



*Aiken Chapter MOAA
The Courier June 2026*



Board Members

PRESIDENT: Col Mike Gossett (540-842-0438)

1st VICE PRESIDENT: COL Lynda Mann (703) 326-7603

2nd VICE PRESIDENT: TBA

TREASURER: Maj Dan Meischen (713) 857-5710

SECRETARY: Capt Brent Caldwell (803) 226-0546

MEETING COORDINATOR: Capt Barbara McKnight (315-723-6185)

CHAPLAIN: CPT Edward Schneider
(703) 851-4918

LEGISLATIVE LIAISON: COL David Lobb (803) 270-8690

JROTC LIAISON: CPT Greg Burkes (803) 645-0693

SURVIVING SPOUSE LIAISON: Sharon Smoot
(803) 642-1292

COURIER EDITOR: CPT Jeanne Townes (803) 439-3303

Mailing Address: 262 Eastgate Dr #239 Aiken, SC 29803

*****All newsletters are sent by email.**

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....AND MUCH MORE





*PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:
Col Mike Gossett, USAF*

It was a pleasure to see so many of our members, cadets, families, and instructors at our annual May JROTC Awards Banquet. The evening provided fellowship, meaningful connections, and an opportunity to recognize exceptional achievement. We proudly presented the National MOAA JROTC Medal to 11 JROTC cadets. The MOAA JROTC Medal is the top honor for a cadet, awarded for outstanding leadership and academic excellence. For the first time, we awarded a \$1,000 scholarship to Cadet Wyatt Hendrix of Batesburg-Leesville High School. We are pleased to report that we have received four additional scholarship commitments since our May meeting. We are excited to see this opportunity grow for these outstanding young leaders and are proud that our Chapter is playing a part in their future.

I am happy to share that our Chapter received national recognition in two categories. We earned the 5-star Levels of Excellence (LOE) Award, the most prestigious honor presented to MOAA councils and chapters for overall performance and contributions. In addition, we received the 4-star Harris Newsletter Award, which recognizes excellence in chapter communications. These honors reflect the strength of our Chapter and the dedication of our members. Thank you for all you do to support our mission.

Please mark your calendars for October 12, 2026, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., for our first annual State of the Chapter meeting at the Aiken County Historical Museum (Banksia). We will share key information and metrics on our Chapter's activities over the past year in support of our members and veterans. We will also introduce our newly formed standing committees, which are intended to guide the Chapter over the next three to five years. I encourage you to consider the many opportunities to serve with the Aiken Chapter MOAA and to find where your skills and interests can make a meaningful difference.

As we gather with loved ones on Memorial Day, let us pause to honor the fallen heroes who gave their lives so we may live in freedom. May we remember their courage, selflessness, and sacrifice, and remain steadfast in our gratitude for all they gave. "Our debt to the heroic men and valiant women in the service of our country can never be repaid. They have earned our undying gratitude. America will never forget their sacrifices." Harry S. Truman

Thank you for your continued support of our Chapter and our community. Together, we will continue to make a meaningful impact in both. I wish you and your loved ones a safe and meaningful Memorial Day.

NEVER STOP SERVING,

Mike Gossett, Col, USAF (Ret)

Aiken Chapter MOAA President





June Meeting Dinner Menu

June 3, 2026

Newberry Hall

Happy Half-Hour 1800

Meeting and Dinner 1830

Preset salad

Grilled Pork Loin w/ Rosemary Red Wine Reduction

Chef Choice Starch

Seasonal Vegetables

Preset dessert

Preset Water and Tea

Coffee Station

Cash Bar

Dress Code: Business Casual

Seating: Assigned.

\$30/person Checks preferred made out to Aiken Chapter MOAA

Deadline for Reservation: May 29, 2026

RSVP: MOAAAIKEN@gmail.com (803) 315-726-1853

Reservation via Cheddar:

<https://aiken-chapter-june3-dinner-meeting.cheddarup.com>

Aiken Chapter Meetings

WANT TO ATTEND THE MEETING?

If you want to attend the monthly meeting but can not drive at night, please contact the meeting coordinator, the 2nd VP (membership chair) or any member of the Board and they will assist in providing transportation. Contact information is on Page 1.



