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A soldier with Combined Joint Task Force 50, which includes personnel from the Hawaii National Guard, active Army and Army Reserve, assists with search and recovery operations Aug. 10 after wildfires devastated Maui, Hawaii, killing more than 100 people. (AIR NATIONAL GUARD/MASTER SGT. ANDREW JACKSON)

AUSA announces 2023 national awards

The Association of the U.S. Army has announced the recipients of its 2023 National Awards, which honor individuals for their selfless service and dedication to the Army and its soldiers.

“Congratulations to our National Award recipients! Their dedication, commitment and desire to serve and support our Army is an example to us all,” said retired Gen. Bob Brown, AUSA president and CEO.

“Each of our honorees has made a difference in the lives of others and in support of our Army and our nation,” Brown said. “They represent the very best of AUSA, and I look forward to honoring them in October.”

The awards will be presented at

the AUSA Annual Meeting and Exposition, Oct. 9–11 at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, D.C.

During the annual meeting, AUSA also will honor retired Gen. Eric Shinseki, former Army chief of staff and secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

AUSA earlier this year announced that Shinseki is the 2023 recipient of the George Catlett Marshall Medal. AUSA’s highest award, the Marshall Medal is presented for distinguished and selfless service.

Shinseki was chosen because of his decades of selfless service to the United States and particularly because of his many efforts to support

the Army and its soldiers and veterans.

Here’s a closer look at this year’s National Award recipients.

Abrams Medal

The General Creighton W. Abrams Medal for exceptional service to the U.S. Army will be awarded to retired Lt. Gen. Robert Foley, a Medal of Honor recipient who led the fielding team for the Bradley Fighting Vehicle, served as commandant of cadets at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, commanded Fifth Army and inspired and mentored generations of soldiers.

“I have known Bob all my profes-

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Medal of Honor recipient honored at Army museum

Almost 60 years after his heroic actions during a 19-hour battle in Vietnam earned him the Medal of Honor, retired Col. Paris Davis' name has been etched in stone at the National Museum of the United States Army.

"I would like to say that I'm overwhelmed by what has happened here today," Davis said as he saw his name on the granite wall of the museum's Medal of Honor Garden. "Never in my biggest or smallest or tiniest dream could I ever put myself where I am right now."

Davis was awarded the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest award for valor, March 3 at the White House for his actions during a fierce June 1965 battle against the Viet Cong near Bong Son.

Serving as commander of Detachment A-321, 5th Special Forces Group, 1st Special Forces, Davis led the fight. Despite being wounded by enemy fire and grenades, Davis refused medical attention and two orders to evacuate until his wounded troops were brought to safety.

"With your valor, you breathed life into that day in June of 1965," said Lt. Gen. Walter Piatt, director of the Army Staff, during the Aug. 9 ceremony at the museum at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. "You were the best of what it is to be Special Forces, what it is to be a soldier, what it is to be a human being."

Amid the chaos and death of the war, Davis fixed his eyes on his cause and his country through poetry.

"There was one verse that Paris Davis used and mentions while in combat, the first two lines of Rupert Brooke's poem [*The Soldier*]," Piatt said. "If I should die, think only this of me: That there's some corner of a foreign field that is forever England."

You were the best of what it is to be Special Forces, what it is to be a soldier, what it is to be a human being."



Lt. Gen. Walter Piatt, left, director of the Army Staff, presents a photo book personalized by Army Secretary Christine Wormuth to Medal of Honor recipient retired Col. Paris Davis at the National Museum of the United States Army at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. (U.S. ARMY/SGT. XAVIERA MASLINE)

Paris Davis would often replace 'England' with 'America.'

During that same deployment, Davis also was awarded the Soldier's

Medal for saving a soldier who was stuck in an overturned and burning fuel truck. Davis pulled the soldier from the truck just before it exploded. He is now one of only four people to have received both

the Soldier's Medal and the Medal of Honor, according to the Army.

Despite Davis' constant love of country, as one America's first Black Special Forces officers, his affections were sometimes unrequited. Though his commander, Maj. Billy Cole, nominated him for the Medal of Honor after the battle, the Army

lost his paperwork at least twice, and it took nearly 60 years for Davis to be recognized.

