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OKLAHOMA VETERAN NEWS MAGAZINE

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OKLAHOMA VETERAN
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Serving Active Duty Military, Veterans and Their Families

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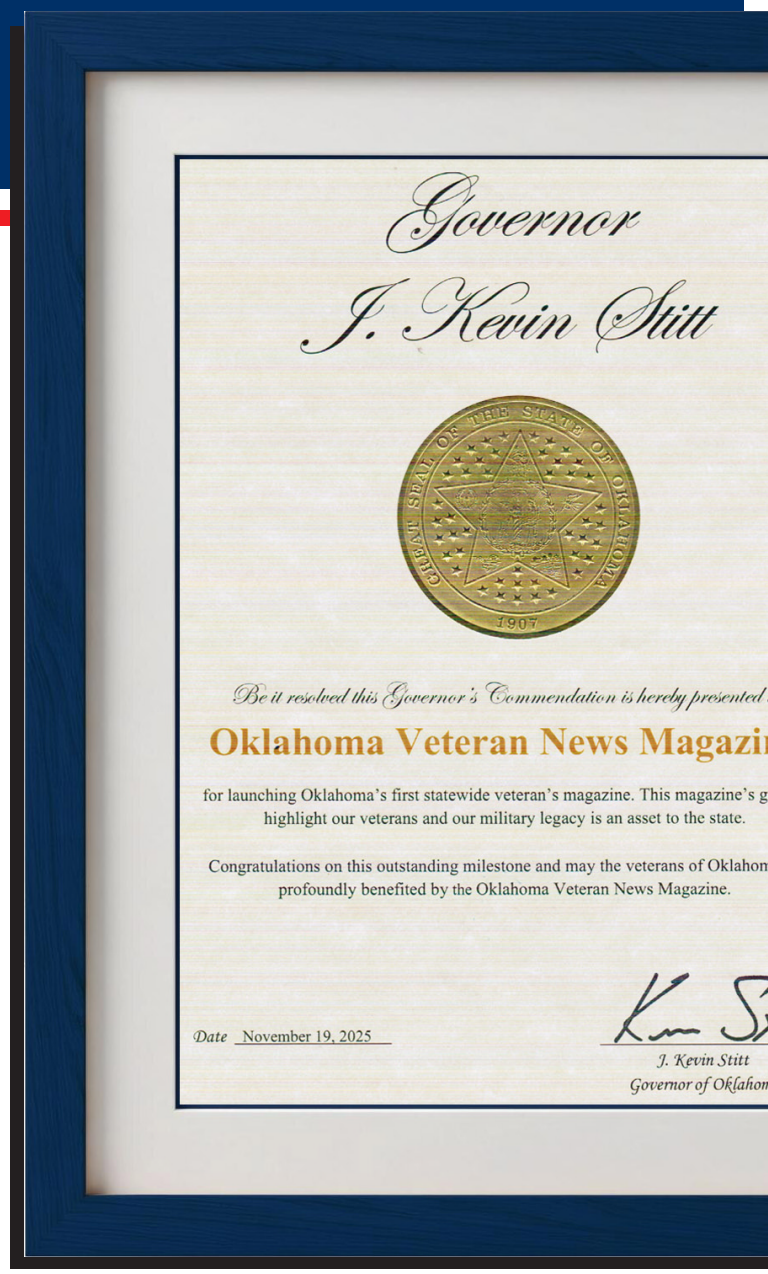
MAGAZINE RECEIVES COMMENDATION FROM GOVERNOR

Governor Kevin Stitt Commends "Oklahoma Veteran News Magazine's" Purpose



Oklahoma's first statewide veteran news magazine, now in its eighth month, has received an official commendation from Governor Kevin Stitt for its outstanding service and contributions to the state's military community. The honor recognizes the magazine's rapid growth and its commitment to sharing stories and resources vital to Oklahoma's more than 300,000 veterans and their families.

The launch of the monthly free "Oklahoma Veteran News Magazine" highlights its mission to honor service members and their families. It invites all Oklahomans to support this important effort.

"We encourage citizens to join in celebrating the missions of our five major military installations and supporting our new publication," Co-publisher Steven Eldredge said. "We are proud to share this free monthly magazine published to increase awareness and support of our service members and our people's support for them among patriotic Oklahomans."

Oklahoma takes pride in hosting some of America's largest and most significant military installations, which serve as regional economic powerhouses and are often the largest local employers.

Altus Air Force Base, Fort Sill, McAlester Army Ammunition Plant, Tinker Air Force Base, and Vance Air Force Base host thousands of service members and their families. They all employ thousands of patriotic civilian Oklahomans and play a vital role in national defense.

Oklahoma's National Guard, Reserves, and their civilian workers also support our military's important role in keeping our country free.

The publishers say this new magazine will aim to strengthen pride and unity among all Oklahomans by highlighting the state's values and priorities for its military community as the Oklahoma Standard.

Oklahoma's Patriots, stationed at these installations, have a significant impact on the economy and community. Their contributions, including job creation, business partnerships, and infrastructure development, are a source of pride for the state.

"Oklahoma Veteran News Magazine" seeks to elevate awareness and respect for veterans' service in Oklahoma and to highlight how our state offers nationally ranked tax benefits to veterans who retire here, honoring their sacrifices while defending American freedoms.

By helping to connect veterans with resources, the "Oklahoma Veteran News Magazine" aims to inspire community engagement. It does this by sharing stories of veteran achievements and providing updates on benefits and services.

The publication acts as an important platform to raise awareness of veteran businesses in our communities. It showcases these businesses so other veterans can recognize them as vital resources, thereby boosting the state's support for its military community.

As its statewide distribution continues

to grow, this magazine will become a vital part of the state's identity and its dedication to the military community. It strives to pay tribute to the service and sacrifice of all Oklahoma veterans and their families.



Co-publishers Steven Eldridge and Steve Sibley encourage Oklahomans to support the publication through subscriptions and article submissions. They ask everyone to share it with veterans in their communities, fostering a sense of belonging and collective pride.

"This magazine will honor the men and women who have taken the oath to defend America in our great state and their families," Eldridge said. "We are proud to provide this free public service. Our goal is to raise public awareness and respect for our service men and women, ensuring their sacrifices are recognized and celebrated across Oklahoma and the world."

SPECIAL NOTE: *Without the support of our veteran-friendly businesses below, we could not publish this magazine. Please be sure to reach out and thank them for supporting Oklahoma Veterans.*

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story and photos by Darl DeVault, contributing editor

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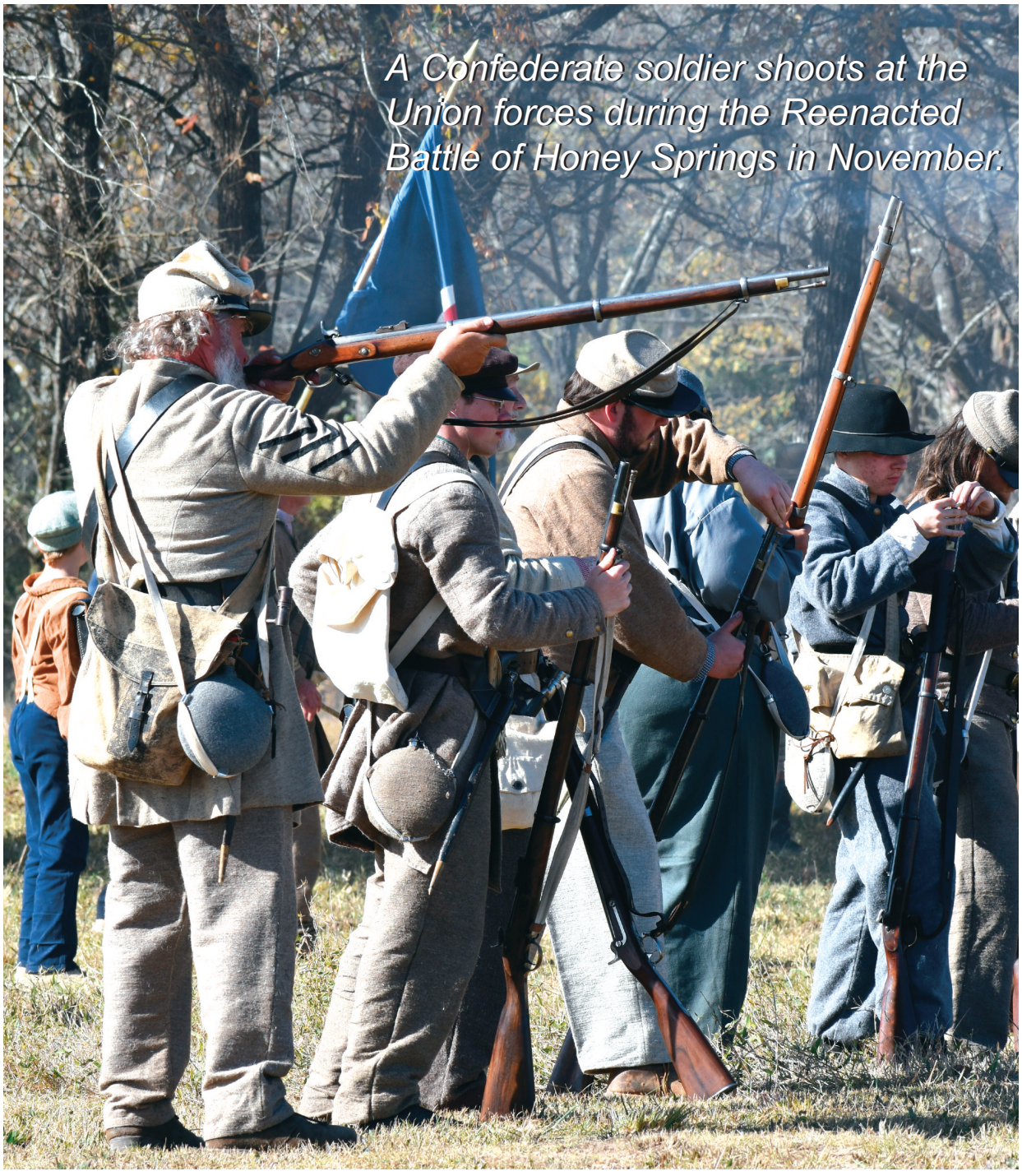
ON THE COVER

Cannons Roar, History Lives: Honey Springs Reenactment



A Confederate soldier shoots at the Union forces during the Reenacted Battle of Honey Springs in November.