June Meeting: June 3, 2026 * Final meeting before summer break**

JUNE 3, 2026 MEETING SPEAKER:

Bennett Tucker, Superintendent of Hitchcock Woods, will be our guest speaker. He possesses extensive knowledge of the 2,100-acre property. We eagerly anticipate his insights into the diverse ecosystems within the Woods and the numerous events that are regularly hosted



Upcoming Events

New Member Wine & Cheese: June 7

New member reception will be at the home of Lynda Mann and Bill Hall, 209 Sterling Grove Circle. New members look for your Evite from our 1st VP, Lynda Mann.

October State of the Chapter Meeting

The Aiken Chapter will hold it's first State of the Chapter Meeting on October 12th at Banksia , The Aiken County Historical Museum. The Board members and the various chapter committees will be featuring the many chapter activities and community out-reach opportunities that our chapter is involved in. Mark your calendars now!!



Look forward to the 2026-2027 meeting season starting in September!

Have a safe and enjoyable summer!





Thank You

I want to extend my sincere gratitude for your continued support throughout the Month of the Military Child. Your partnership helped make our efforts meaningful and impactful for our students and families.

I've included photos from our schoolwide Purple Party held on April 24, 2026, at Mossy Creek Elementary. It was a joyful and memorable event, and our students truly enjoyed celebrating and honoring military-connected students across our school community. The energy, pride, and sense of belonging were evident in every moment.

In addition, I'm proud to share that we collected five large bins of hygiene items, which will be donated to Charlie Norwood and to support homeless veterans. This effort reflects the compassion and service-minded spirit we strive to instill in our students.

Thank you again for your support, generosity, and commitment to our students. It truly makes a difference.

Sincerely,

SONDRA B. THOMAS

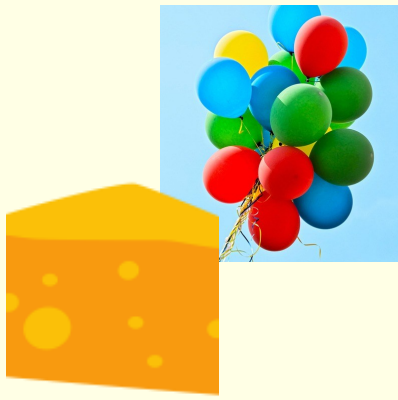
Military Community Liaison

Global Career Development Facilitator

Aiken County Public School District

Thank you





CHEDDAR UP

All Aiken Chapter Members:

The Cheddar Up! online payment plan system is a service of MOAA national to help chapters and councils with dues payment, meeting registrations, and other financial functions. This online system simplifies membership management for chapters and councils by offering secure payment processing and customizable member experiences. It streamlines record-keeping and reduces administrative burdens while enhancing the MOAA brand.

After extensive preparation and testing, the Aiken Chapter has implemented the Cheddar Up! Program this month. Goals of Cheddar Up! are:

Make it easier to join a chapter, renew membership, or make financial contributions

Simplify tracking payments, collection of information from members, and record keeping

Cheddar Up! was implemented by MOAA national and any associated fees are paid by them. There is no cost to any chapter or council.

We will customize the program to suit our needs:

Make reservations for dinner meetings AND pay in advance for meals

Pay annual membership dues

Make a charitable donation, such as a JROTC banquet table

Send event reminders

Make payments with credit card or e-checks

Provide electronic receipts for payments

For the dues page scan the QR Code below or click on this link [web link](#) or you may go to our URL is <https://aiken-chapter-dues.cheddarup.com>

If you are unable or choose not to use the Cheddar Up! system to register for dinners or pay your dues, you can still make a dinner reservation with the Meeting Coordinator and pay at the door. For membership dues, you can pay by paper check mailed to the chapter mail box (address below).

