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MORE INSIDE

On The Cover: Mayor of Muskogee Patrick Cale (left) and retired U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Stephen Reagan pose with the newly unveiled Ernest Evans Memorial in Muskogee.

OKLAHOMA VETERANS
NEWSMAGAZINE
Serving Active Duty Military, Veterans and Their Families

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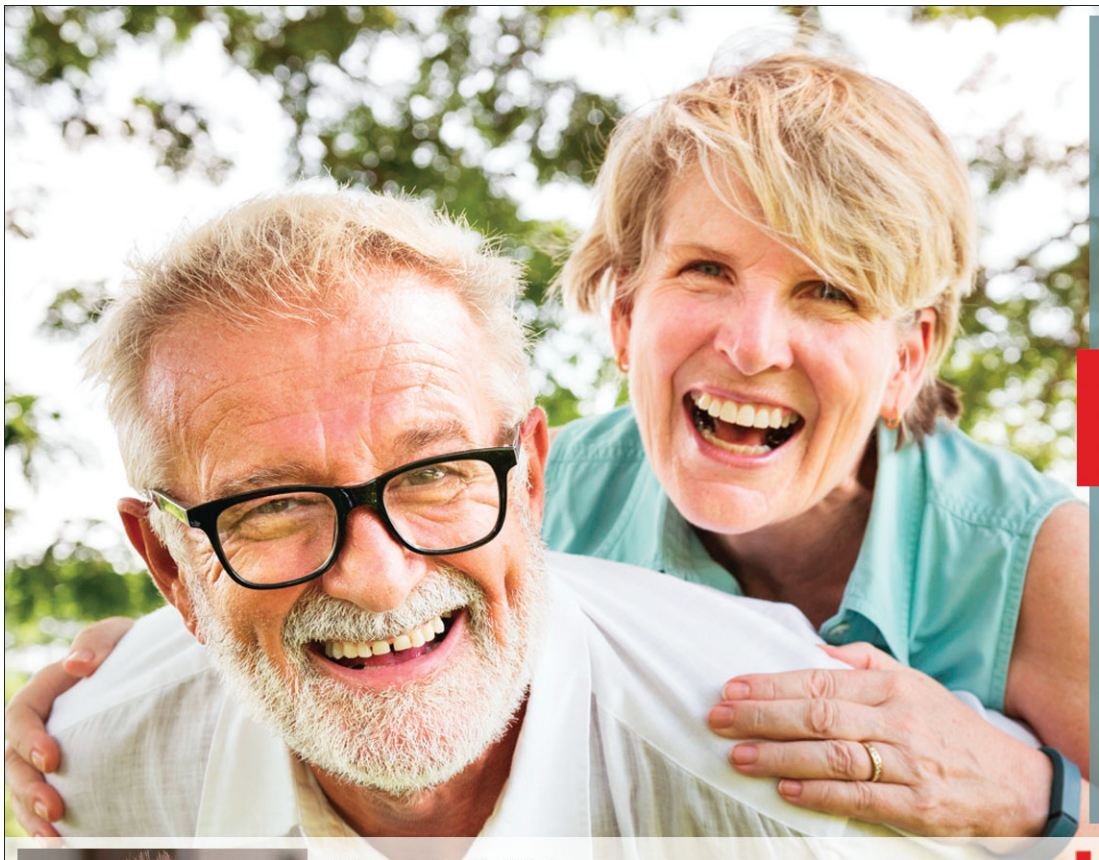

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Tinker Home Away From Home Offers Comfort and Support

Team Tinker Home Away From Home" provides monthly activities, volunteering opportunities, events, speakers, and professional Life Skills seminars at no cost to service members. At each event service members are provided with a free catered meal.

The Team Tinker Home Away From Home program began out of a tragedy but has turned into a triumph for the young military members stationed at Tinker Air Force Base.

The program was founded by Mike and Pam Kloiber that pairs young service members with civilian host families to help alleviate the anxiety of being alone and far from home, often for the first time.

On an icy Christmas Eve in 2011, two Airmen from the 552nd Air Control Wing were killed in an automobile accident in Oklahoma City. After a conversation with then-552nd ACW Commander Col. Greg Guillot, Mrs. Kloiber had her marching orders and set out to create a program modeled after a similar one at the Air Force Academy.

Over the last 10 years, more than 1,500 first term Airmen and Sailors have taken Kloiber up on her offer and actively participated in the program.

The goal of "Team Tinker Home Away From Home" is to provide all eligible, first-term Service Members with a "home away from home."

The program strives to match community sponsors with young service men and women, giving them a welcoming, safe, and supportive place to spend time, especially during the holidays.

These community sponsors provide them a welcoming place to relax and offer opportunities to have fun away from the stress and day-to-day requirements of life on Tinker Air Force Base (TAFB). Families offer personal interactions that can develop into strong, long-lasting bonds.

In addition to the host partnership, "Team Tinker Home Away From Home" also provides monthly activities, volunteering opportunities, events, speakers, and professional Life Skills seminars at no cost to service members.

Pam Kloiber said she and her husband are proud of the impact their program has had on service members.

"Mike was the CEO/President of Tinker Federal Credit Union for 33 years," she said. "Mike and I have always worked as a team, and so when he was working there, I also supported the base in any way I could. I didn't realize how much of an impact that Home Away From Home would have on me when it first began. The program's impact and the resiliency, connectivity and family immersion for the service members have exceeded more than I expected."

Service members can become part of THAFH through several different avenues, Kloiber said.

In addition to being linked with a host family, service members can attend a monthly life skills class through the "Empowerment, Enhancement and Education" initiative.

" I call all of the servicemembers my kids, and my assigned service members connect with Mike and I every Sunday," she said. "I'm always trying to find new and innovative ideas to support the service member's lives. I'm always searching for ways to help empower the service members"

Kloiber writes a program curriculum and each year she has a theme.

For 2025, her theme is Let's Strive to Thrive, a Year of Empowerment, Enhancement in Education.

"Every month we have professional seminars because I want them to have the opportunity to be exposed and learn life skills," Kloiber said. "Many of them have never bought a car, particularly service members that live in inner cities like New York City, Brooklyn, and they don't know how to drive a car. We've helped purchase cars for many service members and help them to learn how to drive. I have a class on car buying."

Kloiber said each month different skills classes are offered.

"Each month we have a speaker talking about various topics pertinent to this age group," she said.

Kloiber said their program hosts an end-of-the-year party for servicemen and servicewomen called "Thanksmas."

"We combine Thanksgiving and Christmas together, and we call it Thankmas," she said. "At all our events we offer a free catered meal. The base leadership, commanders and chiefs all join in to serve the food to service members and they join in the class to show how important it is to better yourself. They take the time to sit and break bread, sit right beside an airman and have a meal. The conversation and connection between the leadership and service members is amazing."

Kloiber said volunteerism is also an important part of Home Away From Home, following the Air Force's values of Service Before Self.

"We volunteer in the community several ways," she said. "We have a connection with Mayor Matt Dukes in Midwest City, and we volunteer with him. He has a neighborhood coalition for senior citizens that need help with various projects around their home. We also laid wreaths for Wreaths Across America, and we volunteered with Hope Therapeutic Horse Ranch. This year we've added a volunteer project and it's Vet Chat, and we will be going in October to Norman's Veterans facility. We will be having coffee and donuts while spending a Saturday morning with the Veterans in Norman."

Kloiber said suicide is a factor in the military, but her program has been fortunate to not have experienced any suicides.

"We've had a lot of airmen that have reached out because they're hurting, having some mental health issues and they need support. The families have been wonderful because they know when the service members come over, and they're consistently visiting with them and doing things with them. They let their service members be there to support them."

Kloiber said Team Tinker Home Away From Home is more than a program to her. It is her passion.

"It's a passion now, a connection with young people that I have been able to see growth and development in them," she said. "They have skills, they have talent, they have ability, but occasionally a few may have a weak self-esteem, and all they just need someone to say, "You've got this."

For more information about Team Tinker Home Away From Home call Kloiber at (405) 503-5041 or visit www.teamtinkerhomeawayfromhome.org Home Away From Home is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable foundation, with no DOD affiliation or governmental status. ■ *story/photo by Van Mitchell*

WWII Hero Ernest Evans Memorial Unveiled

Just after dawn on October 25, 1944, the Japanese sent the largest naval battle group ever assembled to destroy 130,000 American soldiers invading Leyte. Their goal was to destroy the American forces just moving inland, five days after the landings, to push them out of the Philippines. This battle and U.S. Navy Commander Ernest E. Evans' heroic actions had a significant impact on hastening the conclusion of WWII.

Never before that day had one Sailor's actions diverted the burden of attack from so many American service members so decisively as in the Battle off Samar. That man was Evans, a graduate of Muskogee High School and the U.S. Naval Academy.

"[Leyte Gulf], a key battle in the Pacific War, was almost a disaster for the United States," said Samuel Cox, retired rear admiral and director of the Naval History and Heritage Command, in an April 2021 article from "The Oklahoman." "If it hadn't been for what Ernest Evans did, the battle would have gone much worse."

The Japanese forces attempting to surprise the overmatched Taffy 3 task force were aggressively introduced to the unwavering courage and self-sacrifice of the U.S Navy's finest. Three American destroyers, commonly referred to as "tin cans," because they lacked armor, began the fight for their lives against a far superior force.

Among the attacking fleet, the Japanese super battleship Yamato, the largest battleship ever built with 18-inch rifles, outweighed the entire American defending force. It was a formidable part of a massive force consisting of four battleships, six heavy cruisers, two light cruisers, and 11 destroyers.

At the helm of the Fletcher-class destroyer USS Johnston, Evans assured himself a place in U.S. Naval history with his courageous initiative in the face of the overwhelming enemy. Before the order to attack was issued, the determined warrior began a lone preemptive retaliatory strike with extreme prejudice.

Evans entered Navy lore forever by laying a smoke screen to protect his fellow ships and navigating his vessel fearlessly into harm's way to deploy his torpedoes.

The Johnston delivered the immediate first blow, instilling chaos within the Japanese naval ranks. Its 10 torpedoes tore the bow off the Japanese cruiser Kumano in the first few minutes of the three-hour battle. Here was the aggressive Japanese fleet, far outgunning and outnumbering its prey, being attacked and bloodied by the first ship it encountered.

Evans and his only 2,000-ton destroyer were much earlier announced to be the Navy's readiest-for-battle warship. Evans let his assembled crew know his intentions as he took command at the USS Johnston's commissioning in October 1943. "This is going to be a fighting ship," he said. "I intend to go in harm's way, and anyone who doesn't want to go along had better get off right now. I will never retreat from an enemy force."

Evans's tactical blitzkrieg was everything a ship that size could accomplish in that short a time. But his audacious and successful counterattack against overwhelming forces off Samar was not enough for the brave Oklahoman.

The Johnston rejoined the frigate line of destroyers as they made their torpedo runs at the far superior forces. This action meant the small Taffy 3 task force presented a "larger than real" profile in the water to Japanese Admiral Takeo Kurita on his flagship Yamato. By now in the battle, more than a hundred pilots from the Jeep carriers and land bases nearby were swarming the Japanese fleet.

Although his ship had already fired all its torpedoes, Evans wanted to protect his fellow sailors as much as possible with his ship's five 5-inch guns. The well-trained crew fired more than 800 rounds in the battle.

