THANK YOU TO OUR VETERANS

Jeffrey S. Bragg
Secretary,
Florida Department of Elder Affairs

The state of Florida is home to a very diverse population. Men and women of all ages, backgrounds, and beliefs call the Sunshine State home, and we are certainly fortunate that they have chosen Florida as a place to live, work, and play.

Two of the biggest groups living here are our seniors – a group that is obviously very near and dear to those of us at the Department of Elder Affairs – and our veterans. I am so proud that this edition of Elder Update pays special tribute to both groups.

It has now been more than seven decades since 16 million Americans answered the call of their country in World War II. They came from every corner of the country – big cities and small towns, farming communities and industrial centers, the east coast and the west, and from right here in the state of Florida.

They put aside their personal hopes and dreams and instead focused on how best to defend the nation against an unspeakable evil. They took to the battlefield, climbed aboard mighty ships, controlled magnificent aircraft, and when the dust settled, their spirit stood tall in defense of freedom for all mankind. Their reputation as “America’s Greatest Generation” is certainly well-deserved.

I feel lucky to live in a state where veterans are truly honored and respected for their service – where the goal of our Governor is to make our state the most veteran friendly state in the nation. Governor Scott understands the sacrifices and dedication to God and country that these brave men and women have pledged. He knows because it is in his blood. After attending high school and community college, Governor Scott enlisted in the United States Navy, where he served on active duty aboard the USS Glover as a radar man.

His father served our country in World War II, as did his father-in-law. Because of this, the Governor and First Lady are fully aware of the sacrifices needed to maintain the freedoms we enjoy today, and they have both worked tirelessly to support Florida’s veterans and their families.

While more than 61,600 of Florida’s 1.5 million veterans served their country in WW II, significant portions of our population served in Korea and Vietnam – approximately 139,000 in Korea and more than half a million in Vietnam. We honor their sacrifices as well.

Our vets are all around us. Seek them out, listen to their stories, and give them a well-deserved thank you for what they have done for our great country.

What better way is there to celebrate Veterans Day?
HURRICANE MICHAEL: RECOVERY

Ashley Chambers
Director of Communications
Florida Department of Elder Affairs

As you read this, many families in Florida are hurting. They are recovering from the long-reaching and devastating effects of Hurricane Michael. Please know that we are here for you. The Department takes seriously our mission to help elders remain healthy, safe, and independent, and that does not end when an emergency strikes. In fact, we enter a new realm of disaster response throughout our Aging Network to help in any way we can.

 Floridians are strong, and we can be prideful. For years, we would hear residents say they stayed during Andrew and they didn’t think they needed to evacuate for this storm or that storm. But each year, as storms bring new challenges and immense strength, I think we are all doing better to take these threats seriously and heed the warnings and instructions from Emergency Management leaders. As Governor Rick Scott said many times throughout our storm cycles, “We can rebuild your home or your business; we cannot rebuild your life.”

Now that we have survived the initial storm, we enter recovery mode. All emergencies – even those with statewide impact – are truly local when it comes to recovery. We want to share some important resources with you as we work to rebuild together. The statewide, toll-free Elder Helpline is 1-800-96-ELDER (1-800-963-5337). If you, your family, or your elder neighbors need assistance with services or have unmet needs, it is a great place to start.

Following a request by Governor Scott and approval by FEMA, families in the following counties are eligible for FEMA Individual Assistance: Bay, Franklin, Gulf, Leon, Taylor, Wakulla, Calhoun, Liberty, Jackson, Gadsden, Holmes, and Washington. Governor Scott also recently announced that the Florida Housing Finance Corporation is helping families displaced by Hurricane Michael find affordable rental housing through SocialServe. Florida residents displaced by Hurricane Michael can visit the affordable rental housing locator services, FloridaHousingSearch.org, to find available units in Florida.

Please keep in mind to always use caution when selecting vendors following an emergency like this to avoid becoming a victim of fraud or exploitation by unlicensed contractors and other bad actors.

