on how we can better serve our members and community. Please let us know what programs, speakers, activities, or advocacy efforts you would like to see in the year ahead.

Thank you for your continued support. Together, we will make 2026 another strong year for the Southeast Michigan Chapter of MOAA!
Best regards,

Rich

Rich Higgins, LCDR, USN (Ret.)
President

2026 Meetings

Board Meetings			Chapter/Other Meetings			
Jan 20	Feb 17	Mar 17	Jan 29 Chapter Lunch/ Induction of Officers	Apr 6-9 Advocacy in Action	April 16 Chapter Lunch TACOM Guest Speaker	May 9 International Armed Forces Dining out
None	May 19	Jun 16	Jun 16 Chapter Zoom	Jul 16 Chapter Lunch Guest Speaker	Sep 19 Retiree Appreciation Day	Oct 20 Chapter Zoom Mtg
None	Aug 18	Sep 15	Nov 5 Chapter Mtg / Election of Officers	Nov 9 Veteran's Day Remembrance	Dec 12 Wreaths Across America	
Oct 20	None	Dec 15				

Unless otherwise noted, our in-person meetings take place at "The Rusty Bucket" 30450 Telegraph Rd, Bingham Farms, MI 48025. The meetings are announced well in advance via email, our website and this newsletter. If you need information about chapter happenings, contact one of our Board members at this link.

Chapter Board Members

President - LCDR Rich Higgins, USN (Ret)
Vice President -CDR Roy Yaple, USN (Ret)
Treasurer - Vacant
Secretary - LTC Larry Powell, USA (Ret)

Chapter Address

Chapter Digital links:

- Chapter web site, www.semimoaa.org
- MOAA web presence.

https://www.moaa.org/chapter/southeasternmichigan/

For all non-digital correspondence use the following address:
560 Barrington Rd. Grosse Pointe Park, MI 48230

Disclaimer

- **The Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) is a nonprofit military and veterans association dedicated to maintaining a strong national defense and ensuring our nation keeps its commitments to currently serving, retired, and former members of the uniformed services and their families and survivors.**
- **The Southeastern Michigan Chapter of MOAA (SEMI M OAA) is affiliated with the Michigan Council MOAA and the national MOAA Organization and are all nonpartisan**
- **All material or other information - including links - contained in the SEMI MOAA newsletter is provided as a public service to military service members and their families.**
- **The contents of this publication is subject to periodic updating.**
- **Although every attempt is made to ensure that information is accurate and timely, the content is presented "as is" and without warranties.**
- **Use of the information is strictly voluntary and at the user's sole risk.**

Membership

Membership is open to those who hold or have ever held a warrant or commission in any component of the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, Space Force, Coast Guard, Public Health Service, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and their surviving spouses.
The Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) is the country's leading organization protecting the rights of military servicemembers and their families. Those who belong to MOAA not only lend their voices to a greater cause, but they also gain access to extensive benefits tailored to the needs and lifestyles of military officers. MOAA members proudly hail from every branch of the uniformed services. To them, we have made the same promise that they have made to their country: Never Stop Serving. Although membership in the national MOAA organization is not a requirement to join this Chapter, we strongly encourage you to join. The basic level of MOAA membership is free.
To become a member click HERE

US Representative Names and Districts

Click to open webpage

5 - Tim Walberg
6 - Debbie Dingell
7 - Tom Barrett
8 - Kristen Rivet
9 - Lisa McLain
10 - John James
11 - Haley Stevens
12 - Rashida Tlaib
13 - Shri Thanedar

119th Congress

Legislative Corner

The MOAA Advocacy Update

Every week, MOAA's advocacy leaders and other experts discuss issues of importance to our members and the uniformed services community. Watch the latest **here**.

To stay informed, you can subscribe to the MOAA YouTube channel **here**.

To contact your legislators and to learn about what MOAA is working on with Congress, click **here**.

Long-Sought Fix for Combat-Wounded Veterans Takes New Path in Congress

By: Jen Goodale

The Major Richard Star Act, a bipartisan effort to fix a long-standing injustice in the military retirement and disability compensation system, has taken a significant procedural step in Congress as lawmakers look to move the issue forward before the end of the year.

