



# AARON A. WEAVER CHAPTER 776



**Chapter Purpose - To preserve the proud legacy of the Purple Heart**

## 2025-26 Officers

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

## Member News

Chapter 776 Patriots and Associates send a warm welcome to the Chapter's newest member, **Kenneth Decareaux**. Ken, who resides in Lecanto, is a Marine Corps veteran of Vietnam, serving with Company K, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 27<sup>th</sup> Marines, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, Chu Lai.

The Chapter's heartfelt condolences are extended to Chapter 776 Sr. Vice Cdr. **Gary Bain** on the passing of his older brother, Julian, in January. Julian was an Army veteran of Vietnam where he served as a Military Policeman during the Tet Offensive.

Get well wishes for **Dennis Flanagan**, father of Fallen Hero Sergeant Dennis J. Flanagan, who is recovering from open heart surgery for a triple bypass and valve replacement that was performed at HCA Florida Largo Hospital in February.

Best wishes to Patriot **Chuck Kanehl** who is undergoing radiation treatment for skin cancer as he battles his Agent Orange nemesis.

Chapter 776 Finance Officer **Joe**

## Next Meeting

**Tuesday, Mar. 17, 2026, 1 p.m.**  
 Citrus County Chamber of  
 Commerce, Crystal River

## Bimonthly Meeting

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 Chamber of Commerce Building, 915 N. Suncoast Blvd. (U.S. 19), Crystal River, which is located on the east side of the highway approximately 1/4 mile north of the Crystal River Airport. Any member desiring to place an item on the agenda should e-mail Adjutant Ebitz at [info@citruspurpleheart.org](mailto:info@citruspurpleheart.org) or call 352-382-3847.

**McClister** is scheduled to have vascular surgery in his lower legs during March.

Congratulations to Patriot **Bill Merryman** on his selection as Chapter 776 Patriot of the Year, Associate **Kim Frease** as Chapter 776 Associate of the Year and Patriot **Jerry Frease** as Chapter 776 Volunteer of the Year for 2025-26.

Congratulations to Cdr. **Richard Hunt** on his selection as the Chronicle Hometown Hero for this past December.

Chapter 776 Patriots salute Patriot **Will Korber** on having earned the distinction of being presented with the Badge of Military Merit during the Twentieth Annual Purple Heart Ceremony in recognition of his dedicated support of Chapter 776 and fellow veterans.

Well-earned kudos to Chapter 776 Cdr. **Richard Hunt** on another flawless job in organizing and conducting the Chapter's Twentieth Annual Purple Heart Ceremony that had an overflowing crowd of attendees estimated at 650-700.

*See Member continued on page 2*

## Chapter Activities Completed

**January 22.** Attending the Chapter's no-host fellowship breakfast at the Central Café, Inverness, were Curt Ebitz, Jerry Frease, Al Golfieri, Richard Hunt, Will Korber, Mike Krebs, Joe McClister, Paul St. Martin and Colby Dawson, congressional aide to Congressman Gus Bilirakis.

**February 3.** Cdr. Richard Hunt and Patriots Curt Ebitz, Will Korber, and Bill Merryman represented Chapter 776 at the Black Diamond Foundation's inaugural veterans appreciation dinner.

**February 19.** Attending the Inverness Primary School 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Veterans Dinner & Program were Cdr. Richard & Mickey Hunt, Fred Daniels, Curt Ebitz, Claude & Sherry Gregoire, Will Korber, Joe McClister & Annie Fair, Patty Stevenson and Chapter 776 Honorary Life Member Barb Mills who donated patriotic decorated cupcakes for the dessert.

**February 20.** Present at the Associate ladies' February no-host luncheon at Angelotti's in Inverness were Carol Allen, JoAnn Allen, Annie Fair, Kim Frease, Mickey Hunt, Barb Mills, Vikki Pietras, Shirley Platt, and Deborah St. Martin. *The next Associate ladies' no-host luncheon is at 12:30 p.m., Friday, March 27 at Wallace's at the Greenhouse in Homosassa*, across from Village Cadillac & Toyota. Call Kim at 239-229-6428, if you would like to attend.

