

## Hawaiian Airlines Shows Ohana Spirit

by Jacqueline Rychnovsky, Executive Director

In August 2023, I let you know that the Law Office of Shannon James, PLLC generously offered pro bono assistance to the Commissioned Officers Association (COA) in addressing the issue of baggage fee inequities faced by U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps officers. COA was excited to report to you that Southwest and United Airlines joined Allegiant and Spirit Airlines in offering waived baggage fees and/or priority seating for active duty and reserve officers. We vowed at that time to keep you updated with any additional progress made with Delta, American, Sun Country, Horizon, and Republic Airlines. I also shared that Hawaiian Airlines and Jet Blue were activity reviewing the request.



Recently, Steven Wilson, Assistant General Counsel for Hawaiian Airlines, shared that Hawaiian Airlines has updated their passenger service manual to include USPHS officers in their baggage fee exemption policy. Those of us familiar with the Hawaiian concept of the Ohana spirit know how it stresses the importance of family, friends, and community which extends to how Hawaiians view work and business. To Hawaiian Airlines, and to the Law Office of Shannon James, COA offers our sincere mahalo!

## PHS COF Coin Contest Winner

by Dave Corrigan, COA Deputy Director

The PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation for the Advancement of Public Health (COF) is proud to announce the winner of the 2024 Symposium Coin Contest. The coin was designed by CDR Joann Sents. CDR Sents, a therapist and the Neurocognitive Team Lead for TBI Services for DoD, incorporated the USPHS seal and this year's symposium theme *Inclusivity + Innovation: Reducing Disparities in the Service of Health*. When you see CDR Sents at the symposium, feel free to congratulate her on her talented work. These coins will be on sale at the 57th Annual Scientific and Training Symposium in Jacksonville, Florida from June 24th to June 27th. We look forward to all the unique designs for next year's symposium.



from the  
Executive  
Director



Jacqueline  
Rychnovsky,  
PhD, FAANP, CAE  
Captain (Ret.), Nurse Corps, US Navy

### Passages: Two Fair Winds and Following Seas, and a Welcome Aboard

I want to share bittersweet news this month concerning staff transitions at the Commissioned Officers Association (COA) and the PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation (COF).

In April, after two years of dedicated service, COA's Deputy Director, Dave Corrigan, will be leaving COA to embark on a new and exciting opportunity as the Director of Community Engagement for Congresswoman Madeleine Dean in Pennsylvania's 4th Congressional District. In this role, Dave will be instrumental in developing community, nonprofit, and business connections, as well as representing the Congresswoman at various district events. This opportunity presented itself unexpectedly, and while it was a difficult decision for Dave and his family, they decided to pursue the opportunity in support of their community. Dave has been an invaluable member of our team, playing a key role in strengthening our government relations program

see **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR** on page 18

# COA Member Benefits

## Capitol Hill Representation

Efforts on Capitol Hill continually support all Commissioned Corps officers – active, former, reserve, and retired

## Local Representation

COA Local Branches provide venues for meeting fellow officers and a forum for the discussion of issues within the Commissioned Corps

## Newsletter

Newsletter reports on monthly activities and items of interest of COA and the USPHS Commissioned Corps

## Ribbon

Authorized to be worn on the USPHS uniform by members in good standing when attending COA functions

## Insurance Programs

Low-cost insurance programs that may continue as long as your membership in COA remains current

## USF Online Programs

Discounted degree and certificate programs like PhD, DrPH, MPH, MSPH, and MHA

## NYMC Online MPH

50 percent discount for the online MPH and certificate programs

## Scholarship Programs

College scholarships for children, grandchildren, and spouses of COA members and high school seniors

## CPH Exam Discount

Deep member discount and free study guide for Certified in Public Health (CPH) Exam



## Legislative Update

by CAPT (Ret) Alan Echt, Chair, COA Legislative Affairs Committee

First things first: I'd like you all to take a few minutes to read Section 6 of Senator Duckworth's bill, S.2297 - Parity for Public Health Service Ready Reserve Act. You'll see that it addresses many of the parity issues that are of importance to COA members. That includes parental leave parity, by granting USPHS authority under Chapter 40 of Title 10 of the U.S. Code (parental leave is in Section 701 of Chapter 40). The Call to Action to ask your Senators to support this bill is still available on the COA website at <https://www.coausphs.org/COA/Advocacy/Ready-Reserve-Parity.aspx>. Do it now, and then spread the word.

COA has been very busy working for your interests. Mrs. Bettilou Taylor, our advocate from the firm of Taylor Strategies, and COA Deputy Director David Corrigan have been visiting Capitol Hill regularly to advocate on your behalf. On Feb 14, they had meetings on parental leave parity and Senator Duckworth's bill with staff members from the offices of Representatives Bacon and Houlahan, and staff the offices of Senators Murkowski, Casey, Gillibrand, and Hassan. On Feb 28, they met with members of the staffs of Senators Young, Duckworth, Lummis, and Representative Norton. They also met with Representatives Westerman's and Grijalva's staffs on HR. 6492 - To improve recreation opportunities on, and facilitate greater access to, Federal public land legislation. That bill provides measures

to improve the access of armed forces veterans to Federal lands for recreation. Deputy Director Corrigan and I met with staff from Representative Landsman's office on February 22 to discuss introducing a House companion bill to Senator Duckworth's bill. He agreed to do so and is currently seeking a Republican cosponsor.

In the next couple of weeks, Mrs. Taylor will schedule meetings with Senators Reed and Wicker and Representatives Smith and Rogers on issues within the jurisdiction of the National Defense Authorization Act, Senators Manchin, Barrasso, and Sinema on National Park passes, and Senator Sullivan and Representative Kiggans on the Pay our Troops Act.

You read in the last issue about COA's work with members in Massachusetts and Arizona on state-level advocacy issues. COA members in Delaware, South Carolina, and Virginia are working on parity with the armed forces in those states' taxation of retirement pay, and in Michigan on the issue of that state's recognition of USPHS officers as veterans. Because of COA's small staff, advocacy for state-level issues must be led by COA members in those states, but COA can and does provide guidance, beginning with our State Legislative Advocacy Guide, and including Calls to Action and meetings with state leaders, like our meeting with the Director of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Veterans Services.