By drawing fire away from the Jeep carriers he was protecting, his ship was taking hits from powerful 14-inch guns. Despite severe damage to his ship and his wounds from Japanese fire destroying the bridge, Evans repeatedly put the Johnston between the enemy and the more vulnerable U.S. ships. This saved the lives of thousands of his fellow sailors.

This second suicide run met with far less success against the enemy. After almost three hours of battle, the Johnston eased over on her side for 25 minutes until finally sinking.

Her early valiant effort meant the Johnston proved decisive. Without air cover, the enemy, confusing the aggression to be a genuine effort made by a more significant force, broke off the attack and headed for Japan.

Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz wrote afterwards that the success of Taffy 3 was "nothing short of special dispensation from the Lord Almighty."

Evans earned the respect of all Navy personnel forever for his courageous actions, but he lost his life at 36 that day, along with 185 members of his crew. His body was never recovered when the USS Johnston sank after fighting valiantly for three hours.

Evans was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor and a Purple Heart Medal for sparking the decisive victory in Leyte Gulf. He also shared in the Presidential Unit Citation awarded to Taffy 3 for this action.

On Sept. 28, 1945, shortly after World War II concluded, Evans' Medal of Honor was presented to his wife, Margaret, in San Pedro, California. The ceremony was attended by his mother, sister, and sons Jerry and Ernest Jr.

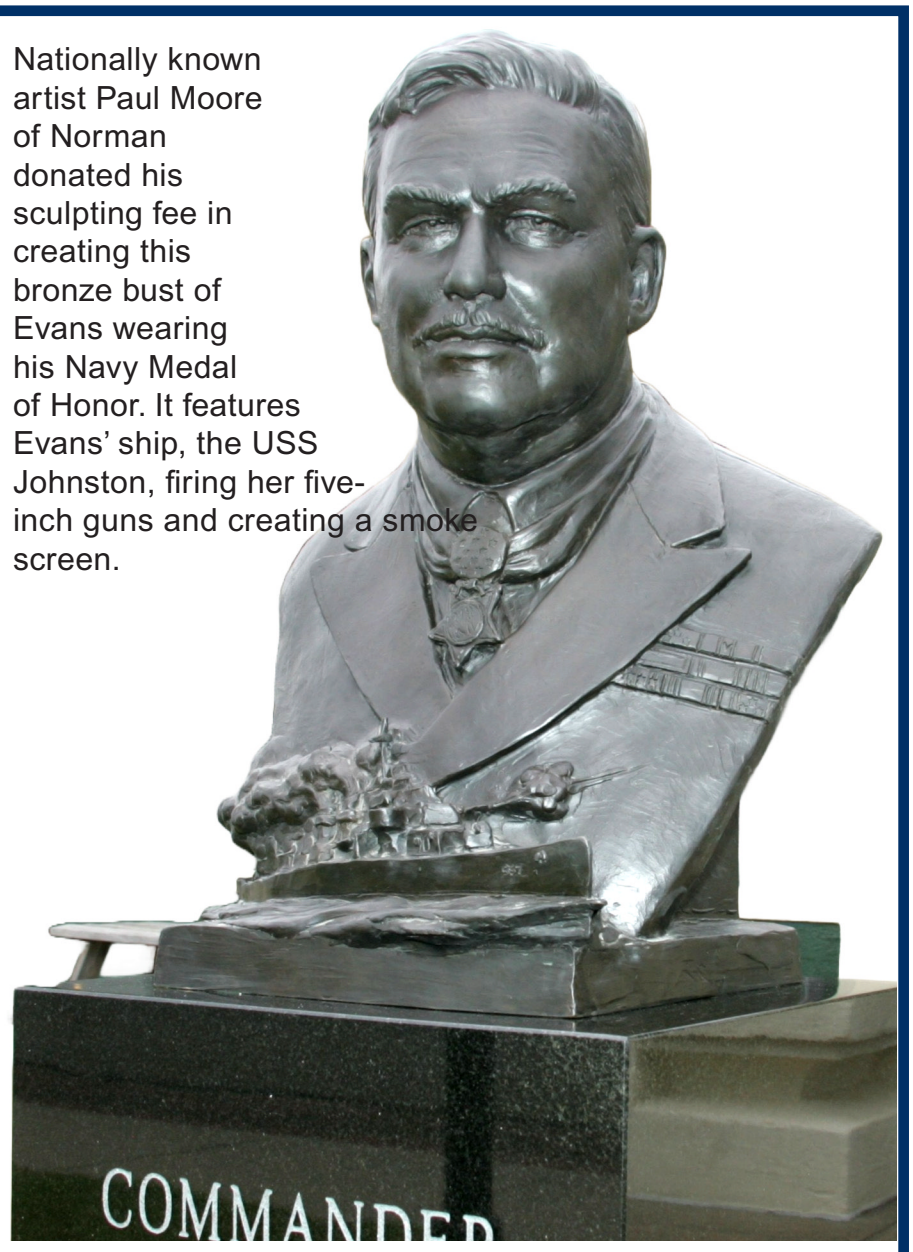
Evans is one of only two destroyer captains from World War II to receive the Medal of Honor.

Evans' exploits have now been interwoven into the Navy's legacy, as his name has graced one decommissioned warship and a building at the U.S. Naval Academy. Last year, the Navy announced that the USS Ernest E. Evans, a DDG 51 Flight III Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer, will soon be the second warship named in his honor.

The USS Johnston, underway, headed to the Pacific for World War II on October 27, 1943, just after its commissioning

On May 7, Oklahomans demonstrated that their servicemen and women are never forgotten during a solemn ceremony to unveil a bronze bust of Evans. In front of the Three Rivers Museum, a monument was dedicated to Oklahoma's most celebrated World War II Navy hero in Muskogee, Oklahoma.

Retired U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Stephen Reagan, who resides in Norman, and his wife, Alice, spearheaded the effort to honor Evans. The campaign to raise funds and acquire the resources to create the monument took almost four years.



Nationally known artist Paul Moore of Norman donated his sculpting fee in creating this bronze bust of Evans wearing his Navy Medal of Honor. It features Evans' ship, the USS Johnston, firing her five-inch guns and creating a smoke screen.

"I consider my work to help Muskogee honor Commander Ernest Evans one of the most significant things I have ever done," Reagan said. "It's a good feeling to help others. I am very proud to have Alice present, who helped make it a great day for me."

Nationally acclaimed artist Paul Moore from Norman created a bronze bust of Evans wearing his Navy Medal of Honor. An identical bust, a gift from Reagan and his donors, is displayed at the US Naval Academy Museum.

The bust sits atop a tall square black granite pedestal. Below his image at the front of the bust is a miniature model of the USS Johnston in bronze, firing her five-inch guns and creating a smoke screen.

Patrick Cale, the Mayor of Muskogee and owner of Muskogee Marble & Granite, was the only corporate donor to the project. He provided the pedestal that features Evans' significant career dates on the front, while the back showcases his Medal of Honor citation.

Reagan and his wife, Alice, volunteer five mornings a week with the Dale K. Graham Veterans Foundation in Norman. It is accredited as a Regional Veterans Service Organization. Its dedicated staff members work tirelessly to help all service veterans and their families receive their full military service benefits. ■ *story/photo by Darl Devault, contributing editor*

Veteran Presented World War II Service Medals

Charlie McGregor, seated, is surrounded by Josie Hill, left, and his four daughters during a military service medal ceremony last month at Villagio of Bradford Village Assisted Living in Edmond.

Josie Hill, a 97-year-old resident of Villagio of Bradford Village Assisted Living at 300 Hadwiger Drive in Edmond calls Charlie McGregor, a 106-year-old resident of the same facility, her hero for helping liberate France, including her hometown of Marseilles from Nazi occupation during World War II.

And, it was Hill's honor last month to present McGregor, a U.S. Army veteran with his World War II service medals to him that were lost in transition after returning home from the war.

Oklahoma U.S. Senator James Lankford worked with McGregor's family to help get his war medals finally awarded to him, and have Hill present them to him.

McGregor was presented with the following medals by Hill:

- Good Conduct Medal
- American Defense Service Medal
- American Campaign Medal
- European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with 1 bronze service star
- World War II Victory Medal
- Honorable Service Lapel Button WWII
- Sharpshooter Badge with Rifle Bar

"I am honored to do this," Hill said. "I'm sorry, it's hard for me to hold my tears back since the first day I met you knowing that you knew the country where I came from. Not only the country, but the area where I'm from. I love you Charlie and I present you with all these beautiful thanks that you deserve."

McGregor thanked Hill, his family, and friends for coming to his medal ceremony.

"I thank you all for coming down. There's such a big crowd giving me attention. I look at my daughters and my nephew and niece. I'm thankful for each one of you for being here today to give me this honor. Thank you," he said.

Lankford also sent a letter congratulating McGregor on receiving his service medals.

The letter read, "Dear Sergeant McGregor, congratulations on your receipt of your long-awaited service decorations, particularly your Bronze Service Star. The bravery you displayed across your career makes you a worthy recipient of this great honor. Thank you for wearing the Cloth of Our Nation. Our country owes a debt of gratitude to those who have dedicated their lives to preserving the liberties and freedoms that we all enjoy. On behalf of the great state of Oklahoma and our entire nation, thank you for guaranteeing the safety and security of its people. I have no doubt your story will continue to inspire, uplift and transform the lives of many. I hope you enjoy a wonderful day as you celebrate this great honor. In God we trust, James Lankford, United States Senator for Oklahoma."

On July 10th, 1941, McGregor, a Kansas native was drafted into the United States Army. He was sent to Virginia to train in the infantry. His wife Mildred stayed with him in Virginia and later went back to Kansas when she discovered she was pregnant.

On May 30th, 1944, he deployed from New York City to the European front of World War II. On June 1, 1944, his first child was born. Due to wartime silence prior to D-Day, he did not receive the information of the birth for several weeks.

McGregor landed in Scotland on June 6, 1944, D-Day. From Scotland, he traveled on a troop train to England, and from there was sent to Marseilles, France.

In the meantime, Hill a young French teenager, had witnessed the invasion of France by the Nazis and suffered from hunger, and many of the traumas suffered by the French people at the hands of the Nazi invasion. She also vividly remembers the liberation of France by the US Army. She did not know Charlie, and he did not know Josie.

McGregor returned to Kansas in November 1945. His Army service medals were somehow lost in confusion at the end of the war. He farmed in Kansas and Oklahoma and had three more children. He and his wife moved from the farm to Bradford Village in 2006, and then to Bradford Village Assisted Living after his wife's passing.

McGregor served four years, four months, and four days in the war and was stationed in Marseilles, France.

He said that was an eye-opening experience.

"It was an education, that was for sure. I didn't know anything. I was just a high school student," he said. "I got promoted several times. I used to be a company clerk, then they made me a platoon corporal, and then they made me a platoon sergeant, then they made me a staff sergeant in charge of the supply room."

McGregor traveled to Europe with about 18,000 other troops on the Queen Elizabeth ship.

"When they were going to invade France, they sent the Queen Elizabeth to pick up a bunch of us in New York. Picked up 18,000 of us," he said. "We crossed the ocean in five days. My first child was born while I was overseas. The Red Cross let me know that

I had a daughter named Judy. I wouldn't get to see her for another year-and-a-half."

