Memorial Day

I’m not going to complain about the high cost of anything this weekend.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Election Results</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorial Report</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans Walk Committee</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POW/MIA Report</td>
<td>6-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership Meeting Highlights</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership Report</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Seminar</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans Incarcerated</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 Years Ago</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcome Home Day</td>
<td>13/14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Dinner</td>
<td>15/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Pie &amp; Ice Cream Sale</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans Mental Health Summit</td>
<td>18/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Rochester Vietnam Veterans Memorial</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 Years of Voluntary Service</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go Fly A Kite for Veterans</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parade Schedule</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank You / The Moving Wall</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golf Tournament</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA Bosses Falsified Wait Times For Care</td>
<td>26/27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millions Pledged for Free Mental Health Care</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agent Orange Benefits Screening Process</td>
<td>29/30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Memory Donations</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership Application</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertiser / Supporters</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Dates / Directions</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact Information</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
President – Valentino Gatto
Vice President – Henry “Hank” Wallace
Secretary – Joe Peck
Treasurer – Alan Frisa
Director – Ken Allocco
Director – Mike General
Director – Lynn Gursslin
Director – Dick Oleksyn
Director – Mike Sanfilippo

State Council Delegates – Bill Auble, Nick DeLeo, Val Gatto, Jerry McDermott, Ken Moore

Nominating Committee – Dan Corona, Chuck Macaluso, Joe Marinaccio, Steve Mros, Joe Peck
Remembering Our Fallen Heroes
Born in May

Website – http://rochestervietnammemorial.org/

Neidermeier, Thomas David  5-1-1947
Petramalo, Thomas  5-6-1936
Quinn, Ronald Gene  5-6-1943
McCarthy Jr., Carl R.  5-6-1950
Pringle, James Edward  5-8-1949
Parker Jr., George Joseph  5-10-1941
Daniels, Rex Martin  5-10-1943
Beltran, Frank Joseph  5-11-1948
Kleinhans, Lawrence C.  5-14-1947
Ludwig, Larry George  5-15-1947
Roczen, Alexander Anthony  5-16-1947
Henderson, Robert Caufeld  5-17-1947
Schumacher, Jeffrey David  5-17-1950
Cartwright, Thomas Clark  5-18-1943
Reed, David N.  5-28-1951
Redding, Walter Lee  5-30-1949

Memorial Tours & Presentations
Persons interested in on-site tours or presentations at schools or organizations, contact Chuck Macaluso at 585-225-8288 or Chuckmac66@yahoo.com

Friends of the Memorial
To be placed on the volunteer contact list, contact Chuck Macaluso at 585-225-8288 or Chuckmac66@yahoo.com
THE VETERANS WALK COMMITTEE
154 Mendota Drive
Rochester, New York 14626

From:
Name: __________________________
Address: _______________________
City/Zip: _________________________
Phone: ___________________________

Sample Brick
PFC John Doe
US Army
65-67 Vietnam

The Veterans Walk Committee of Chapter 20, VVA wants to thank you for your purchase of a personalized, engraved paver brick.

Each paver brick (4" x 8") can have from one to three lines of engraved information. The cost will be $50.00 per brick. Make checks or money order payable to:

VVA Chapter 20, Veterans Walk

The engraved line(s) can include any of the following information:

Full name
Branch of service, rank
Dates of service (1967-1969, etc.)
Conflict (WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Persian Gulf, etc.)

Please print the information you would like engraved on the brick below. (Maximum of 14 letters/numbers, including spaces per line).

1. __________________________
2. __________________________
3. __________________________

Return the completed form to the - Veterans Walk Committee, c/o Chuck Macaluso, 154 Mendota Drive, Rochester, New York 14626.
Include: Payment and “Proof of Service” for above recipient.

Please Note: Engraved bricks will be installed prior to Memorial Day and Veterans Day (twice annually).
Questions please call Chuck or Joan Macaluso as 585-225-8288

5
There are new reports from the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) and the National League of Families that 1 more American has been located and accounted for this month. The total number of Americans who are still missing from the Vietnam War is now at 1621.

Sgt. Alan Lee Boyer, from Missoula, Montana was a rifle man and a member of the 5th Special Forces assigned to MACV-SOG who was assigned to highly classified operations in Vietnam and surrounding areas. On March 28, 1968, Sgt. Boyer with 2 other members of his team were on a reconnaissance patrol mission, along with 7 Vietnamese personnel all of which were part of a command and control detachment from forward base 4, about 15 miles near Tchepone in Laos. The team made contact with an unknown enemy force and requested extraction by helicopter. Because of the difficult terrain, the helicopter could not land and a rope ladder was dropped for the team to climb on board the aircraft. While most of the Vietnamese climbed onto the helicopter, the aircraft began to receive heavy automatic weapons fire. This forced the helicopter to leave the area with Sgt Boyer and 2 another member of his team hanging on the ladder. Seconds after being airborne, the ladder broke sending Sgt. Boyer and the other men falling to the ground. All 3 survived and looked to be uninjured. On April 1, a search and rescue team was inserted into the area where they searched for over 6 hours but failed to locate any evidence of the 3 men. In 1984, a Lao refugee reported that 3 men were killed during that engagement and were buried in the area. One of the men (SFC George R Brown) was located and accounted for in 2001. In later years, the remains of Sgt. Alan Lee Boyer were turned over by 3 Lao Nationals to a peace activist in Laos and identified by DNA. His remains were returned on March 24, 2015, identified on February 10, 2016 and accounted for on March 16, 2016. He was laid to rest with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery on June 22, 2016.

