

# EyesRight

Summer 2018 Edition



## Challenge of a Century

VSC Honors World War II Veteran George Strauch with Challenge Coin Presentation on his 100th Birthday



George Strauch shows off the military challenge coin gifted to him by the VSC.

When George Strauch was born in 1918, World War I was still underway and German forces had just begun what would become the deepest military advance by either side since the conflict began. In 25 years, he would find himself participating in a new war effort against those same forces.

Strauch, who celebrated his 100th birthday on March 28, 2018, served his country during World War II as an airplane mechanic for the U.S. Army Air Corps, the precursor to the modern day U.S. Air Force. To celebrate this milestone, David Burden, project manager, VSC, visited Strauch during his birthday celebration to present him

with a military challenge coin.

"Military challenge coins are traditionally handed out to service members who successfully carry out a challenge given to them," Burden said. "In recognition of George's 100th birthday, we are honored to present him with one. By all accounts, he has earned it."

Though challenge coins were not commonplace during World War II, the visit from the VSC was nonetheless a surprise and an honor for Strauch.

"I didn't know a thing about it," said Strauch, regarding the coin presentation. "It was rewarding to receive the coin, and it was also rewarding to be able to serve my country while getting to work on airplanes."

Born in 1918 in Helen, Pa., Strauch was the youngest of Joseph and Anna Strauch's nine children. When he was 5 years old, his family moved to Keisterville, Pa., the town where he met his future wife and where his interest in aviation began.

"I was always fascinated with airplanes and watching them fly," he said. "I remember back in the old days my friends and I would see an airplane coming overhead behind our grade school – just a little Cessna type plane – and we'd run up that hill behind the school to watch them. We thought we were going to see them land or something."

After graduation from high school in 1937, Strauch went to work at the Lincoln Mine Company Store in Keisterville before being drafted into

*See Challenge of a Century, page 3*

## Bringing Veterans 'Out of the Darkness'

*Campus Walk Program at The University of Akron Raises \$33,000 in Support of Suicide Prevention*

The University of Akron's (UA) annual "Out of the Darkness" Campus Walk has quickly grown into one of the country's largest, raking in more than \$150,000 in support of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) over a five-year run. The most recent event in April drew nearly 400 participants and raised more than \$33,000 toward suicide prevention – well above the \$20,000 goal.

Surpassing the goal amount is hardly new. So far it has happened every time, a trend that event founder Scott Palasik, an associate professor at UA's School of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology, hopes to see continue.

"What we're seeing is that there is a large need for people in the area who just want to experience a day with others who've dealt with loss or are struggling themselves," Palasik said. "Putting on this event is very special for me, personally,



*See 'Out of the Darkness', page 4*

### VA on Track to Eliminate Hepatitis C Infections in Veterans

Only a few years ago, stories appeared in the media about how tens of thousands of U.S. veterans were infected with hepatitis C and how the government couldn't afford to treat them. That was then – today, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is on the verge of eliminating hepatitis C infections in nearly all veterans who are willing and able to be treated.



The issue is especially timely. These veterans, many of whom contracted hepatitis C during their service in the Vietnam War as a result of battlefield injuries that required blood transfusions, are facing consequences like liver disease, cirrhosis and liver cancer because of this largely silent menace. In October 2014, the VA reported that more than 146,000 veterans were infected with hepatitis C. By October 2018, this number will drop to only an estimated 20,000.

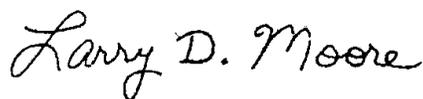
So, what changed? The concern raised years ago was that the drug Sovaldi – a prescription medication capable of curing hepatitis C over a 12-week regimen – cost \$1,000 per pill, an amount that could cripple the VA's budget if all affected veterans were to be treated. At retail price, treating one veteran with Sovaldi would cost \$84,000, but the VA is allowed by law to negotiate drug prices.

The VA successfully worked with Gilead Sciences, Inc., the manufacturer of this drug, to receive a reduced price to treat Veterans. The VA estimates that it has spent \$748.8 million in 2017 on 31,200 treatments of hepatitis C. In 2018, that amount is expected to increase to \$751.2 million to cover 28,000 treatments.

