Some Folks Just Don’t get it

Unfortunately, certain Smithsonian officials seem to be among those who “just don’t get it.” As many of you may recall, I wrote last month about our effort to persuade the Smithsonian to change the design of the National Native American Veterans Memorial, which is to be constructed on the grounds of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian. When the design for the memorial was revealed in late June, we immediately noted that it did not include the logos of the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) or the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). We wrote to the Director of the National Museum of the American Indian (letter on the COA website at http://www.coausphs.org/media/1874/letter-to-museum-of-the-american-indian-director-june-2018.pdf) and asked that the memorial be made inclusive from the

Executive Director

James T. (Jim) Currie, Ph.D., Colonel, USA Ret.

Making History, Again!

by LT Morgan Lee

For the second year, the Public Health Service Commissioned Corps (PHS) was given the honor of marching in the National Memorial Day Parade on Constitution Avenue in Washington, DC. The parade is the largest Memorial Day event in the country, with thousands of onlookers and millions of viewers honoring those who served and continue to serve, as well as those who made the ultimate sacrifice serving our country. This year, the PHS contingent dedicated the parade to CAPT (Dr.) Floyd Hawk. The Commissioned Corps had six medical officers in quarantine duty in the Philippine Islands at the outbreak of WWII. Dr. Hawk was in charge of the quarantine station at Cebu. When the island of Cebu was besieged by the Japanese, Dr. Hawk chose to stay in his quarantine station to take care of his patients, rather than fleeing. He was eventually captured by the Japanese and died of starvation in Fukuoka prison.

The participation of the PHS platoon was made possible through the support of the District of Columbia Commissioned Officers Association. LT Danny Benbassat, who started the tradition last year, planned the event, and LT Timothy Martin led our troops as platoon leader. CAPT Sara Newman and CAPT Michelle Braun provided exemplary leadership by participating and encouraging our officers. After we rehearsed and inspected our uniforms, we joined our brothers and sisters in uniform for a military lunch. This served as a great opportunity to connect with our sister services and talk about who we are and what we do. We were also able to get some great pictures with actor Greg Kinnear and the 2018 Miss America, Cara Mund.

After lunch, we took our place in the assembly area directly behind the United States Coast Guard platoon. Like last year, we were honored by participating in the Grand Finale of the Military. The finale consists of active duty military personnel who march last and close the parade. Shortly after the march began, we halted to face the reviewing stand and
COA Member Benefits

Capitol Hill Representation
Efforts on Capitol Hill continually support all Commissioned Corps officers – active duty 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 reports on monthly activities and items of interest about the Corps & COA

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

$7,500 for Online Degrees
$7,500 scholarships to earn online degrees, which include:
- MPH@GW
- MHA@GW
- HealthInformatics@GW
- MBA@UNC
- MBA@Simmons
- HealthcareMBA@Simmons
- IRonline (American)
- MBA@American

NYMC Online MPH
50 percent discount for the online MPH and certificate programs

Scholarship Program
College scholarships for children and spouses of COA members

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

Legislative Update

PHS Retirees: Please Speak Up Now

by Judy Rensberger

As we all know, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), a White House agency, is proposing to decimate the PHS Commissioned Corps by reducing its size from approximately 6,500 active-duty officers to 4,000. The idea is that an across-the-board cut of 38 percent will somehow increase efficiency. Details, though sparse, can be found on pages 81-82 of OMB’s reform plan, “Delivering Government Solutions in the 21st Century.” In case you’ve missed it, here’s the link: https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Government-Reform-and-Reorg-Plan.pdf

COA Request

PHS retirees can play a constructive role here, and many of you have reached out to COA to let us know you want to help. Here’s how: Let your own members of Congress know that you are concerned and dismayed. You have two U.S. Senators and one U.S. Representative. If you’re uncertain who they are, then visit this website: https://www.govtrack.us/congress/members. Enter your street address, including zip code, and submit. You’ll get names, photos, and contact information for both your U.S. Senators and your U.S. Representative.

What next?
Write, call, or visit your lawmaker’s district office in person. If you write, then make clear in the very first sentence why you are writing: The Administration wants to reduce the size of the PHS Commissioned Corps by 38 percent. You, as a concerned PHS retiree, are asking your elected members of Congress to take an active interest in this matter. Try to keep your letter to one, tightly-written page (it’s not easy). Briefly describe the highlights of your PHS career. Mention any specific benefits of your (or others’) PHS service to your State or Congressional District.

If you call, then plan to deliver your message briefly, clearly, and politely. Be sure to point out that you’re a constituent. After stating your main points or reasons for concern, invite follow-up and leave your contact information. Express your thanks.

If you decide to make an in-person visit, then call ahead to let the staff know you’re coming. Take one or two handouts (call us if you need material). Plan to stay no longer than twenty minutes. Leave your contact information and thank your hosts for their time.

Suggestions

Whether you choose to write, call, or visit the offices of your members of Congress, here are some general suggestions. If you have deployed in response to hurricanes or other natural disasters, see LEGISLATIVE continued on page 4
I was listening to National Public Radio on my way home from work on 26 June and heard an interview with Harvey Pratt, whose design for the proposed National Native American Veterans Memorial had just been selected from among many entries. Mr. Pratt talked about his design, mentioning that it contained the logos of "the five military services." I knew immediately that we had a problem on our hands, as once again, someone operating without malice, but also without total knowledge, had omitted both the US Public Health Service (USPHS) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

The memorial is to be constructed on the grounds of the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, so the next day I drafted a letter to Museum Director Kevin Gover pointing out the omission and asking that the design be modified to accommodate both the USPHS and NOAA. The COA letter can be found on our website at http://www.coausphs.org/media/1874/letter-to-museum-of-the-american-indian-director-june-2018.pdf

I reached out to senior Native Americans in the Commissioned Corps and informed them of what I had learned. I asked these men, all captains and admirals, to reach out through their tribal connections and see if someone knew the museum director.

I then contacted the two-star admiral who commands the NOAA Corps and told him what I had found. He and I have a good relationship, and he knows that we will always look out for NOAA when we can. His folks immediately jumped into the situation, though I don’t know exactly what they might have done.

I emailed the Assistant Secretary for Health, ADM Brett Giroir, to let him know what I had found and what COA had done. I received a prompt acknowledgment from him. He is totally supportive of COA's efforts and is working through his own channels to effect a change in the design of the memorial.

I drafted a letter to my friend Rick West, who was a director of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian. Rick now directs the Autry Museum in Los Angeles, and I asked him to weigh-in on our behalf with his successor.

The Washington Post had run an article about the proposed memorial that same day (27 June) so I contacted the author and told her about the omission. She said she would be interested if we heard anything from Director Gover, and I promised to keep her informed.

