

## CCHQ Presents DD214 Updates at COA's March Retired Officer Gathering

by Jacqueline Rychnovsky, PhD, CAE, Executive Director

On March 19, 2024, the Retired Officers Committee of the Commissioned Officers Association (COA) hosted a one-hour virtual gathering. Agenda items included topics important to retired officers such as the new Department of Defense/Uniformed Services ID card, and rollout of the new COA Survivor's Benefits Checklist. Knowing that retired officers wanted a DD214 update for officers who retired before October 1, 2021, COA hosted RDML Richard Schobitz, Director of Commissioned Corps Headquarters (CCHQ), to share the latest.

During his opening remarks, RDML Schobitz recalled that he and I have discussed the importance of this topic several times, most recently on a phone call when he was in Hawaii visiting officers deployed in support of the Maui wildfire recovery efforts. First, he thanked the retired officers who offered to volunteer their assistance with data entry needs to speed up the DD214 issuance process. RDML Schobitz reported that CCHQ investigated the possibility of accepting this assistance but found that non-HHS current employees are not allowed access to the computer systems. He then explained that issuance of the DD214s was allowed through an exception to Department of Defense Instruction (DODI) 1336.01, signed in May of 2016, which authorized issuance of DD214's for U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps officers. Until recently though, the IT systems could not support this task except to issue DD214's for those who retired after October 1, 2021.

He then offered good news that system enhancements have recently been made to the payroll system which will now support the issuance of the DD214 back to 2016. They are anticipating that this will occur in the summer of 2024, although delays are possible because an outside vendor manages system upgrades. CCHQ is committed to exploring the issuance of DD214s for those who retired before 2016. Frequently asked questions (FAQs) have been developed and can be reviewed at <https://dcp.psc.gov/cmms/separations/DD214%20FAQs.aspx>. These FAQs will be updated as added information becomes available, so check back often.

Following discussion of DD214s, RDML Schobitz shared CCHQ's desire to have retired officers assist with recruitment of new officers. He encouraged the Retired Officers Committee to discuss and brainstorm, then he will connect the Retired Officer Committee leadership with the Call to Active-Duty Team to further explore. "We're really excited to see if there is energy and interest out there and would love take advantage of that," remarked RDML Schobitz. He continued, "No one is better positioned to share the amazing story of

from the  
Executive  
Director



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

### TRICARE Appoints New Director

Last month I attended a virtual "Meet and Greet" for Military Service Organizations (MSOs) and Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) for Dr. David Krulak, the new TRICARE Health Plan Director at the Defense Health Agency (DHA). Dr. Krulak is a family physician and a recently retired U.S. Navy physician, where he served as Executive Officer and Commanding Officer of Naval Hospital Okinawa. The challenges faced by U.S. Public Health Service officers in seeking care in rural environments, for themselves and their families, is well understood by any officer who has served overseas.

Surprisingly, only a little over 20 VSOs and MSOs took the opportunity to meet Dr. Krulak. He opened the meeting with an acknowledgement that he had only been in the seat six weeks and was "drinking from the fire hose," a feeling we have all had when starting a new assignment. Dr. Krulak is not only a retired Navy Captain, but he is also the son of a Marine and a father of a Marine, so

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# 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 of the COA Legislative Affairs Committee

Your advocates Mrs. Bettilou Taylor and COA Deputy Director David Corrigan have been working very hard on your behalf, including holding face-to-face meetings on Capitol Hill with key House and Senate staff. Topics of the meetings were finding cosponsors in the Senate for Senator Tammy Duckworth's bill, S.2297, the Parity for Public Health Service Ready Reserve Act, identifying members of the House who would introduce a companion bill in that chamber, advocating for parental leave parity for the Commissioned Corps, and expanding eligibility for free park passes for service members, veterans, and their families.

In addition to the provisions related to the Ready Reserve, Sen. Duckworth's bill includes provisions related to leave parity with the other uniformed services, including members of the Commissioned Corps in the Military Lending Act and granting several other provisions of Title 10 to active and reserve members of the Public Health Service. I encourage you all to read Section 6 of the bill, under the heading Additional Rights and Privileges. We are awaiting the release of drafts of the FY 25 National Defense Authorization Act to see if any of the provisions of S. 2297 will be included in the Senate's version of the FY 25 NDAA.

Deputy Director Corrigan and I listened in when RADM Hinton and RDML Schobitz briefed members of the Ready Reserve on plans for the future of that component of the Commissioned Corps. We are

waiting to learn the name of the agency that has tentatively agreed to accept responsibility for the ~95 members of the Ready Reserve. RDML Schobitz only hinted at the name by saying that it has "ships." A silver lining may emerge if they are detailed to one of the Armed Forces because they would then theoretically, "...be entitled to all rights, privileges, immunities, and benefits now or hereafter provided under any law of the United States in the case of commissioned officers of the Army or their surviving beneficiaries on account of active military service..." under 42 USC 213.

Frankly, it is beyond my ability to comprehend why the Department established the Ready Reserve and then apparently made no plans to provide long-term support. The Reserve Corps was originally established by a joint resolution in Congress on October 27, 1918, and was reestablished after a decade in hiatus after the "deemed regular" provision in the 2010 Affordable Care Act eliminated the reserve component, including the inactive reserve. Hopefully, fobbing them off on another agency will provide the Ready Reserve with a secure future in a supportive home for many years to come.

Finally, I want to close this month by saying what a great pleasure it has been to work with David Corrigan for the past few years. As you know, Dave is leaving COA in early April to go back to work for Representative Madeleine Dean (D PA-4). I will truly miss working with him.



## Have you Heard About the Sponsor Concierge Program?

by CDR Katie Jacques,  
Chair-Elect COA Board of Directors

Spring greetings to everyone. I look forward to this time of year and can feel the increased energy and excitement as spring and the COF Symposium near. Year after year, my experiences at Symposium continue to grow and become more impactful, for me, as I see us all working towards common causes. I have enjoyed learning more about the relationship between COA, COF, officers, and industry (Sponsors/Industry) in a shared mission of public health.

“What is a Sponsor Concierge” you may ask? The Sponsor Concierge Program was started a few years ago to build ethical relationships with USPHS COF Annual Symposium Sponsors; to enable symposium sponsors to build relationships with the Foundation, Association, and Commissioned Corps Officers; to facilitate partnerships which promote synergy in advancing public health and developing leaders in public health; and to encourage

future sponsorship for PHS COF meetings and annual symposiums.

For the past two years, I have been a Concierge for the Symposium Sponsors and Exhibitors. To me, this is a golden nugget of a volunteer opportunity at Symposium that has been a lot of fun and eye-opening in the amount of support we receive from the Sponsors and Exhibitors of the Symposium. Last year, I was able to connect with Mr. Ronnie Shaw, from Chickasaw Nation. I was able to learn about their growing health care facility and was able to share his contact information with fellow therapist officers who lived nearby. We have received great feedback the Sponsors and Exhibitors who shared their appreciation for the Concierge assignments because it helped them navigate the conference, enjoy the A&C dinner, created increased officer engagement at their booths, and allowed for a relationship to form and understanding of the mutual support for each other’s work.



*COA Chair-Elect, CDR Katie Jacques, served as a concierge for Chickasaw Nation representative Mr. Ronnie Shaw at the 2023 Symposium in Tulsa, Oklahoma*

I look forward to being a Concierge again in June at the COF Symposium. The Sponsors, at all levels, and Exhibitors help make the Symposium as great as it is, and it continues to grow! If you would like to become a Concierge, please complete a short application at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2024concierge>.



