

The Spirit of '776



February 2025

VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA CHAPTER 776



Meeting at The American Legion

"Never Again Will One Generation of Veterans Abandon Another."

Veteran Service Officers & Service Coordinators

Ben Enlow
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Tom Lemons
563-359-3201
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Honor Guard

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Lyle D Petersen



Officers and Board of Directors

President	Steve Satre	210-633-6470	Director	Harold Hansen	563-505-9674
Vice President	John Lavelle	563-355-4213	Director	Greg Paulline	563-650-3055
Treasurer	Joe Wesenberg	309-582-4379	Director	Larry Witt	563-579-6521
Secretary	Tom Lemons	563-359-3201	Director	Ernest Ledtje	563-785-6182
Director	Richard Wahlstrand				

**VVA 776 Meeting
February 26, 2025**

Call to Order: Meeting called to order by Vice President John Lavelle.

Officers present are Treasurer Joe Wesenberg and Secretary Tom Lemons. Pledge of Allegiance said and moment of silence for POW/MIA and those still serving in harm's way across the globe.

Introductions: Thomas Lemons, Darrell Thode, Russ Risley, Dave Thode, Rod Kjersten, Dennis Queal, Harold Hansen, Dave Thode, Bruce Cheek, James Meldrum, Cindy Meldrum, John Lavelle, Shirley Richlen, R, Ernest Ledtje, Ken Fry, Rolf Shave, Jack Kirchhoff, Jack Gruntorad, Bill Churchill, Greg Paulline (Cell Phone), Paula Wesenberg, and Joseph Wesenberg. (22)

Reports

- **Secretary's Report**
 - Motion to approve the report was made by Dave Thode and seconded by Larry Witt.
- **Treasurer's Report**
 - Mention of incoming funds for the Honor Guard.
 - The report filed for audit.
- **Finance Committee**
 - No updates or issues reported.

Personal Stories and Health Updates

- **Steve's Accident and Hospitalization**
 - Steve Satre fell and sustained injuries requiring stitches above his eye.
- **John's Health Challenges**
 - John Lavelle shared experiences of falling and sustaining skin tears. Mentioned being on blood thinners and experiencing significant bleeding.
 - Personal experiences with health challenges influencing decisions about future leadership roles.

- Others in Distress
 - Greg Paulline, Edwin Hildebrand.

Bank Update

- **Northwest Bank Acquisition**
 - Northwest Bank has been bought out and will be renamed Time Bank.
 - Potential changes in checks and interest rates were discussed.
 - Branch locations include Davenport, Bettendorf, and Park Ridge, Illinois.

Correspondence and Acknowledgments

- **Thank You Notes and Donations**
 - Received thank you notes from Quad City Veterans Outreach, Cafe on Vine, Humility of Mary, and UnityPoint Health.
 - Acknowledgment of donations made to various organizations supporting veterans.
- **Mail and Donations**
 - Three checks received from Nancy Rawlings, each for \$50.
 - Discussion on handling veterans magazines received in the mail.

Acknowledgements

- Lyle Peterson was recognized for his contributions to the 50th anniversary committee. As well as everything else he did which are too numerous to mention.
- A special thank you to his wife Carolyn for her help behind the scenes.

Coin Stories and Veteran Engagement

- **Sharing Veteran Stories**

- Joe Wesenberg shared an encounter with a veteran at Sam's, where they discussed the VVA chapter. The veteran expressed interest in visiting, and Joe gave him a challenge coin to encourage attendance.
- Denny Queal advised one veteran, who had completed three tours, in Vietnam, was given a coin in recognition.
- Rod Kjersten shared an anecdote about a Marine involved in recon missions in Vietnam
- Ernest Ledtje gave a coin to a veteran who served as Navy aircrew in Vietnam before becoming a CB and making a career out of it.
- One member met with a Vietnamese Captain that he had known for 15 years. He was back in town and they got together and he gave him a coin.
- **Importance of Storytelling**
 - The group emphasized the importance of preserving veteran stories, referencing a leadership conference in South Carolina that discussed recording stories for the Library of Congress. Despite the program's potential, it did not gain take off.

Membership and Leadership Roles

- Concern was expressed about the need to replace Lyle as the membership chair. The importance of recruiting new members was highlighted, with a call for volunteers to step up.

Honor Guard Activities

- **Funeral Services**
 - Denny Queal provided an update on the honor guard's activities, noting that 19 funerals have been conducted this year, with 35 planned in 59 days. The honor guard has faced challenges such as multiple funerals on the same day and adverse weather conditions.

- He acknowledged the significant contribution of members from contingencies 299 and 669 to the honor guard's efforts.
- **Honor Guard Participation and Challenges.**
 - MAVA has been very accommodating.
 - Members of 299 expressed interest in participating, leading to some logistical challenges.
- Current Situation
 - Participation has dwindled
 - John Lavelle expresses a personal goal to return to the Honor Guard after recovering from illness.

Veterans Memorial Park Statue Proposal

- **Proposal Details**
 - Discussion on installing a statue at Veterans Memorial Park in memory of Vietnam veterans.
 - Estimated cost for the statue is approximately \$15,000.
- **Funding Considerations**
 - Suggestion to raise new funds specifically for the statue, rather than using existing chapter funds.
 - Edwin Hildebrand is currently the primary fundraiser for the chapter, highlighting the need for more members to engage in fundraising efforts.

Upcoming Elections and Leadership Changes

- **Election Timeline**
 - Elections are scheduled for April.
 - Nominations at March meeting
- **Leadership Vacancies**
 - Steve Satre, the current president, does not wish to continue in the role.
 - John Lavelle, currently vice president, is also considering stepping down due to health issues.

Access to the Arsenal

- **Requirements for Entry**

- Visitors need a driver's license and an up-to-date VA card to access the Arsenal.
- Additional security measures include obtaining a gate pass, valid for a year.
- Alternative access with a PIV card for VSOs or retired military personnel.

Organizational Sustainability

- **Concerns and Future Outlook**

- Acknowledgment of the organization's eventual decline but emphasis on prolonging its vitality.
- Encouragement for members to take active roles in sustaining the chapter's activities and leadership.

Donation of Electric Cart for Veterans

- **Discussion on Donation**

- It was mentioned that a member's brother-in-law had passed and that his wife wishes to donate a four-wheeled electric cart to veteran in need. It was noted that the Veterans Outreach Center might be interested in such a donation.
- The outreach center is located at the old Buchanan School on Fremont, north of Kimberly.

Personal Sharing and Community Events

- **Upcoming Car Show**

- It was announced a car show at will be at QCCA, inviting military personnel and veterans to attend for free. The event is scheduled for April 11th, 12th, and 13th.
- A veterans' organization, Anonymous Grateful, will be present at the car show and will also host a seminar at Cornerstone Baptist Church in Eldridge.

Veterans' Mental Health and Support

- **Support for Veterans**

- Discussion on the importance of mental health support for veterans, with a mention of a previous dinner event that raised \$40,000 for Gold Star families.
- The Gold Star luncheon was organized by Lyle, bringing together families from the area.

Administrative and Website Updates

- **Next Meeting**

- The next meeting is scheduled for March 26th at the Legion Hall. Members were encouraged to consider taking on responsibilities, emphasizing a can-do attitude.

- **Website Discussion**

- It was noticed that our website was changed from "Bettendorf" to "Scott County." John Lavelle pointed out we were no longer meeting in "Bettendorf".