Please watch out for your neighbors, and call us at DOEA or the Elder Helpline if you need assistance. We are in this together. We are all Florida Strong.

Special Thanks
Elder Update staff is deeply gratified by the many generous donations given recently by our readers. Your generosity and kindness are truly appreciated, and your donations will be used to ensure the continued production of Elder Update.

• Diana Sam
• Patricia Susan Posey

SUDOKU

There is only one valid solution to each Sudoku puzzle. When you start a game of Sudoku, some blocks will be pre-filled for you. You cannot change these numbers in the course of the game. Each column must contain all of the numbers 1 through 9, and no two numbers in the same column of a Sudoku puzzle can be the same. Each row must contain all of the numbers 1 through 9, and no two numbers in the same row of a Sudoku puzzle can be the same. Each block must contain all of the numbers 1 through 9, and no two numbers in the same block of a Sudoku puzzle can be the same. Good luck!

Solution found on page 16.
www.brainbashers.com
Sudoku Puzzle © Kevin Stone
Sudoku Ref: 149446
The mood was focused, yet calm, as 68 competitors and a legion of volunteers and supporters eagerly awaited the start of Elder Options’ first annual 5K run, Race for the Ages, at First Magnitude Brewing Co., on Wednesday evening, Sept. 12, 2018.

Elder Options’ Executive Director, Kristen Griffis, shared her hopes for the race. “My biggest hope for this race is to bring attention to Elder Options and the good services we provide, and network with partners and individuals in the community so that we can better know each other and help build our relationships.”

At 6:15 p.m., the racing group, ranging in age from 9 to 76, was off and running! The crowd waited a mere 18 minutes and 24 seconds before Ben Wise, 39, of Gainesville blew past the finish line just as a rainbow broke through the clouds. When asked about his win, Wise said, “I feel great, and I love running for a good cause!”

That “good cause” is Elder Options, which serves as the local Area Agency on Aging and the Aging & Disability Resource Center for a 16-county region in North Central Florida.

The Elder Helpline is the first point of contact that seniors have with Elder Options.

Although information and referral to community resources is the primary function of the Elder Helpline, Andrea Longstreet, Information and Counseling Coordinator at Elder Options, says the Elder Helpline fields calls for everything from pest control to animal issues, hoarding situations, homelessness, domestic violence, and suicide threats.

“Our Elder Helpline is one of the best in the state. They get praise all the time from clients and caseworkers who praise us for shorter wait times, answering the phone when people call rather than allowing voicemail to pick up, going beyond just giving people a phone number, and actually caring,” Longstreet said.

Elder Options would like to thank the race sponsors for their generous support:

- First Magnitude Brewing Co.
- Lloyd Clarke Sports
- Bette Simpson, Realtor, Dawn Realty
- Carr, Riggs & Ingram CPAs and Advisors
- Lucille Rhim, Avon Sales Representative
- James Moore & Company
- Volta Coffee, Tea & Chocolate
- The Miller Law Firm
- Brookdale Senior Living
- Lee Crane Insurance Agency
- Express Employment Professionals
- Johnson Group
- Mutual of America

Elder Options 5K Run Raises $8,275 for Senior Programs

Stephanie Mullins McCrory
Elder Options

Pictured here, left to right:

GRANDMASTERS FEMALE
Loretta Engler

1ST PLACE MALE
Geoff Amidon

1ST PLACE FEMALE
Julianne Amidon

2ND PLACE MALE
Otto Strausburg

Other Notable Winners

TOP OVERALL FEMALE
Lisa Johnson, 36, of Gainesville
Time: 20:38

GRAND MASTERS TOP MALE AGE 50-98
Soren Brockdorf, 50, of High Springs
Time: 21:00