## The Work of the Commissioned Officers Foundation (COF): Creating a Future as Noble as Our Past

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

For today's column, I will present information on three specific COF leadership areas. First, I have some thoughts from a recent screening of Invisible Corps. Second, I will provide data on our USPHS officers from both COA and COF conducting Invisible Corps Screenings from May 2023 to March 2024. Finally, I want to share with you the work of COF from our recent quarterly Board of Trustees meeting.

### **Invisible Corps Screening at the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health (ASPPH)**

On 22 March, RADM (Ret) Ali Khan, who serves as Dean and Professor at the University of Nebraska Medical Center College of Public Health moderated a discussion on Raising the Visibility of Governmental Public Health Careers with panelists RADM (Ret) Boris Lushniak, who serves as Dean and Professor at the University of Maryland School of Public Health, and CAPT Sara Newman who serves as Director of the Office of Public Health at the National Park Service. The team presented a screening of Invisible Corps to a full house of academic public health leaders, faculty and staff, and public health students and alumni. The

personal stories shared by the presenters were inspiring. The question-and-answer session was rich by sharing heroic examples of USPHS Commissioned Corps Officers serving at the frontline of public health for the nation. The comments/questions I heard from many of the academic public health leaders in attendance was how can we show this documentary at our school – and the answer was provided.

### **Invisible Corps Screenings (by the numbers) – May 2023 to March 2024**

- 17,797 website views ([www.invisiblecorps.com](http://www.invisiblecorps.com))
- 16 film festivals
- 70 PBS showings in 41 cities
- Capitol Hill briefing
- 21 University and /or joint COA showings

### **The Work of COF via Committee Reports**

As COF continues to build a future as noble as our past, it certainly has been a busy time with our work on strategic planning development, the 57th Annual USPHS Scientific & Training Symposium, Invisible Corps, and other business. On 7 March 2024, the COF Board of Trustees (BOT) held its quarterly meeting. I have

important updates to share with you all, as follows:

President's update, I provided an update on strategic planning via crafting a revised mission and vision statements, developing new values, and updating our strategic goals with associated objectives. The timeline is for a final draft to be presented to the Board for approval will be at our June 2024 meeting. I also asked for self-nominations for COF President-elect for the start of our next fiscal year (1 July 2024).

Treasurer's Report, chaired by Karen Watkins. Teresa Hayden, COF/COA Chief Financial Officer, presented the Balance Sheet and Profit & Loss summary through December 2023. Teresa confirmed the Foundation is fiscally sound.

Executive Director Update. Jacque Rychnovsky presented an update on the Symposium and staff transitions; and, Dave Corrigan presented on the Advocacy Session agenda to be held at the Symposium.

Ad hoc Invisible Corps documentary update, chaired by RDML Steve Solomon, provided data on documentary activities, and recognized RDML Pam Schweitzer and Chris Schueler for their extraordinary contributions both to getting the

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# Serving Those Who Served: Recap of the 2023 Operation Turkey Dinner Supporting D.C. Area Veterans

by CDR Gia Lawrence, RN, BSN, CMCN, CCHP; LCDR Gideon Esuzor, DNP, MBA, PMHNP; LCDR Jamillah Bynum, LCSW, BCD, and LT Frantishka McCrimmon, LCSW, BCD

The 2023 Operation Turkey Dinner (OTD), a joint initiative organized by the Veterans and Military Outreach (VMO) Subcommittees of the District of Columbia (D.C.) and Montgomery County (MoCo) branches of the Commissioned Officers Association (COA) and the Social Work Professional Advisory Group (SWPAG), donated and packaged turkeys and fix-ins to the Southeast Veterans Service Center in Southeast Washington, D.C. during the Thanksgiving holiday. Volunteers packaged and distributed items to underserved, low-income, unemployed, disabled, and minority veterans and their family members who are transitioning from homelessness to stable, permanent housing. This volunteer effort helped to put a turkey dinner on the tables of our deserving veterans and their families.

Approximately 75 to 80 veterans benefitted from donated items (e.g., turkeys, gravy, candied yams, cranberry sauce, corn, green beans, dinner rolls, loaves of bread, and boxes of instant potatoes) from several organizations.

The initiative's leadership team consisted of event leads LCDR Jamillah Bynum and LCDR Velisa Jackson, Administrative Officer LT Christine Nappa, OTD Distribution Event Leads LCDRs Gideon Esuzor and Frantishka McCrimmon, and Marketing Support Lead CDR Deloris Caldwell. On behalf of the D.C. COA, MoCo COA, SWPAG, and the leadership team, we would like to express our gratitude to the following USPHS officers and volunteers who played a part in making the 2023 Operation Turkey Dinner a huge success:

CDR Deloris Caldwell, Department of Defense

CDR Gia Lawrence, Department of Homeland Security

CDR Kelly Fath, Department of Justice

CDR Paula Carter, National Institutes of Health

LCDR Abigail, USPHS Mascot

LCDR Dan Johnson, National Institutes of Health

LCDR Gideon Esuzor, Department of Homeland Security

LCDR Jamillah Bynum, Department of Homeland Security

LCDR Marjorie Gray, Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response

LCDR Marriah Lombardo, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health

LCDR Velisa Jackson, Health Resources and Services Administration

LT Christine Nappa, Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response



*Commissioned Corps Officers, along with Ms. Sadaaquat Akhdar, Assistant with Access Housing, Mr. Jeryl Bennett, Chairman of HUD Veterans Affinity Group (VAG) and Magda Brown, HUD Hispanic Program Manager, during the 2023 Operation Turkey Dinner.*

LT Claudia Fongwen, U.S. Coast Guard

LT Frantishka McCrimmon, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

LTJG Clarisa Medina, USPHS Ready Reserve Corps

These officers displayed tremendous enthusiasm, with many expressing gratitude for the opportunity to serve the veterans and their families.

The transitioning veterans were highly appreciative and expressed their gratitude. This overwhelming support shows that actions speak louder than words. Due to USPHS officership and our undaunting commitment to support our nation's veterans and their families, this event offered sustained support beyond the Thanksgiving holiday.

This annual USPHS volunteer event is open to interested officers who may contact LCDR Jamillah Bynum (jamillah.bynum@hq.dhs.gov) for further information.

## **Access Housing, Inc.**

Access Housing, Inc. is a non-profit, community-based organization established in 1985 to provide housing, employment services, and skill development training to homeless veterans. It was the first program of its kind in the D.C. area. Today, Access Housing, Inc. operates two facilities in Southeast D.C.: the Southeast Veterans Service Center (SEVSC) and the Chesapeake Veterans House. Notably in 2000, SEVSC became home to one of four D.C. Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) Community Based Outpatient Clinics, enabling the Center to provide a full

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# Feeding Hope: Bridging Food Insecurity with Local Pantries

by LCDR Marie Jeoboam, MD, MS, FAAFP

In the land of plenty, where prosperity paints the landscape, a shadow persists. Even within the boundaries of the United States, a country often publicized for its wealth, many endure food insecurity and homelessness. The chasm between those who have and those who have not stretches wider with each passing day. Yet, amidst this disparity, communities rally together, seeking solutions to this pressing issue. One ray of hope in this struggle is the local food pantry, a cornerstone of support for those in need.

