

# THE CATAWBA VALLEY OFFICERS DISPATCH



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**MILITARY OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA, CATAWBA VALLEY CHAPTER**  
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## **President's Comments: LTC "Davy" Davenport**

Well, the decade long struggle to establish state tax-exempt status for military retiree "pensions" has finally reached a successful conclusion. This means that military retirement income and SBP payments received after January 1, 2022 will no longer be treated as taxable income by the state. Now, all military retirees will receive this well-deserved benefit, no matter when they retired: past, present or future. This puts North Carolina in line with 21 other states that exempt military retirement income, and the nine states that don't even have income tax. Without going into the details, it suffices to say that this certainly is a great win-win achievement for both the military and our state. Yes, some of us wanted all government employees to be included in this initiative. However, passage of our state's Appropriations Act with the included benefit for military retirees only (including USCG) is the most we could hope for under the circumstances. Legislation that could provide the same benefit to all government employees can still be pursued by politicians, lobbyists and activists. The important thing here is that the huge military retiree population in our state will now benefit equally, no matter what their rank or when they retired. My sincere thanks to our Legislative Liaison, Colonel Dana Tucker, and to all chapter members who were very active advocates through the years to achieve this long-awaited victory!

Here's another important issue. A National Military Family Association survey report states that 14 percent of military families in ranks E-1 to E-6 confided that they visited a food bank in the last 12 months. Think about it, military families in line with society's down and destitute to get groceries. The recently passed NDAA includes a new Basic Needs Allowance (BNA) for the lower ranks. Obviously, I was pleased to see bipartisan action to help families of junior military personnel. However, the resulting version of the NDAA treats Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) as part of gross income when calculating eligibility for BNA. Contrary to that flaw in the NDAA, the Military Hunger Preventions Act (Senate Bill 1488) does not contain this unfair feature that penalizes military families living off base/post. MOAA will continue its efforts to ensure that military families no longer suffer food insecurity by pushing for passage of Senate Bill 1488 and/or by encouraging the DoD to discount BAH in determining eligibility for BNA. Advocate via MOAA's "Take Action" website!

Our chapter's Board of Directors met on December 16<sup>th</sup>. At that meeting, we nominated new board members; set the annual schedule of events, and we established our chapter's goals. These are our top three goals for 2022. Our top priority is increasing membership in our chapter. Second, supporting military related charities and activities in our community. Third, ensuring that Surviving Spouses in our area are receiving all entitlements. In that regard, I believe that eliminating state taxation on SBP payments, winding down the Widow's Tax, and the 5.6 percent COLA adjustment constitute a long overdue boon to Surviving Spouses. We just need to be sure they're aware of their benefits so they can capitalize on them. Our Surviving Spouse Liaison and our chapter newsletter will key them into other benefits and assistance that's available to them, and the Surviving Spouses "Virtual Chapter" (joinable by emailing: mssvc02@gmail.com) will complement those efforts. At any rate, I certainly do look forward to an even more successful year for our Catawba Valley Chapter, and my continued association with such an incredibly fine group of uniformed officers.

**Christmas Charity Dinner:** Our chapter's Christmas Charity Dinner was very well attended, and everyone had a wonderful time. The Lake Hickory Country Club staff prepared and served an excellent dinner. The Missing Man Table ceremony was conducted by Colonel Joe Cansler, a very moving element of the evening's festivities. The event's guest speaker was Navy Captain "Tank" Michael, MOAA's Program Director for Council and Chapter Affairs, worldwide! Prior to his speech, he held an instructive and motivating executive session with our chapter's staff. Then, his highly informative speech to the general membership was laced with bits of much appreciated humor. He gave insights into various chapter success stories, especially some heart-warming "Never Stop Serving" narratives that gave us all pause for thought. As he gave statistics on local chapter membership compared to MOAA national membership, he pointed out that the average age of membership is creeping up and that recruiting emphasis needs to be more focused on the 40 to 60 year-old demographic. He also emphasized that MOAA National is endeavoring to do even more for the local chapters, especially in the area of community engagement. At the conclusion of his speech, our Chapter President presented "Tank" with a bottle of maple syrup brought down from his Vermont summer residence. Then, the charity raffle drawing was held to raise money for our chapter's Benevolent Fund. LTC Jim Cole won a huge and colorful Santa Clause gnome, designed by artist Jim Shore. Chapter members then spent time exchanging personal holiday well-wishes at the conclusion of the event.