Continued on next page
There have been reports of the recoveries and identifications of individuals from the following wars:

- 1\textsuperscript{st} Lt. Frederick W. Langhorst, US Army Air Corps was reported lost on July 17, 1945 in India. He was accounted for on March 17, 2016 and will be laid to rest with full military honors.
- Cpl. Dennis D. Buckley, US Army was reported lost on February 13, 1951 near Hoengsong, South Korea. He died at the Suan POW Camp on June 30, 1951. He was accounted for on March 21 2016 and was laid to rest with full military honors on April 14\textsuperscript{th} at Rittman, Ohio.
- Fireman 3\textsuperscript{rd} Class John H. Lindsey, Chief Storekeeper Herbert J. Hoard, Fire Controlman 1\textsuperscript{st} class Paul A. Nash, Ensign Joseph P. Hittorff and Machinist Mate 1\textsuperscript{st} class Alfred F. Wells, all of which were US Navy personnel on Board the USS Oklahoma and were lost on December 7\textsuperscript{th} 1941 at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. They were accounted for on April 5\textsuperscript{th}, 6\textsuperscript{th} and 7\textsuperscript{th} 2016 and laid to rest with full military honors.
- PFC. John F. Prince, US Marine Corps was lost on November 20, 1943 at Tarawa Atoll. He was accounted for on April 2, 2016. He will be laid to rest with full military honors.
- PFC. Anthony Brozyna, US Marine Corps was lost on November 20, 1943 at Tarawa Atoll. He was accounted for on April 7, 2016. He will be laid to rest with full military honors.

We finally have our fallen heroes. It has been a long journey, but you are finally home and you were never forgotten.
Rest in Peace Brothers
Highlights of the April Membership Meeting

New Member – Charlie Dolan
US Army 1967-71

New Member – Glenn Klingenberg
US Navy 1971-72

New Member – Mike Smith

Al Smith won the Flag Drawing

Bruce Nichols won the 50/50

Ken Ayotte won a lap robe

The Marching Unit won $100 at the St Patrick’s Day Parade

Voting
Chapter 20 Membership currently is at 617 members and AVVA is at 37 members as of 03/31/16. Membership is growing, but we still need your help in recruiting new members. Don’t forget to renew on time. Don’t let your membership expire.

Please Renew Your Membership!
If you are renewing as a “Life Member”, please remember to include a copy of your DD-214 with your application. PLEASE NOTE: Time payment option (Charge Card) for “Life Membership” has been dropped by National.

When you have an address change, please notify Mike General so we can keep our Roster up to date and notify National.

Need your help in recruiting new members.
Chapter 20 Membership is open to U.S. Veterans who served active duty (other than training purposes) in the Republic of Vietnam between February 28, 1961 and May 07, 1975, or any duty location between August 05, 1964 and May 07, 1975.

Membership includes a subscription to our award-winning newspaper The BTL, and The VVA Veteran, bringing you updates on issues and legislation affecting veterans, as well as unique articles on the people, places, and history of the Vietnam experience.

Associate Membership is open to anyone; you do not need to be a Veteran.

WE Need New Members!
Membership Applications are available on our Website, in this issue of the BTL, or by contacting me at (mwgeneral@aol.com)

NEW: We are offering an “Honorary Membership” to Chapter 20 to all spouses who husbands have passed away. If you know of someone who has lost their loved one, please contact Mike General.
LEADERSHIP SEMINAR

Have you ever thought about becoming an Officer, Director, or Committee chair for Chapter 20? If so, join us on Saturday, July 23rd from 9am to 3pm at the Chili American Legion Post #1830, 450 Chili-Scottsville Rd.

We will be providing “seminars” on what is involved in becoming part of the leadership of Chapter 20. Information and hand-outs will be provided on all elected and appointed positions within the Chapter.

There will be plenty of time for questions and answers. Topics will include the Chapter Policies and Procedures, each of the Officer positions, being a Director, Committee Chairs and other appointees, as well as other items of interest.

No registration fees, free parking, and hand-outs to take home; so if you plan on attending, contact Fred Elliott at felliott@rochester.rr.com or by phone at 585-317-7619. You must be a member of Vietnam Veterans of America to attend.

Sponsored by the Officers and Directors of Chapter 20.