# Board of Directors

## Members Always

By CDR James Gooch, MPH, REHS/RS, Chair of COA Board of Directors

This past month, I met up with a fellow officer for a chat. They arrived at our coffee date sporting a Members Only jacket. One look at that jacket was enough to conjure memories reminiscent of my youth and a reminder of the perineal cycle of fashion. It was also the source of this article, so please stay with me for a reflection. In 1975, Herb Goldsmith created the Members Only Jacket. The advertising tagline was “when you put it on, something happens.” In 2005, I purchased my first (and last) Members Only jacket from a thrift store in Knoxville, TN. The jacket was part of a Halloween costume themed around the 1980s. The jacket was something to behold – a khaki demur with popped collars, tapered sleeves, narrow epaulettes, collar strap, and knitted trim. While I’m still not certain what the collar strap is for, I did end up wearing that jacket for many years as both ironic nod to my 80s birth and functional light weight wind breaker that never wrinkled. At times, while thinking myself demur, I wondered if a jacket could simply be enough to confer my membership into the elite echelons of fashion. Dear reader, the answer simply put is no. However, that intrigue once again surfaced for me after seeing a fellow officer sporting this iconic (?) look. I asked myself, is the jacket enough to convey unique membership? In the case of many uniform services, clothing is enough to confer upon its owner the status and responsibilities of public service. As we have all likely experienced, that reception comes with many expectations and entitlements – which brings me finally to COA.

As you probably know if you are reading this article, COA is a membership-based organization. Membership is available to both officers and non-officers alike. Under Article III in the bylaws, COA recognizes members in the categories of active (O-3 and below and O-4 and above), life, and other (reserve, former officers, retired, students). This inclusive approach is intentional. Membership represents the foundation of COA. It is because of

members and to the benefit of members that COA exists. If you ask anyone here at COA, the relationship between COA and the members is not taken lightly. Since its inception in 1951 (and more informal origins going back to the 1920s), COA’s focus has been supporting and addressing issues pertaining to its members. In fact, in my tenure as a Board of Director and chair of the board, I am confident in saying that COA membership is revered above all other factors when engaging on broad and specific issues for officers. After all, membership for COA represents our lifeblood. Members provide standing to COA, ensuring our efforts with CCHQ and on the hill have representation to those key stakeholders. Membership is what keeps the organization’s mission and legal standing humming. At the national level, this entails a board of directors comprised of elected members and associated committees with selected volunteers. At the regional/local level, this is represented in the diversity of committees and structures that support specific social and community-based efforts within COA branches.

Outside of the fantastic staff at COA, it’s not an individual member or a group of members that keep this organization on its course. The issues facing us as officers, and by extension our beloved USPHS Commissioned Corps, are complex challenging, and extenuated beyond the ability for one generation of officers to fully address. We have to work incrementally at this progress and find the moments of opportunity when they come.

COA represents that measured long-term approach, serving as a living legacy. Serving as the conduit for present members to the untapped potential for future generations of USPHS officers. Those officers who come after us will stand on our shoulders and carry the torch. And so, I invite you again to renew your membership. And this time, I ask that you carry the message of membership to other officers who have yet to committed to COA. For with COA, “when you put it on, something happens.” Now excuse me while I go find that jacket in my closet.



## The Work of the Commissioned Officers Foundation (COF): The Start of our Strategic Planning Process for 2024-2028

by CAPT (Ret) Gene Migliaccio, President,  
COF Board of Trustees

We have come to the end of our 5-year strategic plan that ended in 2023 and we are working in earnest to complete the next plan for 2024 – 2028. Our target is to have a final draft ready for discussion and approval at our Board of Trustees meeting in June 2024 when we meet in-person at the symposium in Jacksonville, Florida.

We began our work at the close of 2023 and formed a COF Strategic Planning Team comprised of the COF Executive Committee, representatives from COA, and members of COA/COF staff. Together we worked with a facilitator to begin to answer the “Why” question– why does COF exist? The framework we are using to answer this question and others is based on the work of Simon Sinek called the Golden Circle. Its principles are deeply grounded in the tenets of human decision-making. Sinek’s Ted Talk on “how great leaders inspire action” is one of the top 10 viewed talks of all time – this talk includes the Golden Circle framework.

Our first face-to-face meeting was held January 2024 with a deep dive on our current vision and mission statements which are as follows: our vision is – advance public health and public health leadership for a healthier Nation; and, the

mission of COF - build leadership in public health through advocacy, education, research, partnerships, and program support. Here is where the work began to truly ask ourselves the questions of: (1) Why – the most important message leaders can communicate that eventually inspires others to action is based on the purpose of why an organization exists – it also is the basis of a strong value proposition that distinguishes COF; (2) How – answers the question of our values or what we as an organization hold dear; and, (3) What – this is what COF does – the services we provide. With these questions in front of us, we have drafted a new/revised vision, mission, and for the first time we created our values.

In mid-February we met virtually to work on our draft mission and vision statements. We focused on a framework by James Collins and Jerry Porras’s “Building Your Company’s Vision” as another approach which advances the concept of core ideology. COF’s Core Ideology is reinforced by, and lived through, Core Values (guiding principles) and Purpose (mission/why). When they accurately reflect the organization, the Core Philosophy is our authentic culture – what others see, experience, and, therefore, believe about COF. It is not aspirational – this is who we are.

Our focus during our work has always been on our officers (active/retires/reservists) and public health. Developing the organization’s Core Ideology is critical in imagining the future of COF. It defines the Foundation’s lasting character – what we stand for in the world. While the board and administrative leadership will change over time, an unchanging Core Ideology allows COF a steady point of navigation for whoever steers the organization.

In early March, I presented our process and progress on the strategic plan to COF’s Board of Trustees. The timeline is to work over the next several months on final drafts of the mission, vision, values and develop out our strategic goals and objectives and present a final draft to the Board in May for comments. A couple of interesting questions that we answered along the way to future scan (I would welcome your thoughts) were: (1) It is January 2030, The Wall Street Journal and The Washington Post have headlines about the PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation. What do you hope the headlines will say? and, (2) If you were to work on an article on COF – 50 years from today – what would it say? Through this column, I look to share our work as we finalize our Plan.