Armed with prior knowledge of the persistent issue of food insecurity, my volunteer experience at the Intown Cares Food Pantry in Atlanta, GA, alongside the Centers for Disease Control and prevention (CDC) Homelessness Public Health Workgroup in early March 2024, shed new light on the challenges faced by those in need, igniting a deeper commitment to addressing this pressing concern. Here, at this client-choice food pantry, the doors are open to all who face food insecurity, without discrimination or documentation requirements. The pantry stands as a refuge of sustenance, providing quality food items to individuals and families grappling with hunger.

During my four-hour shift, I witnessed firsthand the impact of community solidarity as we served 150 households. Ryan, the Food Pantry Coordinator, graciously shed light on the intricacies of running a nonprofit food pantry. Through partnerships with local entities such as churches, community funding partners like Partners for Home, and resource partners like the Atlanta Community Food Bank, the pantry sustains its operations, ensuring a steady supply of nourishment for those in need.

One striking aspect of the pantry's operation is its commitment to inclusivity and accommodation. The pantry serves low-barrier clients, offering different food bags tailored to varying needs. Each bag, weighing approximately 17 pounds, provides sustenance for multiple individuals in a household. With over 600 households served weekly through both in-person distributions and deliveries, the impact is tangible, reaching those who might otherwise slip through the cracks of society.

But beyond the provision of food lies a deeper mission – one rooted in dignity, sustainability, and empowerment. The Intown Cares Food Pantry is not merely a stopgap measure but a beacon



*Partners in Pantry, Allies in Action (Ryan, Food Pantry Coordinator (left) and LCDR Marie Jeoboam (right))*

of hope, striving to prevent and reverse homelessness and hunger in Intown, Atlanta. In a region where poverty rates have surged, where seniors and people with disabilities face heightened vulnerability, the pantry stands as a lifeline, easing the burden of food insecurity and offering a path toward stability.

Yet, the battle against food insecurity is multifaceted, requiring not just provision but also compassion and connection. As I engaged with clients, I realized the profound impact of simple gestures – a smile, a handshake, a name spoken with respect. In the midst of adversity, these acts of humanity affirm the worth and dignity of every individual, bridging the divide between us and them.

There are myriad ways to support this cause – through financial donations, food drives, or volunteering at the pantry in your local community. Each contribution, no matter how small, ripples outward, weaving a tapestry of support for those in need. Together, we can uphold the values of dignity, sustainability, and empowerment, transforming communities and lives in the process.

In closing, the Intown Cares Food Pantry serves not just meals but hope – a beacon of resilience in the face of adversity. As we stand on the front lines of this battle against hunger, let us remember that our actions, however humble, hold the power to nourish not just bodies but spirits. In the embrace of solidarity and compassion, we find the true essence of community – a force capable of transcending barriers and illuminating the path toward a brighter, more equitable future for all.

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range of services to hundreds of veterans residing at Access Housing, Inc. and throughout the community.

## **DCCOA Veterans and Military Outreach Subcommittee**

The VMO subcommittee provides volunteers, support, and service to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and

non-governmental military and veteran service organizations. The vision of the VMO subcommittee is to achieve a USPHS presence throughout the Washington D.C. area in support of veteran and military families. Events promote USPHS visibility, USPHS leadership capabilities, and collaboration with the VA and non-governmental organizations.

# 2024 APAOC 4th Annual Virtual Lunar New Year Celebration

by CDR Song Lavalais, PharmD, MHA, BCACP

On February 23rd, 2024, Asian Pacific American Officer Committee (APAOC) members and their guests came together to celebrate one of the biggest events within the Asian culture. Hosted by the Public Relations Subcommittee, the 2024 APAOC 4th Annual Virtual Lunar New Year Celebration was a huge success with 71 participants joining across the nation. This year's featured country was Vietnam with six Vietnamese officers (CDR Tina Nhu, CDR Quocbao Pham, CDR Trang Tran, LCDR Loan Chin, LCDR Tramara Dam, and LCDR Huan Tran) from the Minority Officers Liaison Council (MOLC) Cultural Ambassador Program (CAP) as guest speakers.

The APAOC Senior Advisor, RDML Emil Wang, graciously gave the official welcoming. He informed the audience that the Lunar New Year celebration marked the beginning of a new year with a clean slate embodying ideas of luck, fortune, abundance, and positive energy. 2024 is the Year of the Dragon, a mighty symbol of power, nobility, and success. He shared that people born during the year of the dragon are known to be naturally charismatic and gifted, often inspiring those around them. He concluded his opening remarks by wishing everyone happiness and prosperity in 2024.

The APAOC Public Relations Subcommittee, led by LCDR Kathleen Tisdale, kicked off the presentation by providing a general overview of the Lunar



2024 APAOC Lunar New Year Celebration Planning Committee

New Year celebration and the significance of the Chinese zodiac and a brief introduction on Vietnam before turning it over to the MOLC guest speakers. The Vietnamese MOLC Cultural Ambassadors shared their wealth of knowledge about Vietnam and their Lunar New Year celebration known as Tết. The audience learned about Vietnamese customs and traditions carried out during the national holiday, such as the year-end offering to the Kitchen Gods and ancestors, cleaning, decorating, shopping, cooking and food preparation, traditional clothes, visiting graves and temples, and traditional games played. Additionally, the presenters invited the audience to showcase their beautiful and festive Lunar New Year traditional clothing via webcam, promoting inclusion of the diverse cultures represented.

The closing remarks were given by the APOAC Chair. She thanked everyone for joining the celebration and gave a special shout out to the Public Relations Subcommittee co-chairs, the 2024 APAOC 4th Annual Virtual Lunar New Year Celebration planning committee, and all the presenters. In the Year of the Dragon, she charged everyone to soar to new heights, embrace change fearlessly, and pursue their dreams with unwavering determination.

The 2024 APAOC 4th Annual Virtual Lunar New Year Celebration was a great success! The presentation was engaging, featuring polls, games, and a video showcasing how APAOC members throughout the country celebrate the Lunar New Year with their families and friends. Public Relations Subcommittee hopes everyone can join us in 2025 as we welcome the Year of the Snake.

# COMMISSIONED OFFICERS ASSOCIATION EVENT

## ADVANCE YOUR CAREER: **BECOME CERTIFIED IN PUBLIC HEALTH**



### PRESENTERS

- CDR Zewditu Demissie, PhD, MPH, CPH
- CDR Reasol Chino, PHarmD, BCACP, CPH,
- Allison Foster, MBA, CAE, President,  
National Board of Public Health Examiners



### JOIN US

Join this informational session to learn more about the Certified in Public Health certification program and how getting your CPH can advance your career. To date, over 10,000 public health professionals have passed the CPH exam. On this webinar, COA members will cover eligibility criteria, the application and examination process, benefits for COA members, and study tips.



### DATE

**MAY 15, 2024**

**12:00 NOON EDT**

Register here:

<https://tinyurl.com/cphsession>





# Greater Los Angeles Officers promote US Public Health career in Occidental College Career Fair

by LT Jamie Williams, MSN, BSN, RN, CDR Sophia Hsu RN, MSN, MPH, and LCDR Charles Park, Pharm.D.

Active-duty service often conjures images of military personnel serving in the various branches of the Department of Defense. While the Surgeon General is a recognizable figure, the broader public may not readily associate the office with active-duty service through the United States Public Health Service (USPHS). It falls upon us, as officers of the USPHS, to promote awareness of our service and its critical role in protecting and promoting the health and safety of the Nation through various outreach activities.