This Seminar is open to all current members of Chapter 20.
Can you believe spring is in the air and VVA Chapter 20 is already celebrating with elections and our annual dinner? Where is the time going? Be that as it may, my Committee is fully funded and expecting a good year ahead. The Attica Active Veterans Group has a new Executive Board and Phil Glaser was elected as the new President. I have known Phil for a long time and he is a real advocate for the vets at the Attica Correctional Facility. He consistently puts the group before himself, is not afraid of paperwork and has an excellent relationship with the staff advisor there. I’ve been sending in your yarn donations right along and the guys are cranking out hats, scarves and Christmas stockings for kids as well as making kites for Chapter 20’s Jack Michel who raises funds for homeless vets. His “Come Fly a Kite for Homeless Veterans” event is scheduled this year for Saturday May 21st at Gratwick Waterfront Park in North Tonawanda from noon until 4:00 PM and we wish Jack well with that endeavor. I also sent in a donation from Chapter 20 to Attica to help with expenses for their veterans picnic scheduled for June 12th and that will be the next time I go into see the men there. Thank you all too for your yarn donations with a tip of the hat to Kenny Allocco who struck the mother lode of yarn and gave it all to me for the price of one cheap breakfast.......The NY State Dept. of Corrections is putting together a new veterans residential treatment program at the Woodbourn Correctional Facility, a medium prison in Sullivan County. I am in hopes that it will be as successful as the old one which we were involved with for years at the Groveland Correctional Facility. Breaks your heart to see so many Iraq and Afghanistan vets incarcerated and it does seem like déjà vu to me from the old days.

The 20th Anniversary Memorial Committee I’m on is really coming together with the program for that celebration in September thanks to the iron hand of Chuck Macaluso. Everyone on the committee is contributing and we are ahead of the curve if you ask me. Should be a memorable day for us all....... Those of us who attended the National Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day at the Monroe County Hospital on March 29th heard a great speech by Gary Beikirch and we were all honored to be a part of that event. I know many hands went in to making the evening such a success and I want to thank everyone who participated. It was so nice to catch up with old friends and Chapter members that I haven’t seen in such a long time.....I am still running a bereavement group for veterans at Lifetime Care, 3111 S. Winton Rd. (Not far from the Vet Center) on the second and fourth Mondays of the month at 1:00 PM and hospice is going well. The thing about hospice and the Vet to Vet Program is that we need volunteers. The need far outweighs the number of veteran volunteers that we have and I hope you will consider serving in this very worthwhile program. Anyone interested can contact myself or program coordinator Rose Fletcher at 214-1444.......Finally on a personal note, I just came back from visiting my son who is in the Navy at Pearl Harbor. He is being transferred and it looked like he was going to Bahrain and the Navy was sending his family back to Japan as his wife is Japanese. Turns out to do so the Navy would have to send all their belongings through customs which is very costly. They cut him orders to a Navy Air Wing in Lemore, California instead, the closest he has been to home here since his enlistment in 2002. For once the governments cheapness paid off!
May 2 – Robert McNamara, the US Secretary of Defense, reports that the North Vietnamese are infiltrating 4,500 men a month into the South. This is three times the number in 1965.

May 10 – Operation Paul Revere is begun with ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) Units and troops of the 3rd Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, to counter possible NVA activities against Special Forces border camps at Duc Co and Plei Me.

May 15 – South Vietnamese Premier Ky dispatches 1,500 ARVN troops to Da Nang, setting off another wave of violent protests by Buddhist dissenters.

May 21 – General Westmoreland’s headquarters in Saigon estimates that for the entire month, the 9th Marines alone have killed more than 270 Viet Cong, while 75 Marines have died in combat actions and 328 are wounded, due primarily to mines and explosive devices, many of them made from equipment which was abandoned by the ARVN Forces south of Da Nang. Colonel Edwin H. Simmons, USMC, commanding officer of the 9th Marines, states that the considerable increase in enemy incidents during the month has been due to the increased freedom of movement of the Viet Cong in many outlying rural areas. This in turn has been due to the Vietnamese Government’s diminished military activities during its period of frequent political instability.

May 28 – The USMC 1st Military Police Battalion arrives at Da Nang from the US and relieves the 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines of its airfield security mission.
Welcome Home!
Maggie Brooks received the Roger Robach Award

Todd Baxter received the Murrell Humanitarian Award

Ken Allocco received a Special Recognition Award

Mark Assini received a Special Recognition Award

Stan Patykiewicz received a Special Recognition Award

Vietnam Gold Star Mother – June Martin

Dr. Pete gets a Lap Robe

Gold Star Dad – Dan Hasenauer
Dr. Al Smith received a Community Service Award

Mike General received a Veteran Service Award

Jack Madigan received a Veteran Service Award

Jack Michel received a Veteran Service Award
Annual Pie, Plant and Ice Cream Sale

Date: May 12th
Time: 9:30AM-1:30PM
Location: Bldg. 5 Auditorium
Canandaigua VAMC

- All monies raised from this sale will help to support Volunteer programs
- Pie slices are served with ice cream and coffee.
- All pies, assorted baked goods and plants are donated by volunteers
- Donated, mature plants and bulbs are most appreciated
- Both house and garden plants are acceptable
- Don’t forget to clean out your closets for quality rummage sale items (no clothing or books, please).
- Marking your items with a sale price before donating would assist us greatly
- Donations should be dropped off in Bldg. 5 Auditorium on May 12 before 8:30AM or in Voluntary Service beginning May 11. If you have a large donation, please call ahead of time: 585-393-7757.

Please fill out the RSVP below and forward to Voluntary Service by May 4 so that we can get an idea of the amount of pies, etc that we can count on. Thank you!