After the war, McGregor and his wife returned to her family farm south of Honeywell, Kansas whose property extended across the Oklahoma state line.

McGregor took over his father-in-law's farming operation after he passed away.

McGregor and his wife raised four daughters, and have 11 grandchildren, 30+ great-grandchildren and one great-great grandson.

McGregor spends each day reading his Bible, and says he always learns something new.

He also recites the same prayer each night.

"God, I'll see you in the morning, your house or mine," McGregor said.

McGregor said he has lived a great life, and he is not afraid of death. He said he looks forward to the day when he enters the Kingdom of Heaven.

"From what I read in the Bible, my mouth may fall open and I may not be able to close it for two or three days," he said. ■ story/photo by Van Mitchell

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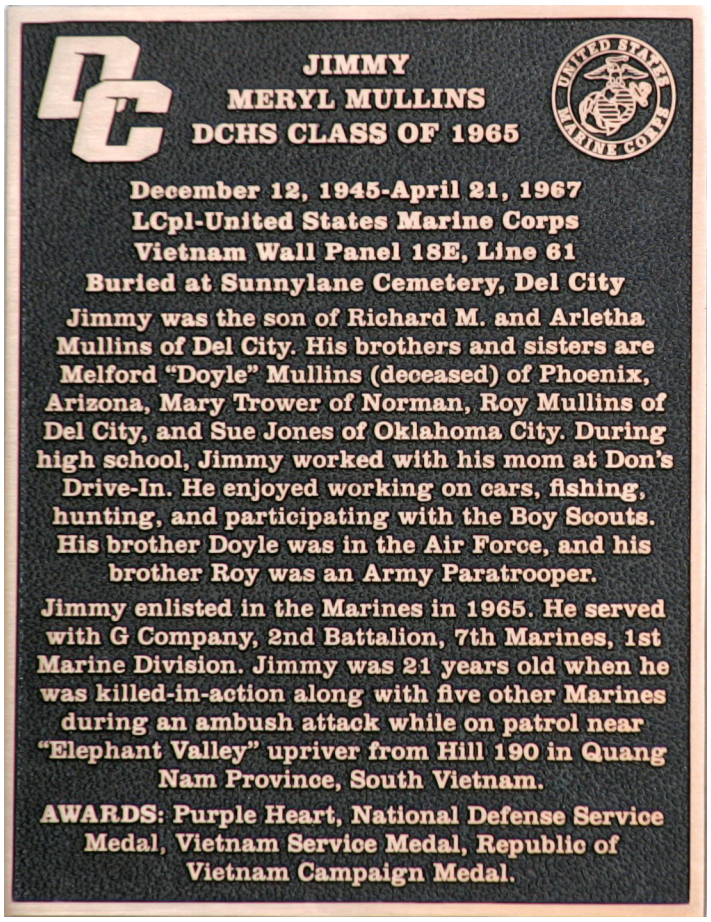
Del City Honors Fallen Heroes



Seven Del City students who were killed in action during the Vietnam War are honored on the new Wall of Honor.

State and local dignitaries, accompanied by many veterans and family members of the inductees, led a 'Del City High School Remembrance and Wall of Honor Induction' on May 3 at the new Kalsu Plaza, at his namesake DCHS stadium. The significant community presence was a testament to the collective respect and honor for our fallen heroes, showcasing the community's active role in the ceremony.

When a statue memorializing Army 1st Lt. James Robert (Bob) Kalsu was unveiled March 29, on Vietnam War era Veterans Day last year, his wife Jan remarked he would have asked, "What about the other Del City students who died in Vietnam?"

On May 5 of this year, the other seven DCHS alumni killed in action during the Vietnam War were commemorated on the Robert Kalsu Stadium's new Wall of Honor. This Wall of Honor, located in the plaza adjacent to his statue, serves as a permanent tribute to these brave soldiers.

A Del City football star, Kalsu, gave up a promising NFL career after starring at OU by showing his patriotism in honoring his commitment to serve in the U.S. Army. He lost his life in service to his country in Vietnam.

Seven of his fellow students now have bronze plaques on the Wall of Honor, each telling a unique and poignant story of their lives and military service. These personal narratives serve as a powerful reminder of the sacrifices made by these brave DCHS students, fostering a sense of connection and empathy from all who will view them.

The United States Marine Corps is represented by 1st Lt. Tom Burton (Class of 1962), Lance Cpls. Jimmy Mullins (Class of 1965), Ricky Sanders (Class of 1966) and Leslie Jones (Class of 1967). The United States Army is represented by Capt. Mike Hope (Class of 1958), Pfcs. Michael Saunders and Gary Parsons (both Class of 1965).

"It is always an honor and humbling experience to attend events honoring our fallen heroes," said retired USN Rear Admiral Greg Slavonic, former undersecretary of the Navy. "It was especially gratifying to be invited to the recent Dedication/Remembrance Wall of Honor ceremony at Dec City High School. Under the leadership of retired Navy Captain John Keilty, all Del City students who answered the call to serve and were killed in action in Vietnam were honored. These young men walked the halls, played on fields around campus and learned in the classrooms."

Each inductee was enshrined with a bronze plaque detailing their life and service during the solemn ceremony held that Saturday afternoon. These plaques serve as a lasting testament to the enduring legacy of these fallen heroes, inspiring future generations of DCHS students with their courage and sacrifice while instilling a sense of inspiration and respect.

The Robert Kalsu Legacy Group was co-founded by Mid-Del School Board Member Gina Standridge and Oklahoma State Rep. Andy Fugate, with the support of many other patriotic community leaders. The Legacy Group raised $200K for the statue and plaques. MTM Recognition of Del City cast the statue and plaques, and Willowbrook Construction built the pedestal. The Mid-Del District Maintenance Department installed the new Wall of Honor.

Kalsu graduated from DCHS in 1963, was an All-American at the University of Oklahoma and an All-Rookie Team member for the Buffalo Bills. He became the only active NFL player to die in the Vietnam War.

"I believe the Memorial Plaza at the main gate of the football field is a fitting location for The Wall of Honor," Slavonic said

in an interview. "It will remind students, parents, relatives, friends and anyone coming to an event at the Del City High School Eagles football field how proud the high school is of the sacrifice of these former students who were young and proud to wear the cloth of their nation in time of conflict."

Additionally, Captain Keilty reached out to the Oklahoma Military Heritage Foundation (OMHF) to establish the OMHF Del City Robert Kalsu Chapter as part of its Hall of Honor.

The "Hall of Honor" will be located at the Del City Community Center. The Hall will honor the 22 Del City citizens who died in military service from World War II to Iraqi Freedom.

"Hopefully, other communities will follow Del City in recognizing their citizen veterans for their sacrifice and service to our country," Slavonic said. The Del City Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Legion played a crucial role in organizing and conducting the ceremony, partnered with Legacy Group, and Del City Navy Junior ROTC members as the honor guard.

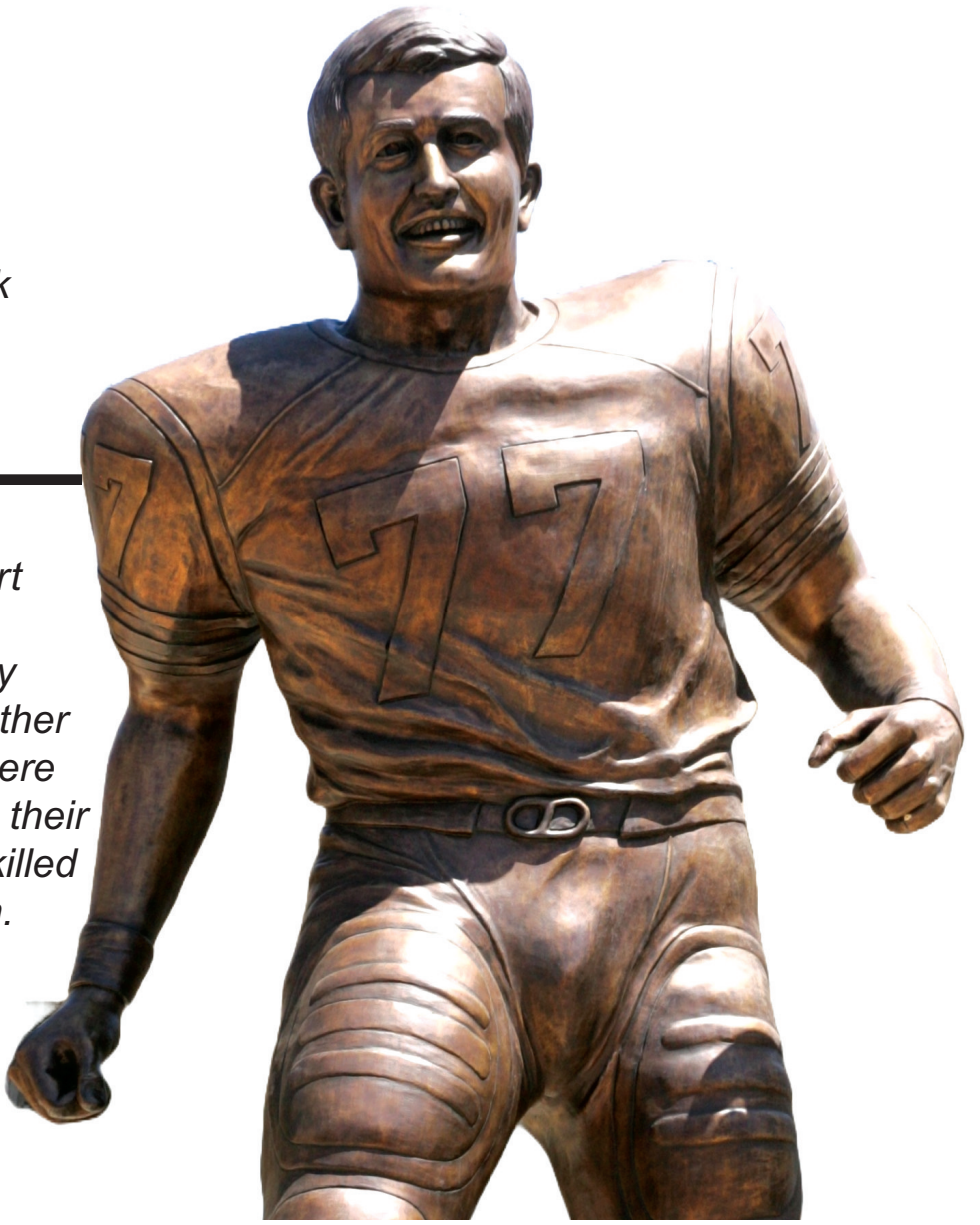
"The day was special for 17 Del City Navy Junior ROTC students who participated in the presentation of our nation's colors and the reading of the individual citations," Keilty

LEFT

From left to right, Del City Junior ROTC Cadets Sebastian Stanton, Eva Black and Beck Boyd present our Nation's Colors.

