

Commander's Message



**State Commander
Douglas Hoffman
US Navy, Post 3160**

Comrades,

We have had a strong and productive year so far, and I want to thank each of you for your continued commitment to our mission and our veterans.

We recently completed a successful week in Washington, D.C., during our Washington Conference. I had the opportunity to meet with our senators and members of Congress, and I appreciate the hard work that Jill [Lynch] and Tom [Levitt] put into making the week run smoothly. Their efforts have been outstanding.

Membership continues to trend in a positive direction. At the moment, we are just over 97% with a little less than three months remaining before our State Convention at the end of May. I truly appreciate everything our membership team has accomplished. We still have work ahead of us, but your dedication is clearly paying off.

I also want to encourage all of you to attend this year's State Convention, which will be held May 28–31 at the Madison Hotel in Harrisonburg. It's an excellent facility, and the staff has always taken great care of us.

Thank you all for making this year so enjoyable. It's easy to stay motivated when you have great people working alongside you. I hope to see you at the convention, and I appreciate everything you do for the Department of Virginia and for our veterans.

Respectfully,
Doug Hoffman
State Commander
VFW Department of Virginia

From the Editor's desk



Comrades & Auxiliary of the Department of Virginia, this is my final edit of the Virginia Veteran newspaper. It has been an honor to be a part of this and I wish Rick Raskin the best of luck in continuing to make our Virginia Veteran the best newspaper in the VFW.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve you.

Yours in comradeship
Randy Coker

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news@vfwva.org or rraskin@vfwva.org

We reserve the right to edit all submitted articles for timeliness, clarity and syntax.

*Note: **Deadline for the next newspaper is:***

June 15, 2026

Please submit articles in MS Word or text (.txt) format.

Pictures: Please include captions and photo credit including who is in the picture.



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Honoring the dead by helping the living



Unwavering support for uncommon heroes

‘We’re going to make sure no one is forgotten’: Black veterans honored at Rose Hill Cemetery

• By Cher Muzyk Staff Writer, Prince William Times



Local vets involved in an effort to commemorate Black veterans buried at Rose Hill Cemetery, a historically Black cemetery in Manassas, include, from left: Rick Raskin, who served in the U.S. Army; Lorrie Allen Smith, who served in the Army; Jerry Martin, who served in the U.S. Marine Corps; Megan Cate, who served in the U.S. Air Force; and Wayne Moore, who served in the U.S. Army and Navy.

For more than a decade, Wayne Moore drove to work on Route 28 every day unaware he was driving right past Rose Hill Cemetery, a historic Black cemetery tucked away in an industrial part of Manassas.

But the worst part, he says now, was that the cemetery had fallen into disrepair, and the veterans laid to rest there were all but forgotten.

Moore, 77, of Bristow, is the commander of Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7589 in Manassas. He said he was shocked when he learned about the cemetery and that it contains the graves of so many Black veterans — both marked and unmarked.

“I thought: ‘Wait a second, every year, for over 13 years, I go to the Manassas Cemetery on Memorial Day and place flags there, and you mean to tell me ... we neglected this cemetery, and there’s veterans in it?’” Moore said. “That’s not going to happen anymore.”

Since then, he and other Manassas-area veterans have made it their mission to make sure Rose Hill Cemetery is properly maintained and included when Scouts place flags on veteran graves on Memorial Day, said Moore, who served four years in the U.S. Army and 30 years in the Navy.

But the veterans wanted to do more. So, to ensure the service and sacrifice of veterans interred at Rose Hill Cemetery is permanently honored, members of VFW Post 7589 and American Legion Post 10 dedicated a new commemorative marble bench there on Friday, Nov. 7.

The \$4,000 bench, paid for with contributions from members of both veterans’ groups, is inscribed: “In memory of the unknown resting here who served in the United States Armed Forces and are known but to God.”

Because of surrounding development, Rose Hill Cemetery is not easy to find. But it includes many gravestones marked with years of military service, leading the veterans to believe dozens of vet-

(Continued on page 4)

erans were laid to rest there, said Jerry Martin, of Nokesville, who served in the Marine Corps for 30 years and is now VFW Post 7589's historian.

The cemetery's most recent burial occurred just a few weeks ago, according to Tim Fitzwater, buildings and grounds manager for the city of Manassas. He said family members continue to be buried there, but plots have long been sold out.



