



AARON A. WEAVER CHAPTER 776

PRESERVING THE PROUD LEGACY OF THE PURPLE HEART



2025-26 Officers

Cdr: Richard Hunt
Sr. Vice Cdr: Bill Merryman
Jr. Vice Cdr: Jerry Frease
Finance Off: Joe McClister
Judge Adv: Colin Pearl
Sgt-at-Arms: Robert Gibson
Trustee 2-yrs: Mike Krebs
Trustee 1-yr: Nate Love
Adjutant: Curt Ebitz
Service Off: Joe McClister
Welfare Off: Mickey Hunt
Historian: Curt Ebitz
Chaplain: Gary Bain

Chapter Activities

Completed

March 1. Cdr. Richard Hunt represented Chapter 776 at a meeting of the Citrus County School District Purple Star Program that supports military-connected students during school transitions.

March 19. Attending the Chapter's monthly no-host fellowship breakfast at the Central Café, Inverness were Patriots Jerry Frease, J.B. Haskins, Cdr. Richard Hunt, Will Korber, Mike Krebs, Earl McMillan.

March 20. Cdr. Richard Hunt, on behalf of Chapter 776, presented a \$1,000 donation to Citrus High School AFJROTC Cadet Isaac Francoeur to support his attendance at the United States Air Force Military Academy Summer Seminar.

March 27. Cdr. Richard Hunt, Curt Ebitz and Nate Love reviewed and evaluated 42 scholarship applications from Citrus County's public and private high schools.

March 27. The Associate Ladies met at Wallace's at the Greenhouse in Homosassa for their monthly no-host luncheon gathering. Attending were Mari-Elain Ebitz, Kim Frease, Mickey Hunt, Nancy Krebs, and Vikki Pietras.

See Chapter completed page 2

Next Meeting

Tuesday, May. 19, 2026, 1 p.m.

The chapter's bimonthly meetings are held the third Tuesday of September, November, January, March, May and July. The meeting is 1:00 p.m. at the **Citrus County Chamber of Commerce Building**, 915 N. Suncoast Blvd. (U.S. 19), Crystal River, which is located on the east side of the highway approximately 1/4 mile north of the Crystal River Airport. Any member desiring to place an item on the agenda should e-mail Adjutant Ebitz at info@citruspurpleheart.org or call 352-382-3847.

Member News

During a reconciliation of the Chapter 776 membership roster, the unreported deaths of Chapter 776 Korean War veteran Cornelius Callahan and Vietnam War veterans Joseph Babcock and Jim Ralph were determined. Chapter 776 Patriots and Associates offer their deepest sympathy to their loved ones.

Associate **JoAnn Allen**; who suffered a severe stroke in March is steadily making progress as she navigates the rehabilitative process.

Please lift up in prayer **Greg Cross**, husband of Associate Sandy Cross, whose health has been declining, and **Linda Golfieri**, wife of Chapter 776 Patriot Al Golfieri, who continues to battle Alzheimer's.

In the vein that you can't keep a good sailor down, Chapter 776 Finance Officer

Joe McClister is back on his feet after undergoing vascular surgery in his left leg.

Dennis Flanagan, father of Fallen Hero Sergeant Dennis J. Flanagan, is up and about again following his successful triple bypass surgery in February.

Appreciative thanks to **Del Zotto Products of Florida** for its generous support as the Purple Heart Sponsor (\$1,500) of the Citrus County Building Alliance 31st Annual Family Fishing Tournament.

An appreciative "Thank you" to Chapter 776 charter member and past commander **J.B. Haskins** who honored the Chapter as the installing officer for the Chapter's 2026-27 officers. A Navy veteran of the Korean and Vietnam wars, J.B. is the recipient of two Silver Stars and three Purple Hearts.

A most appreciative thank you to the following Patriots who presented the MOPH JROTC Leadership Medals to a deserving cadet at Central, Citrus, Crystal River, Hernando, Lecanto, and Springstead high schools: **Curt Ebitz, Jerry Frease, Claude Gregoire, Frank Hayes and Richard Hunt.**

Congratulations to Crystal River High seniors **Lane Komara, Addison Raiford and Nathan Jackson** on their selection as the recipients of Chapter 776's scholarships for SY 2026-27. Lane was awarded the Chapter's \$2,000 College of Central Florida (CF)

See Member News, page 2.

2026 Annual Armed Forces Day Picnic

Chapter 776's annual Armed Forces Day picnic will be held 11:00 a.m. - 1:30 p.m., Saturday, May 17 at the pavilion (next to the tennis courts) in Bicentennial Park, Crystal River. The park is located off of U.S. 19 behind the Crystal River Airport. The Chapter's scholarship recipients will attend. Please come to greet and congratulate them.

Chapter 776 will provide pulled pork sandwiches, BBQ chicken, BBQ baked beans, and beverages. Sergeant at Arms Bob Gibson will provide his delicious BBQ ribs. Each lady is asked to bring a salad or dessert. If you plan to attend, indicate salad or dessert and reply to Adjutant Curt Ebitz no later than May 10 by email at info@citruspurpleheart.org or 352-382-3847.

