

2023 CONFERENCE RECAP

The San Antonio heat fueled the enthusiasm of NCOA members who gathered at the Holiday Inn San Antonio Riverwalk on July 18-21 for the 58th Annual NCOA Conference and Vanguard Awards Banquet.

The Resolutions Committee met on Tuesday afternoon to help set the Association's legislative course for the coming year. NCOA's Director of Government Affairs, Levi Sadr, facilitated the meeting. The Committee will be reviewing the Association's resolutions for relevance and continued need.

The theme for the Opening Icebreaker was "Teamwork Makes the Dream Work." Delegates donned their favorite team colors, jerseys, and t-shirts, mixed and mingled, competed in a variety of Auxiliary-hosted games, and enjoyed plenty of Mexican-style fare - the perfect recipe for a night to remember!



Accomplishing the business of the Association kicked off on Wednesday with the Opening Ceremony. NCOA President Paul Kingsbury welcomed the delegates, as did Brigadier General Russell Driggers and CMSgt Casey Boomershine, the Commander and Command Chief Master Sergeant of the 502nd Air Base Wing and Joint Base San Antonio. Mrs. Janet Driggers briefed the delegates on the Five & Thrive Program that aims to improve the Quality of Life challenges in five focus areas (Childcare, Education, Healthcare, Housing, Spouse Employment) by highlighting preventative measures, promoting best practices, and fostering community partnerships.



Richard Schneider, NCOA's long-time Director of State and Veterans Affairs, was inducted into the NCOA Hall of Fame with his four children – Rich Schneider, Kristin Bond, Leslie Schneider, and Fiona Schneider - proudly in attendance.



As always, we are grateful to the Senior Enlisted Leadership Panel participants who took time from their busy schedules to attend the conference and update our delegates on what was happening in their respective services – representing the



Sergeant Major of the Army was CSM Brian Hester, Command Sergeant Major, U.S. Army Futures Command; representing the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps was SgtMaj Michael Pritchard, Command Senior Enlisted Leader FMFLant, MARFORCOM, MARFORNORTH; representing the Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy was FLTCM Delbert Terrell, Fleet Master Chief, Personnel, Manpower and Training; representing the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force was CMSgt Edwin Ludwigsen, Command Chief Master Sergeant, Air Force Personnel Center; and, representing the Chief Master Sergeant of the Space Force was CMSgt Jacqueline Sauve, Advisor to the Chief Master Sergeant of the Space Force. Moderating the Panel was SSG Martha Erosa, President of the Fort Sam Houston Audie Murphy Club.

During the Awards Luncheon, Small and Large Regional Chapters of the Year were recognized. NCOA's Military Vanguard recipients were presented life memberships in the Association. Chairman of the Board Gerald Morey presented the NCOA Chairman's Award to Robert Barnett. NCOA's Executive Director Joe Terry presented Appreciation Awards to a number of sponsors who have been instrumental in supporting the Association – USAA, Doc-Development, United Healthcare, Korean Defense Veterans Association, and KATUSA Veterans Association. The Awards Luncheon wrapped up with the traditional Parade of Checks. Thank you to the individuals and chapters that made donations to support the Association's benevolent programs and membership development program.



Wrapping up a full day, delegates convened for the NCOA Annual Business Meeting where SMSgt Gerald Morey of Great Falls, MT, Marine Corps Veteran Vicky Hensley of Wingate, TX, and 2LT Ashley Gardner, USAFR, of Colorado Springs, CO, were elected to serve on the NCOA Board of Directors.

Meanwhile, members of the International Auxiliary attended the Auxiliary's Annual Business Meeting where Lee Fike of San Antonio, TX, and Tammy Sullivan of Mather, CA, were elected to serve on the Auxiliary Board of Directors. The Auxiliary's outstanding performers were recognized – the Betty Ross Top Recruiter Award for 2022 was presented to the Spirit of Sacramento Auxiliary, Barbara Weatherill received the Auxiliary Top Supporter Award, and the Auxiliary's President's Award was presented to Scott Rodowick.



Thursday kicked-off with a variety of informative briefings – Tuesday’s Children, AAFES, USAA; Women Veterans Concerns; AAFES; the Honorable James Rodriguez, Assistant Secretary of the Department of Labor VETS; Doc-Development; CMSgt Tanya Johnson, Senior Enlisted Leader of the Defense Health Agency; and Ms. Maureen Elias, Deputy Chief of Staff, Department of Veterans Affairs.

The Knights of the Square Table held their annual assembly to accomplish the business of the Knights of the Square Table – new Knights were dubbed, existing Knights were elevated, fallen Knights were honored, the course for the upcoming year was set.



The stars shined brightly on Thursday evening during the Vanguard Awards Banquet where CMSgt (Ret) Jim Sullivan, chairman of the Central Valley Chapter served as the Master of Ceremonies for the evening. Hats off to Jim for a job extremely well done!

NCOA’s superstar chapters were recognized. The Rogue Chapter from Medford, OR, was recognized as the 2022 Outstanding Large Chapter of the Year and the Magnum Force Chapter from Bridgeport, MI, was named the 2022 Outstanding Small Chapter of the Year. The Trails End Auxiliary from Portland, OR, received the 2022 Auxiliary Chapter of the Year Award.

The guest speaker for the evening was Sergeant Major Michael Pritchard. Then the focus turned to the reason for the evening - honoring this year’s heroic Military Vanguard Award recipients.



The amazing stories of MSG Andrew D.

Chapoton, U.S. Army, Sgt Shawn B. Henson, U.S. Marine Corps, IT2 Thomas D. James, U.S. Navy, SSgt Austin S. Kier, U.S. Air Force, and ET1 Kurt P. Woodhouse, U.S. Coast Guard, had delegates glued to their seats with tears in their eyes. The Vanguard stories appear elsewhere on the NCOA website.

Friday morning was the Breakfast with the Boards – nothing like a hot, hearty breakfast to start the day off right as delegates prepared to depart amid promises to keep in touch and choruses of “see you next year.”

We would be remiss if we didn’t thank our generous affinity partners and sponsors whose support helped make this year’s conference a resounding success. A huge THANKS to our Conference Partner USAA, Platinum Sponsors Korean Defense Veterans Association and KATUSA Veterans Association, Gold Sponsor GEICO Military, and our Vanguard Sponsors - USAA, United HealthCare, Doc-Development, BlueCross BlueShield FEP Dental and Vision Programs, and the NCOA JROTC Program.

Special thanks to Army Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES), BeneFeds, Columbia Southern University, Conviva Care Center, Dixie Flag and Banner Company, Doc-Development, Excelsior University, GEHA, Grand Canyon University, Robert Haltiner, Humana Military, HEB, Jordan Ford, National Cemetery Administration, NCOA Air Academy Chapter, NCOA Knights of the Square Table, NCOA International Auxiliary, NCOA Mountain Post Chapter, NCOA Oregon State Advisory Council, Operation Gratitude, PGK Sir Ted Pilihos, Quilts & Crafts, Grand Knight Sir Paul Siverson, Southern New Hampshire University, PGK Sir Richard Steinberg, Sir Joseph Terry, NCOA Trails End Auxiliary, U.S. Veterans Magazine, The Wash Tub, Lady Barbara Weatherill, Western Governors University, and Xpert Media Management.