The gates of Rose Hill Cemetery, which is located at 10208 Foster Drive in Manassas. It's tucked into an industrial area off Va. 28.

"This is the first time veterans have done anything like this in the city of Manassas since 1889, when the Confederate veterans placed a monument in the cemetery across from the judicial center," Martin said. "But this is for the U.S. American veterans."

Separate but not equal in life and death. After the Civil War, federal cemeteries were open to all fallen service members, but Black people had to be buried in designated sections separate from white people. That policy continued until 1948, when President Harry Truman issued an executive order mandating the integration of the Armed Services, including federal cemeteries.

Similarly, when Rose Hill Cemetery was established in 1887, local laws required that cemeteries be separated by race. Thus, Rose Hill was run by and exclusively served the Black community. It received no public support until about a century later, in 1980, when the City of Manassas took ownership of it.

Samuel Pickett (1854-1885) was likely one of the first people buried in what would become Rose Hill Cemetery, according to the Manassas Museum.

George Butler (1853-1889) who is believed to have been a Buffalo Soldier, is also buried there. Martin said a flag placed at Butler's gravesite indicates he served in the U.S. Army's 9th Cavalry Regiment. Buffalo Soldiers were African American soldiers given the nickname by Native Americans to reflect their bravery and toughness.

While the cemetery has been kept up by the City of Manassas in the last few years, it was "shoddy-looking" in the past, said Joanne Gaskins, who said several of her relatives are buried at Rose Hill Cemetery, including her grandparents, James and Ella Gaskins, and at least two veterans.

The cemetery used to be rural but is now bordered by industrial parks. Gaskins said she was happy to hear about the commemorative bench and said it's even more important now, at a time when two nearby historic Black cemeteries along Wellington Road in Bristow were damaged by adjacent data center development.

Identifying and honoring as many veterans as possible at the Rose Hill Cemetery is an ongoing project, said Stanley Moore, 59, of Manassas. He is the commander of American Legion Post 10 and served eight years in the U.S. Marine Corps.

"They're our brothers and that's never going to change," he said. "We're going to make sure that no one's forgotten and their sacrifice will always be remembered."



The gravestone belonging to George Butler (1853-1889) who is believed to have been a Buffalo Soldier. A flag placed on his gravesite says he served in the U.S. Army's 9th Cavalry Regiment. Buffalo Soldiers were African American soldiers given the nickname by Native Americans to reflect their bravery and toughness.

Reach Cher Muzyk at cmuzyk@fauquier.com

This article was highlighted in the February edition of VFW Checkpoint.

On December 16, 2025 Dale City Post 1503 and Alexandria Post 609 attend the ribbon cutting ceremony for the new Puller Veterans Care Center, located in Vint Hill, Va.



Governor Youngkin and other dignitaries on hand to cut the ribbon for the opening of the new Puller Veterans Care Center



Governor Youngkin takes time to pose for a photo with a few of the Comrades and Auxiliary of District 10



Fauquier Times Puller Veterans Care Center opens in Vint Hill

Residential nursing facility will provide a variety of services

By Sarah Dolgin Staff Writer Dec 16, 2025



Photo by Doug Stroud

Post 7589 Commander Wayne Moore, DAV Past Commander Grailing Carter and DAV member Ed Ortiz at the Puller Center opening.

A sea of pointed military caps adorned with pins tilted toward the sky Tuesday as a flyover marked the long-awaited grand opening of the Puller Veterans Care Center.

The Quantico Marine Corps Brass Quintet filled the cold air with pomp and circumstance, and sunlight shone on military veterans in uniform as they applauded the facility built at the former Vint Hill Farms Station.



Photo by Doug Stroud

The station was once a U.S. Army and National Security Agency site and played an important role in the D-Day invasion of Normandy during World War

Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin speaks at the grand opening of the Puller Veterans Care Center in Vint Hill on Dec 16, 2025.

II after an enemy message was intercepted at the Vint Hill site.



Photo by Doug Stroud

Brock Bakos, executive director of the Puller Veterans Care Center, addresses a crowd at the Vint Hill facility's grand opening on Dec. 16, 2025.

Now, the site will be home to a 128-bed residential nursing facility that offers long-term skilled nursing care, memory care, short-term rehabilitative care and palliative care to honorably discharged veterans who live in or entered military service from Virginia.

To qualify for residence, veterans must need the level of care offered in a nursing home.