The MOAA-supported bill (H.R. 2102 | S. 1032) eliminates a dollar-for-dollar offset faced by servicemembers whose combat-related injuries force them to medically retire before the 20-year mark. Ending this “wounded veteran tax” would allow eligible veterans to receive both full retirement pay and full disability compensation.

In a strategic shift to advance the legislation in this session of Congress, Sens. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), Mike Crapo (R-Idaho), and Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) have filed the text of the bill as an amendment to House-passed appropriations legislation (H.R. 4016).

How MOAA Members Can Help

MOAA’s advocacy remains focused on passing the Major Richard Star Act. We need your help to urge members of Congress to support inclusion of the bill’s language as an amendment to the appropriations legislation, and to oppose procedural barriers that could derail progress. Grassroots engagement remains critical to maintaining momentum.

This article appears on MOAA’s website (MOAA.org). To read the full article, go to this **link**.

To send an email to your representative and ask them to support this Bill, go to this **link**.

Advocacy at the State Level

The Michigan Commanders Group, a coalition of Congressionally Charted Veterans Services Organizations, has identified its most critical issue, namely combating veteran suicide. 133,867 U.S. Military veterans died by suicide between 2001 and 2021. Over 40,000 of these suicides occurred for veterans who had been using the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for their care. More than 68% of all veterans treated at the VA are prescribed psychiatric drugs and 28% are prescribed antidepressants.

Urgent action is needed by the Michigan Legislature and the Governor to save lives and ensure more Michigan families do not suffer further tragedies.

To learn more about this subject, go to this link and ask your representative to get involved.

Veteran Suicide Reduction
Informed Consent and Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy

Veteran suicide remains a profound crisis in the United States, with approximately 17-22 veterans dying by suicide each day. Many of these cases are linked to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), and challenges with mental health treatments. While the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has expanded suicide prevention programs, including crisis lines and community outreach, emerging initiatives focus on empowering veterans through better information and access to alternative therapies. Two notable efforts—informed consent for psychiatric medications and expanded use of hyperbaric oxygen therapy (HBOT)—aim to address root causes and provide safer, more effective options.

One Initiative addresses concerns over psychiatric drug prescribing practices in the VA system. Veterans often receive medications like antidepressants, antipsychotics, and anxiolytics for PTSD and related conditions, but reports highlight inadequate disclosure of risks, including suicidal ideation, severe withdrawal symptoms, and long-term side effects. Black box warnings from the FDA acknowledge these dangers, yet veterans and advocates report that informed consent is frequently verbal or incomplete. In response, H.R. 4837, the Written Informed Consent Act, sponsored by Representative Gus Bilirakis (R-FL-12), seeks to mandate standardized written consent forms. This would require VA prescribers to clearly outline risks, benefits, and alternatives before long-term use of high-risk psychiatric drugs, mirroring existing policies for opioids that successfully reduced overprescribing. Supported by groups like the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the bill emphasizes patient autonomy, potentially preventing medication-induced crises that contribute to suicide risk. Critics, including some medical associations, argue it duplicates existing VA directives, but proponents counter that documented failures in current practices—confirmed by VA Inspector General reports—necessitate stronger safeguards.

Complementing this is growing legislative support for hyperbaric oxygen therapy (HBOT) as a non-pharmacological treatment for TBI and PTSD, conditions strongly associated with veteran suicide. HBOT involves breathing pure oxygen in a pressurized chamber, promoting brain tissue repair, reducing inflammation, and improving neuroplasticity. Studies, including those from Israel and U.S. trials, show significant reductions in PTSD symptoms and suicidal ideation among veterans unresponsive to traditional therapies.

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At the state level, Michigan has advanced efforts through bills like HB 5146 (introduced in 2023-2024 sessions), establishing a grant and pilot program to fund HBOT for veterans with TBI or PTSD at no cost. This reflects broader state trends, with over a dozen states passing or considering similar measures to cover or promote HBOT. Nationally, bipartisan legislation, such as the Veterans National Traumatic Brain Injury Treatment Act led by Rep. Greg Murphy and Sen. Tommy Tuberville in 2025, proposes VA pilot programs to provide HBOT in select networks. These bills highlight HBOT's potential as a "suicide preventative," offering hope for veterans where drugs and talk therapy fall short.