"You have given peace and opportunity to a nation that did not appreciate you nor appreciate the Vietnam War, and from an Army that often did not see you as an equal," Piatt said. "And inside, you weren't equal—you were better, the best of the best."

America is "a place where we come together," and it is the willingness to come together and help others that "gives us the right to say, 'We are Americans, we love being American, and we want America to be the way it is,'" Davis said during the ceremony.

Despite emerging global threats, the future is bright for America, Davis said. "We want America to keep going," he said. "You have to be cognizant that we live in a dangerous world and thank God we have America, ... a place to live, a place to play, a place to know and a place to love."

Schmidt is 1st woman selected to lead active-duty maneuver division

A career military intelligence officer with numerous combat deployments, including with the Army's most elite special operations forces, has been selected for another trailblazing assignment.

If confirmed by the Senate, Maj. Gen. Michelle Schmidt will command the 7th Infantry Division at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, making her the first woman to lead one of the Army's active-duty maneuver divisions.

She most recently was director of force development in the office of the deputy Army chief of staff for resources and plans, G-8. Her assignment to lead the 7th Infantry Division was announced Monday in a DoD news release.

Her selection comes after Maj. Gen. Laura Yeager became the first woman to assume command of a U.S. Army infantry division when she took command of the California National Guard's 40th Infantry Division in 2019. Yeager is now retired.

Activated in 1917, the 7th Infantry Division today enables and sustains two Stryker brigade combat teams and a combat aviation brigade and participates in exercises and operations in support of U.S. Army Pacific and the Indo-Pacific region.

A 1992 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, Schmidt began her career as a platoon leader in the 2nd Infantry Division in South Korea, according to an Army biography. She was a company commander in the 82nd Airborne Division, served as the intelligence officer for the division's 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment and later for the division, and was the senior intelligence officer and squadron commander for 1st Special Operations Detachment-Delta.

Schmidt also was the intelligence brigade commander for Joint Special Operations Command, chief of staff



Maj. Gen. Michelle Schmidt. (U.S. ARMY PHOTO)

for the 82nd Airborne Division, chief of the Initiatives Group for the vice chief of staff of the Army, director of intelligence for U.S. Special Operations Command and deputy commanding general of the 10th Mountain Division. Before being assigned to the Army G-8, she was director of operations for the Defense Intelligence Agency.

In addition to a deployment to Haiti in support of Operation Uphold Democracy early in her career, Schmidt deployed numerous times to Kuwait, Iraq and Afghanistan between 2003 and 2021.

In an episode of the Association of the U.S. Army's "Army Matters" podcast last September, Schmidt said she has enjoyed her Army career despite the tough jobs and numerous deployments. "The best part about it has, of course, been the people," she said.

About 10 years ago, a mentor gave her some advice about leading soldiers. "We can't just talk about it, you have to train it," Schmidt said. "You have to train folks how to be good leaders the same way we would train people how to shoot or do PT. You actually have to work on it."

AUSAExtra

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Support For the Soldier

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sional life and don't think I know anyone who epitomizes what Gen. Abrams stood for more than him," retired Gen. Dennis Reimer, who served as the 33rd Army chief of staff, wrote in a letter endorsing Foley for the award.

Abrams was the architect of the modern-day all-volunteer Army and a leader of character, competence, commitment and courage, Reimer wrote. "Today's Army reflects his accomplishments. These accomplishments would not be possible without soldiers like [retired Lt. Gen.] Robert Foley," Reimer wrote.

A 1963 graduate of West Point, Foley earned the Medal of Honor while serving as commander of A Company, 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry, 25th Infantry Division, in Vietnam. On Nov. 5, 1966, Foley and his soldiers were ordered to extricate another



Retired Lt. Gen. Robert Foley speaks at an author's forum during the 2022 AUSA Annual Meeting and Exposition. (AUSA PHOTO)

company that had come under siege by the enemy, according to his Medal of Honor citation. Moving through the thick jungle, the soldiers encountered a strong enemy force, and the company's leading element quickly

sustained several casualties.