“The words ‘thank you’ seem insufficient,” Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin told veterans in the crowd Tuesday, “for the sacrifices that each of you have made in order to preserve the freedoms and the liberties that we hold dear, that oftentimes we take for granted.”

Youngkin praised the state’s three other veterans care facilities, located in Virginia Beach, Roanoke and Richmond, and said, “I know that the Puller Veterans Care Center will meet that same high mark.”

Groundbreaking for the Puller Veterans Care Center took place in 2017 and the target date for opening the center was late 2019. But both the COVID-19 pandemic and an Americans with Disabilities Act compliance issue with the door frames caused years of delays. Eight years and one ribbon-cutting later, the doors are finally open.

The center’s layout is meant to be different from a traditional nursing facility, said Brock Bakos, the executive director.

The hallways were designed with large windows to bring in natural light, and most seating areas and hallway nooks include military memorabilia.

Each resident has a private room and bathroom and is designated to a “household.” Each of the eight household wings, all named after medal of honor recipients from Virginia, will house 16 residents who will share a living and dining space, a nurse and nursing assistants.

Residents will have access to an in-house pharmacy, a barbershop marked with a spinning barber pole, a chapel, a meditation garden and outdoor paths and courtyards.

There is also a gym space for residents who need physical rehabilitation, outfitted with a model vehicle for those relearning how to get in and out of a car and different kinds of patches of walking terrain to practice.

The center’s staff includes a Life Enrichment Department, dedicated to facilitating activities and events for residents.

“I’m really excited about what we’re going to be doing here,” Bakos told the Fauquier Times. “It’s truly once-in-a-lifetime.”

The center became home to its first two residents in early December and will gradually welcome more veterans. The facility will be able to apply in mid-January for certification to accept residents who rely on Medicaid or Medicare; once that’s accomplished, the center can accept new residents.

Once the center houses 20 residents, it will be able to apply for licensure by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. With licensure, the center will be eligible to receive reimbursements for veteran care and will be able to allow more residents, to move in particularly those with service-connected disabilities.

The facility is named after the Pullers, a Virginia family known for its members’ long history of distinguished military service and advocacy for veterans. Gen. Lewis B. “Chesty” Puller was one of the most decorated U.S. Marine Corps veterans in history. His son, Lt. Lewis B. Puller Jr., was a Marine who was injured in Vietnam and awarded the Purple Heart. His wife, Toddy, was a teacher in Woodbridge and later served in the Virginia House of Delegates, pushing legislation that created many veterans support programs.

The care center is owned and managed by the Virginia Department of Veterans Services and received start-up funding from the state government and from a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs grant. While the center is technically owned by a state agency, its operation will be self-funded, Bakos said.

Funding for the center’s operations will come through Medicaid, Medicare, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; some residents will privately fund their residence. Cash donations are not allowed, but donations can be made to the Virginia Veterans Services Foundation to support the center and other state-run veterans programs and services.

Sarah Dolgin is a Reporter for America Corps member writing about rural life in Fauquier County.

You can reach her at sdolgin@fauquier.com.



Photo from Facebook



Photo from Facebook



Photo by DJ Cate

Wayne Moore, Meghan Cate, Rick Raskin and Jeff Dombroff (Post 9835)

Winter Council of Administration meeting, Harrisonburg Va.

Look who showed up for our Council of Administration



National Commander-in-Chief Carol Whitmore being escorted into the MOC Scratch



Chief Whitmore and Department Commander Hoffman awaiting the start of the Scratch



Department Commander Hoffman being escorted into the MOC Scratch

National Commander-in-Chief Whitmore finishes her remarks at the MOC Scratch



Department of Virginia, Winter Council of Administration meeting Harrisonburg Va.



Department Judge Advocate Randy Coker gives his report



Members of the National Legislative Committee, Jill Lynch, Tom Levitt and Nancy Springer, present their report to the CoA



Department Auxiliary President Kelli Levitt addresses the comrades at the council meeting

Department of Virginia Winter Council of Administration meeting



National Commander-in-Chief Carol Whitmore presents Department Commander Douglas Hoffman with her challenge coin

National Commander-in-Chief Carol Whitmore delivers her speech to the Department Council of Administration.