# USPHS Officers Assist Marine Corps Toys for Tots in Frederick, MD

by CDR Harold Sano, PharmD, MBA and  
CDR Candido Alicea, PhD

On December 9 and 12, 2023, CDRs Harold Sano and Candido Alicea assisted Marine Gunnery Sergeant (GySgt) Hamilton, the lead for the Frederick, MD, Toys for Tots (T4T) program, by organizing and leading two separate DC Commissioned Officer Associations (DCCOA) T4T events. Commissioned Corps officers volunteered on December 9, 2023, to sort toys by gender and age group in preparation for toy distribution for the following week to Frederick County families in need. On December 12, 2023, we organized our first-ever volunteer event to participate in the distribution of toys to the families. This was the 4th year members of DCCOA have volunteered for a Frederick, MD T4T event.

For the Saturday, December 9, 2023, T4T event, 17 USPHS officers and family members volunteered, including the USPHS mascot LCDR Abigail, to volunteer for a 4-hour shift to sort toys in a 30,000 square foot warehouse that had plenty of space to receive giant containers of unopened toys that were donated or purchased with donated funds. On this day, GySgt Hamilton secured over \$20,000 of merchandise from a nearby Target store that was delivered by a military tactical cargo truck. In addition to the new purchases from Target, several Vietnam Veterans, driving in a convoy of pickup trucks, off-loaded several boxes of new toys at the receiving dock. Our team stayed busy using carts and muscle to bring in the newly arriving toys. The donated and purchased toys included action figures, radio-controlled drones, cars, trains, dolls, board games, stuffed animals, stocking stuffers, and bicycles. Once the shipments were brought in, our volunteers separated the toys by child's age group, gender, and type of toy. While organizing the toys, we had the additional task of managing a running tally of the



Officers from DC COA participated in the toy sorting activity for the Marine Corps Toys for Tots Drive on December 12, 2023.

toys processed for inventory purposes as well as ensuring that young children received age-appropriate toys. Additional measures were taken to prevent potential returns at the retail establishments by crossing out price stickers and barcodes.

Over the four hours, we processed over 2,000 toys to be handed out in the Frederick community for the 2023 Holidays. Our team of volunteer officers also helped decorate the empty warehouse space into a warm holiday friendly space with seasonal decorations so the families arriving to receive toys would feel they were in a festive space.

For the Tuesday, December 12, 2023 T4T event, six USPHS officers participated in the distribution of toys to registered Frederick County, MD, families. When the team arrived before the 10 am shift, parents were already lined up to enter the warehouse. The line wrapped from the front of the building and around toward the back of the building. Parents arrived early in hopes of getting specific toys that their children wanted for Christmas before inventory ran out. Only one bicycle per family was allowed and 15 per distribution day. USPHS volunteers took

the presented wish list (shopping list) for each child and went shopping in the back of the warehouse where the toys were previously sorted by our Saturday volunteers. The shoppers used large plastic yard bags and grocery shopping carts to go down aisles of categorized toys by age, gender, and special toy categories (e.g., board games, books, radio-controlled toys), to load the bags based on the wish list. For example, a six- to nine-year-old was allowed seven toys in addition to a bicycle or scooter, if requested. Some officers were assigned to create a preselected group of toys for a specific age group and gender, so shoppers could go down the aisle and quickly load a stack of toys into the shopping cart bag to save time. In addition to trying to honor each child's wish list, the shoppers also picked up a stocking stuffer, one stuffed animal, one age-appropriate book, and one age-appropriate art product.

Volunteering for the T4T events was very rewarding knowing we helped families-in-need have a wonderful Christmas. All the volunteers said they will do it again next year.

# Update: 2024 Scholarships and Fellowship Opportunities and Updates

by Annette Beadle, MSN, RN, COF Grants Manager

As announced in the January-February 2024 edition of Frontline, the application period for the Family Member Scholarships is from March 11 to May 5, 2024. These opportunities are offered to high school, undergraduate and graduate students, who are family members of a Commissioned Officer Association (COA) member. The scholarships are funded by active-duty and retired USPHS members, local COA branches and others. For more information, see the scholarship page on COF's website.

At the direction of the COF President and the COF Director, the RDML Mishoe Diversity "Believe" Scholarship will now follow the same timeline as the Family Member Scholarships; March 11 to May 5, 2024. The Believe Scholarship will now be embedded in the application for the Family Member Scholarship. The RDML Mishoe application will be embedded in the Family Member application once the two cycles open on March 11, 2024. These scholarships are offered to high school seniors and students from underrepresented populations in the health sciences and

research. The applicants must also be sponsored by a current COA member. The goal of this scholarship is to support RDML Mishoe's legacy in supporting those who demonstrate resiliency and tenacity in overcoming challenges. For more information, see the scholarship page on COF's website.

The Foundation relies on a team of COA members to serve as reviewers for the various award submissions. Typically, each volunteer will be assigned to score 5-10 applications; depending on the number of submissions received. Each application will have set criteria and will be scored using a numerical rubric. Reviews are usually completed during the month following the award cycle. The time commitment varies based on the type and number of awards assigned to each reviewer.

If you are interested in volunteering to serve as a reviewer, please send an email with "Award Reviewer" in the subject line and specifying which program you're interested in, by May 8, 2024, to Annette at [abeadle@coausphs.org](mailto:abeadle@coausphs.org).