Our mailing address:

Aiken Chapter- MOAA

262 Eastgate Drive #239

Aiken, SC 29803





ANNUAL AIKEN CHAPTER MOAA MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

DURING THIS TIME OF MEMBERSHIP DRIVE, here's a few reasons to renew membership or sponsor new members to the Aiken Chapter

Between 2024 and 2025 Aiken Chapter grew by 19 members

Monthly Meetings offerings:

- Opportunity to foster fraternal relationships
- interesting speakers/entertainment
- good food

Provide support or services for uniformed members, families and surviving spouses (**list is not inclusive)

- Christmas Angels and Operation St. Nick
- Charity Fund support: Wreaths Across America and several others
- Fisher House meals
- Academy interviews
- JROTC Awards Night
- Gold Bar Ceremony (USCA)

Become aware/involved in legislative objectives and issues affecting local, state and national veterans and military

- Monthly Newsletter The Courier
- Invited speakers bring members up to date on critical issues
- Network of connected members bringing forth critical information and need for advocacy

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION Click here: [PDF](#)



Annual dues \$25.00 to Aiken Chapter. Bring your check to the next meeting **or** mail to :

Aiken Chapter MOAA 262 East Gate Drive #239 Aiken, SC 29803

IMPORTANT EVENTS

JROTC AWARDS DINNER

On May 6, 2026 MOAA will again honor our local outstanding Junior ROTC Cadets at our Annual JROTC Awards Banquet. We are pleased to announce our new innovative program will not only honor our invited JROTC cadets but will award our inaugural scholarship to a deserving Senior JROTC cadet graduating this year.



AIKEN MEMORIAL DAY
PARADE
SATURDAY MAY 23
10:00
DOWNTOWN AIKEN

A TRIBUTE
TO OUR
HEROES

WE REMEMBER AND
HONOR OUR FALLEN
BROTHERS AND SISTERS.



Everyone is welcome to attend the Inaugural
Sisters in Service Luncheon
Celebrating National Women Veterans Day
Honoring women from all services, all ranks, all eras

Featured Keynote Speaker
General Jacqueline Van Ovost, USAF (Ret)

Friday, June 12, 2026

Registration 11:00; Social 11:30; Luncheon 12:00
Newberry Hall, 117 Newberry St. SW, Aiken, SC
Registration deadline June 5

Questions: sisters.in.service.aiken@gmail.com
Register: <https://sisters-in-service-luncheon.cheddarup.com>

Sponsor a JROTC
cadet for \$30

Table sponsorships
are available



Sponsored by
Aiken MOAA
Chapter

Registration &
Website



Cost \$30 pp includes
lunch, beverage &
dessert

Luncheon Choices

Entrée salad w/salmon
Entrée salad w/chicken
Entrée salad vegetarian



Sisters in Service Celebration

Gen. Jacqueline D. Van Ovost will serve as the Keynote speaker for the Inaugural Sisters in Service luncheon at Newberry Hall, scheduled for June 12, 2026, National Women Veteran's Day. Read on to learn about Gen. Von Ovost.

Gen. Van Ovost served as the 14th Commander of U.S. Transportation Command, one of 11 combatant commands in the DoD. She has a diverse operational and training background, which includes command of an air refueling squadron, a flying training wing and the Presidential Airlift Wing. She is a graduate of the U.S. Air Force Test Pilot School and a command pilot with more than 4,200 hours in more than 30 aircraft. Gen. Von Ovost held several key staff and joint assignments during her career. Prior to her retirement, she was the longest serving female 4-star general in the U.S. military, and in 2021 she was the only active duty female 4-star general in the Air Force.

Given her status as a proven strategic leader, communicator and experienced aviator, since retiring she is in demand as a consultant in the areas of national security, logistics and STEM education. She continues to be an inspiration to JROTC and ROTC female cadets, and is a strong advocate for promoting STEM education, especially for females.

Gen. Van Ovost graduated from the U.S. Air Force Academy in 1988 with a degree in Aeronautical Engineering.

If you would like to sponsor luncheon attendance for one of our female JROTC cadets, please contact Lynda Mann at lyndamann@me.com.