Foley immediately ran forward to direct the company's efforts and led his soldiers in an attack on the enemy. When both radio operators

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accompanying him were wounded, Foley defied the heavy enemy fire and helped his soldiers to safety, according to the citation. As he moved forward again, one of his machine-gun crews was wounded. "Seizing the weapon, he charged forward firing the machine gun, shouting orders, and rallying his men, thus maintaining the momentum of the attack," the citation says.

Under increasingly heavy enemy fire, Foley ordered his assistant to take cover, and he moved forward alone, firing the machine gun until the wounded were evacuated. Foley continued to fight after being wounded by an enemy grenade, leading the assault on several enemy gun emplacements and single-handedly destroying three of them.

After Vietnam, Foley served in various assignments across the Army, including in Germany, South Korea and the Pentagon.

After 37 years of Army service, Foley retired in 2000. He has served as president of Marion Military Institute, a junior college in Alabama, and as director of Army Emergency Relief.

He is the author of *Standing Tall: Leadership Lessons in the Life of a Soldier*.

Drexel Biddle Medal

The Major General Anthony J. Drexel Biddle Medal for outstanding contributions to the Association of the U.S. Army will be awarded to retired Lt. Col. F.D. "Dick" Winter and Mary Jane Jernigan.

Winter, president of AUSA's George Washington chapter, retired from the Army in 1993 after serving in command and staff positions in organizations such as the 1st Armored Division, Fifth Army and the Combined Arms Center. He also served at West Point and in several assignments in NATO commands.

After leaving the Army, Winter worked in the defense industry and



Retired Lt. Col. F.D. 'Dick' Winter, left, president of AUSA's George Washington chapter, greets retired Lt. Gen. Leslie Smith, AUSA vice president for Leadership and Education, at an event the chapter participated in earlier this year. (AUSA PHOTO)

has been active in AUSA, serving in several volunteer leadership roles. He is in his third year as president of the George Washington chapter.

"In that position, he has presided over steady growth of the chapter, and he has led its many efforts to advance the mission of AUSA in our local area," retired Lt. Gen. Richard Formica wrote in a letter endorsing Winter for the award. "He has organized numerous efforts to provide gift cards to soldiers facing food insecurity and serves as the tourna-



Mary Jane Jernigan is AUSA's Maryland State president. (AUSA PHOTO)

ment director of the chapter's annual golf tournament, raising awareness of AUSA and, importantly, raising money to award scholarships to deserving youths."

Winter led the chapter through the COVID-19 pandemic while maintaining ties to the chapter's community partners and industry sponsors, Formica wrote. He also maintains a "robust and professionally rewarding" luncheon series that brings together Army and industry leaders.

"Dick epitomizes the values of AUSA, and his contributions extend far beyond his leadership positions within the organization," retired Lt. Gen. David Halverson wrote in a letter endorsing Winter. "Dick's service aligns with the guiding principles of AUSA, such as dedication, innovation, excellence and inclusion."

Jernigan is a civilian aide to the secretary of the Army for Maryland-North, advocating for the Army and serving as a liaison between the community and the Army secretary. She also is vice president of business development for LOGYX and previously provided logistical and technical support to the Army Test and Evaluation Command and the Army Research Laboratory as a subject-matter expert in human systems integration.

Jernigan is an avid supporter of the troops. In 2003, she began supporting a soldier who was deployed to Iraq, sending monthly letters and care packages for the duration of the soldier's yearlong deployment. Her encouragement meant so much to the soldier that he traveled from Georgia to Maryland to meet her and asked her to stand with him when he was promoted.

Over the years, Jernigan has supported more than 1,000 deployed soldiers with care packages.

In 2007, Jernigan began looking to get involved in the local AUSA chapter at Aberdeen Proving Ground. She became the chapter president and turned an inactive chapter into one that drew 150 to 250 attendees to its monthly meetings.