If you do the math, that means 59,200 U.S. veterans will be cured of hepatitis C in 2017 and 2018 alone – for roughly \$25,300 per veteran. This is a great story.

Without Sovaldi, many veterans with hepatitis C were facing certain death. Now, this major health issue for our veterans is on the verge of being eliminated thanks to this innovative treatment option and the VA's commitment.

In Appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Larry D. Moore".

Executive Director



*We assist veterans with basic living needs; these services are available to eligible veterans, their dependents and widows. Services are subject to change.*

- Financial Assistance
- Mortgage payments / Homeowner's insurance
- Rent
- Utilities
- Roofs
- Furnace (replacement and repair)
- Stoves and refrigerators
- Food
- Children's clothing
- Adult work clothing
- Car payments, repairs and insurance (limited)
- Medical / Dental (including dentures, glasses and hearing aids)
- Regularly scheduled transportation to VA medical facilities and Ohio Veterans Home
- Grave markers and flags

### Veterans Affairs Assistance

- Assistance applying for Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits
- Preparation of VA forms and paperwork
- Supportive documentation of claims and pertinent data
- Proper submission of claims to the VA
- Service connected compensation
- Non-service pension
- Widows pension
- Burial benefits
- Headstones

*If you are a veteran in financial need or need help with your VA claim, please visit us at 1060 E. Waterloo Rd., Akron, OH, or call*

**330-643-2830.**

## VA and PsychArmor Institute Partner to Offer Online Suicide Prevention Training

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and non-profit training organization PsychArmor Institute are leading the charge against veteran suicide with a free online, suicide-prevention training video titled "SAVE." The new video is designed to provide anyone who interacts with at-risk veterans helpful tips on demonstrating care, support and compassion.



The VA and PsychArmor Institute hope that SAVE – which stands for Signs, Ask, Validate, Encourage and Expedite – will give family, friends, clinicians and others the power to help curb veteran suicides. The free, 25-minute training video – available

online at [psycharmor.org](http://psycharmor.org) – covers three main topics:

- Suicide as a public health issue in the U.S.
- Signs that a veteran may be at risk for suicide
- Actions that people can take if they identify a veteran at risk

"VA is leading efforts to prevent suicide among veterans, but it alone cannot end veteran suicide," said Peter O'Rourke, acting secretary, VA, in a recent press release. "We need strategic partners, care providers and communities to join us in this effort. Resources such as 'SAVE' are crucial in helping all Americans support Veterans in their community."

In general, suicide is becoming an increasingly common public health issue across the U.S. According to a new report from the U.S. Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), suicide rates in the country increased by 25 percent between 1999 and 2016 – with Ohio seeing an increase of 36 percent during the period. The VA has reported that veterans account for nearly a fifth of all U.S. suicides.

VA suicide prevention coordinators already have led the SAVE course at VA facilities and community centers across the U.S. VA officials explained the online training video series by saying it "extends and promotes this important training outside the VA and is critical in helping everyone play a role in suicide prevention."

Veterans having thoughts of suicide – along with anyone who knows a veteran in crisis – are encouraged to call the 24/7 Veterans Crisis Line at 800-273-8255, chat online at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](http://VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat) or send a text to 838255. ★

### Challenge of a Century, from page 1

the U.S. Army. Entry tests showed Strauch had a high mechanical aptitude, and he was assigned to the U.S. Army Air Corps. He spent much of his military service at Pueblo Army Air Field in Pueblo, Colo., where he helped build and repair B-24 and B-29 bombers.

One of Strauch's primary duties involved running safety wire through bolts fitted with castellated nuts and using a special tool to twist the wire. The process was more complex than it sounds, he said.

"There was a very specific way you had to turn this wire so that the wire wouldn't come off," Strauch said. "You had to tighten the one bolt, and it had to be set up so that if one loosened the other would tighten."

Strauch served over three years of his military service before the war ended. In February 1946, he was honorably discharged as a staff sergeant. When asked what he did after leaving the Army, Strauch quipped, "I went to bed."