VETERAN EVENTS

THE WELLNESS COLLECTIVE



Invites Veterans & Military Personnel to Join Us for Food & Fellowship

Offered On the 3rd Friday of Each Month at

The New Ellenton Community Center

212 Pine Hill Ave, New Ellenton, SC 29809

11:30 AM – Welcome & Coffee

12:00 PM – Lunch Served

12:00–2:00 PM – Fellowship & Resources

All meals and resources are provided at no cost

Offered in partnership with



For More Information

AIKEN COUNTY VETERANS COUNCIL PRESENTS



Battle at the Alley

-----FEATURED BANDS-----

TBD

Saturday, Sep 5, 2026 6-10 PM
The Alley, Downtown Aiken

Chair - Lowell Koppert

VOICES OF LIBERTY

An American Portrait

A Concert Celebrating the 250th Anniversary of Our Country

Tuesday, May 5 - 2:30pm

Aiken Senior Life Services

Thursday, May 21 - 7:00pm

First Baptist Church of Aiken

Veterans are encouraged to attend as you will be recognized in the concert.



The Aiken Singers
Director: Josh Edwards
Pianist: David Brown

Aiken Singers is a 501(c)(3) Non-profit Organization
Donations Greatly Welcomed

FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER



Let's Vote

South Carolina has important elections coming up soon. The Statewide Primaries will be June 9, 2026, and the Midterms will be November 3, 2026. Please note the deadlines for making any changes to your voter registration. Early voting in Aiken will be available as follows:

Statewide Primary election early voting: 8:30 am - 5 pm May 26-29 and June 1-5

Online voter registration deadline: May 10

General election early voting: 8:30 am-6PM Oct 19-24 and Oct 26-31

Online voter registration deadline: October 4

If you haven't voted in recent elections, or have had a change of address, etc., now might be a good time to check your voter registration status and review your precinct and polling place for election day voting. Your voter registration status can be checked online at (click this link) (scvotes.gov) The website contains information on early voting locations. In Aiken, the two locations are:

County Voter Registration Office 1930 University Parkway Suite 1200 (inside the Aiken Co Government Building)

Odell Weeks 1700 Whiskey Rd

Please encourage your neighbors, friends and family to register and vote. For those who may not be comfortable registering online there is a mail-in application available. There is a wealth of information on the South Carolina Election Commission website, scvotes.gov Click this link: "[Voters](#)" there will be a link to Myscvotes, vrems.scvotes.sc.gov where you can access information including absentee voting, sample ballots and more. If you would be interested in being even more active in the elections process, volunteer to be a poll watcher, or just contact the South Carolina Election Commission or your local political party about volunteer opportunities. Most important is to **VOTE**, by whatever means works for you.

Submitted by Ruth Herrera

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

From Sharon Smoot, MOAA-Aiken Surviving Spouse Liaison

In our continuing support of the Fisher House at the "uptown" Charlie Norwood VA Hospital, MOAA-Aiken is doing their best.

Last month I took multiple frozen breakfast and other individually pre-wrapped items for the spouses / families at Fisher House. This way, they can grab several items to eat before or to bring when spending the day at the hospital with their loved one. Both Costco and Sam's Club have many options, for example.

Last year, our MOAA also generously donated \$500 in \$25 dollar Walmart gift cards. They help spouses/families that had to sometimes quickly pack and get their veteran to Augusta. Anyone living 50 miles or more from the hospital can stay - sometimes with short notice if a pressing medical issue needs to be addressed. Needed items are sometimes forgotten when also packing for a disabled veteran.

Whatever we can do to help offset the spouse/family member from having to spend their money at the hospital cafeteria has been a huge help according to the manager at Fisher House. The hospital feeds the patient, but does not provide for the non-patients visiting each day. Individually pre-wrapped snacks, water, meals, etc. are always welcome. Spouses/family members often spend the whole day at the hospital - every day the veteran is there.

Please feel free to contact me to bring items to Fisher House or if any questions.

Sharon Smoot 803-447-471 (text or call). Please clearly include your name.

EDITOR'S NOTE: for our newer members The Fisher House is a place for family members of out of town veterans who are in the Charlie Norwood VA Hospital to stay - sort of the Ronald McDonald House for hospitalized veteran families. Aiken Chapter has a long relationship of supporting these families by providing meals and snacks!





... HOW TO ACCESS THE AIKEN CHAPTER'S WEBSITE?