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# An Engineer Officer's Salute: Commemorating Veterans at Wreaths Across America

by LT Hom N. Sharma, PhD

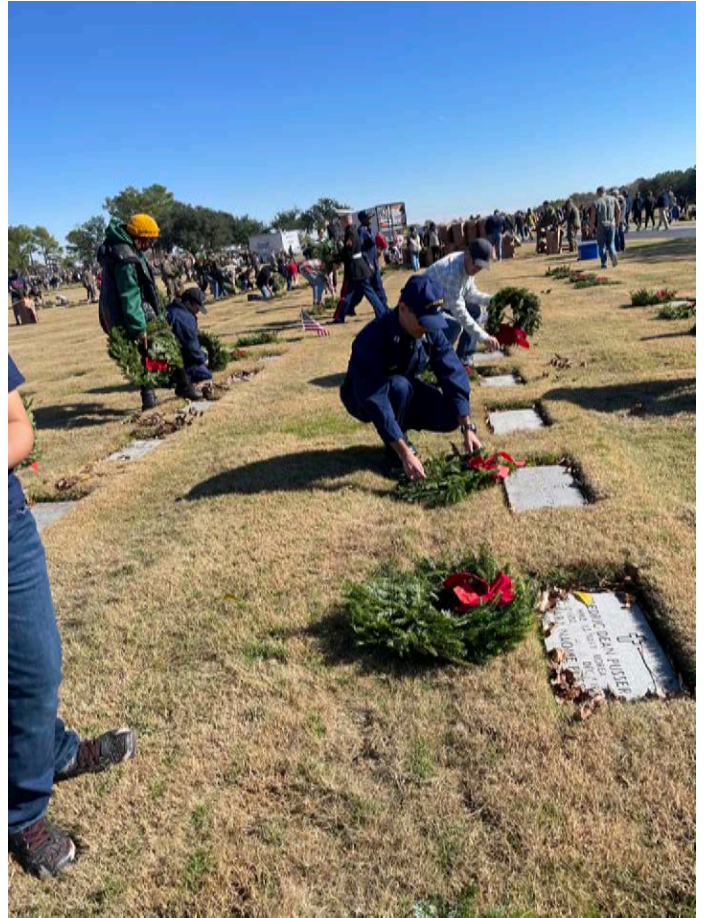
On December 16, 2023, I was honored to participate in the Wreaths Across America event at the Houston National Cemetery. This solemn occasion, dedicated to celebrating the memory of over 90,000 veterans by laying wreaths on the graves, was a touching reminder of the sacrifices made for our freedom and safety.

As a United States Public Health Service (USPHS) engineer officer, I was part of a unique group of over 14 USPHS officers at the ceremony. I felt a profound sense of pride and responsibility as the only engineering officer representing EPAC at the event. This event was particularly special as my family - my wife and our 7-year-old son - joined me to help lay the wreaths. This family participation highlighted the event's inclusive and community-driven spirit and served as an opportunity to educate and instill respect and honor in the younger generation.

The ceremony featured several elements that added to its solemnity, including a majestic flyover by the Commemorative Air Force and performances by local color guard and honor guard chapters. Including Korean War veterans from the Lone Star Chapter, who were presented with wreaths, was a moving reminder of the sacrifices made across various generations.

The initial ceremony included representatives from all branches of the military. However, the absence of a representative from the USPHS Commissioned Corps was notably felt. The USPHS has served alongside other military branches for over 200 years. As we look forward to future ceremonies, I hope to see the USPHS representation rightfully included at the initial ceremony, standing alongside other military branches in a unified salute to our nation's heroes.

In conclusion, my participation in the Wreaths Across America event at the Houston National Cemetery, along with my family, was not just an act of duty but a profound personal commitment. This experience, shared with thousands of others, reinforced



*LT Sharma participated in the Wreath Laying Ceremony at the Houston National Cemetery on December 16th, 2023*

the importance of remembering and honoring the service and sacrifices of our veterans. It was a powerful message of respect and gratitude, echoing beyond the cemetery's boundaries and into the hearts of all present.

In Officio Salutis!

Machinatores Vitae: Paratus, Volens, Peritus!

# Reinvigorating the relationship between the U.S. Public Health Service and HOSA-Future Health Professionals

by CAPT Skip Payne, MSPH, REHS/RS, CPH, APSCP, CHEP and CAPT (retired) Rob Tosatto, RPh, MPH, MBA

The Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service (COA) and the PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation for the Advancement of Public Health (COF) are proudly working with HOSA-Future Health Professionals (HOSA) to engage and support students and provide pathways to public health information and careers. We have also engaged with the Office of the U.S. Surgeon General (OSG) to ensure alignment with U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps activities.

HOSA is a student-led global organization that provides a distinctive program of leadership development, motivation, and recognition for middle school, secondary, postsecondary, and collegiate students enrolled in health and biomedical science programs. The rapidly changing health industry needs dedicated workers who, in addition to their technical skills, are people oriented and capable of being a leader and a member of a clinical or non-clinical health team. HOSA recognizes the importance of providing students with instruction beyond the technical skills required for entry into a health career and uniquely prepares students for higher education and entry-level certification. HOSA provides opportunities for students to develop, practice and refine their technical, leadership, and teamwork skills to transition seamlessly from education to a healthcare or public health career.

OSG began its relationship with HOSA in 2006 after then Deputy Surgeon General Kenneth Moritsugu was the keynote speaker at the HOSA National Leadership Conference. RADM Moritsugu was excited about the potential of these future health leaders, and asked Captain Rob Tosatto, then Director of the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) Program (which was housed in the OSG), to explore a partnership opportunity. For over a decade, that partnership grew and expanded to include other aspects of the USPHS and other agencies within the



*LT Schuyler Price (foreground) and CAPT Mehran Massoudi (background) presenting the Public Health and Medical Reserve Corps awards at the 2023 HOSA International Leadership Conference.*

Department of Health and Human Services. For example,

- MRC units and HOSA chapters were encouraged to partner at the local level to promote youth engagement in public health preparedness and response activities;
- HOSA created several public health-related competitive events (public health, MRC partnership, epidemiology, healthy lifestyles);
- COA branches worked with HOSA leaders to provide judges for state-level competitive events;
- The MRC program office created and sponsored national-level week-long “experiences” for HOSA members and advisors; and
- USPHS officers from various agencies served as speakers, exhibitors and judges at HOSA International Leadership Conferences.

Engagement between the USPHS and HOSA decreased over the past few years as the initial “champions” either retired or moved to other positions. This is unfortunate as HOSA’s mission is especially critical now, considering the acute shortages of qualified medical and public health workers nationwide. Furthermore, the importance of engaging future health

professionals in public health has been amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. Current HOSA members are also, potentially, future Public Health Service active and reserve officers and leaders.

