



# AARON A. WEAVER CHAPTER 776

PRESERVING THE PROUD LEGACY OF THE PURPLE HEART MEDAL



## 2024-25 Officers

**Cdr: Richard Hunt**  
**Sr. Vice Cdr: Gary Bain**  
**Jr. Vice Cdr: Chuck Kanehl**  
**Finance Off: Joe McClister**  
**Judge Adv: John Carlson**  
**Sgt-at-Arms: Robert Gibson**  
**Trustee 2-yrs: Bill Merryman**  
**Trustee 1-yr: Will Korber**  
**Adjutant: Curt Ebitz**  
**Service Off: Joe McClister**  
**Welfare Off: Mickey Hunt**  
**Historian: Curt Ebitz**  
**Chaplain: Troy Allen**  
**Americanism Off: Jerry Frease**

## Chapter Activities

### Completed

**October 28 - November 8.** Cdr. Richard Hunt and Patriots Rob Coughlin, Curt Ebitz, Chuck Kanehl, Jerry Frease, and Mike Krebs participated in the Citrus County Veterans Appreciation Week Veterans in the Classroom Program, sharing their military experiences and adventures with local students.

**November 7.** Chapter 776 Cdr. Richard Hunt, joined by Patriots J.B. Haskins & Earl McMillen and Associate Mickey Hunt, recognized two nurses on the staff of Grand Living Assisted Living for their quick actions that saved the life of a stricken resident.

**November 7.** Chapter 776 was represented at the Inverness Primary School Annual Veterans Day Program by Cdr. Richard Hunt, Associates Sandy Cross and Fred Daniels, and Honorary Life Member Barb Mills.

**November 10.** Attending the Citrus County Veterans Appreciation Week Military Ball from the Chapter were Curt & Mari-Elain, Jerry & Kim Frease, Cdr. Richard & Mickey Hunt and Barb Mills.

*See Chapter completed page 2*

## Next Meeting

**Tuesday, Jan. 21, 2025, 1 p.m.**

The chapter's bimonthly meetings are held the third Tuesday of September, November, January, March, May and July. The meeting time is 1:00 p.m. at the Citrus County Building Alliance, 1196 S. Lecanto Highway (C.R. 491), Lecanto, which is located on the west side of S. Lecanto Highway approximately 1/2 mile south of S.R. 44. Any member desiring to place an item on the agenda should e-mail Adj. Ebitz at [info@citruspurpleheart.org](mailto:info@citruspurpleheart.org) or call 352-382-3847.

## Member News

Chapter 776 Patriots and Associates extend their heartfelt condolences to the **Family of Patriot Robert Bendle** who passed away November 12 after a battle with cancer.

A warm welcome to **Nate Love** of Leesburg as the Chapter's newest Patriot member. Nate, who is an Army veteran of the Global War on Terror, is the CEO & Owner of Love Machining.

An official welcome is extended to **Earl McMillen**, past commander of Chapter 705 and longtime friend of Chapter 776, on his recent "official" transfer to Chapter 776.

A well-earned thank you to Associate **Sandy Cross** for another successful

## Member News continued

fundraising year as the program director for the Chapter's annual fundraising campaign with the National Wreaths Across America program. Thanks to her dedicated leadership, Chapter 776 has earned \$2,090 in rebates from Wreaths Across America and made possible the placement of 418 holiday wreaths on grave sites at the Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell.

Congratulations to Patriots **Rob Coughlin** and **Mike Krebs** on being the Veterans Night honorees during the 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Citrus Stampede Rodeo at the Citrus County Fairgrounds.

**Patty Stevenson**, past Chapter 776 Auxiliary member, was also honored during the 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Citrus Stampede Rodeo for her breast cancer awareness efforts and for helping to establish the nonprofit organization Citrus Aid Cancer Foundation in 2013. Patty successfully completed cancer treatment in September after being diagnosed earlier this year.

Associates **Sandy Cross, Annie Fair, Kim Frease** and **Mickey Hunt** prepared 100 packs of four Christmas cards with stamped envelopes for inpatients at the VA hospital in Tampa to send to their family and friends. The cards were donated by several ladies of the chapter.