That summer, Strauch married his long-time sweetheart Sarah Virginia Waggett and began a 38-year career with Babcock & Wilcox in Barberton, Ohio. He and his wife had three daughters together – Rebecca, Kathy and Dotty.

Wanting to make her father proud, Rebecca Strauch also joined the military. Her initial enlistment turned into a 21-year career that ultimately ended with her becoming an aviator, carrying her father's love of airplanes to the next generation. She eventually became a pilot for United Airlines.

"I'd do it all over again," Rebecca Strauch said. "It was a great experience. And when you're flying helicopters, you get to have some fun."

Regarding his own military experience, George Strauch echoed the sentiment.

"I really enjoyed the mechanics part of working on planes, at least in my capacity," he said. "I definitely took a liking to it." ★



Much of Strauch's military memorabilia remains intact today.

'Out of the Darkness', from page 1

and my focus has always been to try to get veterans involved in some way."

The "Out of the Darkness" Campus Walk program is the AFSP's signature student fundraising series, created to engage young people in the fight against suicide, which is the second leading cause of death among 18- to 24-year-olds. Though Campus Walk events are not geared strictly toward members of the military community, helping veterans in crisis has been one of Palasik's primary goals since launching the UA program. His reasons are deeply personal.

Palasik's father, a former U.S. Army ranger and a Korean War veteran, turned to alcohol and became abusive after returning to civilian life. Though he never served a day in the military, he has seen first-hand the toll that it can take on a person.

"I watched my dad struggle, and I know a lot of that came from his time in the Army," he said. "He saw and experienced things that led him down a bad path, and he never got any help."

Palasik is no stranger to suicide either, having lost his cousin and a close friend to the increasingly common public health problem.

In prior years, Palasik partnered with a local American Legion post to plan and promote the "Out of the Darkness" event. This year, he worked primarily with UA student veterans, of which he said there are more than 1,000. He plans to work with them again in preparation for next year's event and in the future.

"Members of our military are putting themselves in harm's way all the time, and they are doing it for all of us – people they don't even know personally, and yet they are out there and doing it," Palasik said. "They are the ones who are coming back home and having an extremely difficult time making a normal life for themselves. I think they've earned a life of peace, and the fact that so many

of them struggle so much that it comes down to suicide is not right."

If you are interested in supporting or participating in the next UA "Out of the Darkness" Campus Walk, contact Scott Palasik at 330-972-8185 for more details. ★

Photo Courtesy of Scott Palasik



Scott Palasik (center) is flanked by two student veterans during the 2018 Out of the Darkness campus walk event at The University of Akron.



## Tip of the H.A.T. Helping America's Troops

### Dozens of Volunteers Help VSC Place Memorial Day Flags

During Memorial Day weekend, more than 40 members of the Summit County community teamed up with the VSC honor fallen veterans by visiting local cemeteries and placing flags on their gravesites. Volunteers of all ages showed up on Saturday, May 26, to help plant flags at East Liberty Cemetery in Green and Greensburg Cemetery in North Canton.

"We had a great turnout of dedicated participants this year who volunteered their time to help us honor those who have sacrificed their lives for this country," said David Burden, project manager, VSC. "We certainly appreciate their efforts, and we hope they choose to support us again next year as we continue this proud Memorial Day tradition."

Volunteers included members of the Summit County Valer Court Program and staff from the Akron branch of Herzing University. A local Arby's restaurant provided lunches for participants.

Summit County resident Gary Bekelesky, a U.S. Army veteran who served from 1992 to 1999, was one of many who came out to help plant flags, making it a "family affair" with his wife and two children. Though this was Bekelesky's first year volunteering with the VSC, he has regularly helped with flag-planting events in the past. As a child, he often accompanied his father, a World War II veteran, during similar outings with a now defunct Veterans of Foreign Wars post.

"My father was a veteran, I'm a



veteran and I've always believed in honoring veterans that fight and serve our country," Bekelesky said. "My kids were excited to go out and help. It was truly an honor for me and my family."

To learn more about volunteer opportunities with the VSC, please call David Burden at 330-643-7636 or send an email to [dburden@vscsummitoh.us](mailto:dburden@vscsummitoh.us). ★