I then reached out to the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA), a federal government agency that weighs-in on projects in the District of Columbia. "Weighs-in" is perhaps too weak a term, as the CFA actually has to approve the design of government monuments and buildings in the District of Columbia. A copy of the letter we sent...
On August 9, 2018, Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker signed S. 2632, “An act relative to veteran’s benefits, rights, appreciation, validation and enforcement (The Brave Act),” Section 5 acknowledges the Commissioned Officers of the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) as veterans in Massachusetts. This places Massachusetts in line with the Federal recognition of USPHS/NOAA officers as veterans.

Let me share the highlights of how this came to be. The story begins in 2012, when I was teaching in the Massachusetts state university system and applied to purchase “Veteran’s Creditable Service” in the state retirement system. My application was denied because I “did not qualify as a ‘veteran’ in Massachusetts”. This was a total surprise to me! I entered the USPHS as a COSTEP, assigned to Minot, ND, and Eagle Butte, SD. After graduation from nursing school, I served in Tuba City, AZ, until transfer to the USPHS hospital in Brighton, MA. I went to graduate school using veterans benefits, and had qualified for a VA mortgage. I had even been registered as a member of the Women in Military Service Memorial, at Arlington National Cemetery. I went through multiple levels of appeal with the state retirement board, and all were denied, until I was told there was nothing they could do until the law was changed.

I met with my local state representative, Rep. James Miceli, during his evening office hours at our local town hall. One of his staffers, Dave Robertson, helped draft the legislation, including Commissioned Officers of both USPHS and NOAA, to coincide with the Federal recognition of the seven uniformed services as veterans. The bill was filed in January 2015, testimony heard before the Joint Committee on Public Service, and a quick favorable release to the House Ways and Means Committee, also known as the graveyard of bills. We were unable to get the bill released before the end of that two-year legislative cycle. It was then that I was most fortunate to connect with an attorney, Stephen Roche, who had worked closely on Beacon Hill for many years. Using his insights, the bill was refiled in the new legislative session starting January 2017 in both the Massachusetts House and Senate. My local Senator, Bruce Tarr, immediately agreed to sponsor the legislation and was a vocal supporter. In addition, several attempts were made to add the language as an amendment to the budget. There were numerous meetings (so many that I lost count) at the state house with senators, representatives, and their legislative staff. Many times we were fortunate to be accompanied by uniformed officers who could educate about their roles in the state as USPHS officers. Again, we testified before the Joint Committee on Public Service and the bill received a relatively quick favorable release to the Ways and Means Committee. However, this time there was a special Veterans bill being organized and we had gathered enough interest to be included in this special bill. Indeed, it passed unanimously in the House and Senate.

There was not one person who opposed this legislation; indeed, most legislators were quick to thank officers for their service. It was revenue-neutral legislation that drew bi-partisan support. I am extremely grateful for the support of the New England COA and national COA, which wrote several letters in support of our efforts. I am delighted to share this positive outcome with you and look forward to a signing ceremony with the governor and a “victory tour” at the state house to thank the legislators.

Mary Aruda, PhD, APRN, at mary.aruda@gmail.com

LEGISLATIVE from page 4
then please say so. If you live anywhere in Indian Country, or in any state that has benefited from a PHS emergency response, then mention it. Point out that PHS officers occupy “day jobs” in twenty-seven U.S. health and regulatory agencies, as well as the Indian Health Service, and the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Yet they are deployable on short notice to man-made and natural disasters across the country.

Many members of Congress, as well as staff, are unaware of these basic facts. (We are reminded of this every time we visit Capitol Hill). Hearing from concerned and well-informed constituents can have a powerful impact.

COA Strategy

COA’s basic strategy is to alert all members of Congress, especially those whose districts will be most affected by the proposed cuts. This includes Indian Country, and so the Indian Health Service has been our initial focus. Next up: Bureau of Prisons.

At this writing, it is not clear whether the Trump Administration will unilaterally order reductions in the PHS Commissioned Corps, or let attrition play out, or look to Congress for approval. As I write, the question of how much the Administration can do by itself is reportedly under review by the Office of General Counsel in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

It is encouraging to hear from PHS retirees who are concerned and eager to help in whatever way they can. But I have also heard from PHS retirees who say that, over the years, they have seen other threats to the PHS commissioned Corps, and these never amounted to much. So, they wonder, is this threat serious? As one PHS retiree wrote in an e-mail to me, “I am at your service if this cut looks like it’s going somewhere.” Well, it seems to us that it is. And by the time we have unequivocal proof, it will likely be too late.
St. Louis Chapter COA Returns to Service

by LT Sarah Maynard and LT Jerome Anderson

On July 28, 2018, the St. Louis (STL) chapter of the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Officers Association (COA) held its first group activity since becoming reestablished as an active COA branch. STL COA President LCDR Liza Soza, and members LCDR Dustin Hampton, LT Sarah Maynard, and LT Jerome Anderson, along with family and friends, were able to process over 7,500 pounds of food for the St. Louis Area Foodbank. Their volunteer efforts provided over 6,000 meals for people dealing with food insecurities. The St. Louis Area Foodbank, whose purpose is to actively fight to eliminate hunger, successfully distributed 42 million pounds of food last year throughout Missouri and Illinois.

As new acting President of the STL COA, LCDR Soza has been working diligently to reestablish the local chapter after three years of inactivity. One of the biggest challenges is that there are only a few local COA members spread out among three States. LCDR Soza aims to keep the chapter heavily involved in many more new and exciting community service events while making the STL chapter the most active component of the USPHS COA.

American Pharmacists Association Memorial Flagpole Re-Dedication

The American Pharmacists Association (APhA) will re-dedicate its memorial flagpole with a new bronze plaque that honors all federal pharmacists (including USPHS pharmacists) who have served or are currently serving during our nation’s Global War on Terrorism. This ceremony will be held on Monday, November 12, 2018, at the APhA HQ in Washington, DC. This will coincide with the annual APhA Veterans Day Ceremony. The APhA is soliciting donations to support this effort. Donations can be made at the following link: http://www.aphafoundation.org/flagpole-memorial-update
As my co-workers and I wearily watch the weather patterns across the globe, we can’t help reflecting on the tremendous efforts that went into last year’s hurricane response. What we thought was going to be a short three-four week response turned into an exhaustive eight-and-a-half month effort preparing for, recovering from, and rebuilding in the wake of three historic storms: Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria. Those powerful storms ravaged Texas, Louisiana, the US Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and portions of the Southeast United States, leaving tremendous destruction, compromised water systems, and downed power lines in their wake. Because of the storms, hundreds of residents lost loved ones, and millions experienced lack of safety and health services. Throughout the response and recovery efforts, USPHS Officers, alongside their civilian and DoD counterparts, provided heroic acts of leadership in public health assistance, health messaging, occupational health, and disease surveillance.