Chapter completed 2

April 17. Patriot Claude Gregoire presented the MOPH JROTC Leadership medal at the Central High School NJROTC awards ceremony.

April 22. Patriot Claude Gregoire presented the MOPH JROTC Leadership medal at the Springstead High School AFJROTC awards ceremony.

April 23. The Chapter's no-host fellowship breakfast at SOCOS House of Eats, Homosassa, had a record number of attendees. Enjoying breakfast & camaraderie were Curt Ebitz, Jerry Frease, Cdr. Richard Hunt, Frank Hayes, J.B. Haskins, Will Korber, Mike Krebs, Joe McClister, Earl McMillan, Bill Merryman and Art Tharp.

April 24. Chapter Patriots and Associates supporting the Chapter's charitable partnership with the Citrus County Building Alliance (CCBA) annual fishing tournament "Captains' Meeting" in Old Homosassa were Curt Ebitz, Dale Fair, Jerry Frease, Bob Gibson, Cdr. Richard Hunt, Mike & Nancy Krebs, Bill & Barbara Merryman, Rob & Vikki Pietras.

April 25. Patriot Curt Ebitz presented the MOPH JROTC Leadership Medal at the Brooksville High School AFJROTC awards ceremony.

April 25-26. Chapter members who enjoyed a free fishing outing in the CCBA annual fishing tournament generously were Jerry Frease, Nate Love with his father, son, daughter, Bob Gibson with his grandson.

April 28. The monthly Associate ladies met at the newly opened Tijuana Garden restaurant. Attending were Kim Frease, Mickey Hunt, Deborah St. Martin, Barb Mills, Mari-Elain Ebitz, Nancy Krebs, Carol Hayes and Annie Fair. New member Pennie Tharp joined them for the first time.

After the lunch, Mari-Elain Ebitz and Annie Fair visited Associate Member Joann Allen at the rehab center where she is recovering from a stroke.

April 29. Patriot Frank Hayes presented the MOPH JROTC Leadership Medal at the Lecanto High School AJROTC awards ceremony.

May 1. Patriot Jerry Frease presented the MOPH JROTC Leadership medal at the Crystal River High School NJROTC awards ceremony.

Chapter completed 3

May 6. Cdr. Richard Hunt presented Chapter 776 scholarships to Crystal River High School seniors Addison Raiford, Lane Komara, and Nathan Jackson at the Crystal River High School Seniors Awards Night.

May 8. Patriot Cdr. Richard Hunt presented the MOPH JROTC Leadership medal at the Citrus High School AFJROTC awards ceremony.

May 8. Cdr. Richard Hunt presented the Chapter 776 Sergeant Dennis J. Flanagan Memorial Scholarship to Eli Langston at the Crystal River High School Seniors Awards Ceremony.

Future

May 16, 11:30 a.m. Annual Armed Forces Day picnic, Bicentennial Park Pavilion, Crystal River.

May 19, 1:00 p.m. Chapter 776 Bimonthly business meeting, CCBA, Lecanto.

May 25 10:00 a.m. Memorial Day Ceremony, Old Homosassa Veterans Memorial, Homosassa.

Member News Continued

Endowed Scholarship. Addison received the Chapter's \$2,000 Sergeant Dennis J. Flanagan Memorial Scholarship. Nathan was the first recipient of the Chapter's newly instituted \$500 Harold & Pat Layman Memorial Scholarship.

Our collective thanks to Patriot **Claude Gregoire** for his extremely kind and thoughtful words at the Chapter's March bimonthly meeting in acknowledging the Chapter's inclusive welcome and support, noting that of all the veterans organizations he has been a member, Chapter 776 "is his home."



Cdr. Richard Hunt presented Jim Bodenner, Rotary of The Villages, with a \$600 donation for Smiles for Veterans that provides low cost (\$5) dentistry services to qualified low income veterans.

From the Commander

Patriots & Associates & Proud Supporters,

We continue to move forward with many of us doing good things in our community.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to JoAnn Allen and her family as she continues to make progress on her road to recovery from a severe stroke.

Plans are underway with Chapter 776's Purple Heart Entities, the Nature Coast Community Band and Citrus County School District, for a special commemoration of our Nation's 250th anniversary as a free and independent country during the band's Spirit of America concert on June 28 and 29.

Memorial Day is just around the corner. There will be a ceremony at the Homosassa Veterans Memorial 10935 W. Yulee Drive, Homosassa Florida, May 25 at 10 AM. All are encouraged to attend to honor the memories of our Fallen Brothers.

Another Citrus County Builders Alliance (CCBA) annual fishing tournament is now on the books. Chapter 776 is very fortunate to receive a portion of the tournament proceeds, which is our Chapter's greatest fundraiser, typically bringing in \$5,000 each year. Also, several Chapter members were treated to a day of tournament fishing by a professional boat and fishing guide at no charge. My thanks to all who came to the Captain's meeting in support of our partnership with the CCBA.

The Hernando Beach Yacht Club is planning a 4th of July boat parade. My understanding is that they will be looking for participation from us, including riding in said parade. Please contact me if you would like to participate.