The Greater Los Angeles Branch of the Commissioned Officers Association (COA) capitalized on such an opportunity on February 22, 2024. Branch members CDR Sophia Hsu, LCDR Charles Park, and LT Jamie Williams volunteered to participate in a career fair hosted by Occidental College located in Los Angeles, California. Occidental College boasts a rich history dating back to 1887. With 45 majors and minors spanning from humanities to sciences, this institution has educated and worked with notable figures. This includes the 42nd Mayor of Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, and most notably, President Barack Obama, whose interest in politics was ignited during his time at Occidental.

The career fair drew 458 undergraduate student attendees from diverse academic backgrounds. Representatives from over 15 companies and organizations, covering both private and public sectors, were present to engage with students. Among them were the three officers from the Greater Los Angeles COA Branch, who proudly represented USPHS and COA.



*Officers engaged with students in Occidental Community College career fair.*

Their presence underscored the breadth of public health career opportunities available to students within the USPHS and highlighted its influence in protecting and promoting public health.

Throughout the event, officers seized the opportunity to educate students about the USPHS and its mission. They emphasized the diverse roles and responsibilities of USPHS officers, which extend beyond traditional healthcare settings to include areas such as research, emergency response, and policy development. Drawing from their collective experiences across six different agencies, the officers showcased the myriad of paths available for those interested in serving their country through public health. Engaging with students from various academic disciplines, the officers showcased the

interdisciplinary nature of public health and its relevance across sectors. Moreover, the officers shared personal anecdotes and insights, offering glimpses into the unique opportunities and challenges they encountered throughout their careers and highlighted the impact they had on their communities.

The participation of the Greater Los Angeles COA officers at the Occidental College career fair not only raised awareness of the USPHS mission, but also inspired the next generation of public health leaders. Through meaningful engagement and dialogue, officers cultivated interest and enthusiasm for careers in public health, ensuring a continued legacy of service and dedication to the health and safety of the nation.

# COA Board of Directors: Meet Our Newest Directors

by Dave Corrigan, *Frontline* Content Manager

COA has elected new members of its Board of Directors. There were six open spots for this coming term – Dental, Engineer, Environmental Health Officer, Field Representative, Retired, and Scientist. These terms will run from July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2027. Some of the officers elected are incumbents and some are new to the board.

**CAPT Renee Joskow** is an incumbent and serves as the Dental Representative on the COA Board of Directors. She is also the Co-Chair of the Retired Officers Committee. CAPT Joskow has had a variety of duty stations and agencies including 1) NIH/ National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences- Dental Officer (Research), Program Official, 2) DHS-Science and Technology, Bio/Chem Early Detection Program, Senior Medical Epidemiologist, 3) OSG/Office of Force Readiness and Deployment, Medical Readiness Manager/ Director, Training and Education, and 4) CDC/National Center for Environmental Health, Epidemic Intelligence Service Officer/ Emerging Threats position.



CAPT Renee Joskow

**CAPT Kurt Kesteloot** is an incumbent and serves as the Engineer Representative on the COA Board of Directors. He is the current Co-Chair for the Awards Committee. CAPT Kesteloot has worked for the National Parks Service (NPS) since 2010 and currently serves as a supervisory public health consultant. He provides technical assistance to 62 National Park units in 13 states through assessments of water and wastewater facilities along with design and design review. CAPT Kesteloot assesses food facilities and provides guidance on many other public health related issues. He also supervises four USPHS officers and is the lead for NPS Engineering questions in the NPS Office of Public Health Field Services Branch. CAPT Kesteloot received his United States Public Health Service (USPHS) commission in 2004 and served with the Indian Health Service (IHS) from 2004 to 2010.



CAPT Kurt Kesteloot

**CDR Kazu Okumura** will serve as the Environmental Health Officer for the COA Board of Directors starting in July. He also serves as the Regional Emergency Coordinator for the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response (ASPR), Region 9, and is stationed in Honolulu, HI. He led the COVID-19 response in the seven Pacific jurisdictions including three foreign nations. His previous duty stations include the Food and Drug Administration, and the National Institutes of Health. He also served two months as a Safety Officer for the Monrovia Medical Unit Team 2 as the youngest EHO on the team.



CDR Kazu Okumura

**CDR Lashley “Lash” Hatch** will serve as one of the three Field Representatives on the COA Board of Directors. He currently serves as a Commissioned Corps Liaison for the Indian Health Service, overseeing over 400 USPHS officers from all categories in the Navajo and Phoenix Areas. CDR Hatch served as a voting member for PharmPAC from 2019-2022. He served as Admin Chair and oversaw the Annual Report and the Honor Award program, including the creation of a new Junior Pharmacist Award. In the past, he has served in JOAG as awards historian and COF Symposium Pharmacy Category Day Committee. He has presented numerous times on national, regional and local levels including AMSUS and the IHS Southwest Regional Continuing Pharmacy Education Meeting.



CDR Lashley Hatch

**CAPT (Ret) Holly Ann Williams** will serve as one of the Retired Officer Representatives on the COA Board of Directors. As a retired representative on the board, she will also serve as a



CAPT (Ret) Holly Ann Williams

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trustee on the board of the Commissioned Officers Foundation for the Advancement of Public Health (COF). She retired from USPHS in 2022 after a 26-year career in the USPHS during which she was assigned to CDC. She currently serves on the Retired Officers' Committee. She earned her BSN at the University of Pittsburgh, her Master's in Nursing at the University of Washington, and her PhD in Anthropology at the University of Florida

CAPT Williams began her USPHS career as an Epidemic Intelligence Officer at CDC. During her tenure at CDC, CAPT Williams worked in a variety of areas including Malaria, International Emergencies and Refugee Health, Violence Prevention, and served as the Director of CDC's Occupational Health Clinic.

**CDR Tracy Powell** will serve as the new Scientist Officer Representative on the COA Board of Directors. CDR Powell currently serves as a Senior Advisor at CDC, in the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (NCRID). She serves among the highest leaders within CDC and has been sought by CDC leadership for critical, high-visibility positions such as an appointed to serve as a SME for Health Equity, Enterprise Risk Manager, Deputy Brand Chief for the Field Services Branch, and served on nine deployments during the COVID-19 Response.



*CDR Tracy Powell*

## **COF Board of Trustees: Meet Our Newest Trustees**

**CAPT (Retired) Jim Imholte** will serve as a trustee on the board of the Commissioned Officers Foundation for the Advancement of Public Health (COF). After 15 years of private pharmacy practice, he was commissioned as an officer of the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) and served in the Indian Health Service, Federal Bureau of Prisons, Division of Immigration Health Services, and Regional Emergency Coordinator in Region VII, Kansas City. CAPT Imholte currently serves on the Retired Officer Committee of the COA. He was the Vice-President (Acting President) of the New York Branch of the COA. He retired from the U.S. Public Health Service in 2016.



*CAPT (Ret) Jim Imholte*

## **CAPT (Retired) Aaron**

**Middlekauff** will serve as a trustee on the board of the Commissioned Officers Foundation for the Advancement of Public Health (COF). He is an executive pharmacist with 20 years of proven experience in both civilian and Federal Healthcare sectors. He has successfully managed and executed multi-million-dollar budgets, facilitated

TRICARE Pharmacy Beneficiary expert guidance, integrated and consolidated diverse health systems, built cohesive highly performing teams, ensured regulatory compliance, and developed effective mentorship programs. As the Chief Pharmacist for the US Coast Guard, he served as the Coast Guard Surgeon General Chief Medical Officer and was well recognized throughout the Federal Pharmacy career field as an outstanding pharmacy lecturer and expert.