*Captain Frank Michael speaks to chapter*

*Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255  
(Press 1), or phone text to 838255,  
or chat at [www.veteranscrisisline.net](http://www.veteranscrisisline.net)*

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**Vietnam Veterans Wall of Faces:**

The virtual Wall of Faces features individual pages dedicated to honoring and remembering every person whose name is inscribed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. In order to preserve the legacy of those who sacrificed all in Vietnam, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) is committed to finding a photo to go with each of the more than 58,000 names on The Wall. The Wall of Faces allows family and friends to share memories, post pictures and connect with each other. VVMF's website is at [www.vvmf.org](http://www.vvmf.org). The actual Wall of Faces (with name search feature) is at website <https://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/>

**Veterans to Farmers:** NC State just implemented a new feature to its Boots On The Ground program. It's an agricultural apprenticeship program lasting 12 to 18 months. With this lengthy timeframe, the program provides versatile training opportunities for farmers. Veterans receive training to cultivate a well-rounded skill set, from knowledge of production to marketing. Throughout training activities, hands-on experiences are integral to the learning process, with veterans receiving over 2,000 hours of hands-on training and 144 hours of classroom and workshop sessions. Veterans interested in participating can contact Dr. Angel Cruz at [aecruz@ncsu.edu](mailto:aecruz@ncsu.edu). Full details are available at: <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/academics-and-education/apprenticeships/boots-on-the-ground/>

**African American Military Service:** February is Black History Month. Those who are serving or have served in uniform know that the military is truly a "melting pot" that provides a level playing field for all members. And, those of us who are of other races were truly proud to have served with and/or served under African American officers—many have become our close friends for life! Tuskegee Airmen and General Collin Powell aside, it's very true that many heroic deeds and great achievements of African American servicemembers have remained obscure until recently. So, no matter what our given race is, we should read at least one African

American military history book in February to gain better understanding and appreciation of their numerous contributions and heroic deeds throughout centuries of American History. Obtain an African American Military History book from your local library, or search for “Military History, African American” at on-line bookstores.

**IRS’s Military Tax Info:** “Tax Season” is upon us. Money aside, facing the complicated preparation and filing process is headache enough. However, the IRS provides excellent military specific information on its website. It’s applicable to current and former military, and disabled veterans. USPHS and NOAA uniformed service members are also entitled to some of the military tax service! The well-organized IRS website page and links cover many significant deductions and refunds that many of us simply aren’t aware of. Plus, there’s a link to [www.militaryonesource.mil](http://www.militaryonesource.mil) where there’s free filing tax prep and software, and an easy way to contact no-fee tax consultants via phone or on-line chat. Visit IRS website: [www.irs.gov/individuals/military](http://www.irs.gov/individuals/military)

**Scammers Target Military:** Scammers, fraudsters and hackers are now aggressively targeting the military and Veterans. Here are ongoing scams: Veterans Services imposter scams, benefits scams, military records scams, deployed service member scams, military loan scams, military charity scams, job scams, identify theft scams, IRS impersonation scams, scams exploiting a military connection, and phishing scams. You can strengthen your defenses against scammers by visiting websites: [www.idwatchdog.com/education/11-military-identity-scams](http://www.idwatchdog.com/education/11-military-identity-scams) AND [www.militaryconsumer.gov/protect/information-security](http://www.militaryconsumer.gov/protect/information-security)

**My Time to Heal Event:** There will be a faith-based retreat for Gold Star and Surviving Spouses hosted by Eagle Rock Camp and the Sugar Bear Foundation. This is an opportunity to connect with other military spouses and experience four days focused on healing, health, and well-being from March 31<sup>st</sup> thru April 4<sup>th</sup>, at the Catholic Conference Center in Hickory, NC. Background info and further details about the Sugar Bear Foundation and the event—including registration—are available at website [www.TheSugarBearFoundation.org](http://www.TheSugarBearFoundation.org)

**End of Widows Tax:** If you are a surviving spouse eligible for both the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) Annuity and the Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) this applies to you. The National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2020 phases out the SBP offset by DIC over a course of three years. The first reduction of the offset started Jan. 1, 2021, and some surviving spouses saw an increased monthly SBP annuity payment starting Feb. 1, 2021. The next phase now starts Jan. 1, 2022, where the offset decreases to 1/3 the DIC amount. Starting Jan. 1, 2023 the offset will be entirely eliminated.