RSVP for PIE, PLANT AND ICE CREAM SALE
VA Medical Center, Voluntary Service (135), Canandaigua, NY 14424

I will donate: # of pies*: ________________________ # of plants ________________________
I will donate Baked Goods*: What Kind? ________________________ How much? ________________________
I will donate rummage sale items and price them: Yes: __________ No: ________________________

I prefer to make a monetary donation. Enclosed is my check payable to “VAVS Executive Committee” __________

Name: ____________________________________________
Organization: ______________________________________

*Remember! If you are baking items to donate, you will need to attend a Food Safety Course. Thank you for your cooperation and for helping us to meet these safety mandates!

*Special thank you to the VA Employees Association for co-sponsoring this event.
2016 Veterans Mental Health & Homeless Summit

Date:  May 18, 2016
Time:  8:30am - 4:00pm
Location:  Nazareth College, Shults Center
          4245 East Avenue, Rochester NY  14618
Purpose:  The fourth year of the Veterans Mental Health and Homeless Summit is to strengthen communities that care for Veterans and their families residing in the greater Rochester and surrounding areas by discussing mental health concerns and continuing collaborations for access to care and housing resources.

Agenda:

8:30 – 9:00
  Registration & NRD Information
  Resource Table Displays

9:00 – 10:00
  Opening ceremony
  • Welcome and Pledge of Allegiance
  • Opening Remarks
  • Updates of 2015 Summit Action Items
  • 2016 Summit
    Julie Borgen, VA Recovery Coordinator & Distinguished Guests

10:00–10:30
  Plenary Session:  Update on VA Benefits & process
    Laura Stradley, Director, Monroe County Veterans Service Agency

10:30–10:45
  Break

10:45–12:00
  Morning Breakout Discussions:
    Breakout Discussion 1:  Women Veterans & mental health issues
    Breakout Discussion 2:  Spiritual Wellness & Moral Injury
    Breakout Discussion 3:  Accessing Care - Veterans & Their Families
    Breakout Discussion 4:  Housing Supports – Functional Zero Formal Announcement
    Community Partners, Veterans, Family Members, VA Staff
12:00– 1:00  Lunch

1:00– 2:00  Suicide Prevention

2:00– 3:15  Afternoon Breakout Sessions

Breakout Discussion 1: Women Veterans & mental health issues

Breakout Discussion 2: Spiritual Wellness & Moral Injury

Breakout Discussion 3: Accessing Care-Veterans & Their Families

Breakout Discussion 4: Housing Supports – Functional Zero, Now What?

3:15– 3:30  Break

3:30– 4:00  Wrap-up – Review of Opportunities, Action Items & Adjournment

Driving & Parking Directions:

Nazareth College campus map with driving directions is available at https://www2.naz.edu/files/8714/4484/9044/map-directions_info-sheet_FINAL1.pdf

The Summit registration, Opening, and Plenary Sessions will occur in Shults Center. Nearest parking lots are A, F, G.
You are on the Walk of Honor. Underfoot are brick pavers, unobtrusive in color. The focus of the Walk is on your right, a single-file line of identical bollards, seemingly endless, running along the Walk’s edge and curving ahead out of sight. The bollards were installed by artists and are made of brushed stainless steel, “America’s metal,” and each represents a Rochester-area soldier, killed or missing in action in the Vietnam War. Each bollard bears two small plaques; one, an insignia of the soldier’s military branch; the other bearing the soldier’s name, date of birth, date of death or disappearance, and high school. The design committee wanted to personalize each bollard, to express the enormity of local loss. At first the names were supposed to be inscribed on the Walk itself, so that visitors would bow their heads to read. But the act of walking on the names of the dead too closely resembled the act of walking on graves.

The bollards are sequenced chronologically according to the final day in the life of each soldier. They resemble human figures, but your own interpretation determines their posture; they trudge forward, heads down, under the weight of what they carry; or they stand erect, heads tipped back, faces turned up towards the sun. You still have to bow your head to read each name. The Timeline is located along the left edge of the Walk, revealing in black granite the events of the War each day, each month, each year these soldiers died or went missing.

People leave things near individual bollards, personal tokens that create intimate shrines within the large Memorial. As the living, we will always find a way to express a connection with the dead. As human behavior descends into its darker aspects along the black granite Timeline, so the Walk drops gradually as it winds through the series of hills and gardens that make up the Memorial. Every so often, beyond the Timeline, sits a black granite bench, a place for pause. At night, the lights along the walk shine through the bollards. They were designed to resemble the unobtrusive lighting of a church, too dim to read by, but soft enough to be alone with your thoughts.
The VA Voluntary Services held their annual “Volunteer Recognition Banquet” at Burgundy Basin Inn at which several Chapter 20 members were recognized for their service as volunteers.

While there, Marie and I saw Chapter members Vito Scarpetta, Rosemary Rossi-Williams, Dick and Mitzi Lewandowski, and AVVA member Lee Kaufman (he won a door prize).

Locally there are some 659 volunteers who provide a variety of valuable services at Canandaigua, ROPC, and Clinton Crossings. Volunteers at Canandaigua found a duck who had a new brood of ducklings and bought a kid’s wading pool for them until the ducks were old enough to fly. Another volunteer gave CPR to a veteran who was suffering a heart attack at the medical center. (The veteran survived.) One of the volunteer greeters at Canandaigua spotted a veteran who was showing signs of illness and summoned emergency medical assistance for the veteran.