Reenactors made it look, sound, smell and feel like a Civil War battle - by gum, it was!

Cannon Roar, Infantry Charge

Boom! Boom! The ground shook as Union and Confederate howitzers volleyed across the battlefield. Smoke rose while 2,000 spectators filmed or covered their ears. Children cried. The Reenactment of the Engagement at Honey Springs, July 17, 1863, had begun.

Six Confederate cannon fired in sequence. Four Union cannon answered. Amidst the smoke, Confederate cavalry flanked left, sabers in hand, while rebel infantry in grey wool uniforms emerged from the woods. At the midpoint of the battle, they spread into two, 20-man lines and advanced toward the Yankee line, believing they were retreating.

"Yee-haw! Yip-Yip!" Johnny Reb yelled, firing at two infantry squares of 25 Union soldiers standing about 50 feet apart. Two men in blue fell. But Billy Yank held firm and in the actual battle, fired back - just as reenactors did on November 7 and 8. In disciplined turns, the Union squares fired volleys at the rebel line 150 feet ahead. The left column fired - three men in grey dropped. The right column fired - two more grey men fell.

Then, Northern Army cannon thundered, covering the Yankees' advance. The Graybacks retreated across Elk Creek. A narrator explained each step of the battle, which took place on part of the actual battlefield, for onlookers.

Diverse participants

Historical Society information says the combatants in 1863 came from the 1st Division, Army of the Frontier (USA), commanded by Maj. Gen. James Blunt and the Confederate Indian Brigade led by Brig. Gen. Douglas Cooper. They included "American Indians, veteran Texas regiments, and the First Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry Regiment (the first African American Regiment to see combat in the entire Civil War)…Cooper reported his losses as 134 killed and wounded, with 47 taken prisoner. Blunt reported his losses as 17 killed and 60 wounded."

Outcome

The Union victory ensured federal control of Fort Gibson in Indian Territory and Fort Smith in Arkansas. However, American Indians in Indian Territory were devastated. The Historical Society estimates between 11-24 percent of tribal members died and after the war, tribes were forced to sign treaties with the U.S. government that made them give up or sell much of their land.

Rest and Relaxation

After the reenacted battle, blue and grey cavalry soldiers allowed children to pet their horses. Attendees and reenactors lined up at food trucks, although it was startling to see Union and Confederate soldiers eating hot dogs and tacos together.

Nearby, Sutler Row businesses sold books, wooden guns, games, and reproductions of 19th Century household items. Demonstrations included laundresses, a piper, and sanitation methods. Union and Confederate camps housed reenactors and their families over the weekend, adding authenticity to the event.

Molly Hutchins, Site Director, estimated 2,500 school children attended Education Day, Nov. 6, and 5,000 came for the two reenactments. She said 300 reenactors from 10 states participated.

Educating Visitors

Trait Thompson, Executive Director of the Oklahoma Historical Society, explained the purpose of the reenactment is "to give our visitors a better understanding of the Civil War in the Indian Territory." Asked what he hopes people take away from attending, he replied, "Understanding a little bit more about the people that fought here, the reasons they fought and how the battle may have looked. It's always good when you can match fun and education together."

Reenactors Voices

For many participants, reenacting is a passion. "I love history. That's why I do this," said Sean Mize of Edmond, a Confederate cannoneer. Union soldier Preston Ulrich of Moberly, Missouri, has been reenacting since age 13. Now 17, he participates 6 to 8 times a year with his father. "I think it's fun. It's a good way to escape modern life. It lets us dip into what our ancestors did." For Colleen Jefferson of Ft. Worth, "I think this conflict is the defining conflict for the nation because it challenges our beliefs about our founding principles." Jefferson has been reenacting for 14 years.

About the Battlefield

Oklahoma's Historical Society owns and manages the 1,100 acres of the Honey Springs Battlefield east of U.S. Highway 69 between Oktaha and Rentiesville, Oklahoma. It was designated as a National Historic Landmark in 2013. The Society hosts and schedules the reenactment every two years. Planning takes a full year, with support from organizations such as the Friends of Honey Springs Battlefield, a 501(c)(3).





Above: *Artillery firing at a Honey Springs Battlefield Reenactment. Photo by Honey Springs Historical Site.* ***Right:*** *Katie Panaro-Kish of Jacksonville, Arkansas, is dressed in an authentic 1800s Tea Dress. It's her third reenactment at Honey Springs*

Four monuments list the fighting units involved. Please visit the museum to understand the battle. It has a gift shop and two main rooms. One room offers recorded messages on telephones from dairies and papers of participants and mannequins in period uniforms and weapons. The second displays maps of the engagement, explanations and a replica supply wagon. A few artifacts recovered from the battlefield like minie bullets, lead and canister balls, and camp equipment, are on display.

On one telephone recording, the voice of Col. James Williams, Commander of the 1st Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry recounted events. "…I moved my regiment… loaded and bayonets fixed under sharp fire, to within 40 paces of the rebel line, without firing a shot, then halted and poured into their ranks a well-directed volley of buck and ball…which sent them to grass…which they never recovered."

Largest Civil War Battle in Indian Territory

Hutchins emphasized the site's importance: "We're the site of the largest Civil War battle fought in Indian Territory…We are also known as one of the most culturally diverse battles in the entire Civil War. Preservation of our site is important for those reasons. We are dedicated to sharing the history of the (battle) and honoring the men who fought here." ●

story and photos by Lt Col Richard Stephens, Jr., USAFR, Ret.

To learn more, visit https://www.okhistory.org/sites/honeysprings or scan the QR CODE below.

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Highway Sign Serves as Reminder to Thousands

Anthony Del Mar Peterson





Have you seen those memorial highway signs with names and military ranks on them along the interstates in the Tulsa area? Have you wondered about the person named on those signs? One such sign is on Interstate 169 at 76th and 86th Streets in the north and southbound lanes in Owasso. It says “SGT Anthony Del Mar Peterson Memorial Highway.” Who is SGT Anthony Del Mar Peterson and why does he have a sign? I will start at the end of the story and then go back to the beginning.



SGT Anthony Peterson served in the Oklahoma National Guard. He was killed in action while serving in the Zurmat district, Paktya province, Afghanistan on August 4th, 2011. He was 24 and on his second deployment. He is survived by his parents Garth and Terra, two siblings, a son and numerous other family and friends.

I met with Anthony’s parents to learn more about who he was.

Anthony was athletic, loved the outdoors and was always training for something. Despite being a protective big brother, he also liked teasing his siblings. He once tied both of them up and hid them in a closet telling them they needed to learn how to escape in case they were ever captured. When his parents talked to him about it afterwards, he said he was just training them.

Both of his grandfathers and an uncle served in the military, however, they aren’t what influenced him to join. When he was in kindergarten, the family lived in California close to Mather Air Force Base. His mother Terra reminisced about them seeing men jumping out of a Blackhawk helicopter and young Anthony watching with big eyes and stating that’s what he wanted to do when he grew up. His compassion for the military would deepen after the events of September 11, 2001 which drew him to sign up for the military using the delayed entry program. He was so proud, he wore his uniform to his graduation ceremony. Anthony’s father believes he also knew that his parents couldn’t afford to send him to college so joining the military would take that burden off of them.

After his 2005 graduation from Chelsea High School, Anthony volunteered for his first deployment. During that time he was notified that his ex-girlfriend had a son and he was the father. As soon as he came back from that deployment he was an instant father as his son was already under his parents guardianship and living with them. The most important things in his life were God, family and country. His favorite quote was, “Come home with your shield or on it.” In the Spartan world where this quote comes from, to come home without your shield is a sign of cowardice. To come home on your shield (dead) is a sign of honor, meaning you fought til the death.

Garth and Terra Peterson are proud of the man Anthony became and are grateful for the time they had with him. They raised his son, who is now almost twenty years old and is an aspiring music producer. From the time that his dad was killed, he was taught that he had gone to be with God. His memories were kept alive through sharing what was in their hearts, by honoring his life and remembering his sacrifice.

The Peterson’s love seeing their son’s name on a highway sign and hope that it will serve as a reminder to the thousands who drive past it daily to appreciate our freedom and raise awareness about the families who have paid the ultimate price for it. They admit that their own awareness about such sacrifices and the meaning of Memorial Day and Veterans Day grew deeper when they lost Anthony. They encourage people to look up the name of those listed on the highway signs and learn about who they were.

I asked what they would say if they could say anything to Anthony. They agreed they would tell him they loved him and how grateful they are that God lent him to them. I asked what they thought he might say to them. Dad said he would say, “I love you.” Mom said he would say, “Good job, Mom. You did exactly what I wanted you to do.”

Garth and Terra have never lost their faith in God. They remain grateful for the twenty-four years they had with Anthony and for the gift of being able to raise his son.

SGT Anthony Del Mar Peterson is laid to rest at Ft. Gibson National Cemetery. ●

story and photos by Jill Stephenson, mother of a fallen soldier.