A few weeks ago, I had the opportunity to meet with some public health heroes who experienced Irma and Maria first hand in Puerto Rico.

Clinica San Lorenzo, a neighborhood health clinic about an hour outside of San Juan, was severely damaged by Hurricane Maria. Though the building was leveled shortly after the storm, the staff rallied together to make-do with temporary accommodations. Inside, we met with the medical director and the physicians, but it wasn’t until we spent time in the pharmacy that the true nature of this crisis was revealed.

In conversations over the next hour, translated back and forth from English to Spanish, I found that this small group of people endured tremendous hardship in the days following Hurricanes Irma and Maria. The storm not only wiped out their building, but it also destroyed nearly all of their supplies. Though most of the pharmacists, doctors, and nurses were victims themselves, within just six days of the disaster, this team of public health professionals had assembled a makeshift health department and returned to serving the needs of their community. Early on, there was no access to computer systems and therefore no way to determine if the people who showed up for help were patients or had insurance. But, the regional director for the clinic was strong in purpose and instructed her staff to remember that “people come first.” This enabled the health professionals to see and treat everyone regardless of their ability to pay. It gave them strength to carry on their mission.

Having worked within CDC’s Emergency Operations Center many times, I know how challenging it is to meet the demands of a response. Sometimes, our compassion for others and strength of purpose are the only things getting us through the day. I can’t imagine responding to the outbreak of Ebola, or the 2017 Hurricane Response, without strong leadership, vision, and purpose. And yet, sometimes I feel confused about what the current vision is for our service.

Those of us who work in zoonotic diseases often talk about the perfect storm in terms of factors that influence the emergence of disease. With the demands for fitness, readiness, and the recent language in the President’s budget, it can feel that we are in a perfect storm for losing our service. Though times may seem tough right now, please be assured that all of us at COA and COF are working hard for you. We are asking the tough questions and are trying to get answers for many things. If you have questions or concerns, please don’t hesitate to email us, pick up the phone and call us, or speak to your local branch leaders. We will try our hardest to continue to support you until this stormy season of our service passes.
Different Roads Lead to Involvement in the Nursing Professional Advisory Committee (N-PAC)

by CDR Heather Skelton and LCDR Anastasia Hansen

As the N-PAC chair for FY 18, I am frequently asked by nurse officers how to get more involved in N-PAC work. Admittedly, becoming involved in N-PAC work is not easy since open positions are only posted a few times a year and there are typically more applications than there are spots available. Here are stories from four junior officers as to how they secured their positions.

I always recommend that officers apply for everything that is posted. Getting a foot in the N-PAC door helps one navigate much more easily to other N-PAC roles. Here are vignettes about four officers and their involvement with N-PAC.

LCDR Lauren Brewer currently serves as a Medical Classification Specialist for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in North Carolina. She codes and catalogs underlying causes of death of the US population. In 2016 LCDR Brewer began her N-PAC work by responding to a Listserv call for members of the Career Development Subcommittee Webpage Team. The team was looking for a nurse who had experience ensuring documents are 508 compliant. LCDR Brewer gained such experience volunteering with JOAG. She did not have the desired level of experience, but she applied anyway and expressed her interest in learning. After a year on the team, she assumed the lead position. As the N-PAC Career Development Subcommittee Webpage team lead, she updates the PHS nursing website by providing links to the current CV format, benchmarks, and TIPS of the Month. She also supports networking within the N-PAC by ensuring that all the Nursing Spotlights are archived on the website so nurses who missed the original publications of Spotlights can easily locate them. LCDR Lauren Brewer: ywz@cdc.gov

LCDR Allison Gallen is a Board-Certified RN Case Manager stationed in Anchorage, AK, where she works for Southcentral Foundation with the Indian Health Service. She provides comprehensive nursing care, including screening and prevention, chronic disease management, and primary care coordination for both Anchorage and remote patients.

By responding to the November 2016 and 2017 Listserv announcements, she participated in the 2017 and 2018 Healing with CAARE Mission in Raleigh, NC. In 2017 she was competitively selected as an Indian Health Service voting member of the N-PAC. In 2015, she responded to a Listserv announcement for members of the Career Development Subcommittee Nursing Spotlight team. LCDR Gallen’s self-nomination stood out among twenty applicants because she submitted a writing sample. Since the announcement stated that the position required writing “spotlights” of other officers, the writing sample helped her stand out, and she was selected for the position. After being selected as a voting member of N-PAC in 2017, she took over the Webpage team within the Career Development Subcommittee. This led to her being selected as the Co-chair Elect of the N-PAC Communications Subcommittee. She is currently mentoring with the N-PAC Communications Subcommittee and will be assuming the role of Subcommittee Co-chair on October 1, 2018. She was also chosen as the webpage content liaison for the Federal Nursing Service Council, working closely with the Office of the Chief Nurse. LCDR Allison Gallen: agallen@southcentralfoundation.com

Currently stationed in Anchorage, AK, LCDR Anastasia Hansen is a nurse with over nineteen years experience. She manages the student internship program at Southcentral Foundation. Over the past two years, she has processed more than 500 student internship and clinical requests for seventeen different healthcare professions. Throughout her career, LCDR Hansen has been passionate about promoting and supporting education and professional development for health care professionals. LCDR Hansen currently serves on the N-PAC Career Development Subcommittee as one of the four writers of the TIP of the Month, and to date, she has authored four TIPs of the Month. LCDR Anastasia Hansen: AHansen@southcentralfoundation.com

LT Alyssa Givens has served at three different agencies spanning multiple remote-duty locations: Pennsylvania, Texas, Alaska, and Missouri. She currently serves as the Justice Prisoner Alien Transportation System (JPATS) Aeromedical Branch Chief with the U.S. Marshals Service. She is a HRSA NURSE Corps Scholarship reviewer and a member of the COA Symposium Abstract committee, and she has served on the N-PAC since 2015.

LT Givens currently serves on the N-PAC Career Development Subcommittee Nursing Spotlight team and will assume its lead in October 2018. Although LT Givens held the rank of LTJG when the position was advertised on the Listserv, she wanted to get involved with N-PAC early in her career and submitted her application. Being a part of the Nursing Spotlight gives her the opportunity to talk to nurse officers across the country and showcase their crucial work and key contributions to the Corps. LT Alyssa Givens: Alyssa.Givens@usdoj.gov
Contributing to the Commissioned Corps and Enhancing Professional Development: DCCPR Opportunities

by CAPT Esan O. Simon, MD, MBA, FS, USPHS

I heard about some of the changes the Commissioned Corps is undergoing and sought ways to contribute to the Public Health Service. One opportunity was to provide assistance to the Division of Commissioned Corps Personnel & Readiness (DCCPR) in Rockville, MD.