**February 21.** Chapter 776 hosted its Twentieth Annual Purple Heart Ceremony at the Citrus County Fairgrounds Auditorium with an estimated 650 to 700 people in attendance to honor our fallen heroes and combat wounded. The ceremony featured: Remarks by Congressman Gus Bilirakis; patriotic music by the award-winning Nature Coast Community Band; designation of the Withlacoochee River Electric Cooperative as the first Purple Heart Electric Cooperative in the nation; presentation of

*See Chapter continued on page 2*

**Member continued**

Kudos, as well, to the talented members of the award-winning **Nature Coast Community Band** for their musical support of the ceremony. Also, special recognition to **Luke Allen**, grandson of JoAnn Allen and Departed Patriot and Past Commander Richard “Bud” Allen, for his superb job as the acting Chapter chaplain for the ceremony.

A very appreciative salute to Citrus County Tax Collector & Chapter 776 Honorary Life Member **Janice Warren** and her office staff with special thanks to campaign coordinator **Jennifer Steelfox** and top fundraisers, **Lydia Dunn, Tammy Smith, and Bonita Tholund** on raising \$10,541.66 during its fall campaign for the benefit of the Citrus County Veterans Foundation (CCVF), Chapter 776’s principal charity.

Many thanks to the following Chapter members who stepped forward to serve as Chapter officers for 2026-27: Cdr., **Richard Hunt**; Sr. Vice Cdr., **Bill Merryman**; Jr. Vice Cdr., **Jerry Frease**; Finance & Service Officer, **Joe McClister**; Sgt-at-Arms, **Bob Gibson**; 2-Yr. Trustee, **Mike Krebs**; 1-Yr. Trustee, **Nate Love**; Adjutant & Historian, **Curt Ebitz**; Welfare Officer, **Mickey Hunt**; Chaplain, **Gary Bain**; Americanism Officer, **Will Korber**; Judge Advocate, **Colin Pearl**.

Heartfelt appreciation to the ladies of the **West Citrus Elks Lodge Sewing for Veterans** and the **Dunnellon Country Quilters** for sewing and presenting Quilts of Valor during the Purple Heart ceremony to Patriots **Al Golfieri, Claude Gregorie, Frank Hayes, Chuck Kanehl, Nate Love, and Larry Tropf**.

Cdr. **Richard Hunt** was recently blessed by the visit of his son and 13-year old granddaughter who flew in from California for a five-day stay. This was the first time that Cdr. Hunt saw his granddaughter and about 15 years since he last saw his son, Richard, Jr.

Patriot **Al Golfieri** recently had an unexpected heartwarming experience. While in the checkout line at the Homosassa Walmart, a woman and her daughter noticed his Purple Heart cap and thanked him for his service. As he checked out, he learned that the lady had paid for his groceries at about \$100. It pays to wear your Purple Heart cap, especially in Citrus County.

**Chapter continued**

Quilts of Valor to six Chapter 776 Patriots and one non-member Vietnam veteran. Additionally, each of the Citrus County School District’s 23 schools had Purple Star displays honoring veterans.

**February 22.** Chapter 776’s Purple Heart entities flew the Purple Heart flag in commemoration of the 294<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of General George Washington, originator of the Purple Heart decoration.

**February 26.** Chapter Patriots attending the no-host monthly fellowship breakfast at Oyster’s Restaurant, Crystal River were Curt Ebitz, Jerry Frease, Richard Hunt, Will Korber, Mike Krebs, Joe McClister, Bill Merryman, Paul St. Martin.

**February 27.** Curt Ebitz represented Chapter 776 at Congressman Gus Billirakis’ Veterans Advisory Council quarterly meeting.

