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## CCMOAA – President's Message

Our first Chapter Business Meeting Luncheon was held on Wednesday, March 18th at the Taberna Golf and Country Club. We all had a great time celebrating a traditional St. Patrick's Day and conducting a ceremony to install our Chapter Officers. Special thanks once again to the Taberna Golf and Country Club for hosting our Luncheon and to Randy Bogle for organizing the event.

There are several events coming up that we will need you to pay attention to and hopefully become involved. The first and closest is the Wall That Heals (Vietnam Wall) which is coming to New Bern the week of 5 April, they need volunteers. The second will be the honoring of our scholarship recipients which is being worked for the first or second week in June.

Also, in the month of June will be the opening of a new exhibit at NC History Museum – the Hall of Firsts. This exhibit will honor the men and women veterans of the State of NC and their significant contributions to both veterans and their communities.

Action Center – we are in the throws of a new legislative year with a lot of competing priorities for budget dollars. Our active-duty components are at risk more than ever, let's make sure we support them as others supported us.

We have also provided in this newsletter a new vaccination site – use it or share it, stay safe.

Hope everyone is still doing well and once again, we ask if you know of any local veteran who may be in need, please let us know so we may assist.

## CCMOAA - Spring Meeting and Upcoming Events



Leprechaun



Gail and Dee check in



Beginning of a great crowd

Our Spring meeting kicked off at the Taberna Country Club with decorations, check-in, drinks, and socializing. It was great seeing so many of our friends and colleagues. Our thanks to Randy Bogle, for putting together a scrumptious menu and

**Contact Information:** [Randall Ramian, CAPT., USN \(Ret.\), President, Coastal Carolina Chapter](mailto:Randall.Ramian@ccmoaa.org) | [+1 \(650\) 235-6350](tel:+16502356350) | [president@ccmoaa.org](mailto:president@ccmoaa.org)

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options for eating in or taking out. The staff was super, and when asked if we could take meals to those, who at the last minute could not attend, it was could not have been made easier.

The next Business Meeting / Dinner will be in early June – date TBD to honor our Scholarship awardees and their families. Gail Bateman, Scholarship Chair is currently in the process of contacting the local high schools and students for Scholarship applications. These applications will be reviewed by the Scholarship Committee and up to five \$1000 Scholarships will be awarded to deserving students.

Please keep your eyes peeled for the announcement on the dinner. We are working to coordinate the dinner with school graduation schedules and local venues. We are planning for this event to take place sometime in early June.

## CCMOAA - Meet the New Board



Randall Ramian's swearing in



The Board's swearing in (not pictured: Randy Bogle - 2nd VP)



Jim Brumit, acting as past president, passes the chapter pin to Randall.

As President, I am both pleased and humbled that this slate of officers volunteered to continue their service to you for another term. As we were unable to meet in person last year, the 2020 slate of officers were not officially installed in a ceremony. This year we decided to combine both 2020 and 2021 officers for installation. Jim Brumit, President, North Carolina Council of Chapters, presided over the ceremony ably assisted by Chaplain Dr. Will Barnes.

Your Coastal Carolina Chapter Officers and Directors:

- President: Randall Ramian
- 1st Vice President: Mike Kennedy
- 2nd Vice President: Randy Bogle
- Secretary: Mark Sandvigen
- Treasurer: Dan Walczak
- Past President / Director: Marie Senzig
- Chaplain / Director: Dr. Will Barnes
- Scholarship Chair / Director: Gail Bateman
- Program Chair / Director: Keith Thompson
- Kinston Veteran's Home Veteran's Home Liaison / Director: Jerry Kirk

Thank you once again to all our Officers and Directors for serving on the Board and supporting our Chapter and community.



**Volunteers Needed:** The Travelling Vietnam War Memorial - "The Wall That Heals" (April 6 -11) was officially approved by New Bern last week to host visitors and is scheduled to be displayed in Lawson Creek Park, New Bern. They are still in need of volunteers to assist. If you would like to volunteer, please refer to [the wall at newbern](#) to sign up online or call Randall Ramian (650) 235-6350.