Jernigan served as chapter president for more than three years. During her tenure, the Aberdeen chapter was honored three years in a row with the award for “Best All-Around Chapter.” She now serves on the board of directors for the chapter, which has been renamed the MG Harry Greene, Aberdeen chapter, and she is the Maryland State president for AUSA.

“Wherever she goes and whatever she touches, Mary Jane makes the organization better by any standard,” retired Command Sgt. Maj. W. Douglas Gibbens, former president of AUSA’s Second Region, wrote in a letter endorsing Jernigan. “She is a person who gets things done, and her loyalty to soldiers, Army families and to the Association of the United States Army knows no bounds.”

Cribbins Medal

The Joseph P. Cribbins Medal for exemplary service by a Department of the Army civilian will be awarded to Renita Wickes-Deason, director of public affairs at Fort Irwin, California.

Wickes-Deason first served at Fort Irwin, home of the National Training Center, in 1989 when she arrived as a soldier. After leaving the Army, Wickes-Deason worked for Raytheon before returning to government ser-

vice in 2009. “Her tireless efforts, caring attitude and ability to put herself in [soldiers’] place has enabled her to showcase soldiers and the Army on a grand scale,” Tashara Bunch of AUSA’s National Training Center-High Desert chapter wrote in a letter nominating Wickes-Deason. “Her efforts have created relationships and given the Army a reach with not just the local communities but with communities across California and Las Vegas.”

As an example, Wickes-Deason created and plans the Fort Irwin VIP Box Tour, which brings in community leaders, celebrities and influencers to visit the National Training Center. She revamped the media training conducted during rotations, making it more realistic and relevant. Wickes-Deason also has worked to strengthen the post’s relationships with neighboring communities including Barstow, Adelanto, Victorville, Apple Valley and Hesperia, Bunch wrote. Serving as the Fort Irwin public affairs director since October 2021, Wickes-Deason continues to tell the Army and Fort Irwin story.

Wickes-Deason also is an active volunteer, serving as the Barstow Area Chamber of Commerce military affairs chairperson and is a volunteer and speaker for the American Cancer Society, speaking at more



Renita Wickes-Deason, president of the AUSA National Training Center-High Desert chapter, attends the association’s Seventh Region meeting in May. (AUSA PHOTO)

than 70 events as a cancer survivor and caregiver, Bunch wrote.

She also is active in AUSA, including serving as president of the NTC-High Desert chapter. Under her leadership, the chapter had its most successful fundraising events, allowing it to support soldiers, families, veterans and Gold Star families through a school supply giveaway, a volunteer recognition ceremony, scholarships and more.

Wickes-Deason’s “passion and love for the Army and soldiers shows without speaking,” Bunch wrote.

Dixon Award

The John W. Dixon Award for outstanding contributions to national defense from industry will be awarded to Harold Yoh III and Day & Zimmermann, a 120-year-old family-owned company specializing in construction and engineering, operations and maintenance, staffing, security and defense for corporations and governments around the world. Yoh has been the company’s chairman and CEO since 1999.

“Since World War I, the company has provided vital services to the U.S. national security mission and our armed forces by building muni-

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AUSA’s National Awards provide recognition for support and dedication to the Total Army and its soldiers. (U.S. ARMY/2ND LT. TIMOTHY YAO)

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tions plants, manufacturing munitions or serving as an operator at government-owned contractor-operated facilities,” retired Brig. Gen. John McGuiness of AUSA’s Penn & Franklin-Greater Philadelphia chapter wrote in a letter nominating Yoh and the company for the award.

As chairman and CEO, Yoh has been integral in shaping the company’s growth, and today it is a leading provider of munitions to the national defense, McGuiness wrote.

“Hal’s efforts have made an incredible difference in the amount of artillery rounds delivered to Ukraine, which has become a major test of artillery systems,” McGuiness wrote. “Hal’s tremendous efforts go beyond its critical infrastructure, construction, security and training support and extends to the human aspects of serving in the U.S. military.”

Yoh and his company have participated in several initiatives supporting service members and their families, including the USO, Toys for Tots and Wreaths Across America, McGuiness wrote. Day & Zimmermann also participates in veteran hiring programs such as Hiring Our Heroes and Helmets to Hardhats, and the company proudly employs “countless” veterans, McGuiness wrote.