Youth Scholarship Awards Banquet



Left- State Judge Advocate Randy Coker was MC for the banquet



Right: State Auxiliary President Kelli Levitt

The State Honor Guard presents the Colors at the opening ceremony of the Youth Scholarship Banquet



Scholarship Awards Banquet (continued)

National Commander-in-Chief delivers remarks during the Youth Scholarship Banquet



State Commander Douglas Hoffman, National Commander-in-Chief Carol Whitmore, Auxiliary Scholastic Chair Rose Harper along with Scholarship Chairman Ben Guinan and Chief of Staff Joanne Smith present the VOD winner with checks

Women Veteran's Forum



The VFW and JLC storm the Hill in Richmond on January 15



Richmond Hill visit continued on next page.

Richmond Hill visit continued



Department of Virginia in Washington DC, Capitol Hill in force



Department of Virginia pounding the Capitol Hill halls, speaking to as many legislators as possible, during National Legislative week on Capitol Hill



Department of Virginia Comrades & Auxiliary address Congressman McGuire

Advocating for Veterans at Senator Warner's office



Advocating for Veterans at Senator Rob Whitman's office


Department of Virginia's Auxiliary "Celebrating America's Freedom Event" at the Vietnam War Memorial



State Auxiliary President Kelli Levitt being introduced during the "Parade of State Auxiliary Presidents"

Left to right—Regina Banks of Post 1177, VFW National Auxiliary President Lois Callahan, Department of Virginia Auxiliary President Kelli Levitt


VFW Auxiliary's 13th
Celebrating America's
Freedom Event



**National Vietnam
Veterans Memorial**
February 28, 2026

Lois Callahan
National President

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State Auxiliary Secretary Jerry Miller, State Auxiliary President Kelli Levitt and State Auxiliary Guard Bettina Lane





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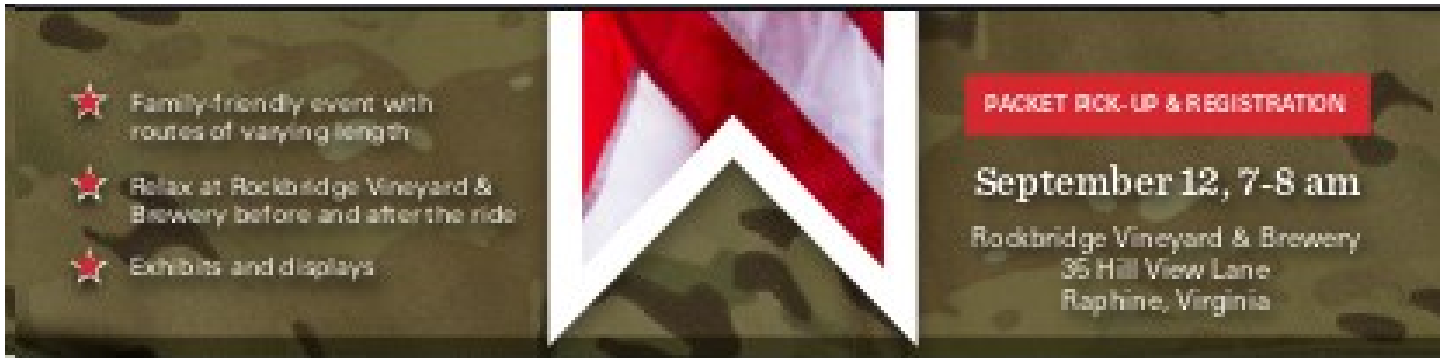
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- ★ Relax at Rockbridge Vineyard & Brewery before and after the ride
- ★ Exhibits and displays

PACKET PICK-UP & REGISTRATION

September 12, 7-8 am

Rockbridge Vineyard & Brewery
35 Hill View Lane
Raphine, Virginia



VALLEY VETERANS



Enjoy either a short, mid, or Metric Century bicycle route through the beauty of the rolling hills and lush fields of the central Shenandoah Valley countryside.

Post-ride food and beverages available. Stay and celebrate with us.

September 12, 2026

Begins at 8:15 am

Last rider off: Metric Century 9 am / Mid 9 am / Short 9:30 am

Meet at Rockbridge Vineyard & Brewery
35 Hill View Lane, Raphine, Virginia

We ride to support our combat veterans and to raise funds for Boulder Crest Foundation, a therapeutic and wellness facility which enables our combat veterans and their families to recover, rest, recharge, and reconnect.



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DAY OF SERVICE 2026

Kicking off on Saturday, May 2



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