DCCPR has routinely asked for temporary assistance from PHS officers. I accepted an opportunity in July 2018 to provide Medical Officer support to Medical Affairs, a temporary duty assignment that proved to be an extremely rewarding experience on a number of levels. Although the intent of my duty was to provide requested support, I discovered that the professional development, expanded knowledge of the Commissioned Corps and a sense of PHS camaraderie were just a few of the benefits of a brief week at DCCPR.

As I walked through the halls of headquarters, officers I had never previously met randomly and courteously voiced their thanks that I was contributing to the DCCPR mission. I learned just how dedicated and committed the staff was, as many of them work weekend hours to accomplish the mission. I also learned how the Commissioned Corps operates.

If you are looking for an opportunity to positively contribute to the PHS, and are able to do so, consider volunteering for temporary duty at DCCPR and make the most out of the opportunity by learning as much as you can during your time there.

HISTORY from page 1

saluted with the other military platoons. Returning the salute were the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, Vice Chief of Staff of the Navy, Chief of Staff of the Air Force, Commandant of the Coast Guard, ambassadors from many foreign nations, and other dignitaries. It is during the approximate 60 second salute that we made history on national television. The broadcast hosts gave a special tribute to the PHS. With millions of viewers watching on TV and on the web, Kyra Phillips of ABC News said: “Also joining us is the Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, one of our uniformed services which was founded in 1889. In recent years they deployed to provide aid to Ebola victims in Africa, earthquake victims in Haiti, and hurricane victims in the Caribbean. We are especially proud and honored to welcome home these troops who have just recently returned from deployment overseas.” You can watch history in the making by going to:

https://www.youtube.com/embed/8v3N7bgQt6Y (queue to 1:46:52)

We felt extremely privileged to march in the National Memorial Day Parade, to honor those who have served and to represent our beloved Corps. We look forward to participating in the 2019 National Memorial Day Parade and to seeing many more Commissioned Corps Officers march with us.

By participating in the 2018 National Memorial Day Parade, the following officers brought honor upon themselves, the PHS, the uniformed services, and our nation:

| Michelle Braun | CAPT |
| Sara Newman | CAPT |
| Daniel Goldstein | CDR |
| Joseph Morris | CDR |
| Kimberly Calvery | LCDR |
| James Coburn | LCDR |
| Andy Duong | LCDR |
| Cindy Eugene | LCDR |
| Daniel Hamil | LCDR |
| Louis Corbin | LT |
| Morgan Lee | LT |
| Timothy Martin | LT (PLT Leader) |
| Tiffany Pham | LT |
| Jennifer Weekes | LT |
| Morgan Lee | LT (Public Affairs Officer) |
Aurora Borealis Branch COA Supports the Ronald McDonald House

by CDR Donna S Johnson

The Community Outreach Committee of the Aurora Borealis Branch (Anchorage, AK) supports the Ronald McDonald House (RMH) located in the patient housing building on the Alaska Native Medical Center campus. RMH provides free housing for pediatric patients and their families. Expectant mothers with high-risk pregnancies who live in remote locations also stay there while they await the birth of their baby.

In conjunction with the US Surgeon General’s health promotion, PHS officers held three events for guests, promoting low-fat, low-sugar options for summertime cool drinks. Items needed to prepare a six-ounce serving of smoothie or low-fat and low sugar options for a rootbeer float were donated by local grocery stores: Fred Meyer, Safeway, Wal-Mart and Costco.

The first event, held in March 2018, had thirty guests who enjoyed nut milk & berry smoothies, along with a Bingo game with prizes donated by the Hospital Auxiliary. Four officers at the event made and served fruit smoothies, while two officers organized and led the Bingo games. The following officers committed time to the event: CAPT Brian Schilling, CDR Velia Turknett, CDR Theresa Castellanos, LCDR Jodi Sides, LCDR Penelope Adams and LCDR Dustin Bergerson. It was very popular activity among the patients, and the RMH volunteer coordinator asked if we could do a similar event in a few months.

The event was repeated in May 2018. Five officers—CDR Darrel Hamel, CDR Sara Hegna, CDR Lisa Townshend-Bulson, LCDR Solveig Johnson and LT Gina Ryan—volunteered up to two hours each: three made and served fruit smoothies and two organized and led ChooseMyPlate.Gov Bingo titled “Healthy Foods & Portions” for approximately twenty RMH guests.

In July 2018, two volunteers—LCDR Jodi Sides and LT Pamela Finch—volunteered two hours to serve sugar-free root beer floats and play ChooseMyPlate.Gov Bingo “Healthy Foods & Portions” with fifteen participants.

MEMORIAL from page 3


We then found the website of Harvey Pratt, designer of the memorial. There was little space for sending a message, but we reached out and expressed our reasoning for why the design needed to be changed. Mr. Pratt responded the next day (6 July):

Hello, Col. Currie:

Thanks for bringing this to my attention. We have a memorial workshop later this month in DC and I will bring this to their attention, as this is a work in progress and changes can be made.

Thanks, Harvey Pratt

This sounded very promising, but we couldn’t blow the victory trumpets yet. There was still the end-of-July meeting and whatever came out of it. We knew that Museum Director Gover would have received our letter by then. It provided a more thorough explanation of what we were asking than the brief amount we could enter onto the Harvey Pratt website.

Through all of this effort, COA kept our senior Native American officers informed about what we are doing on behalf of all Native American USPHS veterans.

As I am writing this part of the story on 9 August, we have been unable to reach the memorial designer, Mr. Pratt. He has not responded to our repeated emails. We sent second letters to both Museum Director Gover and Fine Arts Chairman Powell, as neither of them had responded to us. We don’t know what is going on with the design, but we at COA will persist, taking our fight public if necessary. This should be an easy fix for what we are sure was an unintentional omission of the USPHS and NOAA, but the longer the process goes unresolved, the more difficult it will be to correct it.
Recent Commissioned Corps Memorandums, Directives, and Instructions

As a service to COA members, we have posted in one location on the COA website five recent and important Commissioned Corps Directives, Instructions, and Memorandums. These include the following:


**U.S. Food and Drug Administration to Hold 22nd Annual Commissioned Corps Promotion Ceremony on October 5, 2018**

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will hold its 23rd Annual Commissioned Corps Promotion Ceremony on Friday, 5 October 2018, at 1:30 pm. This prestigious event will be held at the White Oak Campus in the Auditorium located in Building 31, Silver Spring, MD. For some, this will be their first promotion, and for others, this will serve as a uniformed service career-affirming ceremony. At this ceremony, the FDA will formally honor the outstanding achievements and contributions our officers made during the 2018 promotion year and throughout their uniformed service careers. During the ceremony, the Center Director or designated center official participates with a family member to place the new rank on the shoulders of each deserving officer. The FDA is extremely proud of our Commissioned Corps officers and the significant contributions they make in improving the health and safety of this great Nation. Please join us in recognizing these officers and celebrating this monumental career achievement. The uniform of the day for promotees is Summer Whites. All other officers should wear the prescribed uniform of the day.
COF supported leadership learning opportunities highlight the annual Symposium

by CAPT Jason Woo, CDR Andrew Fine, and LT Tiffany Pfundt

“What’s your mindset?” “What do you need to do to Lead from Where You Are?” – if you don’t know the answer to these questions, you didn’t attend any of the leadership skills improvement opportunities the PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation for the Advancement of Public Health (COF) offered at this year’s Symposium. Here’s a brief update of what you missed.