“The above accomplishments merely scratch the surface of the impact Hal Yoh has made and continues to make on the national defense,” McGuiness wrote.

Bainbridge Medal

The Sergeant Major of the Army William G. Bainbridge Medal for contributions to the Army Noncommissioned Officer Corps will be awarded to retired Sgt. Maj. Scott Leeling, who served on active duty for 25 years and retired as the command career counselor for U.S. Army Europe.

Leeling, an AUSA life member who was president of the association’s Pikes Peak chapter from July 2020

to June 2023, enlisted in the Army in 1988. He has served in Army units across the U.S. and in Germany and South Korea, and he served two combat deployments in Iraq. He also served in Bosnia.

In retirement, Leeling leads the military division at Crosscountry Mortgage, where he formulates plans for the military and veteran markets and develops programs to support service members, veterans and their spouses.

Leeling also is president of the Pikes Peak Sergeants Major Association, a member of the Army Chief of Staff’s Retired Soldier Council and an ambassador for Mt. Carmel Veteran Services.

“I have been fortunate enough to know SGM Leeling for more than 15 years, and I have seen his dedication to the Army, soldiers, family members and the community on countless occasions,” retired Col. Thomas Powell wrote in a letter endorsing Leeling for the award. “In every effort he undertakes relating to the Army, he always shows dedication, inspired leadership, enthusiasm and a caring attitude.”

As AUSA chapter president, Leeling “leads the team with the same enthusiasm, initiative and caring demeanor he had while on active



Retired Sgt. Maj. Scott Leeling served as president of the association’s Pikes Peak chapter from 2020 to 2023. (AUSA PHOTO)

duty,” Powell wrote. During his tenure, Leeling led efforts to raise more than \$100,000 to help the community and was a driving force for the annual Santa’s Workshop, which delivers toys to military families in need.

He also spends hours making sure soldiers and their families are supported, mentored, guided, recognized and thanked for their service.

“His exceptional leadership, unwavering dedication to duty, and significant contributions to the Army make him a true role model and deserving of this esteemed recognition,” retired Sgt. Maj. Chester Miller, president of the AUSA Pikes Peak chapter, wrote in a letter endorsing Leeling.

McLain Medal

The Lieutenant General Raymond S. McLain Medal, given to a current or former member of the National Guard for advancing a seamless and component-integrated Army, will be awarded to retired Maj. Gen. Patrick Hamilton, who retired in 2021 after serving as commanding general of the Texas National Guard’s 36th Infantry Division.

“Gen. Hamilton is a leader of America’s Army, not just the Army National Guard,” retired Col. Garry Patterson, president of AUSA’s Texas Capital Area chapter, wrote in a letter nominating Hamilton. “His reputation for leadership excellence, keen management skills, and compassion for people translated into major contributions to the State of Texas and our Nation as well as contributions to the Total Army.”

A 1986 graduate of Texas A&M University, Hamilton served in armor and cavalry units in the Texas National Guard for 35 years. As commander of the 36th Infantry Division, Hamilton led the division headquarters to Kuwait in support of Operation Spartan Shield where he commanded soldiers in nine countries across the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Syria and Jordan. He also has deployed to Bos-

nia and Afghanistan.

Back home, Hamilton was chief of staff to the adjutant general of Texas and director of operations for the Texas Army National Guard. He also led the joint task force responding to the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey, a Category 4 storm that lashed Texas and Louisiana in August 2017, leading 18,000 troops from all components providing support for evacuation operations, search and rescue, shelter operations and distribution of relief supplies.

He is on the board of directors for the CHASCO YMCA in central Texas and the board of governors for the Central Texas Community Foundation. Hamilton also is an active member of his local VFW post, the National Guard Association of Texas and AUSA's Texas Capital Area chapter.

"Gen. Hamilton has been a leader in his local community of Round Rock, Texas," Patterson wrote. "His unprecedented level of commitment and personal involvement in community programs and activities has positively touched the lives of many thousands of Texans."