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Colonel Rosemary Hogan-Luciano Chapter Second Annual Hall of Honor Banquet Induction Ceremony Class of 2026

The Colonel Rosemary Hogan-Luciano Chapter proudly invites all Patriots, Veterans, families, and community members to the Second Annual Hall of Honor Induction of the Class of 2026. The event will be Friday, January 30, 2026 at the American Legion Post 12 at 6101 NW 50th St., Bethany-Warr Acres, OK. Social Hour will be at 6:00 p.m. with dinner at 6:30 p.m.

Presentations & Induction Ceremony will follow dinner

Join us as we honor extraordinary service, leadership, and the enduring legacy of the Colonel Luciano Chapter. Last year's event sold out don't miss your chance to be part of this patriotic and inspiring evening.

Individual tickets are $40 per person and reserved tables of six are $240. Tickets may be purchased online at https://www.eventbrite.com/e/1974924304759?aff=oddtdtcreator

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Exhibit Highlights Edmond's Military History



Above: *The Edmond History Museum is as home the Oklahoma Army National G*
Left: *"Vietnam's effect on Edmond" 50th*

The home of the Edmond History Museum, located at 431 South Boulevard has a history itself.

It once served as the armory home of the Oklahoma Army National Guard's 45th Infantry Division.

"During the New Deal in the 1930s when President (Franklin D.) Roosevelt was putting people to work, the decision was made to build a lot of infrastructure that would help communities," Amy Stephens, Museum Director said. "And just after World War I, there was still a lot of heightened interest in safety and security, and so armories were high on that list. There were, I believe, 52 armories built in Oklahoma. A handful remains now, and a couple of them are museums and some community centers and warehouses. This armory was built in 1936 by the PWA. This was built by the workers in our community, and it was for the National Guard 45th Infantry Division."

Stephens said the 45th drilled out of the building until a new armory was built on Bryant Street in Edmond.

She said the old armory, which is owned by the City of Edmond, was utilized for storing lawn equipment, non-profit offices, and a theater group.

"For about 10 years, it had multiple purposes, including serving as the office of the Edmond Historical Society, which evolved into the Edmond History Museum," she said.

The mission of Edmond History Museum is to celebrate Edmond history through preservation and education. Museum hours are 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday - Friday, and 1 p.m.-4 p.m. on Saturday.

Artifacts visually tell the story of Edmond from the land run to the present.

"We are a community museum," Stephens said. "What makes us slightly unique compared to a lot of community museums is that we change exhibits frequently. It's not the kind of place where you come and you see the farm equipment and then five years later, you come and it's the same farm equipment on display. We have a few permanent exhibits to tell about how Edmond started and talk a little bit about the purpose of this building originally. But after that, we have 43,000 artifacts in our collection to tell different stories."

Stephens said that variety of storytelling has led to an increase in visitors.

"We (museum team) put a lot of emphasis on marketing and helping people understand that this is a museum," she said. "We do a lot more community programming than we used to, and we're out in the community more. When the city remodeled the park that we're sitting inside, that brought in a lot of new people who had never even been here. The number has impressively increased. A couple of years ago, our average attendance was between 15,000 and 20,000, which has been ongoing for several years. The last two years we've had over 30,000 visitors. This year, we were at 34,000. So, we almost doubled attendance from a couple of years ago."

Stephens said the museum currently has a Vietnam War exhibit titled "Close to Home," which pays homage to the service of those from Edmond in that war.

"Telling the story of wars is important," she said. "In Edmond, we have such a large population of military members and veterans. And so, every few years, we are doing some kind of war topic. We were looking at the calendar, realizing that this is the 50th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War and knew this was the time to tell a story that hadn't been told in a while."

Stephens added "What I think is important about this exhibit is we interviewed people who are still alive, and we're telling their stories because they're still around. And we're so fortunate to be able to gather the information about what happened to them then, and how it affected the rest of their life, and where they are now because of it. We profile six individuals. Everything from pilots to being down on the ground fighting in the swamps. And so, the artifacts and stories are about real people and people that live here."

Stephens said the museum also tells the history of Edmond's fire department, and Edmond's connection to the historic Route 66, which turns 100 in 2026.

"The exhibits we have are very Americana," she said. "We are currently installing an exhibit on the history of the Edmond Fire Department. We felt like that was a colorful story that everybody could find some interest in. We do have a small permanent exhibit about Route 66 history. We don't have a ton of huge artifacts. We have a lot of small things, and so it's a smaller footprint."

Stephens said in 2026 the museum will have a new exhibit focusing on Tammi Sauer, a local children's author.

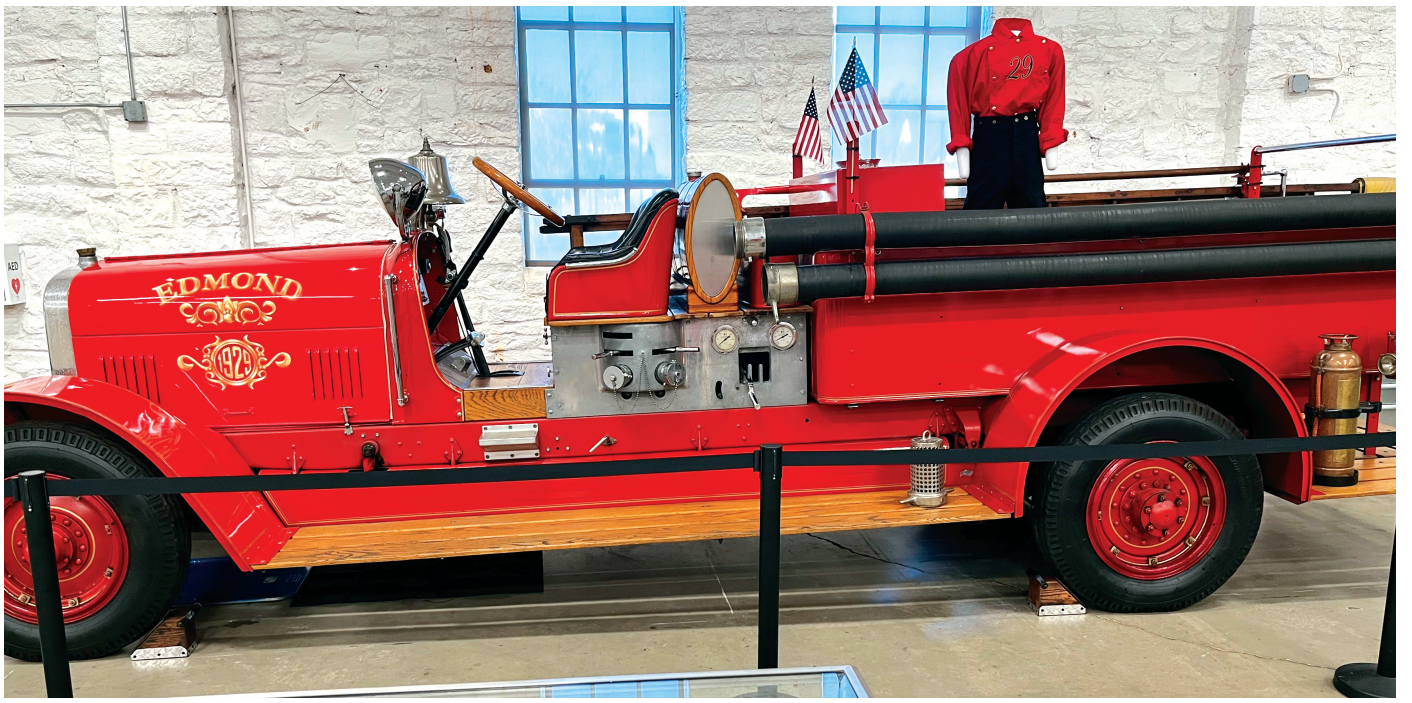
"Early next year, we will be focusing on one of our very prolific local writers, Tammi Sauer," she said. "She's published well over 30 children's picture books, and many are award-winners. They were all done by traditional publishers. She's just a rock star. We wanted to tell that because 52% of our visitors are children."

The museum is also doing a partnership with the Edmond Quilt Guild as well as its annual 5th grade art contest.

"The quilt guild is bringing their experts



housed in a former armory once utilized
uard's 45th Infantry Division.
anniversary postage stamp.



The Edmond History Museum showcases a variety of exhibits telling the history of Edmond, which includes exhibits on the Edmond Fire Department, military history, and an exhibit about Route 66.

in, and people can sign up for a session to bring their family quilts and have it assessed," she said. "Every spring we do an art exhibit of 5th grade art about trees in our town. It's an Arbor Day festival. So, we will continue with that."

Stephens said within the next year, they are converting a garage space on the corner of the museum into an activity classroom space.

"We are naming it the Thunderbird Room in honor of the 45th," she said. "We will have a large neon of the Thunderbird that will be hanging on the walls. We want to pay a little more homage to our veteran history here." For more information visit https://www.edmondhistory.org/ or by calling the museum at (405)-340-0078. Museum admission is free. ●

story and photos by Van Mitchell, staff writer

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Oklahoma Heros Inducted into Military Hall of Fame

The Oklahoma Military Hall of Fame celebrated its 26th Banquet and Induction Ceremony on Nov 1 at the Embassy Suites, Norman. This year's class included 11 living and deceased service members representing all Services and all ranks, one civilian and the Kiowa Code Talkers of WWII. The 590 attendees were awed by their valor in battle. The Hall of Fame is one arm of the Oklahoma Military Heritage Foundation that also supports Hall of Honor Chapters in Oklahoma towns.

After honoring our national symbols, each service medley was played and dinner served. Singer and performer Maggie Bond and guitarist Dennis Hoch, a Navy veteran of Vietnam, provided entertainment.