**New Chapter Member:** Welcome Marine Lt Col Gerald Harper, Senior JROTC Instructor at South Iredell HS!

**Chapter Dues are Due:** Please pay dues by end of January. Send \$25 check payable to “MOAA Catawba Valley Chapter” to our Chapter Secretary: Major Dennis McClish, 117 Wildwood Loop, Statesville, NC 28625-8903 Also, please consider including a donation to our chapter’s Benevolent Fund along with your annual dues!

### - NEWS FROM THE FIVE MILITARY BRANCHES-

**ARMY:** 1 Corps’ 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Field Artillery Regiment, 17<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Brigade was recently equipped with the first prototype Long Range Hypersonic Weapon—a powerful land-based deterrent to adversaries.

**NAVY:** A laser weapon system aboard the USS Portland test fired a laser “cannon” at a floating target in the Arabian sea. The successful target strike demonstrated its capability to destroy weaponized drone aircraft.

**MARINES:** The Corps has now begun divesting itself of tanks and other legacy ground equipment in order to fund acquisition of new equipment for an amphibious fleet that’s more relevant to the future naval fight.

**AIR FORCE:** Combat Aviation Advisors now wear brown berets to signify their special mission in foreign countries that have primitive or limited military flying history; the Advisors teach and train aviation combat.

**SPACE FORCE:** Guardians (and USAF airmen) may now have hands in their pockets or talk/text on a cellphone while walking, subject to other military customs and courtesies that take precedence, such as saluting.

**2021 Calendar:** Board Meetings: – 24 February, 28 April, 23 June, 25 August, 27 October, 15 December  
General Membership Meetings/Dinners: 27 January, 24 March, 26 May, 22 September, 1 December

**Benevolent Fund:** Our designated charities are: MOAA American Patriot Scholarship Program (**MOAA-APS**), Purple Heart Homes (**PHH**) and Welcome Home Veterans (**WHV**). Donate by sending a charity-specific (any or all three) annotated check to Treasurer: CDR Dave Olson, 485 26<sup>th</sup> Ave NE (Unit A), Hickory, NC 28601.

**NOTE:** Our chapter’s Board of Directors just voted to donate \$200 to each of our three designated charities!

————— **CHAPTER PRINCIPALS, DIRECTORS AND STAFF** —————

Chapter President: LTC “Davy” Davenport  
1<sup>st</sup> Vice President: *Vacant*  
2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President: LTC James Cole  
Treasurer: Commander Dave Olson  
Secretary: Major Dennis McClish  
Chaplain: Reverend (WO3) Robert Herron  
Programs Chairman: *Vacant!*  
Director: Colonel (Dr.) Don Gemeinhardt

Director: Colonel Joe Cansler  
Director: *Vacant!*  
Legislative Liaison: Colonel (Dr.) Dana Tucker  
Surviving Spouses Liaison: Colonel (Dr.) Tucker  
Membership Chair: *Vacant!*  
JROTC Coordinator: Lt Col G. Jane Harmon  
Personal Affairs & TOPS: Lt Col Ted Hayes  
Newsletter/Website: Colonel John Liburdi