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**Hall of Firsts:** In June of 2021, the museum will open the display doors on the new military exhibit that will highlight the accomplishments of North Carolinians while serving our country. This June ceremony will also provide an opportunity to induct the inaugural class of the [Hall of Firsts](#).

The Hall of Firsts is looking for nominations of North Carolinian veterans who have made a significant contribution to the State and the Veterans Community. If you know someone you would like to nominate, please contact Mr. Gregory Bethea, Inter-Agency Coordinator, halloffirst@milvets.nc.gov, (Office) 984-204-8364, or go online to [NC's Department of Military and Veterans Affairs](#) for nomination packages.



**Action Center** – The new legislative year is beginning and MOAA is at the forefront of initiatives to help our active-duty service members. More importantly, MOAA is also in a “hold what you have” mode as well. Again, there are many of your benefits under threat; the key will be to stay informed. Our Chapter will once again be participating in “Advocacy in Action” (formerly “Storming the Hill”) to ensure your voice is heard in Washington and in Raleigh.

MOAA has published our national priorities for the upcoming legislative year. Click on the title and see our position, and the changes to the bills. You can show your support by clicking on the “Support Link” at the bottom of each description. You can also cut and paste the descriptions into your legislator’s email and fire them off. Remember, busy people must be told six times to have the information stick and become something they would advocate for.



**Covid-19 Vaccines** – Again, there is media hoopla around all the vaccines, who makes them, which one is better, etc. If you have not gotten your vaccine because you do not fall into the right group, or there is not a clinic close to you, there is hope. Right now, there is more vaccine than there are arms; so, call if you want a shot. If you have not used your VA or military benefit, there is a great site – finally! It is [Vaccine Finder](#). Just type in your zip code and it will give you all the centers around you that are providing vaccinations. Share this with your loved ones if they are having trouble as well. The sooner we get enough arms, the sooner we can get on with our lives.

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## Surviving Spouse Corner: How to Become an Effective Advocate

By: Dr. Vivianne Wersel

It can be very frustrating to find yourself in a position when legislation needs to be changed, but you are unsure where to start. My nearly 16 years’ experience in legislation as an advocate affords me the opportunity to share with you how you can become more involved in improving military survivor benefits. Many surviving spouses already are seasoned advocates, thanks to MOAA and other veterans service organizations. However, for those who are new to this frontier, the following guidance can help you learn to advocate and navigate the process with confidence.

- **Find your passion.** Choose an issue that directly affects you. This will have more of an impact when telling your story.
- **Gather information.** Construct a simple blog regarding how this issue impacts you as a military surviving spouse. Be yourself. It is important you feel comfortable discussing the issue, even if you do not have all the details. Information can be sent later.
- **Determine whether the issue is local, state, or federal.** Some examples include:
  - Federal: Improve VA Dependency and Indemnity Compensation, remarriage law
  - State: Professional licensure, property tax exemption, benefits of military surviving spouses

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o Local (City/County): Noise abatements, zoning ordinance

- **Cultivate relationships with staffers.** This is important because staffers are the ones who will make a difference to move the effort forward. Again, tell your story (brief). Prepare a short bio to help connect you with a staffer and or member when setting up a meeting.
- **Establish a meeting.** During COVID-19, meetings will be held via a virtual platform. If you do not feel comfortable with a virtual meeting, call the elected official's office and asked for a phone conference appointment with the appropriate staffer or ask to leave a message on staffer's phone. Even though you did not virtually meet with the staffer or member, what is important is you raised awareness about your issue. Remember, the elected official and staffer — whether it is federal, state or local — work for you.