Last year’s Christmas stocking program at Canandaigua was a rousing success with some 1,600 stockings provided for veterans – the original goal was 1,200. Did you know that volunteer Marion Potter will be 100 years old this June? (That’s dedication.)

Sitting at our table at the Banquet were Willy Ochaya, a native of Uganda who came to the US 30 years ago and volunteers in the myHealth Vet program. He is a graduate of RIT and is working on his PhD (at age 66). Mary Lynne Bement and her mother Mary Chest were also at our table – Mary Lynne is retired after 23 years as an Army nurse and volunteers in the hospice area at Canandaigua VA. Her mother is the widow of a World War II veteran and also volunteers. Ivan Montgomery and his daughter Denise rounded out the group at our table. They both volunteer as greeters at Canandaigua. Denise is retire after 20+ years in the Department of Defense Force Protection Detachment – they provide security service at US embassies around the globe. An eclectic and interesting group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter Members as Volunteers</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mike Belle-Isle</strong> (100 hours)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>James Coates</strong> (100 hours)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fred Elliott</strong> (300 hours)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Richard Anderson</strong> (750 hours)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All Proceeds to Help Homeless Veterans of WNY

For information, contact:
(716) 515-5844
(716) 435-7210

Visit Our Website www.kitesforvets.com

Come fly a kite for HOMELESS VETERANS

Saturday, May 21, 2016
12 noon - 4 pm
Grafton Park
River Road
North Tonawanda, NY
### Parade Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>May</strong></td>
<td>7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; - Saturday</td>
<td>Lilac</td>
<td>Rochester</td>
<td>10:30am</td>
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<td></td>
<td>29&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; - Sunday</td>
<td>Memorial Day</td>
<td>Irondequoit</td>
<td>3:00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; - Monday</td>
<td>Memorial Day</td>
<td>Rochester</td>
<td>10:30am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; - Monday</td>
<td>Memorial Day</td>
<td>Highland Park</td>
<td>1:00pm</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>JUNE</strong></td>
<td>9&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; - Thursday</td>
<td>Firemen’s Parade</td>
<td>Spencerport</td>
<td>7:00pm</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; - Wednesday</td>
<td>Firemen’s Parade</td>
<td>Barnard</td>
<td>7:00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>JULY</strong></td>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; - Monday</td>
<td>Town Parade</td>
<td>Irondequoit</td>
<td>11:00am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; - Saturday</td>
<td>Firemen’s Parade</td>
<td>Kendall</td>
<td>7:00pm</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; - Thursday</td>
<td>Firemen’s Parade</td>
<td>Webster</td>
<td>6:30pm</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>August</strong></td>
<td>12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; - Friday</td>
<td>Firemen’s Parade</td>
<td>Hamlin</td>
<td>7:00pm</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
A big Thank You to you all from me. First off, thank you to all who voted for me to be a new Board member. I look forward to the challenge.

Next, a big Thank You for the surprise of the Special Recognition Award at our dinner. I am very moved by this, it means a lot to me.

But what I am really most thankful for is that we had so many members come to the annual meeting and vote. The hall was full, more than ever. It shows that you care about Chapter 20. And what is dear to my heart is that we set a new record for flag tickets sold ($166). A special thank you to all who just put in the money and don’t take a ticket. Thank you to all.

Kenny Allocco
CHARITY GOLF TOURNAMENT
IN SUPPORT OF
VETERANS OUTREACH CENTER
SUNDAY, AUGUST 14th
Timber Ridge Golf Club

Registration: 9:00AM - Tee-Off: 10:00AM - Cost: $80
Includes 18-holes of golf, cart, lunch, Steak Roast, beverages on the course, and prizes for all.

Scramble Format!

Awards: *Team Champions* *Longest Drive(2)* *Closest to the Pin(2)

To Register call (585) 317-1351 by July 31st, 2016

Thank you!
SUPPORT OUR VETERANS
VA bosses in 7 states falsified vets' wait times for care

WASHINGTON — Supervisors instructed employees to falsify patient wait times at Veterans Affairs' medical facilities in at least seven states, according to a USA TODAY analysis of more than 70 investigation reports released in recent weeks.

Overall, those reports — released after multiple inquiries and a Freedom of Information Act request — reveal for the first time specifics of widespread scheduling manipulation.

Employees at 40 VA medical facilities in 19 states and Puerto Rico regularly “zeroed out” veteran wait times, the analysis shows. In some cases, investigators found manipulation had been going on for as long as a decade. In others, it had been just a few years.

In many cases, facility leaders told investigators they clamped down the scheduling improprieties after the Phoenix scandal, but in others, investigators found they had continued unabated. The manipulation masked growing demand as new waves of veterans returned from wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and as Vietnam veterans aged and needed more health care.

In 2014, The Arizona Republic, part of the USA TODAY NETWORK, and other media revealed scheduling manipulation at Phoenix VA Medical Center and that dozens of veterans died while waiting for care. Subsequent reporting that year showed that similar problems extended nationwide. Investigators had said manipulation was “systemic,” but they did not identify which facilities had problems and how serious they were. The inspector general soon launched investigations of more than 100 facilities.