These initiatives represent a shift toward veteran-centered care: one protects against potential harms of conventional treatments, while the other expands innovative alternatives. If enacted widely, they could significantly lower suicide rates by fostering informed choices and healing underlying brain injuries. As advocacy continues, these efforts underscore a commitment to honoring veterans' sacrifices with evidence-based, compassionate solutions.
What You Can Do – A Call to Action for Michigan MOAA Members

CLICK HERE to support the Michigan Commanders Group's legislative priorities, including:

- Reducing suicides related to lack of informed consent regarding psychiatric drug side effects and withdrawal issues, ensuring Veterans and families clearly understand risks and care options.
- Supporting a Michigan pilot program for Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy (HBOT) to help treat Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and related conditions, while carefully evaluating safety and effectiveness.

VA Benefits Presentation — Open to All Veterans

Sunday, January 18 at 11:00 a.m.
Zekelman Holocaust Center, 28123 Orchard Lake Road, Farmington Hills, MI 48334

The Jewish War Veterans (Department of Michigan) will conduct an informational session featuring Bethany Mindlin, Senior Constituent Services Representative for U.S. Senator Gary Peters. The presentation will focus on several critical topics affecting veterans and their families, including:
VA death benefits
VA end-of-life planning
VA caregiver benefits
This event is open to all veterans and their guests, regardless of affiliation. Light refreshments (coffee and bagels) will be provided.
Understanding VA programs and navigating available resources can make a significant difference for veterans, surviving spouses, and caregivers. This is an excellent opportunity to hear directly from a knowledgeable representative who routinely assists Michigan veterans with federal benefits and casework.
Members who live in or near the metro-Detroit area are especially encouraged to attend and help spread the word to fellow veterans who may benefit from this session.
This program is hosted by the Jewish War Veterans of the USA, Department of Michigan. We thank them for extending the invitation to the broader veteran community and for their ongoing commitment to supporting the veteran community.

Chapter Luncheon

On January 29th, we will meet for lunch and the swearing in of our 2026 slate of officers. We'll meet at the Rusty Bucket at 12:00pm. We will be ordering from the menu. Hope to see you there. Our last few meetings have had low attendance. It would be great to see you all again. The Rusty Bucket is conveniently located at 30450 Telegraph Rd, Bingham Farms, MI 48025

Wreathes Across America

Chapter President Rich Higgins, and Chapter Vice President Roy Yaple braved the cold and joined a large crowd of Michiganders laying wreathes to honor our nation's fallen at Resurrection Cemetery in Clinton Township.

RETIREMENT SERVICES OFFICE

Do you have a question about survivor benefits? Retired pay questions? Have an issue you would like addressed?

Fort McCoy, WI supports an Installation Retiree Council. The Council oversees five area Retiree Councils located in Rock Island (Quad Cities), Illinois; Des Moines, Iowa; Selfridge, Mich.; and the Wisconsin area. Councils serve as the voice of the retiree community and have the means to submit issues up the chain of command. If you are interested in serving on a retiree council, please contact the RSO at 502-898-3716.

The Selfridge, Mich., Retiree Councils operate Retiree Activity Offices (RAO) at their respective military installations. You can contact the Selfridge RAO at 586-239-5580 or you can email them at selfrao@yahoo.com.
In addition to helping with retirement related questions, the Selfridge RAO hosts the annual Retiree Appreciation Day in September. The RAO is staffed solely by volunteers. If you are interested in helping out, send them an email.

Also consider visiting the Army Retirement Services page at:
https://myarmybenefits.us.army.mil/.