Induction Ceremony
After each inductees' biography was read, the inductee or a representative took the stage with the person who submitted the nomination and the Ambassador who assisted their family's attendance. Two inductees are highlighted.

Army Colonel Philip Adair
Lt. Col. Gale Clem, his daughter, accepted the award because he died in 2017. She noted, "He was very humble. He…would basically give credit to his fellow servicemen, the crew chiefs, the maintainers, and the other pilots with him…it's a tribute to an entire generation of Americans..."

Marine Corporal Byron Gordon
Because Gordon died in 2017, his oldest grandson, Chad Higbee, accepted the honor. Gordon was at Bataan when it fell in April 1942. He jumped in the ocean and swam towards Corregidor Island, 3.5 miles away. Years ago, Gordon was asked why he swam. He replied, "It was either that or a Japanese bullet." Higbee said his grandfather "was actually being encircled by two sharks that were very aggressive. Granddad wasn't really an overtly religious person, but he did pray for help…And that prayer came in the form of a dolphin who drove off the sharks and then gave him a ride." Many in the crowd gasped or laughed hearing that story.

Public Service Awards
After 10 military members, including the Kiowa Code Talkers, were inducted for valor, Major General (Ret.) Douglas O. Dollar, USA, who founded the Hall of Fame, and Colonel (Ret.) Kelly Zachgo, President of the Oklahoma Military Heritage Foundation, awarded Distinguished Public Service Awards to CAPT John Kielty, USN, and Mrs. Pamela Kloiber.

Dollar explained the purpose of the Hall of Fame. "We try to honor veterans for one thing, for valor. They've been outstanding in combat. The other criteria is that they may have done community/public service for veterans, and they certainly deserve recognition and encouragement."

Zachgo was pleased with the night's ceremony. "It was clear that attendees connected with the inductee's stories and sacrifices. We're here to honor Oklahoma's veterans and tonight the cup for them was filled up and held high."

Inductees not listed in October's Veteran News Magazine

PVT Oscar J. Upham, U.S. Marine Corps, 1871 - 1949. Upham served in China during their 1899 - 1901 Boxer Rebellion. He received the Medal of Honor for heroic action erecting barricades under enemy fire. He served on the USS Oregon in the Spanish-American War.

CPL Byron C. Gordon, U.S. Marine Corps, 1919 - 2017. During WWII, Gordon deployed to China, Bataan and Corregidor. He endured 3.5 years as a prisoner of war, surviving harsh labor in prison camps and mines. Gordon was awarded the Bronze Star, Purple Heart, and POW medal.

RADM Albert L. Kelln, U.S. Navy, 1929 - 2022. Kelln graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy, served on the USS Blue and USS Ronquil during the Korean conflict, became one of the first officers qualified to operate a nuclear reactor and was Chief Engineer on USS Enterprise.

SSG Virgil Malone, U.S. Army, 1921 - 2004. During the Battle of the Bulge in WWII, Malone drew the enemy's fire on himself so his fellow soldiers could eliminate a machine gun position. He was wounded in the head and awarded the Silver Star and Purple Heart for extraordinary valor.

SGT Gary L. Opela, U.S. Army. Opela deployed to Vietnam and twice earned the Silver Star. On July 24, 1970, he led a night defense, coordinated supporting fire, and evacuated wounded under heavy enemy attack. Opela helps veterans in Prague.

SGT Harold E. Wadley, U.S. Marine Corps. Wadley earned his first Purple Heart during the Vegas Hill battle, Korean War. With the 5th Marines in Vietnam, he received the Bronze Star with "V" for valor for rescuing wounded comrades. During Operation Swift, he was wounded, earning another Purple Heart and the Silver Star. ●
story and photos by Lt Col Richard Stephens, Jr., USAFR, Ret.

For more information about the Oklahoma Military Heritage Foundation, go to https://okmhf.org.

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Mrs. Pamela Kloiber (center) received a Distinguished Public Service Award at the Military Hall of Fame on Nov 1, 2025.



Sailing into Navy's Biggest Battle of WWII - Okinawa

Enlisting at Seventeen

Bargas was in high school when he enlisted in the U.S. Navy at age 17 in Oct. 1944. Two pals, Jimmy Jackson and Paul Cassilas, enlisted with him. Fortunately, all three came home and stayed friends for decades. After finishing training as a Boatswain's Mate - a "jack-of-all-trades" sailor who performs a variety of duties - at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center on the shore of Lake Michigan,

Sea Duty

Bargas joined the U.S.S. Shenango (CVE-28), a small Navy escort carrier. The 53-foot vessel was manned by about 1,080 officers and enlisted sailors and launched SBD-3 Dauntless dive bombers (nicknamed "slow but deadly") and Grumman F6F-3 and F6F-5 Hellcats.

His memories of life aboard the Chenango reveal both the routine and danger of carrier duty. "We had planes that they went out and done their job and we'd fold them up (wings) on the carrier, go downstairs, you know, that was it," Bargas said. After an aircraft's wing folded, called a "STO-Wing," an elevator would lower one or two aircraft inside the carrier for safety and to provide more space for take-offs and landings.

Fire on the Flight Deck

He also remembered a day when a pilot's landing went wrong. "I remember there's one of them planes coming in and instead of him landing, he made a mistake and he hit the other planes that was already on the deck and they caught on fire. It wasn't his fault…. It (arresting cable) stopped him, but not quick enough. I guess he didn't cut the thing off before he was supposed to." Bargas thinks one or two sailors were killed. The account is confirmed by Wikipedia. "On 9 April (1945), a fighter crashed upon landing and started a raging fire among the strike-loaded aircraft on Chenango's deck." The crew put out the flames and kept the ship operational.

Final Battle

That same month, the Chenango joined other Navy ships in the invasion of Japanese-held Okinawa. Wikipedia states, "She gave air cover in the feint landings on the southern tip of the island, then was assigned to neutralize the kamikaze ("divine wind") bases in Sakashima Gunto." These were suicide planes flown directly into the decks and superstructures of Allied ships.

Specific strikes by Chenango's bombers and fighters included dropping 500- and 100-pound bombs on the runways at Nobara Airfield, damaging airfield barracks and control towers, and attacking fuel supplies and ammunition. They also conducted combat air patrols to intercept Japanese aircraft and protect Allied ships.

According to the National WWII Museum, "The 1945 Allied amphibious invasion of Okinawa lasted from April 1 through the end of June and was the largest and deadliest operation conducted by American forces in the Pacific war." The Navy's "loss of life of nearly 5,000 sailors, with another 5,000 wounded, made Okinawa the Navy's bloodiest battle of the war, greater even than its losses at Pearl Harbor." Luckily, the Chenango's crew escaped kamikaze aircraft attacks.



Eugene Bargas served as a Boatswain's Mate on the U.S.S. Chenango, a Navy escort carrier, during WWII

He sailed countless nautical miles. "For the time I was in, I covered a lot of territory." Bargas said. "I went from one ocean to the other ocean. I went through the Panama Canal. I went to San Francisco and then later on when we came back, we came back through the Panama Canal. One ocean's higher than the other. I didn't know that. I couldn't believe it." Asked if he ever got seasick, he laughed. "Yes, I was sick for about a week." Typhoons? He nodded. "We had several of them. The ocean's rough."

From War to Civilian Life

After being discharged as a Seaman Second Class on April 1, 1946, Bargas returned home and began building a civilian life. He married Patricia, and later, Joyce, and had six children and three step-children. His daughter, Lanna Daniels, said he first leased a Phillips 66 gas station in Tulsa before opening his own business, Bargas Garage, for twenty years. Nearly eight decades later, Bargas continues to serve his community. He attended the U.S. Navy's 250th birthday celebration on Oct. 13 and has been asked to be the Grand Marshal in Claremore's Veterans Day parade Nov. 11th. ●

story and photos by Lt Col Richard Stephens, Jr., USAFR, Ret.



Left: U.S.S. Chenango, a small carrier that served in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans during WWII.Photo by Lanna Daniels

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Randell's Bronze Masterpiece as Oklahoma's Most Robust Veterans Tribute



In keeping with our new mission to bring Oklahoma veteran news to life, we are only now celebrating the installation and unveiling of the most important military tribute statues ever created by an Oklahoman for Oklahomans. On Veterans Day in 2021, Luther sculptor Joel Randell unveiled his bronze composition, "NSU Veterans: Serving and Communicating through the Decades," becoming the most visually detailed and robust tribute to military service ever in Oklahoma, located in Tahlequah.

"The complexity of Randell's tour de force is more than most sculptors will ever achieve in a lifetime if you add up many of their most important military statues," said former CSU art professor Bob Palmer, Oklahoma's most viewed muralist. "For one sculptor to bring so many heroic-sized figurative bronzes to life in one setting is the pinnacle of a once-in-a-generation sculpting effort."

The larger-than-life bronze monument, depicting service members from all branches of the military, graces a plaza on the east side of Seminary Hall on Northeastern State University's Tahlequah campus.

Two years in the making, following the initial prototype's approval, the five bronze military figures are a testament to the involvement of many NSU students and community members in support of America's military mission. The five bronze soldiers representing the military services surround a larger-than-life Lady Liberty, holding a large American flag and a lantern aloft to guide them home.

The Army is depicted by a Cherokee Code Talker from World War I, who sits and provides cryptic communication on the front lines of battle. NSU is the location of the original Cherokee Female Seminary, and Tahlequah remains the capital of the Cherokee Nation.

"We know the Cherokee Nation has a prominent place here in Tahlequah and at NSU. What their soldiers did in World War I was an incredible new effort to help save American lives," Randell said at the unveiling in 2021. "Many know about World War II Code Talkers, but it was the Cherokee and Choctaw patriots who led that effort initially in their war."