RIGHT

The statue of Robert (Bob) Kalsu stood above the ceremony that day as seven other Del City students were honored for serving their country and being killed in action in Vietnam.



said in an interview. "A special thanks goes out to all the Del City service organizations and the city of Del City, including the proud members of our VFW, who stood outside the plaza for the whole ceremony to provide a rendering of honors at the end." ■

story/photo by Darl Devault, contributing editor

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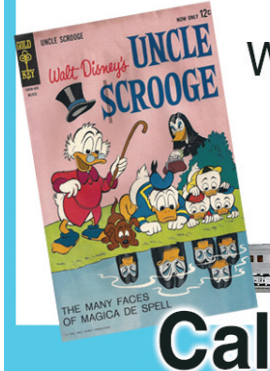

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D-DENT Changing Name, Not Services

Founded in 1986, by Dr. Jay Don Harris, D-DENT-Dentists for the Disabled and Elderly in Need of Treatment, Inc.-is a recognized 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

Starting July 1, D-DENT's new name will be Dentists Donating Smiles to Oklahomans, Inc. Karen Chadwell, Executive Director said.

"We're very proud of the new name as it is more descriptive of what our services are currently and provides us the opportunity to help more individuals that are in dire need of dental health in the future," she said.

D-DENT began as a spin-off of Variety Health Center, eventually becoming its own agency after receiving a $100,000 grant from the Oklahoma State Department of Health's Dental Division.

"D-DENT is a non-profit that provides dental services which are 100% free to the patients," Chadwell said. "The people we help are seniors, 60 and older, Veterans of any age that do not have VA dental benefits and Intellectually and Developmentally Disabled adults."

She added "We help people with life-threatening illnesses such as cancer patients, and transplant patients and those that have severe autoimmune diseases. In a lot of those situations, people are unable to get the necessary medical treatment required if their teeth are in bad shape. With the help of our Volunteer Dental Professionals, our patients will receive all the necessary dental treatment needed to receive the medical assistance they not only need but deserve."

Chadwell said D-DENT has helped over 20,000 people and provided over $30 million in free dental work.

With a network of more than 500 volunteer dentists, hygienists, dental assistants and dental laboratories, D-DENT continues to positively impacts the overall health of many Oklahomans with no access to dental care.

"Our funding comes from grants, fundraising events and donors, both individual and corporate," she said. "We're not a clinic and we do not hire dentists. Every bit of the services provided for D-DENT patients are provided by dental professionals from the generosity of their hearts. Should there be the need for crowns, partials or dentures D-DENT pays the bill. Other than that, the dentists provide the X-rays, the exams, the fillings, the extractions, the services needed for as many appointments as the people need until their oral health has been completely restored."

Chadwell said the services are offered on a one-time basis per patient.

"It is a one pass program. Once patients complete the treatment program, it's up to them to take care of their teeth from that point forward," she said.

Chadwell said D-DENT also offers an oral health preventive program.

"D-DENT's Registered Dental Hygienist, Angela Craig, does oral cancer screenings through our preventative program. In addition, Angela makes routine presentations and consultations in the various senior and IDD organizations throughout the metropolitan OKC area to help people understand the importance of taking care of their teeth, teaching proper brushing technique, providing good oral health guidance, discussions on tobacco cessation, talking about nutrition and its effects on oral health and answering questions regarding their gums or teeth," she said.

Chadwell said D-DENT offers services at senior facilities and facilities where people with intellectual and developmental disabilities go to day centers, as well as many Veterans events across the state.

"We are out in front of the public at all times trying to help people understand the importance of their oral health," she said.

She said oral health is a key indicator of overall health, well-being and quality of life.

"Through our Oral Health Education Out reach program, D-DENT provides education and behavioral interventions to seniors and disabled adults in order to share strategies to help improve and maintain a healthy mouth," Chadwell said. "Because of the many health concerns within this already vulnerable population, oral problems are often overlooked and may be contributors to existing illnesses."

Samantha Romestan, a Veteran and D-DENT patient, said in a testimonial video she was pleased with D-DENT giving her smile back.

"Before (D-DENT), I was unable to afford services and help from anywhere else. The

medications I had to take were destroying my teeth and my bones. I had to find somebody who was willing to take me on as a patient," she said. "The most rewarding part about the program was the finished product and smile."

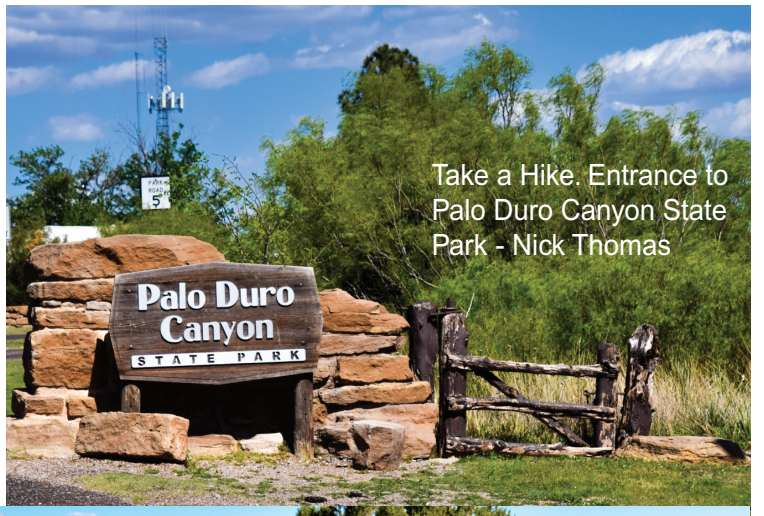
Chadwell said their latest fundraiser will be on July 29 with a golf tournament at Five Iron Golf in Yukon from 5 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Cost is $100 per person with teams of four. Proceeds will benefit D-DENT's Veterans programs.

"It's not a traditional golf tournament. It is going to be at Five Iron's indoor simulated golf course. The golf course we are playing is Pebble Beach. We will have pizza and auction items. It's going to be a lot of fun. Spots are still available."

For more information about D-DENT visit www.d-dentok.org or call 405) 424-8092. ■ story/photo by Van Mitchell

WEEKEND RIDE (OR DRIVE)

Take a Hike! To Palo Duro Canyon, Texas



Take a Hike. Entrance to Palo Duro Canyon State Park - Nick Thomas

Considering its vast area, it might be surprising that Texas is home to just two National Parks. If the U.S. National Park Service ever expressed interest in adding a third, Palo Duro Canyon could be a compelling candidate - assuming the Feds could pry it away from the Texas State Park system. As the second largest canyon system in the United States, it's no surprise this spectacular natural wonder is nicknamed the Grand Canyon of the Lone Star State.

About a half hour drive south from Amarillo in the Texas panhandle, the summers are predictably shadeless and brutally hot, so take the obvious precautions if hiking during those months. Winter, early spring, and late fall are the best times to hike any scorching trail, and there are plenty of them here - more than 15 spread over some 30 miles around the 30,000-acre State Park.

Our first stop was the Visitor Center just as it was closing, but the manager kindly invited us to look around, use the restrooms, and answered a few questions. It's a great place to begin and to appreciate the canyon rim view from the car park. Turning right on Park Road 5 from the Visitor Center, the road winds around a bit for about a mile to a small parking area on the right and the "C.C.C. Trail ¼ mile" sign. This is the entrance to the short Triassic Trail which, in about a quarter mile, intersects with the longer CCC trail at its approximate midpoint (a map of Palo Duro Canyon State Park trails can be downloaded from the park website).

Take a Hike. Unmarked trailhead of Triassic Trail that crosses the CCC Trail.

CCC stands for the Civilian Conservation Corps, a New Deal program developed during the President Franklin D. Roosevelt administration to provide jobs for the unemployed during the Great Depression of the 1930s. The CCC built a road to the canyon floor, trails, picnic areas, small foot bridges, cabins, and the Visitor Center.

The Triassic Trail is an easy half mile to the bluff and back over a few rocks and some uneven surfaces, but affords breathtaking views of the canyon. Since the trail hugs the canyon rim, hikers can watch as cars wind down the canyon basin road below where the Pioneer Amphitheater hosts popular outdoor events throughout the year.

Take a Hike. Vistor Center and car park overlooking part of the Palo Duro Canyon.

Pets are welcome at Palo Duro Canyon State Park, but must be leashed if taken on a hike. Aside from obviously protecting the park's resources, cactuses dot the Triassic Trail. Dogs off a leash may regret attempting to leave their scent on prickly plants! The park also has an all-terrain wheelchair for use on some trails that may be reserved by contacting the park in advance. It can also be very gusty in the region - nearby Amarillo is one of the windiest cities in the U.S.

Other easy trails include the Pioneer Nature Trail, a short 0.4-mile loop leading to the river, and the scenic 2-mile out-and-back Paseo Del Rio Trail that follows the riverbank. Many more challenging trails await the adventurous, including the CCC Trail that offers a rugged descent into the valley. This historic path, carved into the canyon nearly 90 years ago by the Civilian Conservation Corps, stands as a testament to the men whose efforts helped shape this less-traveled gem of the Texas State Park System. ■

Story/photos by Nick Thomas. Nick Thomas teaches at Auburn University at Montgomery in Alabama and has written features, columns, and interviews for many newspapers and magazines. His hiking column describes short trails, hikes, and walks from around the country that senior veterans might enjoy while traveling. See www.ItsAWonderfulHike.com.

Download the VA: Battle Buddy App - Not Complicated

No more long phone waits or trips to the VA medical center. The VA: Health and Benefits App lets you refill prescriptions, message your care team and check benefits anytime, anywhere. With a 4.8 rating in the app store, many Veterans feel it's an essential tool for managing their VA health care.

Your VA care team at your fingertips

Remember the frustration of trying to reach your provider by phone? They might have been busy, or the call may have been outside regular hours. With the app, you can quickly send a secure message to your VA care team, just like using your favorite social media app.

"It's great to know I can message my provider and get quick answers," said Stephen Havard, a Marine Corps Veteran from Texas. "I recently asked my primary care team about a medication, and I had a response by the end of the day." Veterans are taking advantage of this feature, with over 300,000 secure messages sent each month. Remember, secure messaging is for non-urgent communication only. If you're in crisis, call 911, 988 (then Press 1) or go to the nearest emergency room. You can also access the Veteran Crisis Line straight from the app.

Kick pharmacy runs to the curb

Gone are the days of waiting in line at the VA medical center's pharmacy. Refilling medications through the VA: Health and Benefits app is now as easy as ordering takeout. "While sitting in my deer blind, I realized I was low on one of my prescriptions," said Luke Yanny, a Marine Veteran from Wisconsin. "I opened the app and ordered a refill in just a few taps." Using the app, you can select the medication you need from your prescriptions, ensuring you order the correct one. Your prescriptions are mailed to your address on file, usually within 5-7 business days, at no cost. With over 250,000 prescriptions refilled monthly through the app, it significantly benefits Veterans everywhere.

Claims and appeals status updates at lightning speed

Remember when checking your claim status was frustrating? It wasn't very user-friendly, with endless phone loops and navigating various web pages to log in. Now, it's instant. The app gives real-time updates on claims and appeals, bringing you peace of mind with just a glance at your screen. "The app lets you track your claim from your phone," said Thomas Turman, a Navy Veteran from Texas. "It's great not to have to make countless calls for updates." Veterans have checked their claims over 45 million times through the app—providing 45 million moments of clarity.

Appointments managed with military precision

The app's appointment feature serves as a personal assistant, helping you view, cancel or track appointments. The app lets you add appointments to your phone's calendar for easy tracking, ensuring you won't miss any check-ups. "It's a lot easier to track appointments," said Deborah Hall, a Marine Veteran in Alabama. "I recently rescheduled an appointment with my primary care team and added it to my phone's calendar with just a few taps." That kind of efficiency would make your drill instructor proud. Once it's on your calendar, you can easily share it with your caregiver, spouse or family to add to their calendars.