Rudder Medal

The Major General James Earl Rudder Medal, given to a current or former member of the U.S. Army Reserve for advancing a seamless and component-integrated Army, is awarded to retired Col. L. Gordon Sumner Jr., a member of AUSA's Potomac-Liberty chapter and Army Reserve Ambassador for Virginia.

Sumner is "the epitome of volunteerism endowed with a heart for selfless service," retired Lt. Col. Nancy Jean-Louis, president of the Potomac-Liberty chapter, wrote in a letter nominating Sumner.

An active member of AUSA since 1975, Sumner began his Army career in the Army Reserve in Alabama. He then moved to the Regular Army, where he used his experiences in the Reserve to revamp the ROTC Advance Camp at then-Fort Lewis,



Then-Maj. Gen. Patrick Hamilton cuts the cake during his retirement ceremony in 2021 at Camp Mabry in Austin, Texas. (ARMY NATIONAL GUARD/SGT. 1ST CLASS ELIZABETH PENA)

Washington. Pulling in expertise in the Reserve, Sumner gained support from 22 Reserve units to serve as instructors at the camp, training more than 1,500 cadets.

As an Army Reserve Ambassador, Sumner connects the component with its local communities and leaders and helps tell the Army Reserve story. He also is a member of several veterans service organizations, including leading the Greater Washington, D.C., chapter of the Military Order of the Purple Heart. In the past 15 years, the chapter has visited more than 63,000 veterans at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center and area VA medical centers.

Sumner also leads National Purple Heart Day celebrations and ceremonies at Mount Vernon, the Virginia home of George Washington, growing the annual event from a small gathering of Purple Heart recipients into a major event featuring leaders from government and industry.

He also supports fundraising events by the AUSA chapter and has been instrumental in building partnerships between the chapter and other veterans groups, including the local American Legion and VFW posts.

Today, Sumner is president and CEO of Gordon Sumner Consulting LLC. He previously led Veterans

Moving Forward, a nonprofit providing service and emotional support dogs to veterans. He also is AUSA's president for the National Capital Region, representing the association across Virginia, and a senior fellow and affiliate faculty at George Mason University. A member of the Santee tribe, Sumner also is a sought-after speaker on leadership, motivation and citizenship.

"One might ask, what is Gordon Sumner good at? The answer is simply everything," retired Col. W. Glenn Yarborough, AUSA's 2nd Region president, wrote in a letter endorsing Sumner. "Gordon jumps at the chance to get stuff done. He is the ultimate volunteer, and when Gordon accepts a challenge, he gets it done."

Volunteer Family of the Year

The AUSA Volunteer Family of the Year Award for promoting the well-being of soldiers and their family members is presented to the family of Lt. Col. Robert "Jody" Shipley.

Shipley, his wife, Emily, and their three children—Grace, Gage and Hailey—also are the 2023 Volunteer Family of the Year for Fort Cavazos, Texas.

At Fort Cavazos, formerly known as Fort Hood, Shipley commands the

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Retired Col. L. Gordon Sumner Jr. is a member of AUSA's Potomac-Liberty chapter and serves as the Army Reserve Ambassador for Virginia. (DoD PHOTO)

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troop battalion at Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center.

"This family makes a difference every single day in the lives of everyone they meet," Nancy Patterson of AUSA's Central Texas chapter wrote in a letter nominating the family. "As parents, they have taught their children the importance of selfless service, working together as a team, assisting those who might need a little pick-me-up."

In the past year, the Shipley family logged more than 1,000 hours supporting several events and organizations, including more than 560 hours supporting the troop battalion's Soldier and Family Readiness Group in serving a unit with more than 600 soldiers and a hospital that employs more than 2,000 Army civilians and their families. They were instrumental in events celebrating Valentine's Day, Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas, and they helped coordinate an end of summer bash.

The Shipleys also spent more than 360 hours volunteering at and supporting events at Memorial Christian Academy. They also volunteered at Memorial Baptist Church, the Killeen Food Bank and Garden of Hope, a shelter for children entering the foster care system.