The following retirement planning services are offered:
Retirement briefings/counseling
Survivor benefits briefings/counseling
Preparation of Retired Pay Application (DD Form 2656)
Active-duty survivor assistance
The following Post-Retirement services are offered:
Conduct annual RAD
HONORS newsletter
Assistance to service members and families
Information for CRSC/CRDP
Assistance obtaining lost service documents
Information/referral to the Department of Veterans Affairs
TRICARE information
Assistance with retired pay actions

Southeastern Michigan MOAA Chapter ROTC/JROTC Awards Program

Our chapter is active in recognizing high performing students from university and high school ROTC and JROTC programs through presentation of the MOAA ROTC/JROTC medal.We are looking for a chapter member who would like to learn the ropes of this program. Most activity takes place in mid-January when medals are ordered and during February and March in communicating with schools to schedule award delivery and presentation. Each school's award ceremony is somewhat different. Schools involved include the University of Michigan, Eastern Michigan University, Anchor Bay High School, Detroit Public Schools, Howell High School, Genesee Career Institute, and others. If you are interested in learning about this program or presenting a medal, please contact Roy Yaple, yapler@comcast.net

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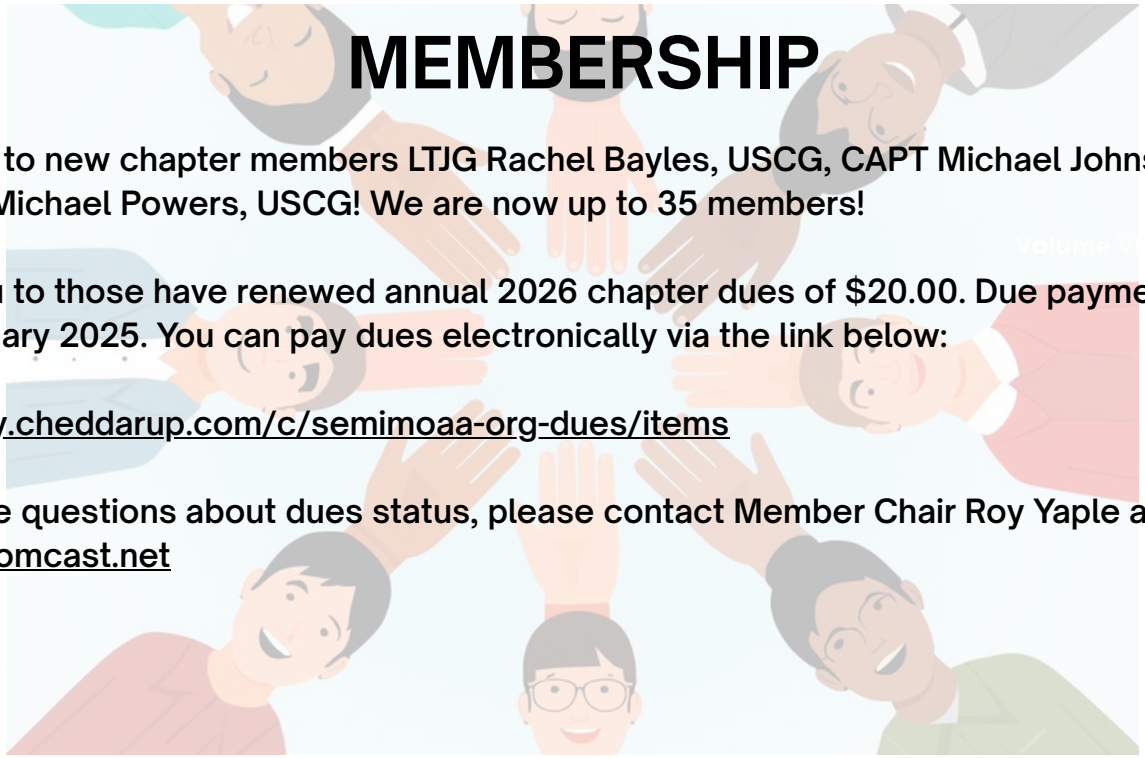

MEMBERSHIP

Welcome to new chapter members LTJG Rachel Bayles, USCG, CAPT Michael Johnson, USN, and CDR Michael Powers, USCG! We are now up to 35 members!

Thank you to those have renewed annual 2026 chapter dues of $20.00. Due payments are due by 31 January 2025. You can pay dues electronically via the link below:

https://my.cheddarup.com/c/semimoaa-org-dues/items

If you have questions about dues status, please contact Member Chair Roy Yaple at yapler@comcast.net

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Chapter Opportunities for Service

The chapter **Treasurer** position remains open. If you are interested in serving in this position, please contact rlhigginsjr@yahoo.com We will be happy to answer questions and provide training. The major activity for this position is tracking and crediting member dues payments.