*See Members page 2*

## Nineteenth Annual Purple Heart Ceremony

**Please mark your calendars, spread the word and make it a priority to attend!**

Chapter 776's Annual Purple Heart Ceremony honoring Citrus County's fallen heroes and combat wounded warriors, and featuring patriotic music by the Nature Coast Community Band, will be at **11 a.m., Saturday, February 8** at the Citrus County Fairgrounds Auditorium, 3610 S. Florida Ave., Inverness. The ceremony will be dedicated to the memory of Departed Patriot Richard "Rick" Allen who died last February. With hundreds attending the annual ceremony, this is the Chapter's signature activity and the county's premier veterans' ceremony. *Recommended dress is the*

*Chapter's formal uniform (Chapter overseas hat, white shirt with Purple Heart tie, navy blue or black blazer and gray trousers. Purple Heart Medal should be worn on the left lapel of the blazer/coat. If you do not have the Chapter's recommended uniform, please wear appropriate attire. All Chapter Patriots and Associates are urged to make every effort to attend with spouses and guests!*



## Chapter completed

**November 11.** Chapter members participating in the Annual Citrus County Veterans Day Parade with nine vehicles were Gary Bain, Rob & Linda Coughlin, Curt & Mari-Elain Ebitz, Jerry Frease, Bob & Kathy Gibson, Claude Gregoire, Joe McClister & Annie Fair.

**November 11.** Chapter 776 Associate Fred Daniels organized and presented the POW/MIA Tribute for the Citrus County 11<sup>th</sup> Hour Veterans Day Service. Other Chapter members in attendance were Gary Bain, Rob & Linda Coughlin, Curt & Mari-Elain Ebitz, Jerry Frease, Claude Gregoire, Joe McClister & Annie Fair.

**November 11.** Chapter 776 Honorary Life Member Barb Mills hosted a Veterans Day lunch for 200 veterans. Chapter members attending were Rob & Linda Coughlin, Curt & Mari-Elain, Jerry & Kim Frease, Bob & Kathy Gibson, Claude Gregoire, Joe McClister & Annie Fair.

**November 11.** Curt & Mari-Elain Ebitz represented Chapter 776 at the Citrus Hills Veterans Day Planning Committee Veterans Day Dinner.

**November 13.** Attending the Associate ladies luncheon were Carol Allen, JoAnn Allen, Sandy Cross, Mari-Elain Ebitz, Annie Fair, Kim Frease, Mickey Hunt, and Vikki Pietras.

**November 22.** Patriots Rob Coughlin and Mike Krebs were the Veterans Night honorees at the 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Citrus Stampede Rodeo at the Citrus County Fairgrounds.

**November 22-23.** Cdr. Richard Hunt was a volunteer worker for the 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Citrus Stampede Rodeo.

**November 22.** Associates Sandy Cross, Annie Fair, Kim Frease and Mickey Hunt prepared and stamped 100 packs of four Christmas cards with stamped envelopes for inpatients at the James A. Haley VAH to send to their family and friends.

**November 23.** Twenty-five Chapter members and guests attended a luncheon ceremony hosted by the Inverness Elks Lodge No. 2522 and served by BSA Troop 302 for the designation of the Lodge as a Purple Heart Lodge. Attending dignitaries were Citrus County Commission Chair Rebecca Bays and Citrus County Superintendent of Schools Dr. Scott Hebert.

**November 26.** Cdr. Richard Hunt represented the Chapter at the Mass of Christian Burial and interment at the Florida National Cemetery for Departed Patriot Robert Bendle.

**December 7.** Thirty-nine Chapter 776 members and guests attended the Chapter's annual Pearl Harbor dinner and holiday social at the Citrus National Golf Club. Honored guest was Kerri Surber, mother of Fallen Hero Sgt. Robert A. Surber.

**December 16.** The Associate ladies' luncheon was attended by Carol Allen, JoAnn Allen, Sandy Cross, Mari-Elain Ebitz, Annie Fair, Kim Frease, Mickey Hunt, and Vikki Pietras.

## Future

February 8, 11:00 a.m. Chapter 776 Nineteenth Annual Purple Heart Ceremony, Citrus County Fairgrounds Auditorium, Inverness.

## Members continued

Chapter 776 Associate **Fred Daniels** organized and conducted the POW/MIA Unseen Guest Tribute for the Citrus County Veterans Day 11<sup>th</sup> Hour Memorial Service. Associate **Mari-Elain Ebitz** was afforded the honor of being the escort for the Unseen Guest.

Special thanks to the **Chapter 776 Ladies** for their homemade baked goods, candies and crafts that made the Pearl Harbor dinner and holiday social auction a festive capstone activity that raised \$1,067 for the Chapter.

Prayers offered up for Associate **Luke Allen**, son of Chapter 776 Chaplain Troy Allen, have been answered as he is home and on the road to recovery after months of hospitalization for chronic pancreatitis.

**Nancy Krebs**, wife of Chapter 776 Patriot Mike Krebs, is walking like she's on a "Volksmarch" following her successful knee replacement surgery in September.