In early 2023, COF and COA began to examine how they could help further the relationship between USPHS and HOSA. Last March, the COF Board of Trustees approved a proposal to support youth engagement and will fund HOSA for scholarships and sponsorship of their public health competitive event.

In addition, a USPHS-HOSA workgroup was established. Active and retired USPHS members include: RDML Paul Reed, retired RDML Pam Schweitzer, CAPTs Skip Payne and David Lau, retired CAPT Rob Tosatto, CDRs Colleen Scott and Margie Mahool, LCDRs Stephanie Chiang, Sophie Yang, Trisha Chandler, Trey Draude, and Bryan Wilson. HOSA representatives are: Dr. Rahma Mkuu (Alum), Elizabeth Carnesi-Hudson (Alum and state advisor), and Aashna Ravi (executive committee member).

The workgroup has developed a work plan with two main goals:

1. Reinvigorate and enhance the relationship between the USPHS and HOSA at all levels

see **HOSA** on page 10



# U.S. Stockpiled Chemical Weapons: The End of an Era

by CAPT Timothy Jiggins, CAPT Danielle Mills, and CDR Gino Begluitti

"I watched figures running wildly in confusion over the fields. Greenish-gray clouds swept down upon them, turning yellow as they traveled over the country blasting everything they touched and shriveling up the vegetation. Then theree staggered into our midst French soldiers, blinded, coughing, chests heaving, faces an ugly purple color, lips speechless with agony, and behind them in the gas-soaked trenches, we learned that they had left hundreds of dead and dying comrades." (Fitzgerald, 2008)

The description above paints the horrific scene witnessed by a British soldier in World War I during a chlorine gas attack against Allied troops. It killed more than 10,000 soldiers within minutes.

Chemical weapons have the devastating potential to kill and maim in a totally inhumane way and cause severe suffering. For 40 years, CDC worked tirelessly alongside other government agencies to eliminate the United States' decades-old chemical weapons stockpile and recovered chemical warfare materiel. We finally accomplished our goal on July 7, 2023. You can sleep sounder tonight knowing the world is a safer place.

From World War I to the early 1960s, the United States stockpiled nearly 40,000 tons of nerve agents and blister agents (CDC, 2013). In March 1968, an aerial test release of the nerve agent VX at Dugway Proving Grounds killed 6,000 sheep in nearby Skull Valley, UT (Lukey, 2007). This event led to Public Law 91-121 in 1970, which directed the Office of the Surgeon General to review Department of Defense transport, testing, and disposal of lethal chemical agents and to recommend actions to protect the public's health and safety (CDC, 1988).

CDC's involvement with chemical weapons elimination began in 1983, when the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Office of the Surgeon General delegated Public Law (50USC 1521) to the CDC. This law required CDC to provide guidance and recommendations to protect the safety and health of the communities and the workers during the destruction of stockpiled and recovered or buried chemical weapons.

After years of design, construction, testing, and operations, we have safely destroyed all these obsolete weapons. CDC oversaw 22 million person-hours of work on the project with no lost time to accidents. Many officers of the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) were instrumental in this effort. Serving alongside our civilian and sister service members, USPHS officers advised on worker health and safety, emergency preparedness and response, and community guidance to protect workers and the public.

Commissioned Corps Officers of the USPHS assigned in the CDC's Chemical Demilitarization Program



A group of USPHS Commissioned Corps Officers and civil servants who worked with CDC on the demilitarization activities through the years gathered on 1/23/2024 to celebrate the complete destruction of the US Chemical Weapons stockpile and 40 years of success in the Chemical Weapons Elimination program.

Name	Rank	Category
Sanford "Sandy" Leffingwell	CAPT	Medical
S. Jay Smith	CAPT	HSO
Marshall Gray	CAPT	EHO
Ken Holt	CAPT	EHO
Harvey Rogers	CAPT	Engineer
Paul Joe	CAPT	Medical
Timothy Jiggins	LT	EHO
Gino Begluitti	CDR	EHO
Sue Sloop	LCDR	Scientist
Shaun McMullen	LCDR	HSO
Danielle Mills	CDR	EHO

On January 23, 2024, CDC held a presentation celebrating 40 years of success in the Chemical Demilitarization Program and the complete destruction of the U.S. chemical stockpile. Partner contributions and recognition included representation from HHS, USPHS, the Department of Defense, the Department of State, the Department of the Army, and the White House.

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# COA Bylaws Update

by CDR Neelam Ghiya, MPH and LCDR Rachel Forche, MPH, Co-Chairs of the COA Constitution and Bylaws Committee.

On January 17, 2024, after careful review and discussion, the COA Board of Directors voted to approve 16 updates to the COA bylaws. These updates can be found incorporated into the current version of the bylaws posted to the [COA website](#). Many of the revisions were recommended by COA's legal counsel. The updates were to clarify and better align existing bylaw language to current COA, USPHS, and State of Maryland's requirements, policies, and procedures. The language changes removed redundant, conflicting, and outdated information. The updates utilized corrected and gender-neutral terminology and plain language. As an overview, some of the amendments were in regard to life membership, board of directors'

members, e-voting, meeting quorum, time periods for annual audits and lapsed membership payments, and Ready Reserve members' rights. The previous Change Record was removed at the end, as well. The COA bylaws should now be easier for members to follow. The COA Constitution and Bylaws committee will continue to monitor anything that may impact these bylaws in the future. Otherwise, another in-depth review for updates is not required for another couple years. However, simple language changes that *do not affecting content* can be addresses on an ongoing basis, if needed. Last year, an all-member vote determined that the Board of Directors can make future bylaws changes to take the burden of constantly voting off the shoulders of COA's members. The COA Board of Directors takes this obligation seriously and will ensure any future bylaws changes best represent the interests of COA's membership.