The newly released findings of those probes show that supervisors instructed schedulers to manipulate wait times in Arkansas, California, Delaware, Illinois, New York, Texas and Vermont, giving the false impression facilities there were meeting VA performance measures for shorter wait times.

In some cases, the system encouraged manipulation even without explicit instruction from supervisors. A manager in West Palm Beach, Fla., sent out laudatory emails touting the shorter wait times the system showed. Schedulers in Harlingen, Texas, reported being berated by supervisors when they booked appointments showing longer wait times for veterans. (It was “not pretty,” one employee said.)

In some cases — in Gainesville, Fla., White River Junction, Vt., and Philadelphia, for example — they found VA employees improperly kept lists of veterans needing care outside the scheduling system, a violation that also hid actual wait times.

Roughly half of the 70 newly released reports are from investigations completed more than a year ago, and the VA says it already initiated discipline against 29 people — three of whom left the agency — because of the findings.

The agency said it has retrained thousands of schedulers and is updating software to make it easier for them to book appointments properly. A pilot program at 10 facilities allows veterans to book their own appointments, and the VA expects to roll that out nationwide, according to David Shulkin, a physician who took over as undersecretary for health at the VA in June.

Shulkin told USA TODAY he also initiated two massive, same-day efforts to try to provide care sooner for more than 100,000 veterans, and he said the agency also has increased capacity to get wait times down.

“We’ve expanded appointments, we have added evening hours and weekend hours, we’ve added 3 million square feet of space, we’ve hired 14,000 new providers,” he said.

Continued on next page
But VA whistle-blowers say schedulers still are manipulating wait times. Shea Wilkes, co-director of a group of more than 40 whistle-blowers from VA medical facilities in more than a dozen states, said the group continues to hear about it from employees across the country who are scared to come forward.

“Until the VA decides it truly wants to change its corrupt and poor culture, those who work on the front lines and possess the true knowledge relating to the VA’s continued data manipulation will remain quiet and in hiding because of fear of workplace harassment and retaliation,” said Wilkes, a social worker at the VA Medical Center in Shreveport, La.

This is not the first time the VA has said it would fix problems with scheduling. When the inspector general found in 2005 that VA schedulers were improperly booking appointments — and wait lists were therefore underestimated by as many as 10,000 veterans — the agency initiated a “national education plan” to retrain schedulers and supervisors. In 2010, VA officials discovered schedulers were using “gaming strategies” to falsify wait times to meet agency performance targets, and they required all schedulers to undergo new training, once again.

In the newly released reports, investigators found schedulers were using the same strategies. Most commonly, schedulers would start the wait clock on the day of the appointment they were booking rather than when the veteran wanted to be seen. The system then showed there was no wait time even if the veteran had to wait weeks or months for an appointment.

As recently as October, the Government Accountability Office said the VA’s wait-time system still is prone to scheduler error and produces unreliable data.

Shulkin said that in addition to the actions the agency has already taken, he is planning to overhaul entirely the way the VA measures wait times and ensures veterans get care when they need it.

“I have found reports in the bottoms of drawers from 15 years ago that suggested that access issues existed in the VA and that we needed to address these systems systemically rather than piecemeal,” he said. “It’s not a matter of just retraining people to be able to accurately record wait-time data, this is a matter of actually redesigning and relaunching your whole approach to how you care for veterans.”

David Shulkin, undersecretary of health for the Department of Veterans Affairs, explains the potential benefits of giving veterans access to certain private health care services.

On Friday, he plans to launch a new “declaration of access” laying out goals to reach by the end of the year, including that veterans will be able to get same-day primary care and mental health care within a similarly ambitious time frame.

He said the agency is moving toward measuring wait times by veteran satisfaction. The VA currently asks veterans at computer kiosks when they check in for appointments whether they are satisfied that they got the appointments when they wanted them. The VA also is working on a new way to measure wait times in the scheduling system.

None of that data is publicly available yet, but Shulkin said he plans to publish it on the VA’s website in coming months. Right now, he said 89% of veterans say they are satisfied and he uses the data to guide management.

“It’s how I know we’re heading in the right direction,” he said.

More than 480,000 veterans were waiting more than 30 days for an appointment as of March 15, public VA data show.
Billionaire pledges $275 million for free mental health care for veterans, families

By Heath Druzin
Stars and Stripes

A billionaire hedge-fund manager has pledged $275 million to build clinics offering free mental health care to veterans and their families.

Steven Cohen, who heads Point72 Asset Management, will build 20 to 25 clinics across the country in the next three to five years, with the first ones opening in July.

The initial clinics will be in New York, Dallas, San Antonio and Los Angeles, according to a press release from the Cohen Veterans Network, the nonprofit group overseeing the effort.

The announcement comes as the Department of Veterans Affairs remains under fire for long wait times and inadequate health care for veterans and is getting increasing criticism for denying health care to veterans with other than honorable discharges.

Cohen’s clinics would offer free mental health care to all veterans, regardless of discharge status, with priority given to post-9/11 vets. The clinics promise short wait times and free transportation to appointments.

“It’s very simple the way we see it: A veteran is someone who wore the uniform for even one day,” Cohen Veterans Network Executive Director Dr. Anthony Hassan said in a phone interview with Stars and Stripes.