*Aaron Middlekauff*

## **RDML (Retired) Steve**

**Solomon** will serve as a trustee on the board of the Commissioned Officers Foundation for the Advancement of Public Health (COF). Steve served two successful terms on the board of trustees, including as President of the board. He is board certified in internal medicine, infectious diseases, and preventive medicine, and has been elected to Fellowship by the American College of Physicians and the Infectious Diseases Society of America. Prior to retiring from government, Dr. Solomon held several senior executive positions at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), serving as Director of the Coordinating Center for Health Information and Service and Director of the Office of Antimicrobial Resistance.



*RDML (Ret) Steve Solomon*

# Update: 2024 Scholarships and Fellowship Opportunities and Updates

by Annette Beadle, MSN, RN, COF Grants Manager

The Commissioned Officers Foundation (COF) is pleased to announce the RADM Jerrold M. Michael Fellowship. Applications can be submitted from April 1 to May 22, 2024. Applicants must be USPHS Officers in the rank of 01-04 and a current dues paying COA member. This fellowship is a certificate program offered through remote learning by the University of Maryland School of Public Health. The two certificate programs offered this year include Global Health and Epidemiology with a Fall 2024 start date. All programs should be completed within 12 months. For more information on the University of Maryland: <https://sph.umd.edu/academics/certificates/> And, for more information on the RADM Michael Fellowship: <https://>

[www.phscof.org/scholarships-grants-and-funding-requests/radm-michael-fellowship/](http://www.phscof.org/scholarships-grants-and-funding-requests/radm-michael-fellowship/)

As with each scholarship and grant cycle, volunteer reviewers are necessary. The dedicated people who take on this role are integral to the success of the scholarship and grant cycles. Depending on the number of applications received, each reviewer is assigned 5-6 applications to score using an established scoring rubric. If you are interested in being a reviewer for the Family Member Scholarship, RDML Mishoe Scholarship or RADM Michael Fellowship, please send an email to the COF Grants Manager, Annette Beadle, at [abeadle@coausphs.org](mailto:abeadle@coausphs.org) with "Volunteer Reviewer" in the subject line.

## 2024 FAMILY MEMBER SCHOLARSHIPS

### HISTORY

The PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation for the Advancement of Public Health (COF) offers a scholarship program available to high school, undergraduate, and graduate students sponsored by a current Commissioned Officers Association (COA) member. The scholarships are funded by active duty and retired U.S. Public Health Service members, Local Branches of the COA and others.

### ELIGIBILITY

- Biological, step, adopted children/grandchildren and spouses of current COA members
- High school senior, undergraduate, or graduate student with applicable school transcripts
- Personal statement describing academic/career goals related to public health
- Extracurricular involvement and community service
- Two letters of recommendation

### DEADLINE

The application period is open and will close on **May 5, 2024**.  
The recipients of the scholarship will be announced in June 2024.

### APPLY

Find more information at:

<https://www.phscof.org/scholarships/family-member-scholarships/>



# St. John's University's Screening of The Invisible Corps Documentary and Panel Discussion

by CDR Kari Schlessinger , Psy.D., Ph.D., ABPP and CDR Jerry Zee, PharmD, MPH, CPH

On February 20, 2024, United States Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps officers - CAPT Andrew Chen, CDR Kari Schlessinger, CDR Jerry Zee, CDR Andrew Gentles, LCDR Adena Yau, LT Josh Ramilo, and LT Lucy Efobi - had the pleasure of participating in the St. John's University College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences screening of *Invisible Corps: In Officio Salutis*. Christopher Schueler produced this documentary to bring awareness to the history and role of the USPHS Commissioned Corps. The evening began with a private reception allowing students, faculty, and guests an opportunity to meet and interact with Corps officers. Specifically, Corps officers had the opportunity to speak with a group of pharmacy students who expressed great interest in all the opportunities the Corps has to offer. Officers provided information regarding leadership abilities and the vast types of work available to Corps officers. One particular student was impressed with learning she would not have to "just work" in a local pharmacy. Officers provided information regarding career paths, deployment experiences, and why the Corps was important to them. After the reception ended, 120 attendees participated in the screening. The documentary did a comprehensive job of providing a timeline of public health events and the development of the Corps.

Following the screening, Christopher Schueler (executive producer and



*USPHS officers and SJU Faculty gather with Invisible Corps Producer Chris Schueler (second from right) after the screening and panel discussion.*

director), with the assistance of RADM (retired) Pamela Schweitzer, moderated the panel discussion. The panelists included RADM (retired) Scott Giberson, CDR Kari Schlessinger, LCDR Adena Yau, LT Josh Ramilo, and Dr. Vibhuti Arya Amirfar. Each panelist presented on his/her Corps journey and leadership experiences. Each concluded with personal stories on his/her impact on public health. RADM (retired) Giberson provided opening and closing remarks regarding the changes in public health over the years and future trends. He spent several minutes inspiring students on potential leadership opportunities and what it means to serve in public health. At the conclusion of the panel discussion, students again had the opportunity

to speak individually with current and retired USPHS officers. The impact of the panel and documentary was obvious by seeing the energy of the students. It was amazing to see so many students who were interested in the varied public health opportunities, including psychology and more specifically how public health impacts the prison system.

If you have not yet viewed the documentary, *Invisible Corps: In Officio Salutis*, it is highly recommended. You can view it at [invisiblecorps.com](http://invisiblecorps.com).

Special thanks to RDML (retired) Pamela Schweitzer, CDR Andrew Gentles, and Dean Anne Lin of the college for organizing this remarkable event!

# It's That Time of Year!

by LT Jamla Rizek, MBA, MSN, RN, CEN, CPEN, NHDP-BC, NRP

I remember deploying during Ramadan and how supportive the other Officers were, from waking up early and eating with me to ensuring that I had food when it was time to break my fast.

What is Ramadan:

Ramadan is the 9th month of the Islamic lunar calendar. The start date of Ramadan changes every year as Muslims follow the lunar calendar and the start date is dependent on the sighting of the moon. It is a sacred month for Muslims as it is believed that the Quran was revealed during this month.

During this month, Muslims all over the world observe this month by fasting (from sunrise to sunset, not even water), giving to charity (zakat), reading the Quran (holy book), attending nightly prayers called Taraweeh, and obtaining spiritual growth.

When the sun sets, Muslims break their fast with dates and then the evening meal (Iftar). It is important to know that not every Muslim fasts during Ramadan. Individuals with health issues or are pregnant, or are traveling, for example, are exempt from fasting.

"Whoever fasts during the month of Ramadan out of sincere faith, and hoping to attain Allah's rewards, then all his past sins will be forgiven."

How can you be supportive to your Muslim peers during Ramadan:

1. Adjust schedules if possible. Muslims will get up during the night for Suhoor, where they drink water, have a light meal, and read the Quran, before starting their day.
2. Consider hosting an Iftar. You can share a dish so they don't have to cook, or you could invite them over to break their fast.
3. Ask your peer what you can do to support them. Don't be afraid to ask questions.

After Ramadan:

After the month of Ramadan ends, Muslims celebrate with a holiday called Eid al-Fitr. Eid al-Fitr translates to, "festival of breaking the fast." Families attend community-wide prayers and then exchange gifts and enjoy delicious meals together. Culture plays a pivotal part in how Muslims celebrate Eid. Want to say something, but don't know what? Just say, "Ramadan Kareem or "Eid Mubarak."