## HOSA from page 8

2. Provide opportunities for HOSA members to learn about public health and public health careers (including the USPHS Commissioned Corps), and increase the number of HOSA members interested in public health careers

To meet these goals, the workgroup is exploring a variety of activities to be conducted over the coming years. In the

meantime, we would appreciate hearing from USPHS active, reserve and retired officers (email [robtosatto@yahoo.com](mailto:robtosatto@yahoo.com)) who:

- are a HOSA alum,
- have participated in past activities between USPHS and HOSA;
- are interested in future activities between USPHS and HOSA; or

- are interested in supporting the activities of the workgroup.

There is an extraordinary and crucial need to guide, support, and grow future health and public health professionals. The partnership between the USPHS and HOSA is a direct path to building such a legacy relationship. We hope all officers will support this initiative.

## *In Memoriam—Dan Clutch.*

*Dan Clutch, Senior Advisor for the Public Health Service Board for Correction of Records, passed away recently. Mr. Clutch was instrumental in forging the PHS BCMR into a viable Correction's Board. He almost single-handedly led what was a dormant institution into a valuable body that served both the Commissioned Officers Corps and the Public Health Service. He did so with grace.*

*Dan Clutch's presence and institutional and personal integrity will be sorely missed. Our offices extend condolences to those he served with his colleagues, his friends, his family, and the Commissioned Officers and the Public Health Service he served so honorably.*

*On a personal note, I will miss his care and concern for the charge he was given.*

**He was—without a doubt—one of the good guys.**

David P. Sheldon



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# DC Metro SGET Impacts Health Education at RAM Event in Largo

by LCDR Courtney Wood, MEd, CCC-SLP, CBIS, CEEL

In honor of Veterans Day weekend, 15 Public Health Service officers from Prevention through Active Community Engagement (PACE) and Surgeon General's Education Team (SGET) joined together to provide health education to underserved community members in Largo, Maryland, during a Remote Area Medical (RAM) clinic from November 10 to 12, 2023. RAM is a non-profit provider of free pop-up clinics, providing no-cost dental, vision, and medical services to underinsured and uninsured individuals within a short timeframe. The RAM clinic in Largo, MD, was a collaborative partnership with RAM, Commissioned Corps Headquarters (CCHQ) Preparedness and Exercise Program and The Links Incorporated (community host group). A total of 55 Public Health Service officers and one Air National Guard member supported the clinic, which delivered \$160,689 worth of dental, medical, and vision services to 417 patients. The clinic was held at Prince George's County Community College.

The DC Metro SGET team led the planning and organization of the health education portion of the RAM mission. Prior to the event, the DC Metro SGET leadership team held informational sessions with the volunteers, liaised with the community host group, ensured volunteers completed pre-requisite trainings, and conducted practice sessions for volunteers to rehearse the presentations.

During the RAM event, educators focused on reducing health misinformation in two crucial areas: importance of vaccinations and opioid overdose response. They provided essential health education about vaccine benefits, recognizing signs of opioid overdose, and how to use Narcan nasal sprays if they think of an opioid overdose is happening. The team was spread out into different areas – some were stationed at the three table booths located outside the dental clinic, near the vision clinic and in front of the medical clinic. Others floated in the patient waiting areas. The individual health education encounters were brief but meaningful. A few DC Metro SGET members conducted 1-hour opioid overdose response group presentations at the Prince George's County Community College continuing education building to members of The Links Incorporated and visiting students. Participants developed better understanding



*CDR Rebecca Cohen and LCDR Hanah Pham educate RAM event participants on how to safely administer Narcan. Community members also were shown how to get free Narcan dispensers in the area.*

of how vaccinations helped promote better health. They gained confidence on how to stop an opioid overdose by practicing administering Narcan nasal sprays on silicone face models while learning how to identify the signs of an opioid overdose.

Overall, the participating Public Health Service officers made significant impact on the community. The DC Metro SGET's educational actions raised awareness on the benefits of vaccinations and improved knowledge on signs of opioid overdose and how to respond. Collectively, 1,125 health education encounters were conducted at the RAM event.



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# Spiritual Wellness

CDR Katrina Redman, MT, SPOC, M.Div., PBCC

## Tough Breaks

I know that you're wondering why there was no column in the last volume of Frontline. Please allow me to explain.

With great enthusiasm, I moved to Alderson, West Virginia on December 2, 2023. I started my new assignment the next day. I was tired, but I was eager to begin my new role as a chaplain at FPC Alderson. My first week here was FANTASTIC! I have the privilege of working with a very knowledgeable team who loves to laugh as much as I do. My first day off was a Friday since I was mirroring my supervisors schedule for training purposes. I was busy all day on Friday decorating my new home for Christmas. I was so happy that I decided NOT to wait for the helper that was coming and put my outdoor angel up by myself (not my best decision). I got the ladder out and ascended it with glee to run a power cord. Unfortunately, I had set up the ladder in the gravel (an unstable base). In an instant, I was parallel to the ground and descending quickly. Half of me landed on the concrete carport fracturing my wrist and my elbow (ouch).

So, in short, I was on sick leave for a month. I was SO disappointed! I had been so eager to get to work and excited to learn new things, and then I had to sit on the sidelines. It was tough. I felt horrible for making such an important decision without even considering the risk factors. Has that ever happened to you? Have you ever made a split-second decision that didn't turn out well? Most of us have. It's an awful feeling, and it carries emotional baggage that can impact how we view our circumstances and how we treat others.

As USPHS officers, we make decisions that affect not only ourselves, but our fellow officers and the people that we serve. Sometimes we "put the ladder in the gravel" and make a decision without considering the impact that it will make for others. If you are carrying the emotional baggage of a bad decision, your spiritual practices are a great way to help you to pick yourself up off of the concrete and heal your wounds. It is important not to lay there. Recovery doesn't mean that the event never happened, it just gives you the ability to put it behind you.

May we all use our "tough breaks" to make us spiritually stronger and wiser. I sincerely apologize for not turning in an article for last month's issue.

### Education: Bones

"Throughout much of human history, bones have been associated not with death but with life. In many cultures, people actually believe bones are the seat of the vital principle or even the soul. As the locus of life, bones have mystic powers ranging from cure and divination to birth and rebirth." Taken from Mark C. Taylor's "Sacred Bones: What remains." Cabinet Magazine, 28, 2007-2008.