Building on the training COF has sponsored in the past, this year’s Symposium offered officers multiple opportunities to learn more about their mindset and how developing an “Outward Mindset” is an essential element of becoming a more effective leader. Starting on the weekend preceding the Symposium, thirty-eight officers participated in the two day “Developing and Implementing an Outward Mindset” (DIOM) training. COF piloted this training last year at the Symposium in Chattanooga with twenty-two officers. Since then, COF support has allowed for additional two-day training sessions in Oklahoma City (August 2017) and in Minneapolis (May 2018), with twenty-five and twenty officers participating, respectively. Additional offerings are currently being planned in Anchorage, AK, in August, and then in Flagstaff, AZ, in October.

Following this core training, Monday’s Preconference Leadership Workshop was entitled “Lead from Where You Are,” based on a theme and message consistently heard from Deputy Surgeon General Sylvia Trent-Adams. After an inspiring keynote by the DSG, over 200 participants heard some of the challenges and successes for adopting this mantra from panels of outstanding Junior Officers and Chief Professional Officers. With these challenges in mind, the remainder of the day was a four-hour session with Jim Ferrell, co-author for the international best-selling books Leadership and Self-Deception, The Anatomy of Peace, and The Outward Mindset.

Ferrell is a founding and managing partner of the Arbinger Institute, an organization established to help provide solutions to a core problem at the heart of the human sciences--the problem of self-deception. This revolutionary understanding of human motivation identified how we end up creating and sustaining problems we don’t know we are causing, and how and why people resist helpful solutions. Arbinger is now recognized as a world leader in improving organizational culture, fostering conflict resolution, and changing mindsets.

As an internationally recognized expert, Ferrell is a highly-sought after consultant and speaker. Mutual interest allowed COF to work with Arbinger to bring Ferrell to Dallas for the benefit of Commissioned Corps officers.

Most training and consulting solutions attempt to improve results by helping people adopt new behavior. Most of these approaches do not achieve the desired results because they fail to go far enough. That is, they try to change behavior without changing what drives behavior: mindset. Without a change in mindset, newly-adopted behaviors won’t stick, and results will suffer. According to Arbinger, the critical ingredient in learning to lead from where you are is to develop and implement an Outward Mindset. The key leadership move, in this parlance, is to learn to see others’ needs, challenges, and objectives so you can adjust the way you do your work in a way that can be more helpful. Mindset determines influence.

Recognizing that adopting an outward mindset is not simply a matter of knowing about it, participants were presented the opportunity to join a Leadership and Self-Deception book circle. The book circles are an officer-to-officer facilitated experience promoting a mutual learning and peer coaching experience. Over 500 officers in duty stations across the country and internationally have participated since these were started in the fall of 2016. Groups meet virtually or in person four-six times over a five-eight week period to share thoughts, insights, and experiences with the material through shared reading and optional exercises. Multiple sessions are scheduled through the end of August. If you are interested in more information or wish to join a book circle, please contact LT Tiffany Pfundt at Tiffany.Pfundt@fda.hhs.gov.

Officers in the Medical, Dental, Pharmacy, Environmental Health, Dietician, Engineering and Veterinary categories also had Category Day presentations on the “Learning Core Leadership Through Service” (LCLTS) program either from officers who had participated in the DIOM training and facilitated the LCLTS program book circles, or from Col. (ret.) Cameron Cozzens, Director of Arbinger’s Government Practice and Relations. Through Arbinger and COF’s support, the core DIOM training can be brought to you, your local COA branch, or even your agency with a little planning and local officer support. For more information about this option or how to bring a training to you, please contact CAPT Jason Woo at Jason.Woo@fda.hhs.gov.
by LCDR Jennifer Cheng-Dobson, LCDR Ranay Yonkers and LT Quynh Tran

Each year PHS officers join together to organize an annual 5K run/walk event, and the 2018 Surgeon General’s (SG) 5K was the biggest yet! This was a four-day event that started with a kickoff 5K run/walk on June 7 during the annual COF Scientific and Training Symposium in Dallas, TX. Over the next four days, officers and HOSA students from across the country led and participated in local 5K run/walks in 36 states, raising awareness for addiction, mental health, and obesity.

The kickoff event took place in Dallas, TX at Brookhaven College, and the run was attended by 305 participants including 20 children. The event was organized entirely by a committee of PHS officers that partnered with a local running event company. More than 75 onsite PHS volunteers helped lead a fully-successful event that included an APFT pre-race station, a health education exhibit lead by various Professional Advisory Councils (PAC), Professional Advisory Groups (PAG) and Indian Health Service (IHS) partners, and an awards ceremony that included a medal specially designed for the event. The health education exhibit included ten booths led by officers from around the country that provided information to participants on a variety of important health topics including opioids, tobacco cessation, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, mental health and suicide prevention. VADM Jerome Adams highlighted the health issues that concern Americans today and reinforced the importance of having PHS officers actively involved in community outreach. He even initiated a pre-run warm up consisting of ten push-ups with all of the kids!

While the kickoff event was hugely successful, what happened around the country was even more spectacular. COA chapters organized twenty-seven runs that included officers, family, friends, children, dogs, and neighbors across the country, demonstrating the benefits of physical activity. The event’s leaders challenged COA chapters to organize the biggest event in their area. The winner for most-attended single event was North Carolina COA (Raleigh, NC) with 34 participants. Rainier Branch COA (Tacoma, WA) came in second with 30 participants, and Phoenix COA (Phoenix, AZ) had 18 participants. The DC COA chapter organized the most number of events totaling 39 participants in various locations in the metropolitan area. "We were out in the community, and people were excited to
see us and learn about who we were," said LCDR Ranay Yonkers, Rainier Branch COA.

As a result, 880 people, of whom one-third were civilians, participated in the SG 5K nationwide. PHS partnered with HOSA - Future Public Health Professionals to raise awareness of mental illness, and Oklahoma HOSA students rallied 122 people to participate in virtual events throughout the state. The event brought a sense of comradery and demonstrated a strong sense of commitment to supporting community outreach by PHS officers and HOSA.