Proof of service in your pocket

The app's one-touch Proof of Veteran Status feature is like having a digital DD-214. "I'm thankful I can use my Veteran's discount at different stores," said Richard McMullen, a Colorado Army National Guard Veteran in Colorado. "Now, it only takes a few seconds to prove my status, and it's a better option—no paperwork."

A new battle buddy

Download the VA Health and Benefits app, your new battle buddy for navigating your VA health care and benefits and let it change how you connect with VA. If you find the app helpful, share it with fellow Veterans. Scan this QR CODE or visit www.mobile.va.gov/app/va-health-and-benefits .

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VA Recognizes Four World War II-Era Veterans

Kim Lane, associate director at the Overton Brooks VA Medical Center in Shreveport, Louisiana, shakes hands with World War II Veteran Albert Smith and presents a framed proclamation signed by VA Secretary Doug Collins.

Family members and Veteran caregivers gathered at the Northwest Louisiana Veterans Home in Bossier City, Louisiana, to pay tribute to four World War II-era residents.

All eyes were on Veterans Alfred Procell, 101; Albert Smith, 101; Billie Taylor, 100; and Robert "Bob" Robertson, 100. Between them, the Veterans have 402 years of combined life experience to celebrate.

"These Veterans are truly a living encyclopedia of history, wisdom and experience," said Kim Lane, associate director of the Overton Brooks VA Medical Center in neighboring Shreveport, where many of the facility's residence receive their care.

Each Veteran received a framed proclamation and coin signed by VA Secretary Doug Collins to celebrate their life achievements.

Robertson, a Navy Veteran, spent time as an engineer aboard the vessel "Landing Ship Medium 310" in the Pacific during his service.

"If the war hadn't ended when it did, I probably wouldn't be sitting here, had they not dropped the bomb on Japan," Robertson said.

He credits his longevity to never drinking or smoking and some fortunate genetics.

"My dad lived to 103," Robertson added.

Robertson, Smith and Procell each served in the Navy, while Taylor had a career in the Air Force.

"We're grateful for the time they have spent with us here at the Veterans Home," said Wesley Pepitone, administrator of the state-run Veterans home. ■

by David Hodge, Public Affairs Officer, Overton Brooks VA Medical Center

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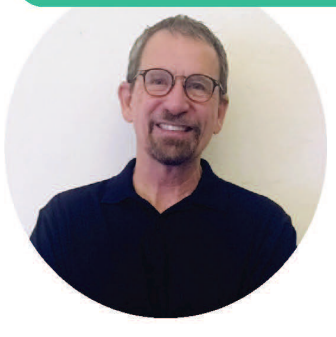

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Presidents Remembered

Harry S. Truman

The 33rd President of the United States

During his few weeks as vice president, Harry S. Truman scarcely saw President Roosevelt, and received no briefing on the development of the atomic bomb or the unfolding difficulties with Soviet Russia. Suddenly these and a host of other wartime problems became Truman's when, on April 12, 1945, he became president when Roosevelt died. He told reporters, "I felt like the moon, the stars, and all the planets had fallen on me."

Truman was born in Lamar, Missouri, on May 8, 1884. He grew up in Independence, and for twelve years prospered as a farmer. He went to France during World War I as a captain in the Field Artillery. Returning, he married Elizabeth (Bess) Virginia Wallace, and opened a haberdashery in Kansas City, which failed.

Active in the Democratic Party, Truman was elected a judge of the Jackson County Court (an administrative position) in 1922. He became a senator in 1934. During World War II he headed the Senate War Investigating Committee, exposing waste and corruption and saving perhaps as much as $15 billion.

As president, Truman made some of the most crucial decisions in history. Soon after V-E Day, the war against Japan had reached its final stage. An urgent plea to Japan to surrender was rejected. Truman, after consultations with his advisers, ordered atomic bombs dropped on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Japanese surrender quickly followed. In June 1945 Truman witnessed the signing of the charter of the United Nations.

Soon he presented to Congress a 21-point program, proposing the expansion of Social Security, a full-employment program, a permanent Fair Employment Practices Act, and public housing and slum clearance. The program, Truman wrote, "symbolizes for me my assumption of the office of president in my own right." It became known as the Fair Deal.

In 1947 the Soviet Union pressured Turkey and, through guerrillas, threatened to take over Greece. Truman asked Congress to aid the two countries, as part of what was soon called the Truman Doctrine. The Marshall Plan, named for his secretary of state, stimulated spectacular economic recovery in war-torn western Europe.

When the Soviets blockaded the western sectors of Berlin in 1948, Truman created a massive airlift to supply Berliners until the Soviets backed down. Meanwhile, he was negotiating a military alliance to protect Western nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), established in 1949.

In 1948, Truman faced New York Governor Thomas Dewey and a left-leaning third-party challenger, former Vice President Henry Wallace, and defied the predictions of pollsters and analysts to win his own full term as president. After the election, the Trumans moved out of the sagging White House so that it could be gutted and reconstructed. The Truman White House renovations were completed in 1952.

In June 1950, the Communist government of North Korea attacked South Korea. Truman later wrote, "There was no suggestion from anyone that either the United Nations or the United States could back away from it." A discouraging struggle ensued as U.N. forces held a line above the old boundary of South Korea. Truman limited the fighting, which frustrated Americans—especially his Korea commander General Douglas MacArthur, whom he fired for insubordination.

Having served almost two terms, Truman decided not to run again. Retiring with Bess to Independence, he lived until December 26, 1972. Later, Americans came to appreciate his honesty, sound judgment, and courageous decision making, admiring him far more than his own contemporaries had. Of his presidency, Truman modestly said, "Well I wouldn't say I was in the 'great' class, but I had a great time while trying to be great."

Elizabeth Truman - First Lady

Elizabeth Wallace “Bess”, wife of President Harry S. Truman.

Elizabeth Wallace, better known as Bess, was born to David and Madge Wallace on February 13, 1885, in Independence, Missouri. 1

Bess was a bright young woman who excelled in sports. After graduating from Independence High School, she attended finishing school at the Barstow School in Kansas City.

At the age of five, she met Harry S. Truman at Sunday school at the First Presbyterian Church, and the two attended school together until they eventually became engaged in 1917. 3

After Harry Truman returned from serving in World War I, the two were married on June 28, 1919. 4

They welcomed a daughter, Margaret, to their family in 1924 and continued to live in Independence.

In the 1920s, Harry Truman embarked on a career in local, and later national, politics that eventually brought the Trumans to Washington, D.C. Bess learned the ins and outs of campaigning, formed friendships with congressional wives, and advised her husband while traveling between Missouri and the nation’s capital. She even worked on her husband’s office staff, handling correspondence. Harry Truman aptly called her “The Boss,” as she expertly navigated life as a senator’s wife and later as second lady during Truman’s tenure as vice president. 5

Following President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s death on April 12, 1945, Harry Truman ascended to the presidency. Bess Truman was now first lady—a role she had never aspired to hold. Unlike her predecessor, Eleanor Roosevelt, Mrs. Truman preferred to stay out of the public eye. She canceled Mrs. Roosevelt’s regular women-only press conferences, though she paid special attention to correspondence from the public. 6

Behind the scenes, Bess was an important political asset and sounding board for the president, discussing critical domestic and international issues together.

The Trumans also moved into a White House in desperate need of repair, leading to a massive, multi-year renovation which modernized the home for generations to come. 7

Meanwhile, the family lived across the street in Blair House. Nevertheless, Mrs. Truman continued in her responsibilities as first lady, hosting events, traveling with the president, and managing their household. She also supported organizations including Girl Scouts of America, the Red Cross, and PEO Sisterhood. 8

After leaving the White House, the Trumans returned to their home in Independence. Bess Truman passed away ten years after her husband on October 18, 1982; they are buried beside each other at the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum in Independence.

Choctaw native supports U.S. Navy

Lt. J. G. Sofia Figueroa is a native of Choctaw, Oklahoma.

SAN DIEGO – Lt. J. G. Sofia Figueroa, a native of Choctaw, Oklahoma, serves the U.S. Navy assigned to Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron (HSM-41 Seahawks).
Figueroa graduated from Bishop McGuiness Catholic High School in 2016.

Figueroa joined the Navy three years ago. Today, Figueroa serves as a Naval Aviator.

“I joined the Navy because my family has a legacy of military service, with both my father and grandfather serving full careers in the Air Force,” said Figueroa. “I hadn’t considered joining myself until my older brother attended the Naval Academy. Through him, I learned about the career and education opportunities that the Navy had to offer and decided I wanted the chance to serve there too.”

The skills and values needed to succeed in the Navy are similar to those found in Choctaw.

“Choctaw is a small town; somewhere between rural and suburban,” said Figueroa. “The people there are hard-working, honest, humble, and extremely generous. It costs me nothing to be kind and help others where I can, and I’d like to think those are qualities I’ve learned from growing up in Choctaw.”

According to Navy officials, members of HSM-41 Seahawks fly and maintain the MH-60R Sea Hawk helicopter, the Navy’s most advanced rotary wing maritime strike platform. The Navy MH-60R is able to perform many different missions. Some of the most common operations include strikes on maritime targets, submarine hunting and attack, electronic warfare, search and rescue, medical evacuations and supply support.

With 90% of global commerce traveling by sea and access to the internet relying on the security of undersea fiber optic cables, Navy officials continue to emphasize that the prosperity of the United States is directly linked to recruiting and retaining talented people from across the rich fabric of America.

Figueroa serves a Navy that operates far forward, around the world and around the clock, promoting the nation’s prosperity and security.

“We will earn and reinforce the trust and confidence of the American people every day,” said Adm. Lisa Franchetti, chief of naval operations. “Together we will deliver the Navy the nation needs.”

Figueroa has many opportunities to achieve accomplishments during military service.

“My proudest accomplishment in the Navy is earning my wings as a helicopter pilot,” said Figueroa. “Flight school challenged me in many new ways, but with great friends, peers, and leadership throughout, we made it.”

Figueroa can take pride in serving America through military service.

“Serving in the Navy means so much more to me now than when I initially joined,” said Figueroa. “Though I am still very early in my career, I have had the priviledge of working with some of the most dedicated and inspiring individuals I have met. I am so grateful to have the opportunity to serve my country, and even more so, to serve with such an amazing team.”

Figueroa is grateful to others for helping make a Navy career possible.

“First and foremost, I would like to thank my parents for their outpouring of love and support throughout my entire life,” added Figueroa. “I’d also like to thank the staff from Bishop McGuinness who wrote letters of recommendation for me and those coaches who helped me become a better teammate and athlete. Their contributions are a large part of the reason I am here today, and I am very grateful. Finally, I have to thank my parish, Saint Philip Neri, for their continued support even now.”