Surviving Spouse Corner: Making a VA Benefits Compensation Claim

By: Nora Durham

I have been a surviving spouse for 24 years. My husband, a 33-year veteran of the Marine Corps and a naval aviator, died in 2001 from heart disease. He was never a member of MOAA.

I became acquainted with MOAA in 2019 during a visit to Washington, D.C. It was a chance meeting during Advocacy in Action, at which time some in the group learned I was the widow of a Marine Corps officer. I was led to the registration booth and immediately became a MOAA member. I learned there are approximately 47,000 surviving spouse members of MOAA — representing about 12% of the association's members. I'm now a proud Life member.

This brief encounter started a journey for me to be as active as possible. I became my local chapter's surviving spouse liaison and then a member of the Surviving Spouse Advisory Council (SSAC).
Through my involvement with MOAA, I learned about VA Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC). As my husband served in Vietnam and was exposed to Agent Orange, it was determined his exposure subsequently caused the heart disease that contributed to his death. This qualified me to receive this benefit. With the help of a local veterans service officer (VSO) and the VA Office of Survivor Assistance, I will receive this tax-free monthly compensation for the rest of my life.

Suppose you are the surviving spouse, child, or parent of a servicemember who died in the line of duty, or the survivor of a veteran who died from a service-related injury or illness. In that case, you might be eligible to receive this tax-free monetary benefit. Visit the VA's website to learn more.

For additional information and support, contact a local VSO if one is available in your community. Not all VSOs are as helpful as others, but I finally found mine.

To prepare for opening a VA claim for disability or other benefits compensation, applicants must possess the following documents:
Military discharge (DD Form 214) — original or certified copy is best
Other military service information (branch, dates of service, Reserve or National Guard service dates, etc.)
Medical records (military and/or civilian) if available, and if applying for a service-connected disability, contact information for civilian medical providers who treated the veteran for military-related illnesses or injuries (i.e., doctors, specialists, hospitals, etc.)
Bank deposit information (i.e., voided check) — the VA will automatically deposit into this account if benefits are awarded

If the above documents are not available, veterans or surviving kin can request them online at www.archives.gov/veterans.

This article appeared on MOAA's website. To learn more click this **link**.

Are you on Facebook?

The MOAA Surviving Spouses and Friends group offers dedicated support and advocacy for spouses who have lost their loved ones in service.These programs provide a network of peers and resources to help navigate the vhallenges of being a surviving spouse.
This Facebook group is private, but you can request to join. Click on this **link** to request to join.

VA Healthcare, Pension and Compensation; Weekly Zoom Calls

If you are in the White Lake or Milford area, please feel free to contact Henry Storm or Roy Yaple (yapler@comcast.net) about the VA breakfast meetings, Monday and Friday at 7AM at Leo's Coney Island in White Lake and Wednesday at 7AM at the Americus Grill in Milford. Breakfast is pay as you go and a wonderful place to enjoy fellowship with other veterans and ask questions on VA-related topics.

If you are applying for VA Healthcare or considering filing a VA disability claim, and are looking for help, please consider attending the weekly 4PM Thursday Zoom coffee or the noon Sunday Zoom podcast on VA Healthcare and Disability Claim topics.

This is the **link** for you to save to access the Website. Here you will find all of the links that are individually listed below :

- 12:00 - 1:00 PM EST Sunday Noon Veteran Sitrep Podcast
- 4:00 - 5:00 PM EST Thursday Vet Talk
- Facebook Page Trusted Helpers: A daily update on what is happening with your VA benefits
- 550+ Videos, created by Air Force Veteran Ed Ruckle, answering questions veterans, like you, have asked.

Please note that the VA 1010EZ, the form for applying for VA Healthcare has been revised as of this month (July 2024). If you applied in the past and were denied VA Health Care, another look with the new form may be appropriate to see if you qualify for VA Healthcare).

The end of a relationship. Loss of a job. Housing instability. Feeling a loss of purpose. At some point, everyone will face a challenge. Some of those challenges may develop into a crisis.

Recognizing a crisis in yourself or those you care about can help you know when to find support.

24/7 Confidential, Crisis Support, for Veterans and Their Loved Ones

Dial 988 then Press 1

Or text 838255