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# Spiritual Wellness

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

## Why Do Some Religions Not Celebrate Birthdays?

I have a big birthday coming up this year. Some of you may big birthdays coming up this year too. You may or may not be looking forward to that event. I consider it a blessing (and a miracle) that I am still here!

Did you know that some belief systems do not celebrate birthdays? It's true! Many followers of Jehovah's Witness do not celebrate birthdays, but they are not alone. Some followers of Christianity, Islam, Orthodox Judaism, and Hasidic communities do not celebrate birthdays either. No, it is not so that they can stay the same age forever! I did some research on this, and I discovered some key points that may help us to understand how this connects with their worship practices.

The origin of birthday celebrations has been debated. Some believe that it dates back to the reigns of monarchs, when celebrating a sovereign's birthday demonstrated loyalty and devotion to the state. Others trace birthday celebrations back to the ancient Greeks who believed that a protective spirit was present with the individual on their birthday, and feasts and offerings were made to this spirit. However, it wasn't until the rise in Christianity that birthday celebrations became more common because of celebrations of the birth of Jesus Christ. The reasons that some belief systems do not celebrate birthdays varies. Some believe that it is a worldly custom that originated with pagan practices like those of the ancient Greeks (Jehovah's Witness, Seventh Day Adventists). Some believe that it promotes individualism and self-importance, envy and jealousy (Amish), or conceit (Hasidic). Others believe that it is not in alignment with the teachings of their prophets (Islam), or that birthdays are not as significant as other religious events (Judaism).

Whether you choose to celebrate or not, the anniversary of your being a part of the world offers each of us a time to reflect on who we are and our purpose in the world. Care should be taken when someone chooses not to participate in birthday celebrations or gift exchanges. This can impact their social and emotional well-being as they sincerely seek to increase their spiritual well-being by observing this practice.

As we strive to support and encourage each other, we must remain respectful in giving others the space to be spiritually well. You are all in my thoughts and prayers.

### Education: Bar/Bat Mitzvah

A Jewish ceremony for boys (Bar) at the age of 13 or girls (Bat) at the age of 12, that formally marks the assumption of the obligation to observe the commandments, along with the corresponding right to take part in leading religious services, to be counted in the minimum number of people needed to perform certain parts of religious services, to form binding contracts, to testify before religious courts and to marry.

Jewish Practices and Rituals. [www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org)

### Spiritual Exercises

1. Article: <https://www.religionwriters.com/2023/05/what-religion-doesnt-celebrate-birthdays/>
2. Website: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/bar-bat-mitzvah-and-confirmation>
3. Book: *Living the Seasons: Simple Ways to Celebrate the Beauty of Your Faith throughout the Year* by Erica Tighe Campbell

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

*Correction to Frontline 2024, Vol 62, Issue 2, page 13. The submitted image which accompanied the article led to an assumption that it was a radiograph of the author's wrist. The image was obtained by the author through an internet search and can be found in a CMAJ Journal article, Vol 188, Issue 7, by Ben-Yakov and Boutis (2016). The image may be subject to copyright. Further into the article, under the "Education" section, the sentence ends abruptly which alerts the reader that an editing error occurred. The entire sentence can be found in the "Spiritual Exercises" article by Taylor, Issue 28, "Sacred Bones." The online version of the March Frontline newsletter has been corrected.*

# Public Health Emergency Response Strike Team



by LCDR Miaka Huynh & LT Helen Young  
Editors: CAPT Tammy Midgley & LT Ciarra Jones

The Public Health Emergency Response Strike Team (PHERST) is the Nation's rapidly deployable health and safety team for all Commissioned Corps Headquarters (CCHQ) sponsored deployment requests. The team is comprised of public health professionals committed to empowering and aiding in the stabilization of communities during their times of need.

Since its inception in 2020 and onboarding its first officers in July 2021, an initial team of 25 grew to 69 officers, spread across four regions. Between 2021-2023, PHERST made headway in representing USPHS and demonstrating the team's capabilities. Highlights of PHERST's accomplishments include:

- 147 deployments, with some officers deploying more than once for extended durations, resulting in a combined total of 3,665 cumulative deployment days.
- Supported 45 missions, including:
  - COVID-19 response
  - Afghanistan repatriation
  - Operation Allies Welcome (OAW)
  - Haitian migrant crisis
  - Hurricane response
  - No-notice missions with international impact
  - Ebola response
  - Backfilled staffing shortages with Indian Health Services
  - Unaccompanied children
  - Cabinet-level request missions
  - Mpox (Monkeypox)
- Served as content designers, adjunct professors, and liaisons for COTA-sponsored trainings, including Deployment Safety Academy for Field



*On behalf of PHERST, Region 3 PHERST officers receiving Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health Award from Assistant Secretary for Health Admiral Rachel Levine.*

Experience (D-SAFE) and USPHS Regional Deployment Role Training.

- Received the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health Award in 2023 for Outstanding Teamwork, earning the recognition of an extraordinary team that had a positive impact on emergent and urgent public health threats nationally.

In October 2023, PHERST shifted into a new phase. The new structure maintained the critical response capability that the PHERST had become known for while transitioning to clinical and patient safety roles within Military Treatment Facilities (MTFs), in partnership with the Defense Health Agency (DHA).

PHERST's presence at Role 4 Casualty Reception Centers - those sites that would receive inbound wounded from OCONUS conflict - assists DHA with clinical staffing gaps needed to ensure access to care for members of the uniformed services and their families. PHERST officers continue to deploy through an on-call schedule of one month out of every five months. Each MTF officer has designated roles in which they function within their scope of practice to ensure they are meeting the facility's goals while building on their skillsets for immediate response capabilities.

Currently, there are five geographic areas where PHERST officers are assigned:

- Joint Base San Antonio (San Antonio, TX): Brooke Army Medical Center, Wilford Hall Ambulatory Surgery Center, & Randolph Clinic
- Madigan Army Medical Center (Tacoma, WA)
- Naval Medical Center San Diego (San Diego, CA)
- Naval Medical Center Camp Lejeune (Jacksonville, NC)
- Alexander T. Augusta Military Medical Center (Fort Belvoir, VA) | Walter Reed National Military Medical Center (Bethesda, MD)

To shed light on PHERST, its transition, and the roles officers have within the MTFs, LCDR Huynh and LT Young interviewed LT Ciarra Jones. LT Jones is an officer that onboarded to region 3 PHERST in March 2023 and has since transitioned to Naval Medical Center San Diego in California. Please see the interview below.

**Question:** How has your PHERST journey been so far?





*LT Jones providing clinical support to Navy and Marine Corps personnel.*



*LT Jones conducting a comprehensive safety inspection.*

## **PHERST** from page 17

**Answer:** In March 2023, I had the privilege of being commissioned into the United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, marking the beginning of a profound journey in public health and emergency response. My first assignment brought me to Rockville, MD, with CCHQ, as the Human Resource Specialist for PHERST. As I reflect on my journey as a PHERST officer, I am filled with a profound sense of accomplishment and purpose. Each step of this journey has reinforced my dedication to protect, promote, and advance the health and safety of our nation. The experiences I have gathered, the complexities I have navigated, and the impact I have been privileged to make all resonate with the core mission of the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps. Looking ahead, I remain steadfast in my commitment to this noble cause, driven by a passion to contribute meaningfully to our nation's well-being and to uphold the highest standards of public health in every endeavor I undertake.