The Navy is represented by a catapult officer, better known as a "shooter," who signals when a pilot should take off from a carrier's flight deck.

A U.S. Marine is seen as a soldier from the Vietnam War wading through a flooded rice paddy while using his hand to signal to fellow soldiers.

The Air Force is depicted by a modern-day female officer pilot holding her flight helmet who successfully completed another mission.

"Incidentally, she would be the highest-ranking person in this composition. She is stepping off the world stage having finished a successful flight, with the satisfaction of a job well done," Randell said.



CENTER: A modern-day U.S. Air Force female officaer pilot smiles in satisfaction after successfully completing a mission.

The U.S. Coast Guard rescue crewman stretches his arms along a helicopter cable in a heroic effort to save someone in peril at sea.

Elevated in the middle stands a woman who represents the families back home. She is holding a lantern aloft, with a large, colorful American flag billowing in the wind. The lantern has a light feature that emits an amber glow at night.

"Lady Liberty is holding a lantern aloft, effectively shining the way home for those who are scattered abroad. She is standing on a representation I call a semi-globe representation of the Earth," Randell said. "With her right foot, she is 'standing' on Tahlequah so those who see her can remember where home is."

The two-foot-tall globe at the center of the monument, which all the figures are touching, shows how American veterans have served

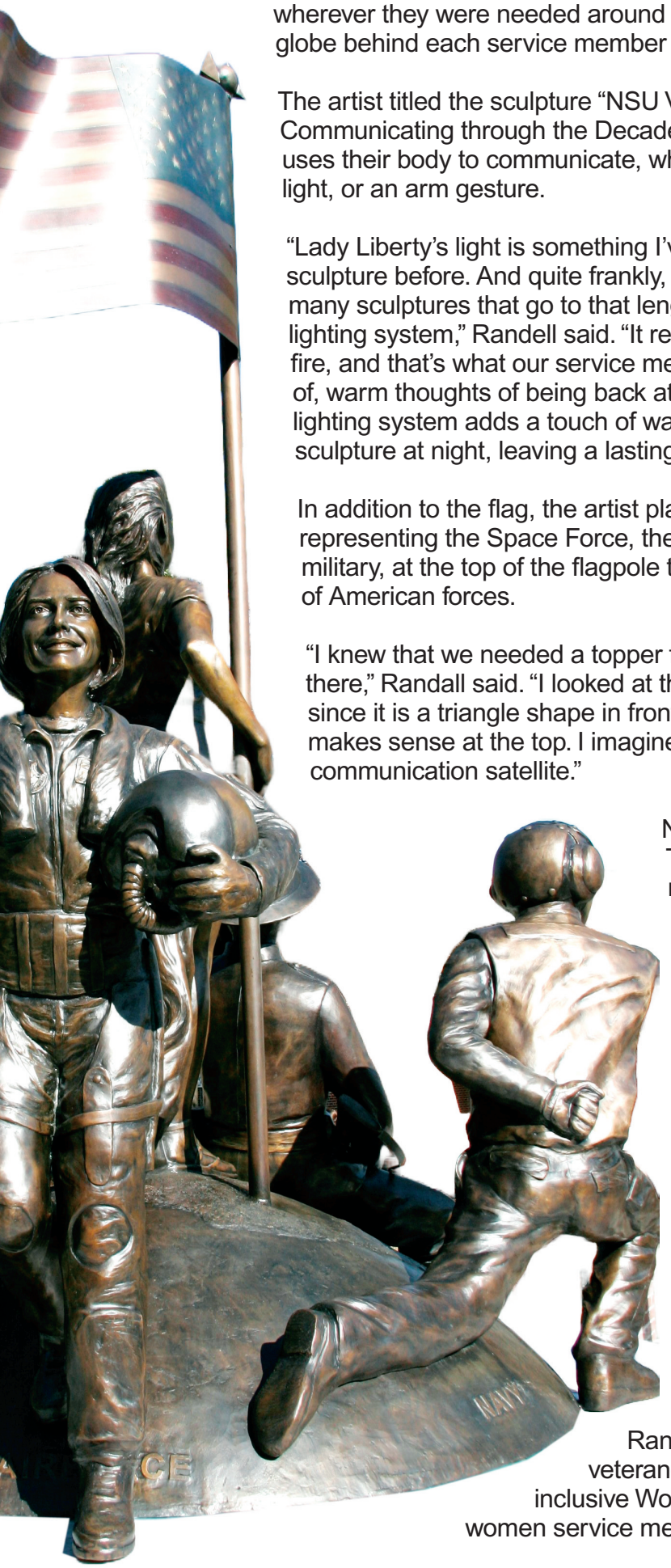
wherever they were needed around the world. The names of the branches of the services are etched low on the globe behind each service member to help viewers connect with their role in serving.

The artist titled the sculpture “NSU Veterans: Serving and Communicating through the Decades” because each figure uses their body to communicate, whether through a radio, a light, or an arm gesture.

“Lady Liberty’s light is something I’ve never done in a sculpture before. And quite frankly, I don’t know of too many sculptures that go to that length to have an internal lighting system,” Randell said. “It reminds you of a warm fire, and that’s what our service men and women think of, warm thoughts of being back at home.” The innovative lighting system adds a touch of warmth and nostalgia to the sculpture at night, leaving a lasting impression on viewers.

In addition to the flag, the artist placed a triangular logo representing the Space Force, the newest branch of the military, at the top of the flagpole to round out the depiction of American forces.

“I knew that we needed a topper for our flag, right up there,” Randall said. “I looked at the Space Force logo since it is a triangle shape in front of a globe. I think it makes sense at the top. I imagine it in this setting as a communication satellite.”





Five bronze soldiers, each representing a branch of America’s military, encircle a larger-than-life statue of a lady symbolizing the home front. She holds a large American flag and a lantern held high to light their way home.

NSU President Steve Turner praised the monument in 2021, expressing his pride in the new addition to the campus and its proximity to the historic Seminary Hall. “I can’t think of a better place for it to be, adjacent to historic Seminary Hall,” Turner said.

NSU has been recognized as a military-friendly campus. It is also a veteran employer champion and a proud part of the U.S. Department of Defense’s Yellow Ribbon campaign.

It offers comprehensive services for veterans and their families. Resources include a dedicated Office of Veterans Services to assist with educational benefits, a veterans’ lounge, credit for military service, and flexible online learning options. The university helps veterans maximize benefits, complete degrees, and transition to civilian careers.

Randell, 51, is nationally renowned for his patriotic bronze statues, particularly veteran-themed monuments. His prominent works also include the large bronze inclusive Women’s Veterans Monument of similar complexity in Del City, Okla., honoring women service members from each service.

He earned a bachelor’s degree in art education from the University of Central Oklahoma, studying figurative sculpture in bronze with David L. Phelps. After college, he completed his traditional sculpting apprenticeship with Shan Gray.

“The NSU Veterans Monument was a dream come true project,” Randell said recently in an interview. “NSU afforded me a robust budget, allowing me to include all branches of service, various wars and conflicts, while honoring both men and women in a glorious tribute to veterans. At 110 percent life-size, it was heroic size but not overwhelming. With the figures rising from the globe at different points, it is a visual feast from every angle. I am proud this sculpture captures the actions of serving in the military during both peace and war.” ● *story and photos by Darl DeVault, contributing editor*

Faith and Faith Keep Shafer Striving to Give



George Shafer, a U.S. Army veteran, now serves as Generation Church's Pastor of Digital Communications in Guthrie, and his wife Meredith serves as Pastor of Assimilation and Small Groups.

George Shafer, a U.S. Army veteran, was at his lowest point when his wife Meredith found him in their family's treehouse with a shotgun aimed under his chin.

He credits her with getting him the help he needed when he was ready to end it all.

"I suffered a traumatic brain injury (while serving) and I got into a deep depression," Shafer said. "I am a veteran that has struggled. I have struggled with the aimlessness, and the lack of passion, feeling worthless, feeling empty, feeling void."

Shafer those feelings only heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic after he and his wife's ministry which helped veterans struggling with addiction closed its doors.

"When the ministry (in Edmond) fell apart in the pandemic, I lost many relationships, and I really isolated myself. I hurt a lot of the friends that I had at the time," he said.

Shafer said after Meredith found him in the treehouse; she went to work to get him help.

"She was relentless," he said.

Meredith Shafer wrote in a Facebook post about her and George getting saved 12 years ago.

"Twelve years ago, today (Sept. 28) the Lord saved us," she wrote. "I was pregnant with our youngest, and life had been in shambles for a while. Mr. Wonderful (George) was chained by addiction, and I was at the end of my rope. That day I found him in our kids' treehouse about to take his own life. It turns out, he was at the end of his rope too and did not know how to get out of those chains. Twelve years ago, God met us in a treehouse and changed our lives forever. Not in an instant like we wanted, but over and over in the daily choices He showed us how to make."

Shafer said their response to the pandemic helped shape his family's future.

"When the pandemic hit Oklahoma, our family had a meeting around the dining room table. We were all nervous, but we discussed what opportunities were available in our new norm," he said. "We told our kids that it was a difficult situation, but it was also globally difficulty being experienced by everyone. Meaning, the people who are quickest to adapt to change will be the most prepared when the pandemic was over. Our family received this well, and got to work! But they also helped me do the same."

Shafer decided to go back to school online through Liberty University and receive his Masters of Divinity degree from Regent University.

"There's just been a calling on my life (to complete his education), and I've known it for a very long time. And I ran from it. But when COVID hit that was one of the thresholds that was there for me to cross," he said.

Shafer credits his wife and children for sticking with him through his studies.