**About This MOAA Chapter:** The Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) is a nonprofit veterans association dedicated to maintaining a strong national defense and ensuring our nation keeps its commitments to currently serving, retired, and former members of the uniformed services, including their families and survivors. MOAA and its affiliated chapters and councils are nonpartisan, without any political party affiliation, bias, or designation. Membership is open to those who hold or have ever held a warrant or commission in any component of the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, Space Force, Coast Guard, U.S. Public Health Service or the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The MOAA Catawba Valley Chapter covers six counties: Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Iredell and Lincoln. Our chapter is active in the community through its Benevolent Fund (explained above) and JROTC support. The chapter also engages in ad hoc charitable support and activity, with emphasis on homeless Veterans. A one-page membership application form is posted on the “Join Chapter” button on our chapter website homepage; the mailing address for the application is shown right on the form itself. **Please join our chapter!** Our chapter website is at: [www.moaacvc.org](http://www.moaacvc.org)

*Our chapter website is easy to view on mobile devices:* [www.moaacvc.org](http://www.moaacvc.org)

*The MOAA “Take Action” website is at:* <https://takeaction.moa.org>

**RESERVATION FOR GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING/DINNER AT LHCC**

This is my reservation for MOAA Catawba Valley Chapter’s General Membership meeting/dinner being held on **January 27th** at Lake Hickory Country Club. The social hour in the club’s lounge will start at 6:00 p.m. and dinner will be served at 6:30 p.m. Guest Speaker for the evening will be Dr. Vivianne Wersel who will speak on Surviving Spouse issues, entitlements and support. The Doctor’s biography is on the following page.

Name of Attendee(s): \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_

Menu Selection(s): London Broil \_\_\_\_\_ / Baked Salmon \_\_\_\_\_ / Veggie Plate \_\_\_\_\_

**AS A PRECAUTION, WE STILL REQUEST THAT EVENT ATTENDEES BE ONLY THOSE PERSONS WHO ARE AT LEAST TWO WEEKS PAST THEIR FULL COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION VACCINATION!**

Please send this slip and your check (**\$30.00 per attendee**) to arrive no later than January 24<sup>th</sup> (a Monday) to:

**CDR Dave Olson, 485 26<sup>th</sup> Ave NE (Unit A), Hickory, NC 28601**

## **BIOGRAPHY**

- Dr. Vivianne Cisneros Wersel -

Dr. Vivianne Cisneros Wersel was born and raised in a Marine Corps family. She enjoyed a long career in military medicine as an audiologist, serving active-duty military, Veterans, and their families in addition to her advocacy work for military families. As a military spouse enduring multiple moves and later as a military surviving spouse, Dr. Wersel maintained her career as a mother and an audiologist, and stayed directly involved in the Marine Corps Key Volunteer Program. Dr. Wersel was entered into the Congressional Record for her remarkable work to support military servicemembers, retirees and their families, including survivors.

Dr. Vivianne Cisneros Wersel, is the surviving spouse of Lt Col Richard "Rich" Wersel, Jr. USMC, who served in Operation Iraq Freedom I and II and died on active duty at Camp Lejeune 2005. She founded the Surviving Spouses Support Group at Camp Lejeune and the Arlington Gold Star Wives Virtual Chapter. The Doctor was instrumental in changing the SGLI and Death Gratuity (SA 1376) policy so that all active duty surviving spouses are now eligible for enhanced benefits, and she was also involved in repealing the Widows Tax.

She publicized the needs of military surviving spouses and their families by testifying before Congress twenty times and frequently appearing in national media as a spokesperson for military surviving spouses. She was featured numerous times in the national media for her contributions to military families (USA Today, Huffington Post, Marine Corps Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, and Military Update).

Dr. Wersel is the Legislative Committee Chair for the Western North Carolina MOAA Chapter and serves on the American Academy of Audiology Legislation committee. She is the Public Relations Officer for Gold Star Wives of America Inc. and is the President/Founder of Arlington Gold Star Wives. Dr. Wersel is an advisor for Military Hearts Matter and is a member of the Advisory Committee for Signia Hearing. Vivianne has testified on behalf of military families and survivor issues before Congress twenty times.

She holds a Doctorate of Audiology from Salus University in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, and is a recent retired staff audiologist at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, Bethesda, Maryland. Upon retirement she was entered into the Congressional Record for her work to support military servicemembers, retirees and their families, including survivors.

Dr Vivianne Wersel resides in Asheville, North Carolina and continues her work as an audiologist, as well as an advocate for military surviving spouses.