Thanks to all of our sponsors: Commissioned Corps Officers Association, American Heart Association, HOSA – Future Health Professionals, AMSUS – The Society of Health Professionals, Natural Grocers, District of Columbia COA, North Carolina COA, Phoenix Branch COA, Rainier Branch COA, Thomas Jefferson COA and South Texas COA for making this event successful. Thank you also to each of the 400+ PHS officers who served on the planning committee, volunteered, participated and organized local events. Together we raised awareness for issues that aligned with the Surgeon General's initiatives while engaging in physical activity within our communities. This event was a remarkable accomplishment for Commissioned Corps officers, and it served as a reminder of the critical role we have in making Americans healthier one community at a time.

Retiring COA Member Receives Congressional Recognition

RADM Pam Schweitzer, who served as Chief Professional Officer for the Pharmacy category from 2014-2018, was recently given recognition by her member of the U.S. House of Representatives. He inserted a statement about her in the Congressional Record, which is the official account of activities on the floor of Congress. Here's what Rep. Paul Gosar (R-AZ) said about RADM Schweitzer.

*RECOGNIZING THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF REAR ADMIRAL PAMELA M. SCHWEITZER

HON. PAUL A. GOSAR
of Arizona in the House of Representatives
Wednesday, July 25, 2018

Mr. GOSAR. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to stand today to recognize the distinguished career of a remarkable constituent of mine, Rear Admiral Pamela A. Schweitzer. Rear Admiral Schweitzer is retiring after proudly serving her country for nearly 30 years.

After receiving her Bachelor’s degree in biology in Biological Sciences from California State University Fullerton, Rear Admiral Schweitzer went on to earn a Doctor of Pharmacy from University of California San Francisco and an Ambulatory Care/Administrative Residency at University Hospital.

see SCHWEITZER continued on page 19
Frontline profiles six PHS officers who are in their 11th or 12th year of service. We asked about their work and to reflect on changes in the Commissioned Corps since they joined.

**Charles N. McKee**  
**Commander**  
**Pharmacist, Indian Health Service**

Magnolia state of mind: I plan, evaluate, and coordinate pharmacy services at the Choctaw Health Center in central Mississippi

Ever-changing: I’ve seen the transition of many pharmacists into greater roles as clinical providers

Robots are here: My favorite experience was the success from implementing a robotic prescription system. We exceeded our goals for improving patient safety and reducing average wait time!

Good advice: At one time, I considered resigning from the Commissioned Corps because I felt officers were treated unfairly compared to their GS counterparts. If you’re not happy at your current duty station, then try another one. You just might like it – I did!

**Anne Whitis**  
**Commander**  
**Chief Physical Therapist in Chinle, AZ**

Mysteries of the Corps: The Commissioned Officer Training Academy and PAC mentoring programs have vastly improved new officers’ success at figuring out the “mysteries” of the Commissioned Corps system

Ike and Gustav: Besides the joys of working with lovely people in some of the most beautiful locations on Earth, my favorite time was a 17-day deployment during Hurricanes Ike and Gustav to staff the Federal Medical Station in College Station, Texas

Left in the lurch: It was challenging to have to resign my commission with the USAF without a guarantee that I would be commissioned by USPHS. Inter-service transfers were not an option for physical therapists when I came onboard.

**John D. Gibbins**  
**Captain**  
**Veterinary Epidemiologist, NIOSH**

The uniform: The biggest positive change has been the emphasis and importance placed on officership and the obligations of serving our country in uniform

Flyboys: I was a Public Health Officer in the Air Force from 1997-2006, and deployed to support Operation Enduring Freedom

Consistent struggles: Over the next 11 years, officers continue to struggle to meet both PHS and agency needs and responsibilities

Oh mercy: My favorite experience was deploying to the Pacific on the USNS Mercy

**Steven Scherling**  
**Commander**  
**Engineer, Minnesota District, Indian Health Service**

Minnesota wild: I lead a team to design, fund, and help maintain water and sewer systems for tribes across Minnesota

Run silent, run deep: I served for five years as a submarine officer in the Navy

PHS changes: I’ve seen more deployments and deployment-support infrastructure, tighter commissioning standards, and increased PHS-specific training and development

Mirror, mirror: I want to see the Commissioned Corps continue to be exercised for domestic and foreign policy, for peacetime humanitarian missions and to combat global health threats
Kimberly W. Roman  
Captain  
Flight Surgeon, USCG

New generation: I train new Coast Guard flight surgeons. Part of that training is real life experience getting hoisted under a USCG helicopter. It's scary and exhilarating at the same time.

Service by the sea: Since transferring from the Navy in 2006, I have spent my entire time in the PHS with the Coast Guard. I have practiced clinical and operational medicine, deployed with the PHS, and now write aviation medicine policy. It has been exciting and educational.

Next up: As my time in service begins winding down, it is interesting to think what I will do for the rest of my career or life, but I will always know that my service as a Navy and PHS physician were the right thing for me to do and I am honored to have been allowed to serve.

Christine O’Leary  
Lieutenant Commander  
Supervisory Consumer Safety Officer, FDA in Charlotte, NC

Connecting the Corps: Social media and web capabilities are making PHS activities and networking more accessible to all officers

What’s a BOTC? I attended BOTC. We no longer have BOTC. It automatically ages you by declaring this!

Passport stamps: I’ve enjoyed many opportunities to travel to foreign countries, including FDA inspections in China and Peru. My work there was valuable in protecting the American public from importation of adulterated food and drugs.

Balancing act: My single most challenging moment was returning from maternity leave after only six weeks. Learning to balance life as both a mother and an officer has forced me to be very deliberate in my decisions and execution of my goals.

The Anchorage Aurora Borealis and Mat-Su Fireweed COA members volunteer at the third annual Ride AWAIC fundraiser

by CDR Lara Nichols

AWAIC (Abused Women’s Aid in Crisis) is the largest domestic violence emergency shelter in Alaska, offering a full continuum of services for victims and those who care about them. Since 1977, AWAIC has been providing a domestic violence safe shelter, intervention, and resources to women, men, and children in the Anchorage community. AWAIC is committed to supporting victims of domestic violence, their friends, family, and the community by providing crisis intervention, advocacy, and outreach in the community.

The Ride AWAIC fundraiser sponsored by AWAIC and Diamond Girls Motorcycle Club is a community event to show support for domestic violence survivors and our community. It is an annual motorcycle ride from Anchorage to Wasilla, AK (forty-six miles), with five checkpoints along the way. The Wasilla Harley Davidson hosts a celebration at the end of the ride with a BBQ, live music, and great prizes.