**Question:** What is your current role as a PHERST Officer with Naval Medical Center San Diego?

**Answer:** As a PHERST officer, I integrate my clinical expertise in my respective category HSO Public Health – Epidemiology within the Department of Public Health in Preventive Medicine. In my current capacity, I am entrusted with a range of critical

responsibilities, each contributing significantly to the operational efficacy and safety of our DOD personnel. This includes the comprehensive management of safety inspections and leading the Tuberculosis Control Program at the Marine Corps Recruitment Depot. Core components involve the rigorous evaluation and enhancement of command, control, and communication (C3) frameworks. This aspect is crucial for the successful implementation of Regional and Installation Emergency Management (EM) protocols, as well as Anti-terrorism/Force Protection (AT/FP) programs. Furthermore, I oversee significant health programs, managing the prevention and control of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), Hepatitis B Virus (HBV), and Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) infections among Navy and Marine Corps personnel. This extends to ensuring the medical and operational readiness of recruits and welfare of our service members.

### **Recruitment of PHERST officers**

The future of PHERST offers limitless opportunities. The team is still in search of motivated and dedicated officers to expand its five teams. Officers interested in joining PHERST or looking for more information may email the PHERST Recruitment Mailbox at [dha.ncr.Admin-Mgmt-J-1.mbx.phs-pherst-recruitment@health.mil](mailto:dha.ncr.Admin-Mgmt-J-1.mbx.phs-pherst-recruitment@health.mil).

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# How Self-Care Improves Employment Outcomes

by LT Erica Bussey-Jones, MPH

I'm sure we've all heard the saying, "you can't pour from an empty cup" at some point in our lives. Well, while the saying may seem cliché, I am here to tell you that it has made me rethink my life choices and what I prioritize. As officers, we put on our uniform daily dedicating our lives to serving the underserved. We're up early and often are up late prioritizing our family member's needs. Being there for everyone when they need us is our superpower. No matter how tired we are or how many other things are on our to do list, we always seem to make it happen. But, in the midst of all of the chaos, how are you doing? I'm not inquiring about the person that shows up to their duty station daily committed to getting the work done, or the person that rises early to pack everyone's lunch for the day and get the kids dressed for school, or the one that is often up cleaning during nightfall hours when the rest of the house is sound asleep. I'm speaking of the person within. The one's reflection you see when gazing into the mirror and the one tossing and turning after midnight because they forgot to begin working on that report that is due the next day.

Step back, evaluate your overall health and answer these questions. Am I in a

mentally, emotionally, and physically good space? Am I getting easily agitated by the slightest things? Am I always tired and lacking energy? Am I truly putting my best foot forward in all I do or doing just enough to complete the task? If you feel in agreement with any of the previous statements, it's time to implement regular selfcare. Most people see selfcare as taking elaborate vacations, getting regular massages, or partaking in activities you enjoy on a regular basis. While these are all great ways to ensure that you are taking care of yourself, there are small things you can do daily to improve your mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing. Listed are things you can do daily depending on how much time you have. Prioritize taking a little time to yourself to relax, reflect, and release which will result in a clear mind, relaxed body, and peaceful soul.

- 30-minute walk/physical activity
- 20-minute relaxing bubble bath
- 10-minute journaling
- 5-minute meditation
- 1-minute of positive affirmations

Participating in one or multiple of these practices will not only promote a healthy



LT Erica Bussey-Jones

mind, body, and soul but you will also see results in your employment. You will be more focused and energized which will result in increased productivity. Take care of yourself, and everything you are involved in will begin to flow effortlessly. I hope this article encourages you to self-reflect and identify ways that you can incorporate selfcare into your daily routine so that you will be able to serve in a capacity that is fulfilling to achieve your goals!

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## COF from page 4

documentary made and for their tireless efforts to make it available and seen to the widest possible audience (Pam will be receiving recognition at the Symposium in June).

Nominations Committee, chaired by RDML Kerry Nessler, provided a draft motion to accept the committee recommendations for the 2024-2027 BOT – three new Trustees will join the Board in July. The new trustees are CAPT (ret) Arron Middlekauff, CAPT (ret) James Imholte, RDML (ret) Steven Solomon. Motion approved.

Research and Grants Committee, chaired by RDML Paul Seligman, provided a draft motion to accept the committee's

recommendations for the 2023 Fall Cycle Seed Grants (\$125K). Motion approved.

Education Committee, chaired by RDML Pam Schweitzer. CAPT (Ret) Rob Tosatto presented a request for additional funding for the HOSA project which will be discussed and considered for the FY25 budget in June. RDML Schweitzer recommends increased involvement at the state chapters level and not to only prioritize the annual HOSA meeting.

On a Personal Note: That is a wrap until next month. Remember to always lead with courage and passion for the Corps, COA, and COF!

# OBITUARIES

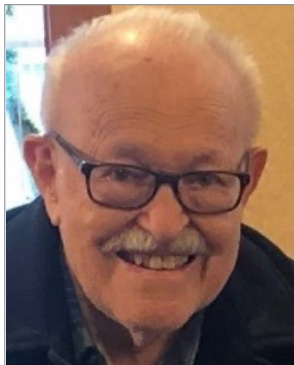
## **CAPT (Ret.) Donald A. Carlyle – Life Member**

Bellevue, Washington - Donald Andrew Carlyle was born in Seattle, Washington on January 16, 1925 and died on December 12, 2023.

Donald Carlyle graduated from Renton High School and began studying engineering at the University of Washington. He then served in the United States Army. After a medical aptitude test, he was sent to pre-medical school. When World War II ended, he transferred his studies to the United States Public Health Service (USPHS), where he received further training and graduated from the University of California at San Francisco, School of Medicine. With further studies, he specialized in radiology.

After serving many years, he retired as a Captain of the USPHS. He then went into private practice as a radiologist in Seattle, Washington and later at Western Clinic in Tacoma, Washington.

He was preceded in death by Mary Carlyle, his beloved wife of seventy-two years. They raised two children and enjoyed their grandchildren.



## **CAPT (Ret.) Celeste B. Evans – Life Member**

Mount Dora, Florida - Retired Captain Celeste B. Evans, aged 99, passed away peacefully in her home on March 7, 2024. Born on July 15, 1924, in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, to the late Ethel and Joseph Gelwicks. Celeste was a U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) officer and retired as a Captain. She was the head operating room nurse and cared for leprosy patients in the Carville, Louisiana leper colony.



Beloved mother of Diann Felber and her husband Michael; a cherished, loving grandmother to Justin and Jessica and her husband James and proud great-grandmother to Omar, Kaia, and Myka. She leaves behind her dear sister, Madeline Dawson. Celeste's affection extended to her numerous nieces, nephews, and a wide circle of caring friends. Her love, sacrifice and devotion to her family defined her life, leaving a legacy of a woman who lived with character and integrity and epitomized the essence of a matriarch and a saint. Her impact will resonate through the lives she touched with her kindness and compassion.

## **LCDR Esther Grimsley – Life Member**

Green Valley, Arizona – Esther M. (Nowell) Grimsley passed away on July 23, 2023. She was born in Missouri, and married William Grimsley, MD, who preceded her in death. In her lifetime, she was an operating room supervisor.