**February 27.** Chapter 776 recognized the Citrus County Tax Collector Office and its top three fundraisers for their participation in the Fall 2025 fundraising campaign conducted in partnership with the Chapter for the benefit of the Citrus County Veterans Foundation. Chapter attendees were Cdr. Richard & Mickey Hunt, Curt & Mari-Elain Ebitz, Ann Fair, Jerry Frease, Claude Gregoire and Will Korber.

**March 2.** Curt & Mari-Elain Ebitz, Jerry Frease, Richard Hunt, Mike & Nancy Krebs attended the Veterans in the Classroom Appreciation Luncheon at the Withlacoochee Technical College hosted by Citrus County Superintendent of Schools Dr. Scott Hebert.

**Future**

**April 24, 6:00 p.m.** CCBA’s 31st Annual Family Fishing Tournament Captain's Gathering. Chapter members are requested to attend and “show the flag” in support of the event, which provides the Chapter with its principal source of income.

**April 25-26.** CCBA’s 31st Annual Family Fishing Tournament. *Chapter members interested in participating in the tournament as guests of fishing boat captains contact Cdr. Richard Hunt at*

**From the Commander**

Greetings!

Aaron A Weaver Chapter 776 is awesome!

We completed our 20th Annual Purple Heart Ceremony. The auditorium was packed, our Chapter well represented, every school in the district had a display, and all three High Schools had JROTC Cadets in attendance.

We had an impressive showing of Gold Star Mothers and Chapter Members. The musicians of the Nature Coast Community Band outdid themselves. Almost every local elected official was in attendance, including Congressman Gus Bilirakis.

Our own Will Korber received a Badge of Military Merit during the ceremony from the Commander of the local Sons of the American Revolution Chapter who, in period dress, represented General George Washington. Withlacoochee River Electric Cooperative became a Purple Heart Entity. Seven Quilts of Valor were awarded to veterans in attendance. A program like no other. Well done, Patriots!

The next Citrus County Building Alliance (CCBA) Fishing Tournament is April 25-26 with the Captain's Meeting Friday evening April 24. As in past years, professional boat captains have invited Chapter members to participate for free in the tournament. **Chapter members interested in “Going fishing” should contact me at 407-579-6190 or [obakesan@att.net](mailto:obakesan@att.net).**

Until next time, Yours in Patriotism

Richard Hunt, Commander

407-579-6190 or [obakesan@att.net](mailto:obakesan@att.net).

**May 16, 11:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.** Annual Armed Forces Day picnic, Bicentennial Park Pavilion, Crystal River.

**May 19, 1:00 p.m.** Chapter 776 Bimonthly business meeting, Citrus County Chamber of Commerce, Crystal River.

### Departed Patriot Harold P. Coates



It was recently learned that Patriot Harold P. Coates, a former resident of Hernando, passed away at his home in Attica, Michigan on August 14, 2020. Patriot Coates grew up in the Sylvan Village area near Pontiac, Michigan.

At the age of 18, he enlisted in the Army. He saw combat action while serving with Company C, 397<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, participating in the Rhineland and Central Europe Campaigns. Attacked during the Battle of the Bulge by elements of three German divisions, including a full-strength SS-Panzer Grenadier division, heavily supported by armor, the 100<sup>th</sup> Division was the only unit to hold its position against the Nazi's last, desperate offensive.

Only in his teens, Patriot Coates rose to the rank of Staff Sergeant and was in charge of a rifle platoon of 38 men. Serving with distinction and great courage, he was awarded the Silver Star for Gallantry in Action, Bronze Star and Good Conduct Medal.



The Citrus County Tax Collector Office (TCO) fall fundraising campaign, in partnership with Aaron A. Weaver Chapter 776 Military Order of the Purple Heart, raised \$10,541.66 for the Citrus County Veterans Foundation.

### 2026 Purple Heart Ceremony



## 2026 Purple Heart Ceremony



The ceremony took place at the Citrus County Auditorium.