"They are the embodiment of giving from the heart, and their exceptional level of community involvement stands as an example for others to emulate," Patterson wrote. "They have and continue to touch the lives of many. Their seemingly boundless energy and genuine desire and determination to make a difference is truly inspiring."

National Service Award

AUSA is honored to present its National Service Award to Veterans United Home Loans, which works to help veterans and military families become homeowners.

In the past 20 years, the company has closed over 500,000 VA loans and



Lt. Col. Robert 'Jody' Shipley, left, his wife Emily and two of their three children attend a Mommy and Child Superhero breakfast for Shipley's battalion at Fort Cavazos, Texas. (COURTESY PHOTO)

become the No. 1 VA lender for homebuyers in the nation, according to its website. The Veterans United Foundation, the company's nonprofit arm, has raised more than \$50 million for veteran organizations, military families and local communities.

"In both their highly successful business activities and in their far-ranging charitable work, Veterans United focuses on supporting soldiers, veterans and their families," retired Gen. Carter Ham, former AUSA president and CEO, wrote in a letter nominating the company for the award.

One key to the company's success is the "extraordinary effort" it makes to educate current and prospective homebuyers, from determining eligibility to taking ownership of a home.

"Veterans United stands with their customers every step of the way," Ham wrote.

In addition to hiring veterans, Veterans United also is dedicated to making a difference in the lives of veterans and service members, Ham wrote. The foundation has provided more than \$1 million in scholarships to disabled veterans and surviving spouses and children, and it works closely with organizations such as the Armed Forces YMCA, Homes for Our Troops and TAPS to support the military community.

Overall, the foundation has donated more than \$50 million to help the community, and Veterans United employees spend thousands of hours on weekends and evenings giving back, retired Sgt. Maj. of the Army Kenneth Preston, former AUSA vice president of NCO and Soldier Programs, wrote in a nomination letter.

"Veterans United is a unique organization that serves as a role model for their business processes, work environment, training programs, charitable support and support of veterans and military families," Preston wrote.



Veterans United®
Home Loans

Leaders from AUSA spend time with soldiers, local chapter

Earlier this month, members of the Association of the U.S. Army's NCO and Soldier Programs and Family Readiness directorates traveled to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, to provide support to the soldiers and families stationed there and participate in events hosted by AUSA's Fort Leonard Wood-Mid Missouri chapter.

Fort Leonard Wood is home to the Army's Maneuver Support Center of Excellence. Its mission is to develop competent leaders and warriors of character and drive change in the Army's engineer, military police, protection services and chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear branches.

During our visit, the AUSA chapter had a full day of events scheduled, starting with the monthly membership breakfast attended by chapter leaders and community partners. Brennon Willard, the chapter president, gave opening remarks and thanked the community partners for their tremendous support.

After breakfast, we met with Command Sgt. Maj. Jorge Arzabala, senior enlisted leader for the Maneuver Support Center of Excellence and Fort Leonard Wood. Arzabala organized an NCO leader development forum with a group of more than 100 NCOs from across the Army who



Retired Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel Dailey, AUSA's vice president for NCO and Soldier Programs, speaks at a breakfast hosted by the association's Fort Leonard Wood-Mid Missouri chapter. (AUSA PHOTO)

were attending the post's professional military education schools.

I had the honor of serving as the guest speaker for the forum and used the time to share my top 10 leadership tips—a collection of lessons I learned throughout my 30-year Army career. I fielded several questions from the audience and gave them advice on how to be more effective leaders.

One of the well-received pieces of advice I gave to the NCOs was number 10: "Never forget that I am just a soldier, no better or worse than any other, but just one of them." One of the attendees, Staff Sgt. Daniel Cut-

shall, a drill sergeant with the 169th Engineer Battalion who is attending Fort Leonard Wood's Senior Leader Course, said the reminder that NCOs are "just soldiers" was his favorite takeaway, adding that the leader development forum was "really motivating."

When the forum ended, Arzabala escorted us to lunch, where we had the opportunity to talk with a small group of NCOs from across the installation.