“My first goal is to qualify as a helicopter pilot within the fleet replacement squadrons,” said Figueroa. “For the next eight years, I plan on using this to travel to as many places as I can. The best part of the Navy is working with all of these amazing people. As long as I continue to work with such amazing talent, I plan on staying in.” ■

By Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Tristan Cookson, Navy Office of Community Outreach

SSA Reinstates National Social Security Month under the Trump Administration

The Social Security Administration (SSA) recently announced that it is reinstating National Social Security Month—a public awareness campaign held in April each year that is dedicated to helping Americans access their benefits. The agency last observed National Social Security Month in 2019, during President Trump's first term. The early days of the COVID-19 pandemic forced the cancellation of National Social Security Month in 2020, and the Biden Administration never resumed the observance.

"President Trump has promised to protect Americans' hard-earned Social Security benefits so that all eligible individuals can access them," said Lee Dudek, Acting Commissioner of Social Security. "Under the previous administration, SSA promoted radical and wasteful DEI and gender ideology while employees worked from home. The result was sky-high wait times for customer service and unconscionable delays for benefit decisions. Resuming National Social Security Month further aligns the SSA workforce with President Trump's principle that government must serve The People—and at SSA that means helping all Americans access their benefits in office, over the phone, and online."

Effective immediately, April of each year will once again be recognized as National Social Security Month. This year, the period of enhanced public outreach will extend to August 14, when Social Security celebrates its 90th Anniversary. Social Security has a proud tradition of public outreach dating back to its establishment, when employees fanned out across the country to enroll Americans in the program. This year's enhanced public outreach to help eligible individuals access their benefits continues Social Security's proud tradition of service to the American people.

At the same time, SSA continues its work with the Department of Government Efficiency to rapidly transform SSA into a customer-focused organization that safeguards Americans' benefits. In alignment with President Trump's directives, SSA has identified a range of cost avoidance or efficiencies, including terminating or de-scoping wasteful contracts promoting radical DEI and gender ideology. SSA has also refocused its workforce on customer service by: implementing President Trump's directive that teleworking employees must return to work in-person full time; surging employees in support positions to front-line service positions; and eliminating layers of outdated and inefficient bureaucracy in its headquarters and regional offices to increase accountability. The combined savings from all of these measures is estimated to be over $1 billion. Ongoing modernization of SSA's IT will further improve the agency's customer service across all of its service channels while protecting benefits from waste, fraud, and abuse.

For more information about customer service improvements at SSA, please visit the agency's Communications Corner at www.ssa.gov/news.

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JULY 1 - Willie Nelson & Family & Bob Dylan in Concert
LOCATION: Lucky Star Casino 7777 US-81 El Reno, OK 73036 **Note:** Don't miss your chance to see Willie Nelson & Family and Bob Dylan at the Outlaw Music Festival hosted at the Lucky Star Casino this summer. Treat your ears to a live performance by the legendary Willie Nelson, best known for his successful 1970s "Shotgun Willie" album. Secure your tickets to see this bragging-rights-worthy concert in El Reno this July. www.luckystarcasino.org/concerts

JULY 2 - Vinita Fireworks Show
LOCATION: Craig County Fairgrounds Vinita, OK 74301 **Note:** Celebrate Independence Day in Vinita and see fireworks light up the summer night sky at the annual Vinita Fireworks Show.

JULY 2 - Kickapoo Casino's Fireworks Show
LOCATION: 38900 W MacArthur Shawnee, OK 74804 **Note:** Celebrate Independence Day at the Kickapoo Casino in Shawnee on July 2. Pack up some lawn chairs, blankets and the whole family and find a spot at the casino, located just off Hwy 177.

JULY 2 - Independence Day Celebration
LOCATION: 321 W Ferry St Salina, OK 74365 **Note:** Join the Independence Day Celebration in Salina for four days full of family fun. Visitors of all ages can enjoy the daily carnival, food, shopping and the marina on Lake Hudson. On Thursday night, gather around the water's edge to see fantastic fireworks light up the night sky.

JULY 3 - Fireworks Spectacular
LOCATION: SaltCreek Casino Pocasett, OK 73079 **Note:** Celebrate Independence Day with food, fireworks and family-friendly fun during SaltCreek Casino's Firework Spectacular in Pocasset. Enjoy everything from food trucks and bounce houses to face painting and prize drawings at this annual celebration. Be sure to stick around for the main event as a magnificent fireworks display lights up the night sky after sundown.

JULY 3 - Red, White & Boom
LOCATION: Scissortail Park Oklahoma City, OK 73109 **Note:** Celebrate Independence Day with beautiful and inspiring music during Red, White & Boom at Scissortail Park in downtown Oklahoma City. Grab some lawn chairs or blankets and bring the whole family.

JULY 3 - Fantasy in the Sky
LOCATION: Skiatook Municipal Airport Skiatook, OK 74070 **Note:** Skiatook hosts its annual fireworks display and Fourth of July celebration in a unique setting at the Skiatook Municipal Airport. Come enjoy Fantasy in the Sky with a huge fireworks show and old-fashioned family fun. There will also be food vendors, so bring your appetite for delicious summer foods to complete the festivities including classic snow cones.

JULY 3 - Sand Springs Star Spangled Salute
LOCATION: Case Community Park 2500 S Rivercity Park Rd Sand Springs, OK 74063 **Note:** Sand Springs invites visitors to gather at Case Community Park for a free Independence Day celebration. At this annual family-friendly event, listen to local music while chowing down on food available on-site. At dusk, look up for the grand finale and watch the bright, colorful fireworks display as part of the Fourth of July festivities.

JULY 3 - Blanchard's Independence Celebration
LOCATION: Hwy 62 & NE 10th St Blanchard, OK 73010 **Note:** Celebrate the Fourth of July with a multitude of family-friendly activities during Blanchard's Independence Celebration. Listen to live music by the Oklahoma City Symphonic Band while shopping from local vendors or enjoying various food options. This exciting event will also feature helicopter rides and present military honors before the fireworks display at dusk.

JULY 3 - 6th - Quapaw Tribal Powwow
LOCATION: Beaver Springs Park Quapaw, OK 74363 **Note:** Experience the Quapaw Nation's 153rd powwow at Beaver Springs Park in Quapaw. This four-day celebration over 4th of July weekend includes dancing, contests, vendors and plenty of family fun. Come learn about the culture and history of the Quapaw Tribe during this annual event.

JULY 3 - Fireworks Night at FireLake Casino
LOCATION: 41207 Hardesty Rd Shawnee, OK 74804 **Note:** Come out to Firelake Casino for an evening of Independence Day fun on July 3. Arrive early to get a good spot at the casino or at the nearby Shawnee Outdoors location. Settle into your lawn chairs or lay out on a blanket and wait for the show to explode to life at 10pm.

JULY 3 - Freedom Fest
LOCATION: Yukon City Park & Chisholm Trail Park Yukon, OK 73099 **Note:** Yukon's Freedom Fest celebrates U.S. independence with a full weekend of holiday fun. Bring the whole family to enjoy a lineup of live outdoor concerts on the Freedom Fest agenda. Peruse the food trucks on site to taste a little of everything while enjoying the festival atmosphere. There will be lots of activities for the kids so bring all your little ones to this summer event. Pack up the car with lawn chairs and blankets for the nightly firework shows and get ready to look up at the sky to watch colors bursting overhead.

JULY 4 - Calvin 4th of July Celebration
LOCATION: 523 2nd St Calvin, OK 74531 **Note:** Celebrate Independence Day this summer at Calvin's 4th of July Celebration. The festival kicks off with a parade in the morning followed by an afternoon of carnival games and activities. Gather around to watch the turtle races or take the kids to the petting zoo complete with pony rides.

JULY 4 - Sallisaw 4th of July Celebration
LOCATION: Sallisaw High School Sallisaw, OK 74955 **Note:** Enjoy family-friendly activities while celebrating the 4th of July in Sallisaw. Conveniently located off I-40 at Sallisaw High School, this event features food, drinks, live music and a spectacular fireworks display at dusk. Don't miss this fun, patriotic event for all ages this July.

JULY 4 - Heroes of America Fireworks Show
LOCATION: Apache Event Field Lawton, OK 73501 **Note:** Make your way to Lawton for the Heroes of America Fireworks Show and tribute to all military and first-responders. Celebrate Independence Day with live entertainment, children's activities and more. Plan to feast on 4th of July favorites from local food and drink vendors.

JULY 4 - Hillwilly's Hillbilly Cookout
LOCATION: Hillwilly's Oklahoma City, OK 73103 **Note:** Spend your Independence Day at a can't-miss event in downtown Oklahoma City during Hillwilly's Hillbilly Cookout. Located in the Midtown District, this cowboy-themed eatery will offer drink specials, free hot dogs and a lineup of live music throughout the Fourth of July festivities.

JULY 4 - Hillwilly's Hillbilly Cookout
LOCATION: Hillwilly's Oklahoma City, OK 73103 **Note:** Spend your Independence Day at a can't-miss event in downtown Oklahoma City during Hillwilly's Hillbilly Cookout. Located in the Midtown District, this cowboy-themed eatery will offer drink specials, free hot dogs and a lineup of live music throughout the Fourth of July festivities.

For more festivals, scan the QR Code with your camera!

SEPT 5-7 - GREATER TULSA COIN SHOW
LOCATION: Stoney Creek Hotel, 200 W Albany St., Broken Arrow, OK. **Note:** Hosted by Magic Empire Coin Club www.oklahomanumismatic.org . Friday, Sept 5th, Noon - 6 pm - Saturday, Sept 6th 9 am - 5 pm - Sunday, Sept 7th, 9 am - 2 pm. FREE ENTRY!

EDITORS NOTE: Be sure to email your **July 4th** celebration information to be included in our July issue of Oklahoma's Veteran News! Listing are free, and based on space available.

CAR/CYCLE SHOWS

JULY 11-02 - Atoka Double Point Race
LOCATION: Atoka Motorsports Park Atoka, OK 74525 **Note:** Experience the heart-pounding action of live racing during the Atoka Points Race at the Atoka Motorsports Park. Drivers from across the country will gather for exciting drag racing on the dirt track. Each point race includes a test and tune the day before, providing guests the opportunity to see more vehicular action. Enjoy the fun atmosphere and exciting action as drivers rack up points by winning races throughout the year.

JULY 20 - Oklahoma Auto Expo & Hop
LOCATION: Oklahoma State Fair Park Oklahoma City, OK 73107 **Note:** See rows of dazzling cars at the Oklahoma Auto Expo & Hop at Oklahoma State Fair Park this summer. This must-see event is part of the WEGO Tour and WEGO-Midwest Tour featuring cars from all across the nation. Don't miss this indoor car show which has been touted as the original low rider tour.

JULY 24-26 - Whole Hawg Days & Rodeo
LOCATION: 301 N Main St Eufaula, OK 74432. **Note:** Whole Hawg Days & Rodeo in Eufaula is a celebration of summer fun that includes a parade, car show, Hawg cook-off and much more. This annual event is brought to a close on Saturday with the much-anticipated Whole Hawg Poker Run, held by boat and motorcycle around Lake Eufaula. Pick up poker chips at participating marinas around the lake, then return to the starting point to see which lucky player has created the best five-card stud poker hand. This poker run features plenty of fun and cash prizes.

JULY 25-27 - Slamboree Truck, Car & Bike Show
LOCATION: Osage Casino Hotel 951 W 36th St N Tulsa, OK 74127 **Note:** Slamboree welcomes spectators and car enthusiasts out to enjoy the sights and sounds of one of the Midwest's largest car shows. Held at Tulsa's Osage Casino Hotel, this event is open to all vehicle types, including cars, trucks, street rods, rat rods and motorcycles. Judging starts Saturday and continues Sunday if needed. There will be top awards for cars, trucks and bikes, plus 'best of' awards, kids choice and ladies choice.