Hassan, an Army and Air Force veteran who has spent years studying military behavioral health, said he picked the initial locations based on their high concentrations of veterans and long VA wait times for mental health appointments.

“There are gaps in care, and we’re here to fill those gaps in care,” he said.

Cohen, whose son, Robert, deployed to Afghanistan in 2010 as a Marine, said in a statement that eliminating stigma was one goal of the clinics.

“The wounds of war are serious,” Cohen said. “It is not easy to serve your country in combat overseas and then come back into society seamlessly, especially if you are suffering. These men and women have paid an incredible price and it’s important that this country pays back that debt.”

Patients will have the option of participating in studies connected with Cohen Veterans Bioscience, a nonprofit that aims to develop better detection and treatment of post traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury.

Cohen’s $11.1 billion fortune has drawn the attention of the Securities and Exchange Commission. In January, he was barred from managing outside investor money for two years by the SEC for failing to adequately oversee an employee. In 2013, his firm SAC Capital Advisors pleaded guilty to insider trading charges and paid a $1.8 billion penalty.
Agent Orange benefit screening process scrutinized in Congress

By Frank Matt

WASHINGTON

The House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs is looking into whether a contractor thoroughly reviewed the files of Vietnam veterans who might deserve benefits for illnesses linked to exposure to Agent Orange.

A contractor that pre-screens veteran files for evidence of those illnesses often spent just minutes reviewing each file, internal company documents show.

The contractor, QTC Medical Services, reviewed files for 160,000 veterans. They were paid approximately $300 for every file reviewed under 2 inches thick and $350 for files more than 2 inches thick.

An unsealed lawsuit and contract documents obtained by McClatchy shed light on the contractor’s pre-screening process.

The suit alleges that QTC — a Lockheed Martin company — did not give their employees the necessary training to spot evidence of illnesses linked to Agent Orange and pressured employees to work at a pace that made it impossible to thoroughly review the file.

“This lawsuit raises a number of serious questions,” said Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Florida, the chairman of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, in a statement to McClatchy. “Every veteran’s VA claim deserves a thorough and objective review. Our investigation will continue until we are satisfied that’s the case in this situation.”

QTC Medical Services and Lockheed Martin, citing ongoing litigation, declined to comment.

This lawsuit raises a number of serious questions. Every veteran’s VA claim deserves a thorough and objective review. Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Florida, chairman of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs

Agent Orange benefits are a moving target for the Department of Veterans Affairs. An ongoing class-action lawsuit — Nehmer v. Department of Veterans Affairs — requires the VA to review old veteran claims when new illnesses are linked to Agent Orange exposure. That gives veterans who were previously denied benefits an updated review.

QTC reviewed 65,000 files for ischemic heart disease, Parkinson’s disease and hairy cell leukemia potentially linked to herbicide exposure in Vietnam, as well as 95,000 files for peripheral neuropathy. Only the files flagged by QTC as potentially eligible were sent back to the VA for a final decision.

The National Veterans Legal Services Program, who filed the class-action suit, told McClatchy that since 2010, they’ve identified more than 1,600 cases in which the VA failed to recognize and pay the required retroactive Agent Orange compensation, resulting in an additional $42 million being paid to veterans and their survivors.

Barton Stichman, NVLSP’s joint executive director, said they are paying close attention to the allegations against QTC to see if pre-screening is where veterans are falling through the cracks.

Continued on next page
“If the contract or QTC did not ensure a process that was compliant with the Nehmer Court Orders, then the cases that were not flagged by QTC would have to be reviewed again.” Stichman said.

The lawsuit against QTC, brought by former claims file analyst David Vatan, was dismissed on grounds that Vatan did not know the terms of the contract, so whatever evidence he presented about how QTC performed the reviews, he could not prove the company misrepresented its work. Vatan and his attorneys have appealed.

McClatchy obtained the full contract with QTC through a Freedom of Information Act request.

$175 million Amount of fiscal year 2015 QTC contracts with the Department of Veterans Affairs

QTC’s contract stipulates the company must train its employees before they review files for Agent Orange-related conditions based on a guide provided by the VA. Vatan’s lawsuit alleges he and other analysts were not formally trained and were never given the VA’s training guide.

Instead, analysts were given a “reference manual” from QTC that omits much of the background information on relevant medical conditions included in the VA’s guide, as well as details about what supporting evidence for benefit eligibility might look like in a veteran’s file. The contract also states that QTC must review each veteran’s entire file.

But QTC’s reference guide permits analysts to abbreviate the process, using summaries of prior benefit decisions printed on colored sheets of paper.

QTC’s senior vice president of operations, Dr. Margie Shahani, testified to Congress in 2008 that it would take a qualified analyst 60 to 90 minutes to review each claim file, an equivalent of seven or eight files per day.

Internal documents show QTC’s analysts worked much faster under a competitive performance rating system. Some analysts averaged nearly 30 claims per day and those who reviewed fewer than 12 to 15 were reprimanded for poor performance.

In the response to Vatan’s complaint, Lockheed Martin’s lawyers argued the contract did not spell out how much time they should spend on each file. “There is nothing inherently wrong with QTC encouraging people to work quickly,” the motion reads.

