

2024 CONFERENCE RECAP

The San Antonio heat (while not as hot as many parts of the country for a change) fueled the enthusiasm of NCOA members who gathered at the DoubleTree by Hilton San Antonio Airport Hotel on July 16-19, 2024 for the 59th 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 continue reviewing the Association's resolutions for relevance and continued need.

The theme for the Opening Icebreaker was "NCOA Olympic Gold." Delegates donned their favorite red, white, and blue colors, jerseys, and t-shirts, mixed and mingled, competed in a variety of Auxiliary-



hosted games, enjoyed plenty of BBQ-style fare, and four new Rats were initiated – the perfect recipe for a night to remember. Rats were initiated - the perfect recipe for a night to remember!



Accomplishing the business of the Association kicked off on Wednesday with the Opening Ceremony. NCOA President Garry McClure welcomed the delegates, as did San Antonio's Mayor Ron Nirenberg. NCOA's Director of Government Affairs provided an informative update on the Association's legislative activities.



SgtMaj Troy Hensley, USMC (Ret), long-time NCOA member, supporter, Development Director, and Past Grand Knight was inducted into the NCOA Hall of Fame with his widow Vicky Hensley and many family members and friends proudly in attendance.



Informative briefings from John Boersler, Chief Veterans Experience Officer, from the Department of Veterans Affairs, CSM (Ret) Informative briefings from John Boersler, Chief Veterans Experience Officer, from the Department of Veterans Affairs, CSM (Ret) Diahann White from the Korean Defense Veterans Association and representatives from Defense Health Agency (in person and via Zoom) rounded out the morning's General Session.



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 along with personalized backpacks. Sir Terry Haines was presented the International Auxiliary’s Top Supporter Award. NCOA’s Executive Director Joe Terry presented Appreciation Awards to our sponsors and partners who have been instrumental in supporting the Association .

Awards of Excellence were presented to core members of the Sunshine State Chapter for their efforts on behalf of the Association in New Port Richey, FL. 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 MSG Robert Llewellyn, of Hope Mills, NC, and CMSgt Theodore Pilihos, USAF (Ret) of Cibolo, TX, were elected to serve on the NCOA Board of Directors.

Meanwhile, members of the International Auxiliary attended the Auxiliary’s Annual Business Meeting where Scott Rodowick of Elverta, CA, Ronda Smith of Tucson, AZ, and Margo Wazbinski of Midland, MI, were elected to serve on the Auxiliary Board of Directors. The Auxiliary’s outstanding performers were recognized – the Betty Ross Top Recruiter Award for 2023 was presented to the Spirit of Sacramento Auxiliary, and the Auxiliary’s President’s Award was presented to Ronda Smith.

Thursday kicked-off with informative briefings from Walmart and AAFES. Longtime NCOA life member Ed Badrak was presented an NCOA Vietnam War Recognition Medallion.



The morning was rounded out with the Senior Enlisted Leadership Panel. As always, we are grateful to the 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 Victor J. Laragione, Command Sergeant Major, Army Medical Center of Excellence; representing the Sergeant Major of the Marine



Corps was SgtMaj Michael R. Brown, Marine Corps Installations, National Capital Region, Marine Corps Base Quantico; representing the Master Chief Petty Officer of



the Navy was Force Master Chief PatrickPaul C. Mangaran, the 17th Force Master Chief, Bureau of Medicine & Surgery, Director, Hospital Corps; representing the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force was CMSgt Chad W. Bickley, Command Master Chief, Headquarters Air Education and Training Command and Joint Base San Antonio – Randolph; representing the Chief Master Sergeant of the Space Force was CMSgt Brian O. Sheffield, Senior Advisor to the Chief Master Sergeant of the Space Force; and representing the Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard was Command

Master Chief Shawn A. Burns, Command Master Chief for the 8th Coast Guard District. Moderating the Panel was SSG Latrice Lewis-Turner from the JBSA Sergeant Audie Murphy Club.

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 and the course for the upcoming year was set. Sir Scott Ytzen assumed the mantle of Grand Knight and Sir Ted Pilihos was presented the Knights of the Square Table Lifetime Achievement Award.



The stars shined brightly on Thursday evening during the Vanguard Awards Banquet where CMSgt (Ret) Jim Sullivan, chairman of the Central Valley Chapter once again 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 2023 Outstanding Large Chapter of the Year and the Magnum Force Chapter from Bridgeport, MI, was named the 2023 Outstanding Small Chapter of the Year. The Trails End Auxiliary from Portland, OR, received the 2023 Auxiliary Chapter of the Year Award.



The guest speaker for the evening was Command Sergeant Major Rick Merritt, USA (Ret). Then the focus turned to the reason for the evening - honoring this year's heroic Military Vanguard Award recipients.

The amazing stories of SGT Liam W. Douglas, U.S. Army, Cpl Aidan J. Meyler-McAuliffe, U.S. Marine Corps, LS3 Adriene M. Johnson, U.S. Navy, MSgt Greggorey L. Brewer, U.S. Air Force, and ME1 Joseph P. Deer, 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 nice, filling 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 Sponsor Korean Defense Veterans Association, Gold Sponsors GEICO Military and Columbia Southern University, and our Vanguard Sponsors - USAA, United HealthCare, Doc-Development, Korean Defense Veterans Association, and the NCOA JROTC Program.



Special thanks to American Public University System, Army Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES), Army Residence Community, Association of Mature American Citizens, Colorado Technical University, FIREARMS Legal Protection, GEHA, HEB, Humana Military, Longbridge Financial Services, Lowe's, Morale Patch Wine Co, National Cemetery Administration, NCOA Air Academy Chapter, NCOA International Auxiliary, NCOA Knights of the Square Table, NCOA Oregon State Advisory Council, NCOA Rogue Chapter, Operation Gratitude, Randolph Brooks Federal Credit Union, Top Sarge Business, Quilts & Crafts, Grand Knight Sir Paul Siverson, U.S. Veterans Magazine, Vibrant Works Base Supply Center, Waldorf University, Walmart, The Wash Tub, Western Governors University, and Xpert Media Management (XMM).