The 3rd Annual Ride AWAIC was the most successful ride yet! The rain held off (for the most part) and although it was a little chilly outside, it was a great day. The amazing volunteers helped make this event successful. Nine officers and five family members from the Aurora Borealis and Fireweed COAs teamed up with the Anchorage AWAIC and the Diamond Girls Motorcycle Club to volunteer at this year’s event on May 19. The volunteers from
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of all Native American veterans.

The Museum Director did not respond to us, so we sent him a second letter (on COA website at http://www.coausphs.org/media/1907/letter-to-museum-director-gover-re-national-native-american-veterans-memorial-august-2018.pdf). He has yet to respond to COA, but one of his minions told a senior Native American USPHS officer in an email on 15 August (found on the COA website at http://www.coausphs.org/media/1914/smithsonian-response-to-national-native-american-veterans-memorial-request-august-2018.pdf) that the Smithsonian would not change the design of the memorial. They blamed it on the wording of the 1994 authorization for the memorial, which mentions the “armed forces.” We have read the authorization language and believe that the Smithsonian is taking an ill-advised and very narrow interpretation of its authority to create the memorial.

Starting the day after we received the Smithsonian’s response, we escalated our actions. We wrote to designer Harvey Pratt and suggested that we did not hold him responsible for the design flaws, as he did what the Smithsonian asked him to do. We also suggested to him that he figure out how to incorporate the USPHS and NOAA logos into his design, as we are confident we will win this one.

We also reached out to staff for the two Congressional committees—House and Senate—that have oversight of the Smithsonian and asked for meetings. We met with staff for Rep. Jamie Raskin (D-MD), who has the distinction of representing more Commissioned Corps officers than anyone else in the U.S. House of Representatives. In our meeting with Raskin’s staff we laid out the OMB proposal threat to the Corps and our desire to get the National Native American Veterans Memorial design changed to include the USPHS and NOAA. Raskin represents Indian Health Service headquarters, the Food and Drug Administration, the National Institutes of Health, and NOAA headquarters in Silver Spring, MD. He also serves on the House Administration Committee, which has jurisdiction over the Smithsonian.

We then met with both Republican and Democratic staff of the Senate Rules and Administration Committee, which has jurisdiction over the Smithsonian. They promised to consider our concerns. We will be meeting in the coming weeks with staff for members of Congress with large numbers of PHS officers in their States and districts.

We also asked Native American PHS officers to write to the Director of the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian and express their desire that the PHS logo be added to the memorial design, including their tribal affiliation. We reminded them not to use government computer or email addresses. We also asked them to include a statement something like: “The views expressed in this letter are my own and do not necessarily represent those of the US Public Health Service or the Department of Health and Human Services.”

We filed a Freedom of Information Act request with HHS asking for the number of Native American officers who serve and have served in the Commissioned Corps. We are waiting for that answer, which will provide us with a vital bit of data we can use in

PUBLIC HEALTH NEVER TAKES A DAY OFF.
Because Disaster Doesn’t Either.
Our quest to right this wrong.

We reached out to the reporter at The Washington Post who had written the initial story about the memorial design as well as to the National Public Radio reporter who had interviewed memorial designer Harvey Pratt back in June. On the media side we also contacted Oklahoma Public Radio as well as staff for the Oklahoman newspaper, which had run a large story about the memorial.

All the while, we kept the Assistant Secretary for Health (ADM Giroir) and the Surgeon General (VADM Adams) apprised of our efforts and suggested ways they might become involved. We even suggested that HHS Secretary Azar be brought into the fray and asked to reach out to the Smithsonian, because, as we said, “These are his people, too.”

While this was going on about the Native American Veterans Memorial, we continued our Hill meetings to educate members and staff about the OMB proposal to cut the Commissioned Corps by 2500 officers. John McElligott and Judy Rensberger are spearheading these efforts while I work the Native American veterans memorial problem. Some of the members of the COA Legislation Committee performed yeoman service by going through data as to where PHS officers are assigned and helping us figure out Congressional districts. Based on these data and other we received through our FOIA request, we have created a listing of all fifty States with total numbers of PHS officers assigned and breakdowns by those assigned to the Indian Health Service and the Federal Bureau of Prisons. We have a further break-down by Congressional districts where the greatest number of officers are assigned to the Indian Health Service. We will be prioritizing our Capitol Hill visits based on which States and Congressional districts would be most affected by the OMB proposal.

We also reached out to other organizations and asked for their support in the fight to preserve the Commissioned Corps. You can’t get far in this town if you try to go it alone, and COA does everything to cultivate relationships with other like-minded groups. To date, we have letters of support from the following organizations:


This is where we stand on these two issues toward the end of August. I actually feel better about the OMB threat to the Commissioned Corps than I do about the National Native American Veterans Memorial. Rest assured, however, that we at COA will not abandon our efforts on either front.

If you have not renewed your COA membership for the fiscal year that started on 1 July, please do so. We need the strength that only comes when we represent the largest number of you.

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**PHS Officer’s Action Recognizes Disabled Veterans**

CAPT (ret.) George Durgin, a long-time COA member and COF donor, was still on active duty when he reached out to the State of Maryland and asked about the re-design of a license plate for disabled veterans whose vehicles are registered in the State.

According to the Maryland Department of Motor Vehicles (MDVA), CAPT Durgin, then serving as the USPHS Liaison to the Federal Bureau of Prisons, “saw a variety of veteran plates with patriotic designs at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.” He then contacted the MDVA’s Outreach Program and suggested a new plate design. He provided photos of other State’s plates which served as a baseline for the MDOT MVA’s design of a new Maryland plate for disabled veterans. The plate is now available to eligible veterans.at the MDOT MVA website.

According to the MDVA press release, “The collaboration between the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs, the Maryland Department of Transportation Motor Vehicle Administration, and Capt. Durgin, is an outstanding example of how one person can make a difference in the way we serve our veteran community,” said Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary George Owings.

“I look forward to seeing the newly issued Disabled Veteran Plates and to creatively finding new ways to honor Maryland’s veterans. . . . We appreciate Capt. Durgin’s recommendation as we continue to look for additional ways to honor our veterans and deliver premier service to all Maryland residents,” said MDOT MVA Administrator Christine Nizer.

Veterans who are determined to be 100 percent disabled, permanent and total, by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs are eligible to apply for the plate at no cost to the veteran. For more information, visit the MDOT MVA’s website at http://www.mva.maryland.gov/vehicles/licenseplates/disabled-license-plate.htm

COA commends CAPT (ret.) Durgin for his initiative and imagination. His success demonstrates what one determined Commissioned Corps officer can accomplish when they set themselves to the task.
PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation
Donations Received, August 1 to August 31, 2018

We thank everyone who donated in memory of RADM Jerrold M. Michael. Those funds will support the continuing education of junior officers.