<https://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/28/taylor.php>

### Spiritual Exercises

1. Article: <https://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/28/taylor.php>
2. Journal article: The Ethical Dilemma Facing Conservation: Care and Treatment of Human Skeletal Remains and Mortuary Objects by Gary S. McGowan and Cheryl J. LaRoche <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3179991>
3. Book: The Sacred Bones by Michael Byrnes

Questions? Comments? Contact me at [khredman@hotmail.com](mailto:khredman@hotmail.com).



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# Serving and Connecting: A USPHS Commissioned Corps Officer's Journey from the West to the East Coast

by CDR Sean K. Bennett, LCSW, BCD

As a dedicated U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps officer, my commitment to service and community engagement has been a driving force throughout my career. For the majority of 2023, I had the privilege of being stationed in the vibrant city of San Diego, California, where I was an active participant in the SoCal Commissioned Officer Association (SoCal COA). The experiences and connections forged during my time in San Diego laid the foundation for a seamless transition to the dynamic DMV (District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia) area later that year.

My involvement with the SoCal COA was marked by a series of impactful community service activities aimed at addressing the pressing needs of the local community. Notably, I contributed to packaging over 70,000 pounds of food for the Feed San Diego food bank, a collaborative effort that directly benefited local families facing food insecurity. Engaging in a cleanup activity at La Jolla public beach allowed me to witness the positive impact of collective action in preserving and beautifying public spaces. Additionally, I participated in the inaugural memorial 5K organized by SoCal COA to honor a fallen USPHS officer, a solemn yet meaningful occasion that highlighted the sense of duty and camaraderie within the USPHS Commissioned Corps community.

In September of 2023, my journey led me to the DMV area on the East Coast, where I promptly immersed myself in local COA branches in Washington, D.C. and Baltimore. Recognizing the importance of maintaining a spirit of service and collaboration, I

wasted no time volunteering for community events that aligned with my commitment to making a positive impact.

One such event was the public screening of *The Invisible Corps: In Officio Salutis* at the University of Maryland on October 18, 2023, where I actively participated in discussions and educational sessions that aimed to raise awareness about the diverse roles and contributions of the Commissioned Corps. My dedication to mental health advocacy was further evident in my participation in the Out of Darkness Community Walk sponsored by the American Association for Suicide Prevention. This event not only underscored the significance of mental health awareness but also highlighted the power of community support in fostering resilience and preventing suicide.

In support of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, I joined the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Awareness Month Virtual 5k/10k. This event, organized in collaboration with the local COA, exemplified the commitment to health and wellness within the USPHS Commissioned Corps and served as a poignant reminder of the collective strength that comes from unity and shared purpose.

My journey from the West to the East Coast reinforced a fundamental truth: no matter where you are stationed, connecting with your local COA branch is a vital avenue for meaningful engagement and service. COA not only provides a platform for professional development, it also serves as a catalyst for positive change in the lives of those we serve. Through collective action and a commitment to service, USPHS officers can make a lasting difference in the communities they serve, leaving an indelible mark on the broader landscape of public health.

## EPA Develops New Interim Policy to Credit Servicemembers' Prior Service Time for Leave Accrual Purposes

by CAPT (Ret) Michael Stover, P.E.

In the past, United States Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps officers who retired from active duty and sought employment in the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as a civil servant faced a disappointing reality. If the officer was successful in navigating the hurdles of the application process, including being referred by EPA's Shared Service Center to the selecting official for employment consideration, undergoing an interview, and then receiving a tentative offer of employment, the agency has in the past taken the unwavering position of offering only the minimum leave accrual rate (4 hours per pay period for annual leave) to the candidate, despite the officer having 20 to 30 years of prior service.

This was standard practice for EPA despite [5 CFR § 630.205](#): Credit for prior work experience and experience in a uniformed service for determining annual leave accrual rate and [OPM](#)

[Policy Guidance](#): Creditable Service for Annual Leave Accrual for Non-Federal Work Experience and Experience in the Uniformed Service, which allowed for:

"the head of an agency or his or her designee may, at his or her sole discretion, [to] provide credit for active duty uniformed service that otherwise would not be creditable under [5 U.S.C. 6303\(a\)](#) for the purpose of determining the annual leave accrual rate of an employee who is a retired member of a uniformed service as defined by [38 U.S.C. 4303](#)."

EPA's standard practice not to consider a retired service member's service time as creditable for leave accrual purposes was, according to the agency, because EPA did not have a policy to implement 5 CFR § 630.205. Therefore, EPA offered retired officers the minimum leave accrual rate as if the candidate were a new federal employee at the agency. This practice was strictly

see **EPA POLICY** on page 17

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# Exploring the Advantages of Leading a Poster Presentation at the USPHS Scientific & Training Symposium

by LT Christine Nappa, LCSW, BCD

The 12th Annual Poster Competition at the 2024 U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Scientific & Training Symposium presents a unique opportunity for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to showcase their impactful work in public health. The Symposium, set to take place from June 24 to 27, 2024, at the Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront in Jacksonville, FL, invites USPHS officers to submit abstracts for the Poster Session. This article explores the myriad benefits of leading a poster presentation at the Symposium.

**Showcasing Impactful Work:** Participating in the Poster Session allows individuals to spotlight their contributions to public health. Whether it's original research, strategic initiatives, policy changes, program evaluations, or case studies, the Symposium provides a platform to present work that has tangible and measurable impacts on the health and safety of the nation.

**Networking Opportunities:** The Symposium hosts a diverse audience of professionals, including USPHS officers, public health partners, researchers, and policymakers. Leading a poster presentation creates an avenue for networking with like-minded individuals, fostering collaborations, and establishing connections that can be invaluable for future projects.

**Contributing to the Symposium Theme:** "Inclusivity + Innovation: Reducing Disparities in the Service of Health": By aligning with the symposium theme, presenters can showcase how their work contributes to reducing health disparities. Whether through innovative approaches or inclusive practices, the Symposium aims to highlight strategies that advance health equity, making it an ideal platform to share initiatives that align with this year's theme.