## MOAA Outlines TRICARE Mental Health Advocacy Goals

By: Karen Ruedisueli

For years, military families have reported barriers to getting mental health appointments in both military treatment facilities (MTFs) and the TRICARE network. As MOAA [reported](#) last year, an August 2020 DoD Inspector General [report](#) validated those claims and underscored the need to address mental health care access problems. MOAA recognizes the shortage of mental health providers is a national problem and contributes to access challenges, so our recommendations focus on actionable goals to achieve incremental improvements, including:

**Mental Health Appointment Schedulers:** MOAA seeks a pilot program to test the effectiveness of mental health appointment schedulers in assisting beneficiaries with making mental health appointments. This “ask” is consistent with an IG report recommendation but expands the pilot to cover the direct care system as well as the TRICARE purchased care network. The pilot would not only provide direct assistance to beneficiaries seeking mental health care but also could serve as a data collection tool to gain a better understanding of barriers to access. In response to the IG recommendation, the Defense Health Agency (DHA) stated plans to develop such a pilot.

**Enhanced TRICARE Contract Requirements:** MOAA will advocate for more robust mental health network adequacy and provider directory requirements in the next generation TRICARE contract (T-5) including:

- Ongoing mental health provider certification/credentialing to continuously build the pool of TRICARE-authorized mental health providers even if overall network adequacy requirements are met.
- Provider directory accuracy requirements specific to mental health care to eliminate duplicates, providers no longer practicing, and inaccurate provider categorization.
- A comprehensive list of institutional behavioral health providers across all regions, accessible to all beneficiaries. This list is critical for families who must seek inpatient care outside their geographic area due to limitations on local options.

**Telehealth Licensure Flexibility:** MOAA seeks a study on the impact of COVID-19 national emergency licensure waivers allowing providers to practice telehealth across state lines, and the feasibility of making such waivers permanent.

**Reduced Mental Health Copays:** MOAA wants a targeted fix to reduce mental health and other therapy copays that does not result in increases to other TRICARE Prime or Select copays, enrollment fees, or other out-of-pocket costs. TRICARE mental health copays more than doubled in 2018, and military families now pay more per visit than federal employees covered by Federal Employees Health Benefits plans. The combination of high copays plus the frequent visits required for mental health care treatment creates a barrier to access for some families. We cannot allow cost to prevent families from seeking care. The mental health of servicemembers and military families is a readiness issue. MOAA is committed to improving access to mental health care for all military beneficiaries.

## This Key Military Pay Indicator Is Bouncing Back. But Will It Matter?

By: Kevin Lilley

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The Employment Cost Index (ECI) for private-sector wages and salaries, a metric that guides future military pay raises, ticked up slightly in the first quarter of this calendar year – good news for servicemembers, but not a guarantee. The quarterly ECI of 2.8% was up from the [2.7% reported Oct. 30, 2020](#). That October figure is used yearly as a guideline in setting the military pay raise – the 2020 figure, for example, should offer a hint at the FY 2022 raise. And while the October number was down from 2018 and 2019 figures, it would still represent the third-largest raise in the last 12 years. The 2.8% figure released in January sets a good trend for servicemembers, who could see future raises in line with a growing index.

While the military pay raise has reflected ECI in every National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) since the fiscal year 2017 version, there is no rule that Congress or the administration must tie proposals or the final raise to that figure. One doesn't have to look far into the rearview to see the administration ignored this guidance in the following NDAA's:

- ECI Q3 FY 2012: 1.8%, FY 2014 raise: 1.0%
- ECI Q3 FY 2013: 1.8%, FY 2015 raise: 1.0%
- ECI Q3 FY 2014: 2.3%, FY 2016 raise: 1.3%

Fiscal pressures could lead elected officials to seek savings in many corners of the budget. And while these figures may seem small to those outside the uniformed services community, MOAA and other groups are well aware of the damage undercutting military pay can do to those in uniform – not just meeting short-term financial obligations but suffering from thousands in lost retirement funds as pay cuts ripple into the future. MOAA tracks these figures and others to ensure budgets are not balanced on the backs of the military community.