**Platinum ($1,000)**
- Dr. Jose Betancourt ^#
- RADM Steven L. Solomon, (Ret.)
- RADM Jason J. Woo ^#

**Gold ($500)**
- Ms. Judy Rensberger ^#
- CAPT Thomas M. Tarpley ^

**Silver ($250)**
- Mr. and Mrs. Munungman ^#
- RADM George A. Reich, (Ret.) ^

**Bronze ($100)**
- CAPT Maria D. Benke ^
- RADM Richard J. Bertin (Ret.) ^#
- Ms. Kathleen Dwyer ^#
- CAPT Gerard M. Farrell, USN (Ret.) ^#
- CAPT Paul O. Fehnel, Jr. (Ret.)
- CAPT Raymond Goldstine ^#
- Ms. Robin Michael ^#
- CAPT Winsor V. Morrison, (Ret.)
- Ms. Marie O’Riordan ^#
- CAPT Richard M. Taffet, (Ret.)
- Ms. Jan Tamura ^

**Friends (Under $100)**
- Mrs. Carol Dellapenna
- Mr. Stephen Deming
- CAPT George A. Durgin, Jr.

**Donation Levels**
- Leadership Society...$10,000
- President’s Society...$5,000
- Founder’s Society...$2,500
- Platinum..............$1,000
- Gold..................$500
- Silver.................$250
- Bronze................$100

Visit phscof.org/giving to donate online today!

COA Donations
Commissioned Officers Association of the USPHS Donations Received, August 1 to August 31, 2018

CAPT Paul S. Arell
LCDR Jennifer J. Clements
CAPT Malcolm B. Reddoch

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the Aurora Borealis branch included: LCDR Dustin Bergerson with sons Austin and Andre; LCDR Allison Gallen with son Lucas; LCDR Jodi Moore; CDR Sara Hegna; CDR Shelly Inda with daughter Sierra; and CDR Jonathan Smith and wife, Donna Smith. Volunteers from the Fireweed branch included: LT Chris Chong, LT Christy Pierce, and CDR Kristina Cohen. The volunteers put in nearly fifty hours of volunteer time by assisting and handing out water at the checkpoints and plating food at the BBQ. This year, AWAIC raised nearly $15,000 and had almost seventy motorcycle riders to help raise awareness. The money raised will help provide domestic violence survivors with safe shelter and resources and will continue efforts for domestic violence prevention.
RADM Jerry Michael & GI Bill Transferability

by Judy Rensberger, COA Director of Government Relations

RADM Jerrold Michael, USPHS (Ret.), who died on 25 July at the age of 90, was, by all accounts, one of the most gifted, devoted and steadfast Public Health Service officers ever. An active COA member for over 60 years, RADM Michael was kind and helpful to all COA staff, including me, and he was a huge and savvy asset to our legislative program.

GI Bill Transferability, in the news again his summer, is, by all accounts, one of the most valued benefits ever offered to the active-duty USPHS Commissioned Corps. It is certainly the most valued benefit ever obtained primarily through the efforts of COA.

That the two are linked will surprise no one who knew RADM Michael. Nor will it surprise any of the 300 active-duty PHS officers who participated in COA’s three-year letter-writing campaign to win GI Bill transferability for USPHS and the NOAA Corps.

Background

When Congress passed the first major overhaul of the GI Bill in 2008, it included a wonderful new benefit that permitted service members to transfer their own, unused educational benefits to their college-bound children. In the eyes of the Defense Department, it was a useful retention tool, and it would be tweaked several times over the coming years to refine and reflect that idea.

To COA’s profound dismay, GI Bill Transferability was limited to armed services personnel. We had not seen this coming. COA and its Legislative Affairs Committee immediately flew into action. We quickly learned that members of Congress were disinclined to revisit the massive GI Bill overhaul they had just completed.

Still, we had no choice but to try. Although most COA members didn’t need the GI Bill’s educational benefits themselves (all were all college-educated health professionals, and many had multiple advanced degrees), they were very interested in a benefit would help finance their children’s college educations.

COA staff, together with our Legislative Affairs Committee and other COA members who answered our call, began the long effort to appeal to members of Congress one-by-one. COA staff made countless visits to Capitol Hill. COA members wrote letters to their own members of Congress, then followed up with phone calls, all on their own time.

(One COA member, a PHS physician with five children, used annual leave to return home and visit his U.S. Senator in person. He won his Senator’s active support, and his Senator’s staff became PHS advocates as well.) MOAA and the rest of The Military Coalition supported our cause.

COA staff had chosen to focus primarily on the U.S. Senate. And that is where RADM Jerry Michael entered the picture. In retirement, RADM Michael served twenty years as the Dean of the School of Public Health at the University of Hawaii. He knew both of Hawaii’s U.S. Senators very well. Senator Daniel K. Inouye, Hawaii’s senior senator, chaired the powerful Committee on Veterans’ Affairs. They both weighed in. RADM Michael spoke personally with Sen. Akaka, and Sen. Inouye’s staff approached other Senate offices in his name and on our behalf.

It all came together on the night of 16 December 2010, when the “Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Improvements Act of 2010,” which already had passed the Senate, cleared the House. Then-President Obama signed it on 4 January 2011.

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of California Irvine Medical Center. She is a Board Certified Ambulatory Care Pharmacist, and currently serves as Executive Master of Health Administration Program at the University of Southern California Sol Price School of Public Policy.

On August 7, 2014 Rear Admiral Schweitzer was appointed to be the first female Chief Professional Officer of Pharmacy for the United States Public Health Service. As Chief Pharmacy Officer, Rear Admiral Schweitzer was responsible for providing leadership and coordination of USPHS pharmacy programs and professional affairs for the Office of the Surgeon General and the Department of Health & Human Services.

While serving her country, Rear Admiral Schweitzer worked in a variety of roles including, progressing in leadership responsibilities in the Indian Health Service, the Veterans Administration, as well as the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. She made an indelible mark within each of these organizations, which is a testament to her strong dedication to public service.

Rear Admiral Schweitzer has been recognized for her leadership contributions many times. These recognitions include receiving the National Council for Prescription Drug Programs Champion Award in 2017, American Society of Health-System Pharmacists William Zelmer Lecture Award in 2016, the University of California San Francisco Alumni Award in 2015, American Pharmacists Association Distinguished Federal Pharmacist Award in 2014, IHS Senior Pharmacist of the Year Award in 2013 and the USPHS Mary Louise Anderson Leadership Award in 2012.

Rear Admiral Schweitzer will always be remembered as someone who put her country and the well-being of others above all else. She will be greatly missed and I wish her the best in her retirement on behalf of a grateful nation.”