"Meredith Shafer, Jack, Tate, Lucy, and Isaiah; this victory is for you," Shafer wrote in a Facebook post. "For the missed: sports events, kid drop-off and pickup, parent/teacher conferences, etc. Thank you for helping me, believing in me, and trusting me for the past 7 years through both an undergrad and a challenging master's program. For a guy who had a 9th grade education prior to college, there were days I wasn't sure we were going to make it (math and Greek). You guys helped me break generational curses and change the trajectory of our family name."

Shafer graduated with his master's degree last spring but was still unsure of what was next for him.

That is when he and his wife felt a calling to come to Generation's Church in Guthrie.

"I scheduled a meeting with my pastor Josh Seabolt (and told him his story)," Shafer said. "I told him I made a lot of mistakes, and he showed me the grace of Jesus Christ."

Through that conversation, Shafer was later hired as Generation Church's Pastor of Digital Communications, and his wife serves as Pastor of Assimilation and Small Groups.

He thanked Generations Church for giving his family a shot.

"To our Generations Church family, you will have no idea how much your love and support has meant to our family. So grateful for each of you," he said. "It's very humbling."

Shafer is the former chaplain of the American Legion Lebron Post 58 in Guthrie, where he helped launch its Bunker 58 Esports program, which is designed to reduce veteran suicide by providing an environment of a connection, teamwork, and camaraderie for local veterans.

Shafer said his struggles help him better help other veterans.

"When I see that in somebody else, I'm able to recognize it," he said. "Not because I've experienced exactly what that person has experienced, but it rekindles my desire to ensure that nobody ever feels that way again. To ensure that they understand that they're made in the image of God, in the image of their creator, and that they have worth, and that they have value. Even if they no longer wear the uniform or serve the country, they still have value and they still have worth, and they still have things that they were put on this planet to do. And if I can help them get through this short, temporal period of feeling empty, it's my honor to do that." ●

story by Van Mitchell, staff writer

For more information about Generations Church visit https://www.generationsguthrie.com.

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Fun Fact

The first US state to require license plates was New York, in 1901. Each car owner ordered their own plate to be made, out of porcelain baked onto iron, or out of ceramic materials.



Sources: www.inspectaride.com, leatherlicenseplates.com

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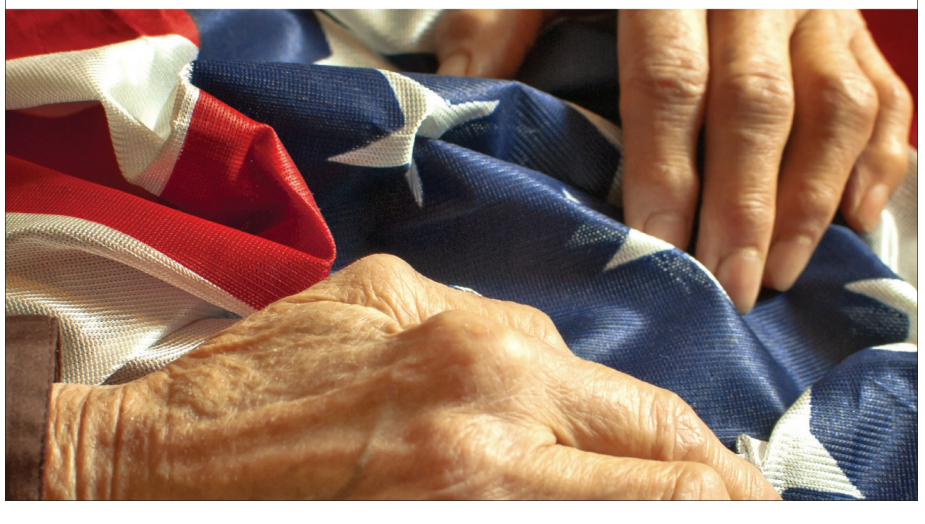

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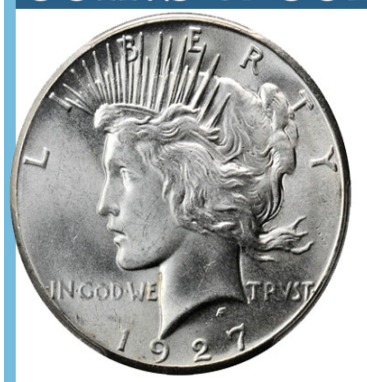

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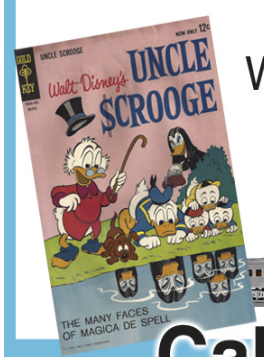

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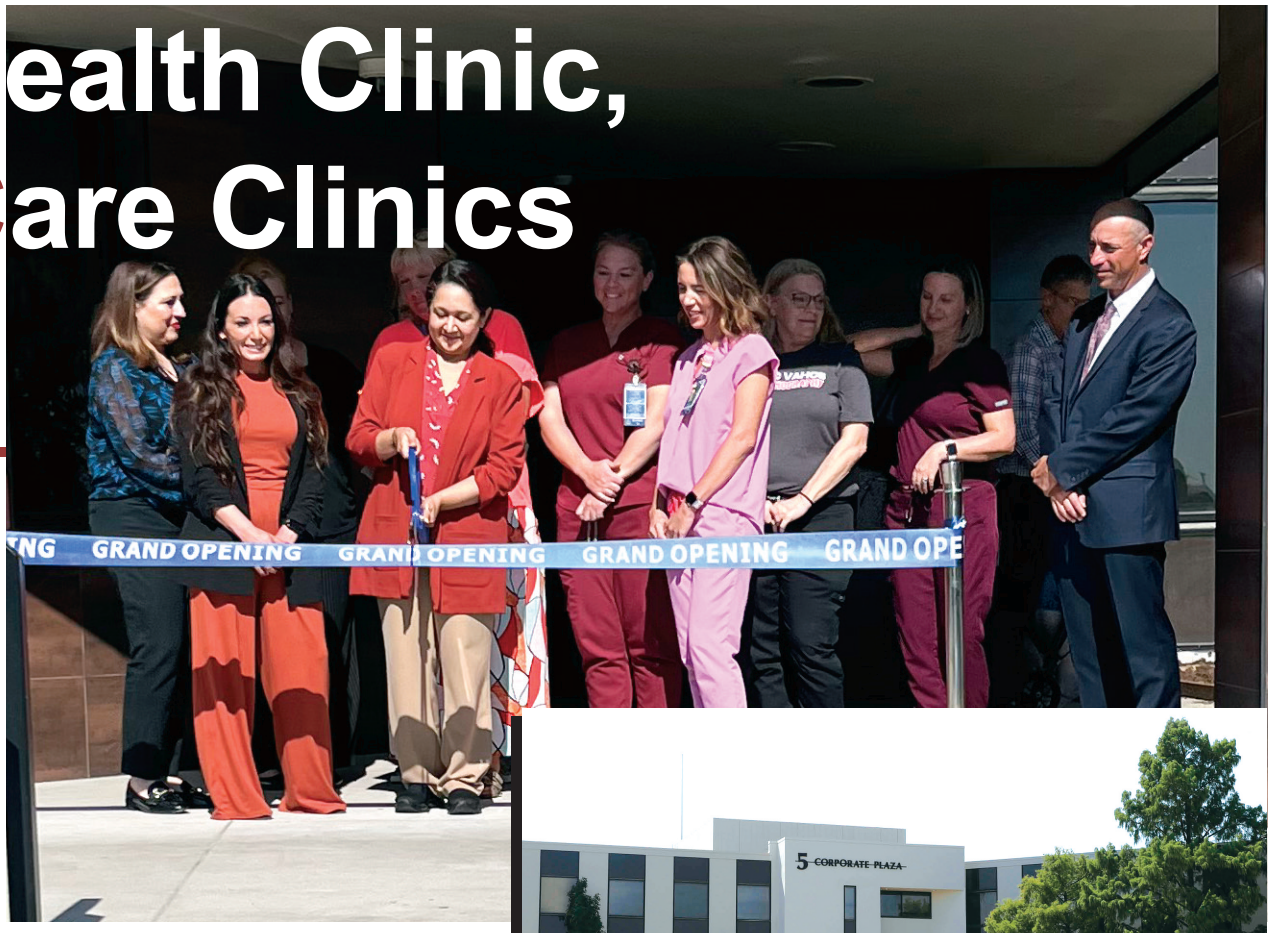
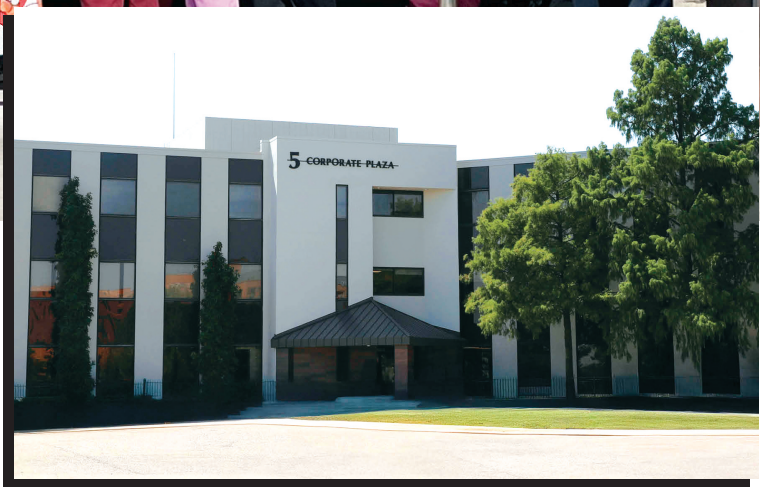




A ribbon cutting was held recently for the new VA clinic opening in northwest Oklahoma City. This new clinic will be where the Women's Health Clinic and specialty care clinics are relocating from the VA Medical Center.