AUGUST 16 - Good Vibrations Car Show
LOCATION: Claremore Expo Center 400 S Veterans Pkwy Claremore, OK 74017Blinn Memorial Park Tonkawa, OK 74653 **Note:** This Father's Day weekend, head to the Claremore Expo For a great classic car show, make your way to the annual Good Vibrations Car Show in Tonkawa. Held rain or shine, the show features rows of cars, trucks, motorcycles, off-road vehicles and tractors. There is also a bicycle contest. All entries are judged by the participants, and the top 15 cars will win from several categories, including Best of Show.

Chaplain's Corner

Chaplain Donn Turner - Never Too Late To Serve

With a dream of serving in the military since the age of five, Oklahoma City native Donn Turner is beginning a new chapter in his life as a military chaplain. What makes his story so unique is that he was commissioned into the Navy Reserve in his early fifties.

Like many others, Turner dreamed of becoming a naval aviator after watching the film Top Gun as a young man in the 1980s. He joined America's Sea Cadets, a U.S. Navy youth development program, as a young student with the intent of eventually joining the Navy. However, when it was time to attend college, the Air Force had more opportunities for pilots, so Turner enrolled in the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps program at the University of Oklahoma. He completed boot camp at Lackland Air Force Base, but unfortunately, Turner was medically discharged from the service.

"I was heartbroken but soon found fulfillment by serving in the United Methodist church," said Turner who has served as a bi-vocational pastor in his civilian job. "I never imagined that I was being prepared for a different mission."

Twenty-four years later, at the age of 48, Turner came across a Navy chaplaincy advertisement. Despite being past the maximum age for direct commissioning, something compelled him to click the link.

"I was stunned to read that I could still serve," Turner said. "I was even more surprised when I discovered that my ministry experience over the last 24 years was exactly what I needed to meet all of the professional requirements."

Determined to pursue this new chapter, Turner enrolled in the Master of Divinity program through Liberty University, adding Christian Counseling to his degree. He also realized that in order to meet the Navy's physical requirements, he'd have to lose more than 100 pounds to be qualified to serve. Over the course of 18 months, he adopted a healthy diet and lost 110 pounds to align with Navy fitness standards.

"Chaplain Turner, despite now being in his early fifties, demonstrated remarkable determination, a lifetime of leadership, and a deep understanding of pluralistic ministry, making him a strong candidate," said Lt. David Lockwood, the Chaplain Program Officer of Navy Recruiting Command.

After a rigorous officer package submission process, Turner was accepted and took on the new title of chaplain.

"I called everyone I knew to share the great news of my appointment as a Navy chaplain," Turner said. "When that turned out to not be enough, I even shared my excitement with strangers in grocery stores and gas stations. I do not believe my feet touched the ground for the first few months."

LT j.g. Turner currently serves at the Oklahoma City Navy Reserve Center (NRC) as a Navy reserve chaplain. He will soon join the fleet and transition to active duty through the reserve component to active component (RC to AC) program. Outside of his reserve duties, Turner works as a learning and development professional, creating and managing corporate training programs, while also serving as a bi-vocational minister at a United Methodist Church. These experiences have equipped Turner with the skills and insight to excel as a chaplain.

"Some people serve because they need an extra paycheck. Some serve because it's what the contract requires," said Cmdr. Andy Valerius, former commanding officer of the Oklahoma City NRC. "The fact that he changed his diet and lifestyle later in life to lose weight just goes to prove that he wants to be here serving our nation and its Sailors."

Determination and passion are evident core values ingrained in Chaplain Turner's persona. Once he joins the fleet, he will share his experiences and wisdom with everyone he encounters.

At age 48 Donn Turner became a military chaplain after seeing a Navy chaplaincy advertisement.

"As a chaplain, I get to be someone's spiritual advisor, teacher, mentor, or coach," Turner said. "More than anything, I get to be their champion." ■

Story by Petty Officer 2nd Class Gabriela Isaza, Navy Reserve - Navy Public Affairs Support Element West.

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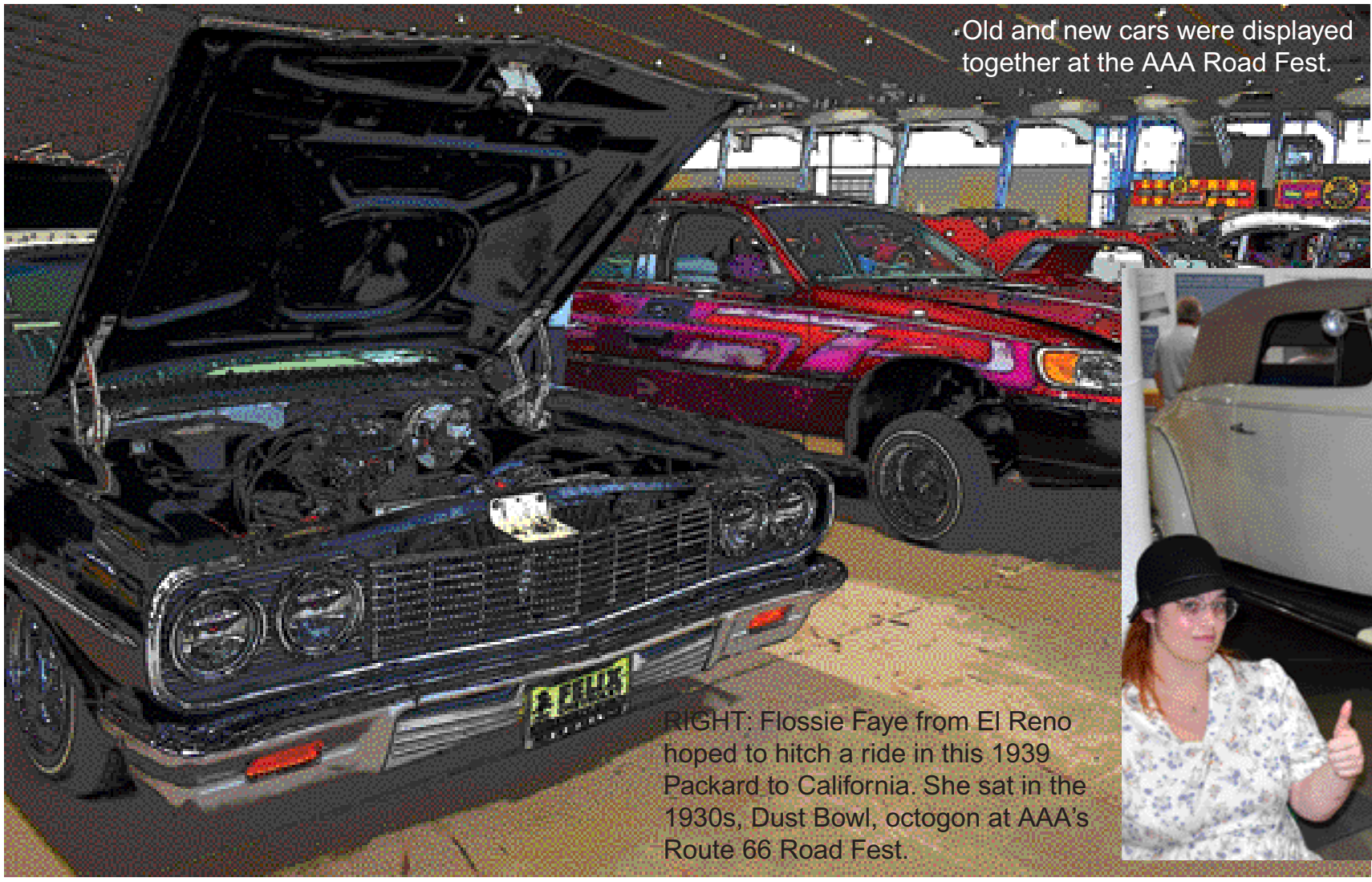


Old and new cars were displayed together at the AAA Road Fest.

RIGHT: Flossie Faye from El Reno hoped to hitch a ride in this 1939 Packard to California. She sat in the 1930s, Dust Bowl, octogon at AAA's Route 66 Road Fest.

The faithful and curious came to the fourth American Automobile Association (AAA) Route 66 Road Fest to appreciate, inform and explore Route 66 at Tulsa's 354,000 square foot SageNet at Expo Square, June 21-22.

Downstairs, a collection of 96-years of cars and pick-up trucks held many aficionados' attention. Upstairs, people learned about Route 66, also known as America's Main Street and the Mother Road, by walking through cubicles that explained it's history, gathered information in the Route 66 Community Center, looked at goods and services offered by 80 vendors and played games in a large Kid's Activity Zone.

Ron Watkins of the Green Country Classic Mustang Club said 220 vehicles checked in for the car show. From a 1929 Ford Roadster to a 2025 Ford Mustang, there were polished and gleaming Chevrolet Cameros and Bel Airs, Ford Fairlane Victorias and Falcon GTs, Plymouth Firebirds and Barracudas, Dodge Challengers and Darts, and a variety of pick-up trucks. Car owners were happy to explain engines, body panels, tires and paint techniques to admiring guests. Awards were given to the Top 3 in 30 classes of vehicles.

Many visitors journeyed into Route 66's past by visiting seven interactive, eight-foot-tall octagons in exhibits called "The Journey" that explained each decade (1920s - 1990s to Today). Each octagon held one or two vehicles, actors in period clothing, artifacts, historical facts, photographs, and lists of popular music that made up its ten-year period. For instance, the 1950s cubicle showed off a glossy 1959 Ford Galaxie Fairlane and the front end of a diner with a row of stools and a waitress that visitors could talk with. Several people were surprised to learn the route was created in 1926 and removed from the U.S. Highway system in 1985, a period of 59 years.

At the Presentation Stage, seats filled up to listen to a variety of "about the road" topics from writers, photographers and travelers of Route 66. On Saturday, Jim Ross and Shellee Graham discussed their new book, "Route 66: The First 100 Years"; Michael Wallis shared two personal stories about hitchhiking in the 1980s and 1990s; Richard Rawlings, the star of the popular Reality TV Show "Fast N' Loud" and who owns Gas Monkey Garage, talked about car culture; Jennifer Rogers, Will Rogers' great granddaughter, presented "Will Rogers & Route 66"; and Jim Hinckley provided a dark view of the Mother Road with his "Murder and Mayhem on the Main Street of America."

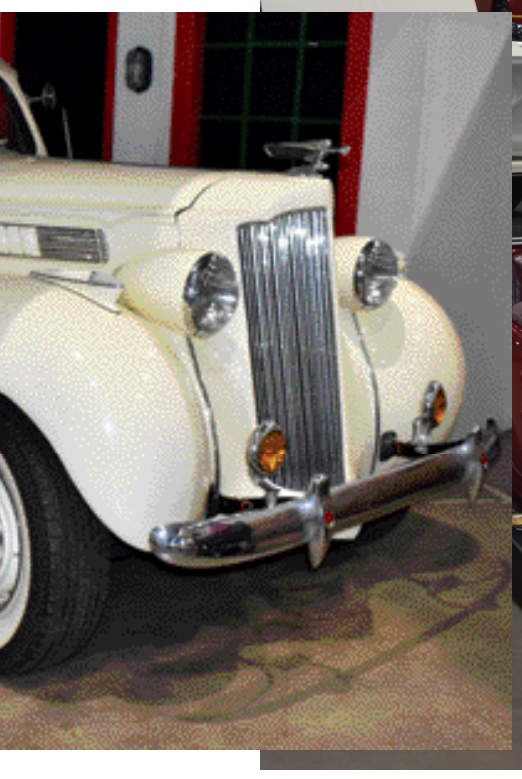
Hinkley, author of over 20 books, told me, "This Road Fest is probably one of the best events on Route 66, blending education with good old fashion family fun. It's the magic of Route 66 made manifest."