To access the website you must go through the SC Council's website (www.moaasc/aiken) BUT you can click on the link

here: [Aiken Chapter](#)

... HOW TO OPEN IMBEDDED LINKS IN OUR COURIER?

Many of us are challenged by many of today's technological advances. We incorporate links into our documents to make it easier to access information. By placing the cursor just under the link and pressing the ctrl button on your keyboard a hand (with a finger pointing to the link) will appear. Then just one click and you are at the imbedded website.

LOCAL VETERAN ASSISTANCE

Aiken County Veterans Affairs: Major Dwight Bradham is the Aiken County Veterans Affairs Officer. He and his team can be reached at (803) 642- 1545 or dbradham@aikencountysc.gov by email. If you have any veteran issues, please contact the office.

US Congressman Joe Wilson - Veteran Assistance: The local number to Congressman Wilson's Aiken County office is (803) 642-6416. His State Senate office also regularly assists veterans with many issues. The number is (803) 212- 6000.

Veterans Legal Clinic: The USC School of Law operates the Veterans Legal Clinic. Veterans can inquire about help with a legal problem by calling (803) 777- 2278



REMINDER FROM MOAA



Reminders from national MOAA to remain non-partisan in everything concerning MOAA

Partisan Political Activities: As organizations exempt from federal taxation under Sec. 501(c)(19) of the Internal Revenue Code, MOAA and its affiliates must take care to avoid engaging in partisan political activities. Under IRS rules, we are prohibited from directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office.

Divisive Social Issues: We are all aware of the divisive nature of the debate over today's leading social issues – protesting during the national anthem at sporting events, racial justice, public protests, and the conduct of law enforcement officers. These are issues over which many Americans have deeply held, but differing, personal beliefs. This is also true within the military community among the ranks of active duty and retired officers and within MOAA itself.

MOAA leaders have an obligation to keep this in mind when communicating on behalf of MOAA or its affiliates. Suggesting that MOAA only supports one side of a deeply divisive issue sends a message to those with a different belief that MOAA is not for them. See the complete statements from MOAA: (click this link) [MOAA - MOAA Guidance on Partisan Political Activities](#)

More from MOAA National



NATIONAL MOAA's LEGISLATIVE MISSION: MOAA's greatest mission is to improve the lives of those who serve and their families, which is achieved largely through the tireless advocacy efforts taking place in our nation's capital. For more than 90 years, MOAA has supported legislation that benefits the uniformed services community and has remained equally vigilant when fighting to stop legislation that threatens our livelihood. The larger our numbers, the greater our voice. [Legislative Accomplishments](#)

NATIONAL MOAA's ADVOCACY IN ACTION: Please visit the national MOAA website (www.moaa.org) to learn more about MOAA's Key Advocacy Issues. Click on the Advocacy tab at the top of the homepage. Learn about such topics as Legislative Action Center and Accomplishments; Health Care; Family Issues; Guard and Reserve Issues; COLA; State Report Card; Advocacy News and Advocacy Leaders. The webpages have contact information and forms to help you reach out to your Congressional Representatives to advocate for these and other important issues.

Take a look at what is posted on the MOAA advocacy page this month: [Ensuring Servicemembers and Families Are Heard: The Work of MOAA's Currently Serving Advisory Councils](#) [Click on Advocacy](#)

KEEP CONNECTED: ensure you are signed up for The MOAA Newsletter and register as an advocate at the [Legislative Action Center](#).

Here's the link .

[MOAA: Legislative Advocacy Center](#)





Important Links

Listed here are several links to contacts that members and friends of Aiken Chapter may find informative or helpful.

MOAA National: [MOAA](#)

Aiken Chapter MOAA: [Aiken](#)

****Please Note an application to Aiken Chapter is on the Home Page as a PDF

Department of Veteran Affairs: [DVA](#)

Aiken County Veterans Affairs: [ACVet](#)

Aiken County Veteran's Council: [ACVC](#)

Lindsay Graham's Website: [Graham](#)

Joe Wilson's Website: [Wilson](#)

Tim Scott's Website: [Scott](#)