The VA OKC Healthcare System recently opened its newest VA clinic in northwest Oklahoma City.

This new clinic will be where the Women's Health Clinic and specialty care clinics are relocating from the VA Medical Center.

The North Portland VA Clinic will consist of two separate buildings and will cover a total of 25,604 square feet, said Wade Vlosich, Director of the Oklahoma City HealthCare System. The facilities will employ 75 staff members.

Building 5, located at 3625 NW 56th Street, will house the Women's Health Clinic, Imaging, and Lab services. This relocation will provide the women's Veteran population with a facility outside of the VA Medical Center.

This move will offer an environment for female Veterans who may feel uncomfortable using the medical center due to past trauma.

Building 3, located at 3613 NW 56th Street, will house Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Chiropractic, Acupuncture, Orthopedics, Podiatry, Urology, Optometry, Ophthalmology, and the Optical Shop.

"We're really excited about this opportunity," Vlosich said. "It started about four years ago with the growing female population here in Oklahoma. Right now, we have about 10,000 female veterans and that continues to rise every year. We're netting about 400 female veterans every year. This year alone we've seen about 80,000 veterans, so almost 12%, 13% of our total population is female veterans. As we expand the services, we wanted to get a female specific clinic. We are proud of all that we've done to bring this to our female veterans."

Vlosich led tours of the two buildings during a ribbon cutting ceremony Sept. 30.

"Over here will be the check-in (in Building 5)," he said. "We'll have two entrances, one for females and then the other side is a commingled area where it'll be for men and women because we do have some men that need mammograms. We will still have every service. The only thing that will be different is that the female specific primary care teams will be here. All our primary care teams will have females in each one of the sites."

Vlosich said a survey was done about five years ago, and one the top requests was a one-stop shop for female veterans.

"One of the things they said they wanted was a one-stop shop, so when they come in, they can get pelvic floor, they can get GYN, they can get mammography, bone density," he said. "What they're going to be working on when you come in to say for a female exam, they will have a screening for all of these set up for one day. If you need to come in and get bone density mammography, all of that can be done in one day so you don't have to come out multiple times."

Vlosich said the North Portland clinics will also include a VA Express Care (same day walk-in) Clinic, including a VA-specific Ortho Express clinic.

"We're opening up two VA-specific Ortho express clinics because we have so many same day ortho needs that we'll have urgent, like an express same day ortho clinic," he said. "You don't have to go to primary care or anybody, you just walk in, and they can get your x-rays and get all that stuff done here."

The VA is the world's largest and most comprehensive provider of sensory aides and prosthetic devices. Veterans enrolled in the VA health care system and referred by a physical medicine and rehabilitation physician can receive a full range of services and equipment like:

- Artificial limbs and surgical implants, including artificial joints and pacemakers
- Wheelchairs and other medical devices
- Aids for Veterans who are blind, have low vision, or are hearing impaired
- Adaptive equipment and modifications to make your vehicle or home more accessible
- Other devices and services to help increase your mobility, dignity, and independence
- Clothing allowance for Veterans with devices that damage their clothing

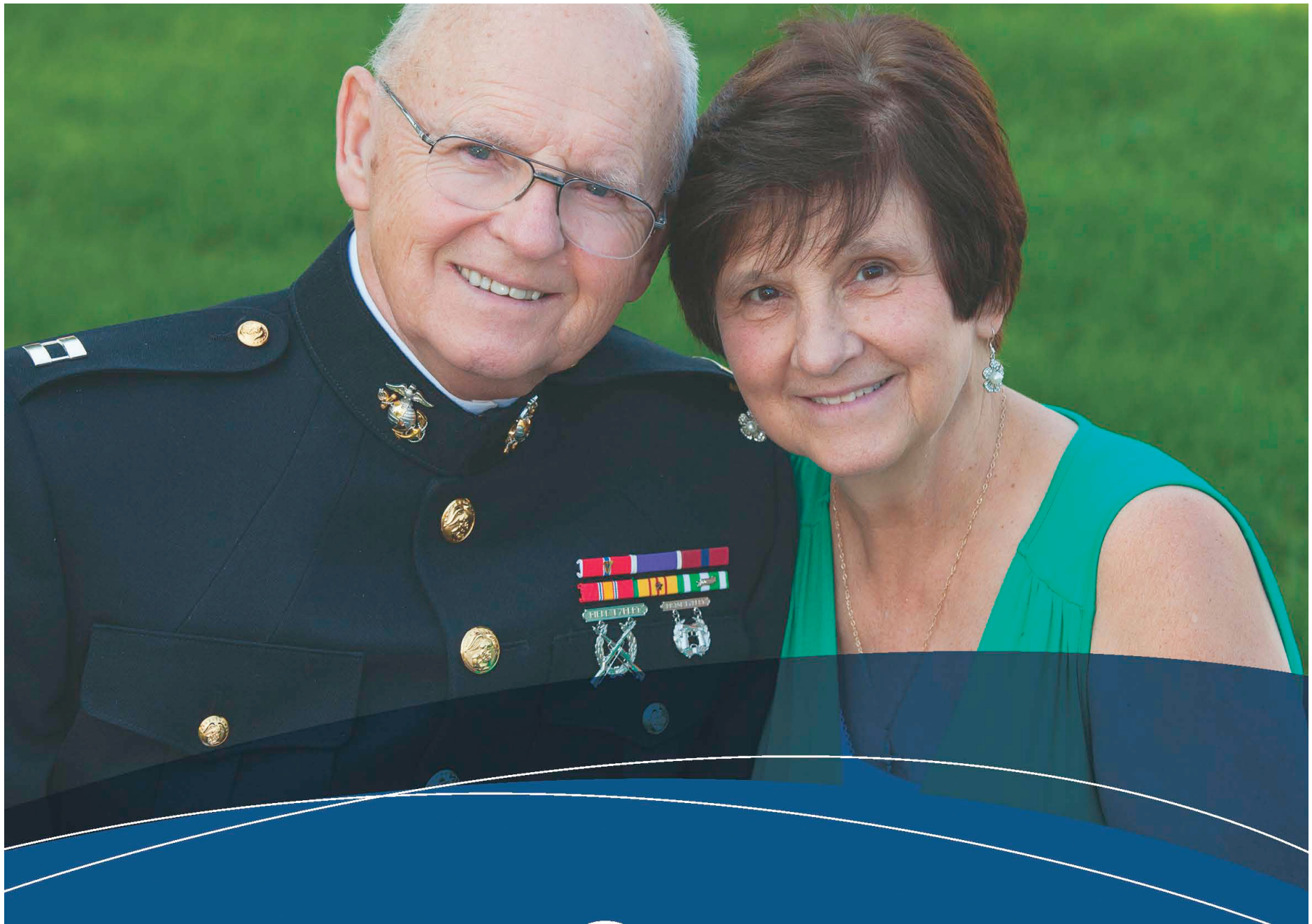
Vlosich said the North Portland clinics will have an orthotic space.

"We'll have both prosthetics," he said. "Instead of going up to the main campus and picking up prosthetic devices, you can come in here. There is a big ortho PT gym here and then an OT that will work in this space. This is part of just expanding those services overall."

Vlosich said the North Portland VA will be secure.

"There are some FBI and Homeland Security people in the building, so we've got a lot of that," he said. "We do have a VA police area. We have an armory as well." ●

story by Van Mitchell, staff writer



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Taking Passion in Coins to Next Level



Bill Norfleet has been collecting coins for years, and after retiring, he took his collecting to the next level by opening his business Brazito Coins and Collectibles, located at 2525 Northwest Expressway, Suite 222 in Oklahoma City.

"I've collected coins for a long time, and when I retired, I decided I'd just start selling some and buying some and trading back and forth," he said. "It keeps me off the sofa. It helps me to meet people and do things."

Norfleet sells/buying at coin shows, sells coins online, and meets with individuals by appointment only at his Oklahoma City office location.

"I'm not a high-pressure salesman at all," he said. "I'm not going to pressure them to sell them (coins). I just try to help them (with coin information/values). Hopefully they'll come back when they do want to sell them if they do."

Norfleet said the internet has changed the way coins are sold.

"The online section is taking over from the storefront business," he said. "Coin shows are not a storefront, but they're akin to them. It's face-to-face-stuff. I'm afraid that the (smaller) coin show deal is kind of dying."

Norfleet said there are still larger coin shows that attract buyers/sellers from across the country.

"One of the biggest ones in the country is in Orlando, Florida," he said. "We went to that one in January. It had 660 tables. We went to one a couple weeks ago in Houston. That's a pretty good size show with 120 tables. There was a lot going on there. A lot of people buy and sell. The bigger shows have many different things there, and you draw a whole lot more people."

Norfleet said to help better attendance at the Oklahoma coin shows, he is using email to help attract more attendees.

"We are trying something new. We're going to send out an email to about the first 1,000 people that are identified as having an interest in coins," he said. "We'll send out a few emails, one of them four weeks before the event and one another week or 10 days before the event. We'll see how that works."

Norfleet said his website features a variety of certified coins.

Certified coins have been graded by an authoritative third party like the Professional Coin Grading Organization (PCGS) or Numismatic Guarantee Company (NGC).

A coin that has been certified will come in a tamper-evident encapsulation or slab from the organization that certified and graded it. This slab will have the necessary information to verify the coin's grade and authenticity.

"A lot of what we have for sale are what are called certified coins, and they're in a plastic container," he said.

Norfleet said coin collectors have a wide variety of coin interests.