The following is an excerpt about Esther from the May 2023 (page 26) issue of Frontline, written by COA's Executive Director Jacques Rychnovsky:

As you have heard me say, hearing from members is the most enjoyable part of my day. On the Friday afternoon preceding the 4th of July holiday, I received a call from a vibrant former officer, 98-year-old Lcdr Ester Grimsley, who asked COA to help her obtain a copy of her PHS1867. Ester served on active duty as a member of the USPHS Reserves from 1965 to 1966. Following her commissioning, she received orders to Vietnam where she served as the Operating Room Supervisor at the Da Nang Province Hospital. Esther needed proof of her service to seek care for Agent Orange exposure through the Green Valley, Arizona Veterans Administration (VA) clinic. On a Friday afternoon, I quickly assisted by completing her SF-180. Per her request, I faxed the form to the front office of the retirement complex where she resides. Esther hopped into her golf cart with her Cocker Spaniel and retrieved, signed, and returned the form. I urgently sent the request to CCHQ late on a Friday afternoon, outlining the pressing nature of this unique situation. CCHQ staff rapidly tackled the problem and provided Lcdr Grimsley with proof of her service by the following Monday afternoon, a 24-hour workday turnaround. Bravo Zulu to CCHQ staff for so efficiently meeting the needs of this former officer. (This story was shared with permission).

## **CAPT (Ret.) Paul J. Schmidt – Life Member**

Tampa, Florida - Dr. Paul J. Schmidt passed away peacefully while under the care of Hospice on September 19th, 2023. Paul was born in New York City in 1925. Paul served in the US Army during WWII and held a Bachelors from Fordham University and a Masters from St. Louis University. Paul went on to receive his Doctor of Medicine from New York University in 1953.



Paul was preceded in death by his loving wife of 63 years, Louise, his sons Matthew and Thomas, daughter Maria, and grandson Edward.

Dr. Paul J. Schmidt had joined the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) and retired as a Captain. During his tenure, he was the Director of the Clinical Center at NIH. Dr. Paul Joseph Schmidt, CAPT USPHS (Ret) will be interred in Arlington National Cemetery (TBD) with his wife Louise and son Thomas.

**OBITUARIES** from page 20

### **CAPT (Ret.) Billy G. Wells – Life Member**

Nocona, Texas – Billy Gene Wells passed away on January 3, 2022, only a week after his 93rd birthday. He was born on December 27th, 1928 in Waurika, Oklahoma. He attended the University of Oklahoma and received a degree in pharmacy.



In 1956, he commissioned into the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) and was assigned as a pharmacist at the Indian Hospital in Lawton, Oklahoma. After retirement, he enjoyed traveling around the country in his motorhome.

Billy was a proud father and valued education and recreational life experiences. He was preceded in death by his parents, son Dale Leaman, and brothers Frank and Ora Leaman. He is survived by his sister Ola B Wells Faus (Ben), daughters LaRetta Wells Stevens (Leon) and Renee Wells, son Billy Wells, and his grandchildren and great grandchildren.

### **CAPT (Ret.) Robert Oliver Wolf**

Washington D.C. - Robert O. Wolf, passed away peacefully on February 4, 2024, at Sibley Memorial Hospital in Washington, DC, at the age of 98. He was born on March 14, 1925, in Mansfield, OH, to the late Clarence F. Wolf and Rebekah Stull Wolf.

Robert's journey was marked by a commitment to service, learning, and a deep sense of purpose. During World War II, Robert honorably served his country in the US Navy. In 1958, Robert embarked on a distinguished career in the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS). He conducted his dental internship in New Orleans, LA, then moved to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), where his research contributed significantly to both public health and individual patients. Robert was a life member of the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, finding joy in the great outdoors, leading hikes, participating in cabin work-trips, and serving as President (1974-1975).

Robert is survived by his beloved wife, Carol, his loving children Rebecca and Thomas, his brother Reverend James B. Wolf, and his two grandchildren, Robert and Kathren

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## **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR** from page 1

commitment to the patient is engrained in how he will execute his new position.

The first person to speak shared concerns with Dr. Krulak over “the erosion of certain TRICARE networks.” In certain parts of the country, TRICARE reimbursement rates make it difficult to build robust networks, and some providers only participate in TRICARE out of a sense of patriotism. Dr. Krulak informed the group that the T-5 contract which will go into effect on January 1, 2025, will tighten the requirement for the contractors to be accountable for keeping an adequate network of providers. He also said that he would look into the specifics of the new contract to ensure that the TRICARE contractors are held accountable to have more local network providers in certain areas and that they aren’t balancing the lack of providers in one area against another area where a plethora of providers exist, thus technically meeting the contract requirement.

Next, the issue of quality and timely care was discussed. One attendee pointed out that pay and quality healthcare are the two most important quality of life issues for uniformed service personnel. While many were happy that certain military treatment facilities (MTFs) reopened access to military families and retirees, the speaker felt that patients should have the opportunity to return to the network for primary care needs should they feel the quality of care being received is inadequate. Doing so during open enrollment season alone might not be enough.

Additional commenters brought up issues regarding the inflated cost of TRICARE for Young Adults (TYA). Following this, a discussion about coverage for continuous glucose monitoring, chiropractic care, inpatient eating disorder care for those over age 20, 24-hour blood pressure monitoring for pediatric patients,

and other treatments were discussed. Dr. Krulak emphasized that while it might seem as if TRICARE lags in approving new treatment modalities, they wait for solid and hard evidence to determine if novel therapies will be covered. He stated that while Medicare, the Veterans Administration, and the Food and Drug Administration also have robust review policies, TRICARE’s system is independent, and they particularly do not consider any studies paid for by industry. Dr. Krulak said, “There will be times when we determine that treatments and testing show promise but have not yet met necessary criteria. They must be both safe, and effective.”

During his remarks, Dr. Krulak discussed the importance of health care quality. He acknowledged that there are different standards to measure healthcare quality, that some are better than others, and certain ones utilize real-time data and not older data which might not reflect current trends. He said that TRICARE aims to put solid quality measurement in place, and as a former hospital commander, I know that Dr. Krulak understands the extreme importance of this topic.

During the call, I shared with him the challenges that officers with rural and remote assignments with the Bureau of Prisons, Indian Health Service, Department of Homeland Security, the U.S. Coast Guard, and other agencies have. As a Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USUHS) medical school graduate, he remarked that he understands the vital role that USPHS Commissioned Corps officers play in the health and safety of our nation. I have followed up with Dr. Krulak and have an in-person meeting scheduled with him at the end of April. I will be sure to let you know how it goes. In the meantime, send me any message or concerns you have for him, and I will be sure to share.

Until next time!

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## **DD214** from page 1

the USPHS Commissioned Corps than our retirees! We are thrilled to work together as one Corps to celebrate our history and our future.”

He then turned things over to CAPT Elizabeth (Beth) Helm, Deputy Director of Business Operations and Management, who announced that CCHQ has recently developed an email listserv to communicate with retired officers. It is CCHQ’s plan to begin communicating with retirees via this listserv, so it is vital that all retired officers have a valid email and mailing address in the USCG pay portal. She asked that any questions regarding your Statement of Service (PHS 1857) or retired pay or issues with the Coast Guard pay center be directed to her since they are currently working on revising the Interagency Agreement (IAA).

RDML Schobitz closed remarks from CCHQ by saying CCHQ welcomes the opportunity to brief mission and deployment successes with the group at future gatherings. He said he is proud of officers and feels that retirees will be too. He also said that he will use COA as a touch point to keep the retired officers updated when the DD214 process starts, as it will be rolled out by year of retirement and not all at once. “I see COA as an important part of the U.S. Public Health Service family. I do think it is critical that we spend more time engaging with our retirees and encouraging more of our retirees to remain part of COA. Please know it was our honor to be here with you today.”

The full recording of the March 19th Retired Officers gathering can be viewed at <https://tinyurl.com/MarchRetireeEventVideo>.

# PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation

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