In between presenters, the Red Dirt Rangers, Weston Horn, of Weston Horn & The Hush rock and roll band, and Daniel Jordan played together, as did the Annie Ellicott Duo.

On Sunday, Joe Sonderman from Missouri, another prolific Route 66 writer, gave his "Must Sees on Route 66," Joey Madia discussed "Cyrus Avery: Father of The Mother Road" and planners from Claremore, Sapulpa and Tulsa talked about their plans for the route's Centennial year in 2026.

Next to the stage, 19 vintage travel trailers from the 1940s to the 1970s parked in the Vintage Trailer Resort. Lots of families ducked inside them to see original and nearly-original furnishings.

Two hundred and twenty vehicles came to the AAA Road Fest in Tulsa, June 21-22, 2025, ranging from 1929 to 2025.



This 1958 Silver Streak Chico travel trailer looks at home in the Vintage Trailer Resort

At the Route 66 Community area, people learned about towns on or near it, state associations that promote and preserve it, and museums and hotels on its sideroads. The Oklahoma Route 66 Association manned a booth to explain all about Oklahoma's Main Street. It's President, Rhys Martin, said, "Route 66 has been called a linear village, and the Route 66 Road Fest is a great example of how true that is. The Oklahoma Route 66 Association was joined by folks from all eight Route 66 states to showcase how special this road is to so many people. We all hope our enthusiasm and education leads people to take road trips of their own."

Steve Brant operates the Spirit of America museum in Stroud. He manned a booth in the Route 66 Community area. Brant said "people were delighted to discover the Route 66 Spirit of America Museum exists just down the road from the Rock Café…And they were happy to learn the museum will be launching the 'American Moonshot Project,' to help America break free of the culture of hate and division and adopt a culture of love and cooperation instead."

Steve Sibley attended with his wife and brother. Asked what he thought of the Road Fest, he said, "It's pretty cool - the cars, the booths that represent the different timelines and they have people dressed in character." Road Fest wasn't just a trip down memory lane for the middle aged who drove it 40 or more years ago - plenty of couples with children walked through the exhibits too.

Children had their own playground, the Kid's Play Zone. Coupons could be bought for $1 each to participate in a Boy Scout-run Pinewood Derby, Hot Wheels and pedal car races, 18-hole mini golf, learn art or play 21st century virtual reality games. Although the area was mostly filled with children, a few adults were spotted racing cars and playing mini golf with their kids.

AAA organizers hoped for 12,000 attendees over the two-day period, which would be 2,000 more than in 2024. "We really hope our guests experience Route 66, which is celebrating its history and culture," said Ben Young, Director of AAA's Brand, Content, and Publications. "Our main goal is to get people exploring all that Route 66 has to offer."

After picking up travel information about Route 66, it appeared visitors were ready to jump in their vehicles and cruise America's Main Street upon leaving, perhaps starting in Tulsa, which has 28 miles, then continuing for the rest of Oklahoma's portion of Route 66, about 400 miles. ■

story/photos by Richard Stephens, Lt. Col, USAF Retired

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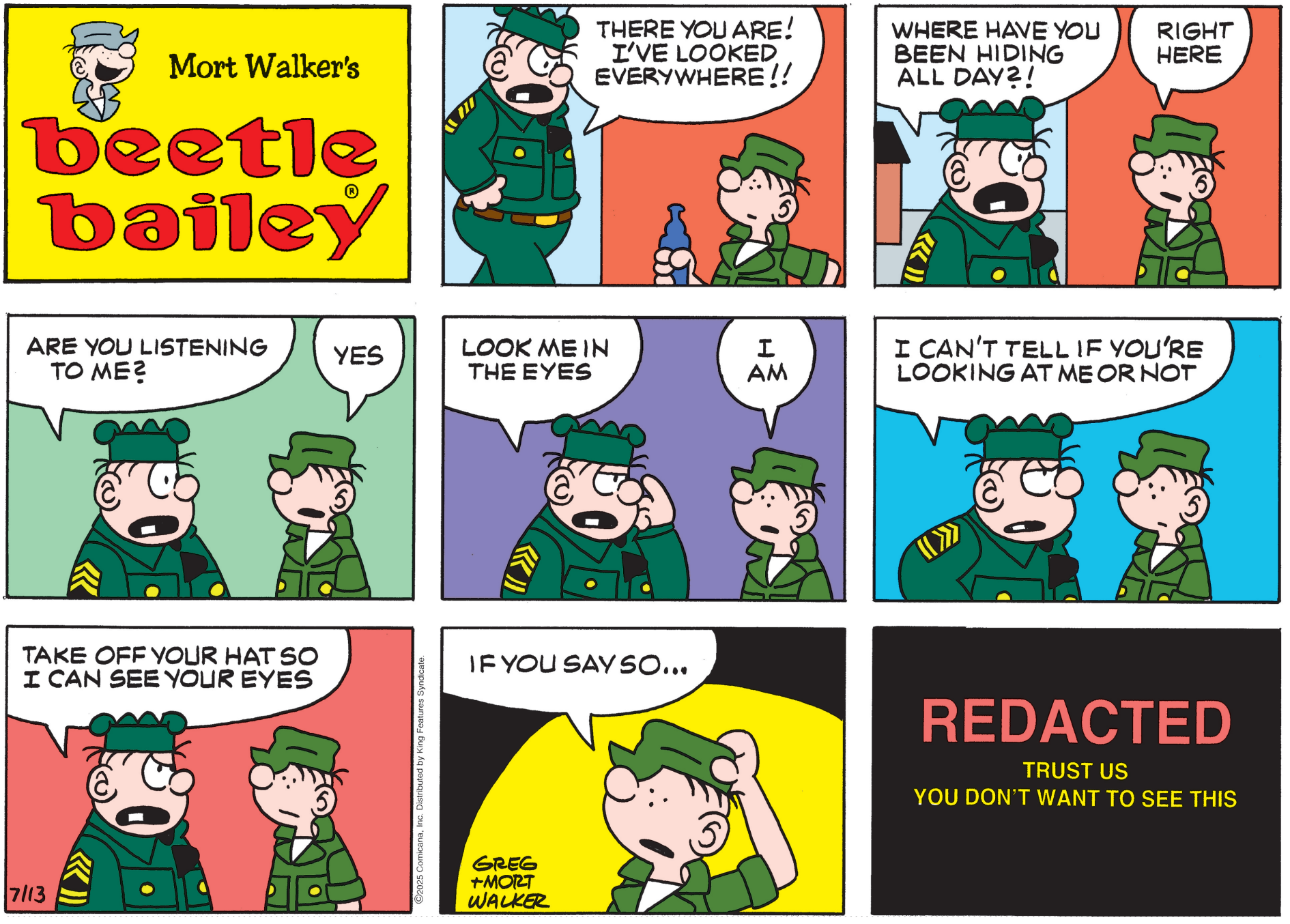

Midwest City Native Serves With Navy Medicine in Italy

Petty Officer 2nd Class Heather Boswell is from Midwest City, Oklahoma and is assigned to U.S. Navy Medicine Readiness and Training Command (USNMRTC) Sigonella / U.S. Naval Hospital (NH) in Sigonella, Italy.

Petty Officer 2nd Class Heather Boswell, a native of Midwest City, Oklahoma, serves the U.S. Navy assigned to U.S. Navy Medicine Readiness and Training Command (USNMRTC) Sigonella / U.S. Naval Hospital (NH) Sigonella, Italy. Boswell is a 2017 graduate of Midwest City High School who also graduated from the University of Oklahoma in 2025 with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice.

Boswell joined the Navy six years ago.

"I wanted to better my life and have a new scenery and fresh start," Boswell said. "I decided to go active duty, so I can travel the world and be able to pay for college."

The skills and values needed to succeed in the Navy are similar to those found in Midwest City.

"Ever since I was a little kid, I had always had a strong work ethic," Boswell said. "I remember when I used to always want to go to work with my parents to help them out. When I turned 16, I started working in the restaurant business. It taught me how to deal with people from different backgrounds in life and to always chase after my dreams. That work ethic has been instrumental in helping me accomplish my goals and be successful while in the Navy."

Today, Boswell serves as a culinary specialist (CS) with USNMRTC Sigonella.

"My favorite part about being a CS is being able to network with new people and to put a smile on someone's face," Boswell said.

USNMRTC Sigonella / NH Sigonella is a community hospital located in the heart of the Mediterranean in Sicily, Italy. Comprised of a local satellite clinic and two branch health clinics located in Bahrain and Souda Bay, USNMRTC Sigonella's staff of 387 serves approximately 8,500 active duty, family members, NATO members, retirees and other beneficiaries based on international collaborations and status of forces agreements.
CS2 Boswell accurately reflects her exceptional leadership and unwavering dedication," said Lt. Okechukwu Ezeonwurie, department head for materials management. "Beyond her daily responsibilities, which include expertly managing meal preparation for our personnel and overseeing the secure handling and distribution of a high volume of mail to our service members, CS2 Boswell also capably manages vehicle maintenance, linen distribution and key control. Her commitment extends beyond her official duties, as evidenced by her volunteer work at a local animal shelter and her active participation on both the Corpsman Ball and Navy Ball Committees. CS2 Boswell's contributions significantly bolster team morale at Naval Air Station Sigonella. Her recent accomplishment of earning a bachelor's degree further exemplifies her commitment to personal and professional growth, embodying the highest standards of naval tradition. CS2 Boswell serves as an exemplary role model for junior sailors and we deeply value her presence within our ranks."

The U.S. Navy is celebrating its 250th birthday this year.

According to Navy officials, "America is a maritime nation and for 250 years, America's Warfighting Navy has sailed the globe in defense of freedom."

With 90% of global commerce traveling by sea and access to the internet relying on the security of undersea fiber optic cables, Navy officials continue to emphasize that the prosperity of the United States is directly linked to recruiting and retaining talented people from across the rich fabric of America.

Boswell has many opportunities to achieve accomplishments during military service.

"In the six years that I have been serving in the military, I have accomplished many things," Boswell said. "I made E-5 in less than four years, received two Navy and Marine Corps Achievement awards, graduated with my bachelor's degree in criminal justice and have been recognized for many small achievements. However, I am most proud of making petty officer second class at my first command, and I am also proud of being able to help out other sailors with their goals and to become a great leader."

Boswell can take pride in serving America through military service.

"Serving in the Navy means the world to me," Boswell added. "It has given me the ability to realize how much potential I have in life. It also gives me the opportunity to make my family proud and to give my nieces and nephews someone to look up to." ■

story/photo by Rick Burke, Navy Office of Community Outreach

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