"It's just wide (coin interests)," he said. "Two of the most popular of all time are Morgan dollars and Peace dollars. The (Morgan) were made from 1878 to 1921. Now there were some years in the 1920's and 1930's when they weren't made because the price of silver got to where it didn't make sense to make a dollar with it. They made a few in 1934 and 1935. The Peace dollars were made from 1921 to 1935. Gold coins are popular. The Indian head two-and-a-half-, five- and ten-dollar Indian head gold coins. The Saint-Gaudens coins are popular."

Norfleet said he receives phone calls from people who are interested in selling their coins and inquiring about what they might be appraised at.

"We talk about what they have, and that gives me a good feel whether it's worth their time and mine for us to get together or not," he said. "I had one lady call and said she had a lot of foreign coins she was interested in getting appraised. I told her I didn't

handle foreign coins, but I gave her information on some people who do. Sometimes you get people who don't have any children or grandchildren, or as is my case, don't have any children or grandchildren who are interested in coins. That's true of a lot of people. We try to be helpful to them in figuring out how to make that decision, whether they want to sell them or keep them."

Norfleet said he has never lost interest in collecting coins.

"I just enjoy the hunt, but I've always enjoyed going to coin shows and taking a list with me of things that I want and looking for them," he said. "Sometimes you don't find what you are looking for. But a lot of times, you'll find something." ●

story by Van Mitchell, staff writer

For more information about coins call Norfleet at (405) 495-4000, email billnorfleet@hotmail.com or visit www.brazitocoinsandcollectibles.com



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Sapulpa's 100-Year-Old Marine Recalls War and Resilience

A Serious Start to an Interview
Stephens. "Sir, is there a story or two you want to share about your service?"

Mauch. "For the younger generation, World War II was terrible. I would like for them to know that. It's not something you would be anxious to get into…The young people need to know it's not like video games."

Stephens. "Please elaborate. Do you mean in general or some of the things you saw?"

Mauch. "You're constantly hoping you stay alive so you can come home and have the American dream to marry and have a family. And that's constantly on your mind."

Stephens. "How did your service or the war change you?

Mauch. "Yes. Physically, I was like 135 pounds. After I got through bootcamp, I'm about 175. I think a little bit stronger (chuckles). Mentally, you were kind of prepared because of the Drill Instructor. He instructed you on how tough you should be."

Stephens. "What would you say about how you did?"



A young Marine William Mauch poses for a picture during WWII. Photo by William Mauch



Mauch. "Well, you experience so many things that if you're 17 or 18 when you go in, you're very inexperienced. When you come out, you faced a totally new world of time while you were there."

Stephens. "Do you mean facing a world of life and death?"

Mauch. "Yes. The value of life. You're more confident if you're in the Marine Corps, especially. You're more confident in your life in the future, I think all the way through life after."

Stephens. "Anything else you'd like to say?"

Mauch. "Marry a lady that you love, for sure, and that will take good care (of you). Enjoy your family as long as possible."

William "Bill" Mauch, now 100, saw combat close up as he rode in amphibious assault landing tractors during two of the Pacific's most grueling battles - Peleliu and Okinawa.

Into the Heat of Peleliu



Left: In front, William Mauch. Behind him, from left, Glenna Howard and Patricia and David Mauch. Claremore.

Between Sept. 16 and Oct. 20, 1944, Mauch was deployed to the island of Peleliu, a small island in the Palau archipelago located some 500 miles east of the Philippines. He arrived just after the initial Sept. 15 landing. He said, "I was in reserve maintaining the radio systems of about a dozen tractors in our company."

Conditions were brutal. Temperatures soared to 115 degrees daily. "We drank contaminated water (from contaminated petroleum 55-gallon drums) and there was no way to bathe." Relief came when the Navy supplied water purified through osmosis systems. Mauch said they were often dehydrated and suffered from dysentery and jungle rot in the crotch and armpits. "It was total misery."

The Invasion of Okinawa

Five months later, Mauch "carried the first wave of troops to shore April 1, 1945", during the invasion of Okinawa - the final island battle before an anticipated invasion of mainland Japan. Once again, he rode in amphibious tractors formally named as Landing Vehicle, Tracked, LVT4.

Each LVT4, Mauch explained, "would haul about 25 or 30 (personnel) in the rear, and the front was the driver and the radio operator, and then the commander would be also aboard…You could communicate back and forth on the tractor…I was responsible for the radio intercom systems for 12 of those LVT tractors." He described how the vehicles were designed for transport and protection. "And then on the back was a drop tailgate, I'll call it, and the troops would come out there and the tractor would protect them more or less while they got out. Then we could haul supplies, ammunition and things like that. Your initial job was to get the troops ashore."

The Somber Duty of Burial

After the initial invasion of Okinawa, Mauch's duties took a somber turn. "About the third day that we got a dispatch to pick up a load, and that was about, I'll say six or seven dead bodies in body bags. We loaded them on our tractor…We'd haul them to the to the designated cemetery area." The temporary gravesites were later uncovered and the remains returned to the United States.

Living Under Fire

In a Sapulpa Times interview by Micah Coquette, "Lifelong Sapulpan Bill Mauch turns 100, inducted into the Centenarians of Oklahoma Hall of Fame," Mauch reflected, "'On that island, we were constantly under threat to our lives,'" adding, "'You have rifle fire, you have mortars, you have big guns and bombers every night. You have anti-aircraft shells that burst and can land on your tent. There's just all these ways you could get killed.'"

Building a Civilian Life

Discharged in Feb. 22, 1946, Mauch returned to Sapulpa. His father took him to an Odd Fellows meeting where he reconnected with his high school mechanical drawing teacher. "He saw me there and he said, 'Oklahoma Gas & Electric head called for a young man to train as an engineer…I'd like for you to go ahead…So I did and they hired me. And I spent three years as a junior engineer for OG&E."

Realizing he needed to use his GI Bill, Mauch enrolled at Oklahoma A&M, spending nearly five years earning a degree in architectural engineering. Afterwards, "I went to work in the aircraft industry for Douglas Aircraft in their structural engineering in Tulsa. Later, McDonald Douglas bought them. I worked for them for 33 years."

Love and Legacy

He married Helen in 1954, and together they celebrated 70 years of marriage before her passing in 2024. The couple raised four children and were blessed with six grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren. Today, William Mauch continues to live in his hometown of Sapulpa. ●

story and photo by Lt Col Richard Stephens, Jr., USAFR, Ret.

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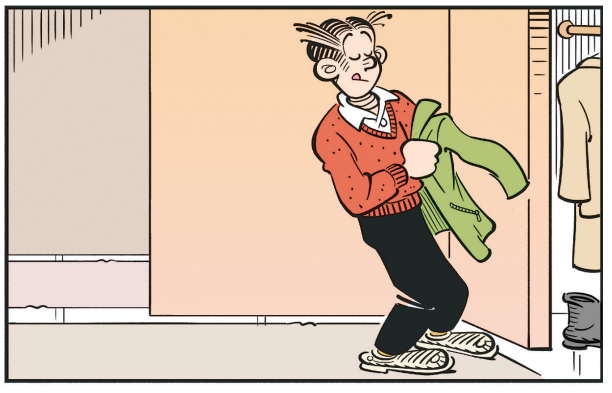





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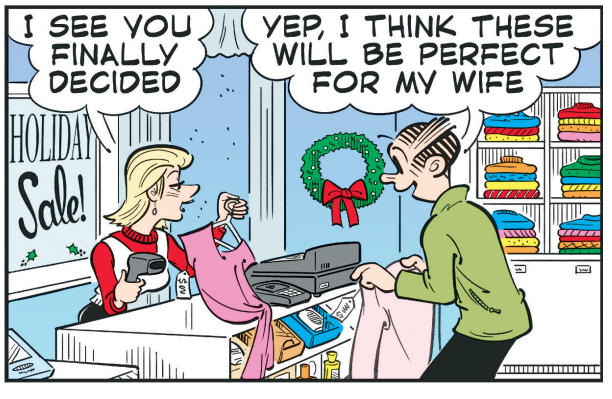

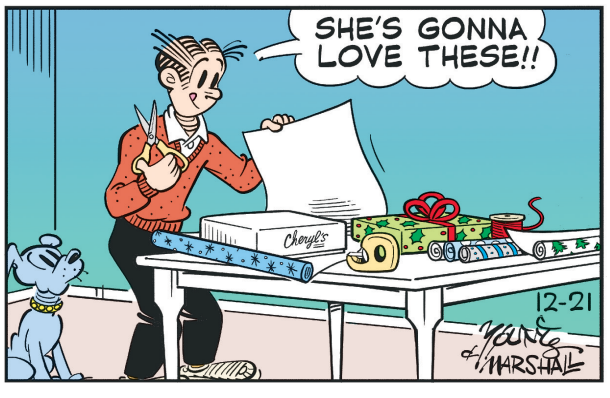

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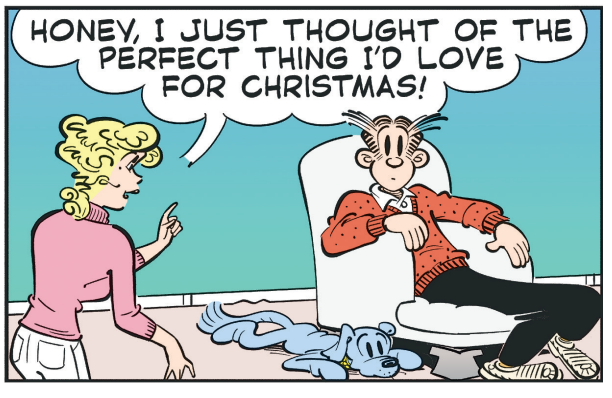



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