Chapter 776 Proud Supporter **Robin Mecler** is back on her feet after undergoing surgery the first week of December for a total hip replacement.

Associate **Carol Allen** incurred complications following her gallbladder removal surgery that necessitated treatment with antibodies and has left her suffering with chronic pain. Please offer up prayers for her.

Appreciative thanks to Associate **Sandy Cross** as the outgoing coordinator for the monthly Associate luncheons and to Associate **Kim Frease** who has stepped up to replace her as the coordinator. The luncheons have strengthened the bond between the ladies of the Chapter. All Chapter ladies are welcome!

## From the Commander

Patriots & Associates,

Here we are wrapping up another year. Time surely flies. It is my sincere hope that 2025 brings us all a healthy, happy, and prosperous New Year.

We continue to be a highly active and successful Chapter. I am so enormously proud and honored to be associated with all of you.

Our Nomination Committee is working hard to find willing and capable Chapter officers for the coming term. If you are interested, please let Curt know of your interest at 352-382-3847 or info@citruspurpleheart.org.

Our Pearl Harbor Dinner/Holiday Social Dinner was a resounding success. The events of that day in December when Pearl Harbor was attacked will never be forgotten with the Chapter Adjutant reading FDR's "Day of Infamy" speech that was transmitted by radio to the entire Nation. All had an enjoyable time. Dinner was fabulous. Our auction was a huge success, with donations of many baked goods and other items with spirited bidding to take these items home.

February is bringing our Purple Heart Ceremony. It promises to be the largest and best yet. All Patriots, Associates, Family, Proud Supporters and Friends are encouraged to attend. This year's ceremony is being dedicated to Richard "Rick" Allen. Nancy and Savannah Weaver will be speaking about Nancy's outstanding book about our Chapter's namesake, Aaron A Weaver. The event is always free and open to all. Our own award-winning Nature Coast Community Band will be playing. We will also have displays by the many schools in Citrus County competing against each other.

Our Purple Heart Family remains strong. We need to continue looking out for each other. Together, we are the best we can be.

Wishing a fabulous year for all of you, my Brothers and Sisters!

Yours in Patriotism,  
Richard Hunt, Commander





Chapter 776 presented the Inverness Elks Lodge No. 2522 with a Purple Heart flag in recognition of its designation as a "Purple Heart Lodge" during a luncheon ceremony hosted by the Elks.



Chapter 776's newest Patriot member Nate Love, a combat wounded Army veteran of the Global War on Terror.

Associate Mari-Elain Ebitz was afforded the honor of being the escort for the Unseen Guest for Citrus County's Veterans Day 11<sup>th</sup> Hour Memorial Service POW/MIA Unseen Guest Tribute.



### Departed Patriot Robert C. Bendle, USMC



Patriot Robert "Bob" Bendle of Inverness passed away in Gainesville at UF Health Shands Hospital on November 12, 2024 at the age of 78 after a battle with cancer. A native of the state of New York, Bob was a proud United States Marine who was wounded in action while serving in Vietnam. In addition to being a recipient of the Purple Heart, he was awarded the Good Conduct Medal.

After his service in the Marine Corps, Bob worked for the state of New York at the Mid-Hudson Forensic Psychiatric Center for over three decades until retiring. Bob and his wife, Sheila, relocated from New York state to Citrus County in 2006. He loved fishing, reading, helping others, and was extremely social.

In addition to being a life member of Chapter 776, he was a life member of the Marine Corps League Detachment 1139 and American Legion Post 77. Committed to helping fellow veterans, Bob was very active with the Citrus County Veterans Coalition and volunteered with Hospice for Veterans. A

man of strong faith, he was an active parishioner of Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church in Inverness.

Those left to cherish Bob's memory are his devoted and loving wife of 55 years Sheila Bendle of Inverness; daughters Melissa Secore of Inverness and Michelle Beatty of Concord, NC; and four grandchildren.

A Mass of Christian Burial was performed on November 26 at Our Lady of Fatima followed by interment with honors at the Florida National Cemetery, Bushnell.

## 2024 VETERANS DAY PARADE



Thanks to the craftsmanship of Chapter 776 Sergeant of Arms Bob Gibson, the highlight of the Chapter's Veterans Day Parade participation was his vintage military vehicle.



Chapter members Annie Fair and Joe McClister relaxed amid the hustle and bustle of activity in the staging area for the Veterans Day Parade.



Chapter 776 Patriot Claude Gregoire waits for the Veterans Day Parade to start in his luxurious minibus.