We continue to have a limited quantity of some durable medical equipment available at no cost to our members and their families. If you have particular need, please contact me to determine if its available.

As always, take care of yourselves and each other. Remember that we are family.

Yours in Patriotism,
Richard Hunt, Commander
407-679-61890; obakesan@att.net

Departed Patriots

James Ralph, M.D.



Dr. James Ralph, Chapter 776 charter member and former Inverness resident, passed away in Apopka, Florida, April 24, 2018 at the age of 81. A graduate of Stanford University (B.A., 1958) and the Duke University School of Medicine (M.D., 1962), he served for 33 years as a medical officer with 16 years active and 17 years reserve duty, retiring with the rank of colonel.

Dr. Ralph served two combat tours in Vietnam as a Special Forces flight surgeon. His heroic actions on numerous medical missions of mercy earned him the moniker of "The Crazy Doc" from Brigadier General Joseph W. Stilwell, Jr.. He received the Purple Heart on January 2, 1964 when his helicopter was brought down by hostile ground fire. Despite serious injuries, he removed the severely injured pilot and co-pilot from the wreckage and comforted them until they were medically evacuated. In 1991, he participated in Operation Desert Storm, performing a number of medical related duties, to include medical evacuation missions and assessing the toxicity of Kuwait's burning oil fields.

His awards include the Silver Star, Distinguished Flying Cross, Bronze Star for Valor, Purple Heart, 11 Air Medals and three Vietnamese Crosses of Gallantry. Although he had the singular distinction of being the most highly decorated medical officer of the Vietnam War, Dr. Ralph was most proud that no combat wounded patient died in his care, no matter how severe the wounds, injuries or illnesses.

Dr. Ralph was interred at Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors. He, was preceded in death by his wife Barbara in 2010 and is survived by his two sons.

Joseph R. Babcock

Joseph R. Babcock, a Michigan native, passed away on August 17, 2024 at the age of 77 in his Twin Lake, Michigan home surrounded by his family. After his stint in the Army, he worked as a Supervisor of Operations for Industrial Services Inc. in Ludington, MI, retiring in 2001. A "snowbird," he enjoyed traveling to Florida in the winters, fishing, hunting, antiques, metal detecting, western shows, and spending time with his family.



Patriot Babcock was an Army veteran, serving two combat tours of duty in Vietnam as a Specialist in the 591st Engineer Company (Light). His awards include the Purple Heart and Good Conduct Medal. He is survived by his wife, two daughters, one son, and nine grandchildren. Burial with military honors took place at Fort Custer National Cemetery, Augusta, Michigan.

Cornelius M. Callahan



Cornelius M. Callahan, a former resident of Crystal River, passed away on December 8, 2025, at the age of 92 at his Sarasota, Florida residence. Patriot Callahan served in the U.S. Army from May 1950 to April 1955. During his service he saw combat in Korea while serving with the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team. He was wounded in action near Kotan, Korea on June 7, 1951. His military awards include the Purple Heart, Combat Infantryman Badge and Parachutist Badge.



The Chapter 776/Citrus County Tax Collector Office (TCO) fall fundraising campaign raised 10,541.66 for the Citrus County Veterans Foundation (CCVF), which provides financial assistance to Citrus County honorably discharged veterans and their surviving spouses.



Past Chapter 776 Cdr. J. B. Haskins administered the oath of office to the Chapter 776 2026-27 officers. Left: Haskins; Mike Krebs, Trustee; Bob Gibson, Sergeant at Arms; Richard Hunt, Commander; Joe McClister, Finance officer; Bill Merryman, Senior Vice Commander; Colin Pearl, Judge Advocate; Nate Love, Trustee; Curt Ebitz, Adjutant. Not present: Jerry Frease, Junior Vice Commander; Gary Bain, Chaplain; Will Korber, Americanism Officer; Mickey Hunt, Welfare Officer.

Chapter 776 presented a \$1,000 donation to Citrus High School Air Force JROTC Cadet Captain Isaac Francoeur to support his attendance at the United States Air Force Military Academy Summer Seminar. Left: Colonel (ret) Rodney Hammond, Cadet Isaac Francoeur, Chapter 776 Commander Richard Hunt, and Citrus High School Asst. Principal Mike Einspahr.



CCBA 31st Annual Family Fishing Tournament Captains Meeting. Left: Bob Gibson, Rob Pietras, Vikki Pietras.

MILITARY ORDER OF THE PURPLE HEART



CCBA 31st Annual Family Fishing Tournament Captains' Meeting. Left front: Nancy & Mike Krebs; left back, Jerry Frease, Bill & Barbara Merryman.



New Associate Member, Pennie Tharp joined the Associate ladies at their monthly lunch; from left, Kim Frease, Mickey Hunt, Pennie Tharp, Deborah St. Martin, Mari-Elain Ebitz, Barb Mills, Nancy Krebs, Carol Hayes and Annie Fair. After the lunch, Mari-Elain Ebitz and Annie Fair visited Associate member Joann Allen at the rehab center where she is recovering from a stroke.