**Professional Development:** Presenting a poster at a national symposium enhances professional development. It provides an opportunity to receive constructive feedback from peers and experts in the field, aiding in refining research methodologies and communication skills. This experience contributes to the presenter's growth as a USPHS officer.

**Visibility and Recognition:** The Symposium attracts attention from key stakeholders and decision-makers in public health. Leading a poster presentation provides visibility for the presenter's work and offers the chance to gain recognition and acknowledgment for their contributions to the field.

**Knowledge Sharing:** Participating in the Poster Session facilitates the exchange of knowledge and best practices. Attendees can learn from each other's experiences, challenges, and successes, contributing to the collective advancement of public health initiatives.

Leading a poster presentation at the USPHS Scientific & Training Symposium offers several benefits, from showcasing impactful work to fostering professional development and networking. As the Symposium explores the theme of "Inclusivity + Innovation: Reducing Disparities in the Service of Health," participants have a unique opportunity to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on advancing health equity and promoting the well-being of the nation. Submitting an abstract for consideration is not just an opportunity but an investment in the future of public health.

For tips on presenting your poster, visit: <https://www.phscof.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/USPHS23PosterTips.pdf>

To submit an abstract for this year's Poster Session, visit: <https://www.phscof.org/presenter-guidance/#Posters>

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## **EPA POLICY** from page 15

applied by the agency even if the officer served for years through a detail to the EPA or other agency prior to retirement, which led to a difficult decision by the officer: either (1) accept the offer and the accompanying minimum leave accrual rate (and accept the reality that it would take 3 years to earn a rate of 6 hours per pay period, and 15 years to earn the maximum of 8 hours per pay period), or (2) decline the position and seek instead other employment that provides a more accommodating work-life balance.

This all changed in May 2023 when during a certain hiring process at that time, EPA issued an [Interim Policy](#) on Annual Leave Accrual for Non-Federal or Uniformed Service Work Experience. Under this policy, EPA can now consider providing service credit

under certain circumstances for leave accrual purposes to newly appointed employees based on prior non-Federal or active-duty uniformed service work experience.

While this new interim policy will not allow for retroactively credited service time, it will greatly benefit not only retired USPHS Commissioned Corps officers interested in employment with EPA, but also retired officers from other uniformed services who have dutifully served the nation and now can rightly receive credit for their prior service time and the accompanying commensurate leave accrual rate.

Link for interim policy: <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:VA6C2:51301f11-8dca-4dec-a260-4c262a1b2742>

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR** from page 1

while contributing to the success of numerous projects. His passion, dedication, and leadership have left a lasting impact on COA. While we are sad to see him go, we are excited for Dave as he takes on this new challenge. Please join me in expressing our heartfelt appreciation for his hard work and wishing him the best in his future endeavors. We also want to offer Dave early congratulations, as he is tracking to graduate with his Master of Public Health (MPH) degree from Gwynedd Mercy University in May 2024.

Over the next few weeks Dave will focus on turnover of his responsibilities, including the planning of the Retirement Seminar, Legislative Affairs Committee and Government Relations activities, attendance at Officer Basic Course, Spring grant programs, and other projects. He will continue to support COA in a contracting role for Frontline newsletter support, so we will still have him around for a bit.

Next, COF's Grants Manager, Lynn Abrahamson, MPH, RN, has retired following an illustrious 45-year career in public health. Over the past three years, Lynn played a crucial part in creating operational efficiencies, expanding the grants and scholarships peer review systems, all while maintaining effective communication with multiple applicants. Her dedication to assisting scholarship and grant recipients in executing their projects has left a lasting impact on our community. Throughout her professional career, Lynn held various leadership positions, including Director of a local health department and Director of Community Health Services for several municipal and county health departments. Her commitment to public health extended beyond our organization, as she served on numerous boards supporting the public library system, the American Public Health Association, and Youth Journalism International.

As Lynn enters retirement, she looks forward to pursuing her passion for tennis, engaging in additional nonprofit volunteer activities, expanding her art projects through mixed media and collage, and taking much deserved vacations, both stateside and overseas. We express our gratitude to Lynn for her outstanding contributions and wish her a fulfilling retirement.

Filling Lynn's big shoes will be CAPT (retired) Annette Beadle USN, MSN, who will provide contract support several days per week



*CAPT (Retired) Annette Beadle will be supporting the PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation several days a week to manage various grants and scholarship programs.*

to support the foundation's grants and scholarships programs. Annette retired from the U.S. Navy Nurse Corps in 2015 following a highly successful 30-year career. While on active duty, Captain Beadle held a wide variety of clinical and leadership assignments in both inpatient settings in the states as well as overseas. Her operational assignments included Operation Desert Storm, Fleet Surgical Team and Medical Operations Officer, Continuing Promise 2009, and the USNS COMFORT. Captain Beadle was the first Deputy Commander of Nursing at the Fort Belvoir Community Hospital and ended her distinguished career in the highly prestigious and coveted billet as Deputy Director of the Navy Nurse Corps. In her spare time, Annette fosters animals, is a licensed veterinary technician, and has a Warrior Canine Connection dog "Beadle," named after her. Welcome, Annette!

In closing, I want to give an extra big shoutout to COA/COF staff Teresa Hayden, Erica Robinson, and Donna Sparrow, for holding down the fort as we work through these transitions.

Until next time!

# PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation

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## We Welcome New Members of COA, February 1 - February 29, 2024

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LCDR Allen Gunn, *VA*  
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**COA**

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**Executive Director**

Jacqueline Rychnovsky,  
[jrychnovsky@coausphs.org](mailto:jrychnovsky@coausphs.org)

**Grants Manager**

Annette Beadle  
Contractor  
[abeadle@coausphs.org](mailto:abeadle@coausphs.org)

**Deputy Director**

David Corrigan  
[dcorrigan@coausphs.org](mailto:dcorrigan@coausphs.org)

**Producer**

Curveball Media, Victor Perea

**Chief Financial Officer**

Teresa Hayden Foley  
[thayden@coausphs.org](mailto:thayden@coausphs.org)

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