It takes 10-12 minutes for an experienced (analyst) to process one file in the computer system alone. How was the review conducted? Former QTC claims file analyst David Vatan

When one of his colleagues reported reviewing 50 files in a day, Vatan complained to a Lockheed Martin ethics officer. Vatan pointed out that 50 files a day would leave the analyst just 12 minutes per file if he or she worked two hours of overtime and took no breaks. “It takes 10-12 minutes for an experienced (analyst) to process one file in the computer system alone,” Vatan said. “How was the review conducted?”

Both the Department of Justice and the VA Office of the Inspector General investigated the allegations in the lawsuit, but neither chose to intervene and neither would comment on their investigation.

In fiscal year 2015, QTC’s various contracts with the Department of Veterans Affairs exceeded $175 million.
In Memory Donations

When the simple act of placing flowers on a casket or placing stones on a headstone does not seem to be enough to honor the memory of a special someone who has passed away, one may choose to make a donation in his or her honor to commemorate the values and beliefs of the deceased. Chapter 20 VVA is committed to recognizing the sacrifices made by all military personnel in every branch of the armed forces. The memory of the deceased veteran is honored in the continuous work and service carried out by the dedicated Chapter members and associates. The monetary donations sent by individuals help make it possible to continue serving veterans and their families. The combined efforts of donors, lawmakers, members, and associates have far-reaching effects on the quality of all our lives.

Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 20 offers several ways of commemorating a special person. One of those ways is the Memorial Walk at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial at Highland Park. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Walk is a pathway of bricks inscribed with the names of individuals who have served their country with valor. Their names will forever remain a reminder of the dedication and tenacity demonstrated by the thousands of men and women who have served in the U. S. Armed Forces.

If you wish to make a monetary donation directly to Chapter 20 in support of all the functions and services they provide to veterans and their families, send your check or money order payable to Chapter 20, VVA:

Vietnam Veterans of America
Chapter 20
P.O. Box 12580
Rochester, NY 14612
Name: ________________________________ Date of Birth: ________________ Sex ( )M ( )F

Address: ______________________________________

City: ________________________________ Home Phone: (555)________________________

Zip: ___________ County: __________________________

Email Address: _______________________

Sponsor: ______________________________

I am not a Vietnam Veteran, but I want to help Vietnam Veterans and their families.

Please accept my donation:
( ) $10 ( ) $20 ( ) $50 Other ($__________)

Payment Options: ( ) Check ( ) Money Order

Return this application, along with a copy of your DD214 to:

Chapter 20, Vietnam Veterans of America
P.O. Box 12580
Rochester, NY 14612


Term: ( ) 1 Year $20 ( ) 3 Years $50 ( ) Life Membership $100

VVA is a non-profit veterans service organization. Programs and services are funded by member dues and public donations.

BETWEEN THE LINES:

Between the Lines is published monthly by Chapter 20, Vietnam Veterans of America. The views and opinions expressed are not necessarily those of Chapter 20 or the Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc., its Officers, Board of Directors, or the General Membership. Between the Lines can be viewed on the Chapter 20 website at www.vva20.org.

We welcome letters to the editor, poetry, original articles, and suggestions. Submissions should include name and phone number and can be sent to Between the Lines, P.O. Box 12580, Rochester, NY 14612 or emailed to felliott@rochester.rr.com. We reserve the right to edit for space and clarity and to not use materials we think inappropriate for the publication. Deadline for submissions for each issue is the 10th of the preceding month. Exceptions may be granting by contacting the Editor.
Your business card could be here. Contact Chapter Treasurer, Alan Frisa (afrisa@rochester.rr.com), for details.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Board Meetings</th>
<th>Membership Meetings</th>
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<tr>
<td>May 3, 2016</td>
<td>May 12, 2016</td>
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<td>June 7, 2016</td>
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<td>July 5, 2016</td>
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**Monthly Membership Meetings start at 6:30 pm**

*At the Italian American Sports Club, 1250 Buffalo Road, Rochester*

**Driving Directions to the Italian American Sports Club:**

The Club is located at 1250 Buffalo Road close to the intersection of Howard Road, directly across from the stone quarry, next to the Eagles Club and the Catholic Diocese of Rochester.

From the East: Heading west on 490, exit Mt. Read Blvd. and turn left; south on Mt. Read to Buffalo Road circle, turn right, west on Buffalo Road, 1.4 miles, the Italian-American Sports Club is on the right side.

From the West: Heading east on 490, exit 33 east, Buffalo Road (Gates Center); head east on Buffalo Road; continue past Howard Road; the Italian-American Sports Club will be on the left side in about .5 mile.
**Contact Information**

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- **Vietnam Veterans Memorial at Highland Park**
  www.rochestervietnammemorial.org/The_Memorial
- **VVA New York State Council**
  www.nyvietnamvets.org
- **Honor Flight**
  www.HonorFlightRochester.org

**VVA Chapter 20**

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  www.nyvietnamvets.org
- **Honor Flight**
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- **VA Outpatient Clinic**
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- **Veterans Outreach Center**
  546-1081
- **VA Vet Center**
  232-5040
- **Veterans Administration**
  800-827-1000
- **Monroe County Veterans Service Agency**
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