After a windshield tour of Fort Leonard Wood, we headed to the USO on post for a special event—the opening of an Operation Deploy Your Dress shop at the facility. Operation Deploy Your Dress, a longtime partner of AUSA, offers gently used dresses and accessories to service members and dependents.

Maj. Gen. Christopher Beck, commanding general of the Maneuver Support Center of Excellence and Fort Leonard Wood, provided remarks at the event, noting that families are critical to mission readiness.

"It is our job to pass on the time-honored traditions and introduce them to our military culture. We want spouses to attend our military balls and formals, but they are sometimes prohibited by the associated costs," Beck said. "The addition of an ODYD shop on Fort Leonard Wood will provide our service members who may otherwise not have the resources the unique opportunity to receive a formal gown at no cost."

AUSA's NCO and Soldier Programs and Family Readiness teams would like to thank the Fort Leonard Wood-Mid Missouri chapter for an incredible visit and—more importantly—for all it continues to do for our soldiers and families at the installation and in the community.

Retired Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel Dailey is AUSA's vice president for NCO and Soldier Programs and was the 15th sergeant major of the Army.



Retired Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel Dailey addresses an NCO leader development forum at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. (AUSA PHOTO)

AUSA recognizes this year's most successful chapters

The Association of the U.S. Army has named its Best Chapter winners for 2023 based on their achievements and success in growing membership, hosting events, raising money for scholarships and other programs, and supporting Army units and recruiters.

The awards will be presented during AUSA's Annual Meeting and Exposition Oct. 9–11 at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, D.C.

"In my first year as director of membership, I have been impressed with and inspired by the energy our chapter leaders and members place into supporting our soldiers, family members and all those who strengthen our Army. These volunteers are the lifeblood of the association, and they work selflessly every day to advance AUSA's mission," said retired Command Sgt. Maj. Troy Welch, who previously served as the AUSA's director of NCO and Soldier Programs.

The Best Chapter awards are calculated in six groups, with five based on chapter size and one for the best overseas chapter.

- The George Washington chapter at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, Virginia, and the Redstone-Huntsville chapter in Alabama are Best Chapters among groups with more than 1,000 members.

- The North Texas-Audie Murphy chapter in Dallas is Best Chapter for those with 550 to 999 members.

- The Texas Capital Area chapter in Austin and the Fort Leonard Wood-Mid Missouri chapter are Best Chapters for groups with 350 to 599 members.

- The Major Samuel Woodfill chapter in Cincinnati is Best Chapter for those with 200 to 349 members.

- The National Training Center-High Desert chapter at Fort Irwin, California, and the Puerto Rico Chapter at Fort Buchanan are Best Chapters for groups with fewer than 200 members.



Chapter presidents learn about new AUSA initiatives and discuss best practices at a workshop during the 2022 AUSA Annual Meeting. (AUSA PHOTO)

- The Best Overseas Chapter is the Gen. Creighton W. Abrams chapter in Wiesbaden, Germany.

The rankings result from a review of activities reports from AUSA's 121 chapters, looking at achievements including membership growth across all categories, meetings and events, scholarship programs, support for local military units and recruiters,

and engaging local politicians about AUSA priorities.

The overall level of achievement was high, as 106 chapters were designated as Star Chapters for increasing their membership over the operating year, 23 had events for ROTC, 61 held events for Army families, 55 supported recruiters, 64 sponsored professional development programs, 35 had events to honor Vietnam veterans and 33 hosted young professionals events.

AUSA also announced that 21 chapters achieved Chapter of Excellence status, 35 chapters qualified as Superior Chapters and 70 achieved Merit Chapter distinction.

"Throughout the year, our chapters have faced a variety of challenges and met them all with aplomb. They constantly go above and beyond to support soldiers, families and their local communities," said Angelina Flores, AUSA's director of chapter and region support. "I am proud to work with our members in their efforts to give back to those who serve and defend our nation."



This year's Best Chapter awards will be presented during AUSA's Annual Meeting and Exposition Oct. 9–11 at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, D.C. (AUSA PHOTO)



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