MASTERS TOP MALE AGE 40-49
Robb Eggleston, 48, of Gainesville
Time: 22:39

MASTERS TOP FEMALE AGE 40-49
Sandy Flory, 41, of Gainesville
Time: 23:12

AGE GROUP 60-69 MALE
Gordon Anderson, 62, of Gainesville
Time: 35:42
SOME MEDIGAP PLANS WILL BE PHASED OUT FOR CERTAIN BENEFICIARIES

Bonnie Burns
Medigap Consultant, SHIP TA Center

Beginning in 2020, certain Medicare beneficiaries won’t be able to buy a Medigap Plan C or F, including high deductible F. The Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act (MACRA), enacted in 2015, prohibits the sale of any benefit for the Part B deductible to any “newly eligible” beneficiary beginning in 2020. “Newly eligible” means any Medicare beneficiary who becomes eligible for Medicare Part A, or who is deemed to be eligible, on or after January 1, 2020, regardless of whether they enroll in Medicare. This provision was enacted to increase cost sharing and reduce “first dollar coverage.” Medigap plans C and F, and high deductible F, include coverage of the Medicare Part B deductible.

The federal prohibition has led to confusion about whether the two most popular Medigap plans – C and F (including high deductible F) – can be sold to anyone after that date. It’s important to know that the federal prohibition does not apply to anyone who was already eligible for Part A prior to 2020, regardless of whether they enrolled in Medicare before or after that date. Medigap plans C and F and high deductible Plan F can continue to be sold now and after 2020 to Medicare beneficiaries who were eligible for Medicare Part A prior to 2020.

One out of three Medicare fee-for-service beneficiaries is covered by a Medigap. This is an important source of health benefits, particularly for rural beneficiaries. More than 13 million Medicare beneficiaries have a Medigap policy, according to a recent report by AHIP (America’s Health Insurance Plans), and the majority have Medigap Plan C or F to help budget their health care expenses after Medicare has paid.

Medigap policies were first standardized in 1990 federal legislation following a long history of sales and marketing abuses of those products. Congress charged the National Association of Insurance Commissioners (NAIC) with creating a working group of regulators, industry, and consumer representatives for creating 10 standard Medigap benefit packages. Three states – Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Wisconsin – had already adopted some version of standard benefit packages and were exempted, and continue to be exempt, from the required design of those 10 benefit packages but no other requirements of the law.

The 10 benefit packages were assigned a letter designation of A through J originally and, along with certain other regulatory standards, were adopted by the NAIC in the 1992 NAIC Medicare Supplement Insurance Model Act and Regulation, effective July 1992. The changes in the models were incorporated by reference into federal law. States adopted the NAIC Models to comply with federal law and to maintain their regulatory authority over Medigap products sold in their state. States were, and continue to be, able to adopt additional standards that do not conflict with federal law. For instance, some states included more rigorous consumer protections, open enrollment for people younger than 65 with a disability or permanent kidney failure, or more generous guaranteed issue rights.

What Happens Next?
Questions have been raised about whether companies can continue to sell Medigap Plans C, F, and high deductible F, whether premiums will be increased because of the federal prohibition, and whether Plans C and F will become closed blocks, leading to a death spiral of those plans.

Many brokers and agents seem to believe that Medigap Plans C and F cannot be sold in 2020 under federal law, and that is simply not true. Companies can still issue coverage for these Medigap plans to anyone who was eligible for Medicare Part A prior to January 1, 2020, and agents are not prohibited from selling those Medigap plans to eligible beneficiaries. Companies can continue to sell to eligible buyers, and those plans remain an option for eligible buyers who experience a guaranteed issue event.

All Medigap plans are guaranteed renewable, and an individual’s Medigap plan can only be terminated for nonpayment of premium. Medigap premiums increase almost every year, in part because the Medicare deductibles they cover increase annually. Premiums also reflect increases in medical costs related to the benefits covered by a Medigap plan and the number of people covered by that plan. Premiums are unlikely to increase during the next several years based solely on this federal change. While newly eligible beneficiaries cannot buy these plans when they become eligible for Medicare, those who were previously eligible can still buy Plan C or F, either because they have a guaranteed issue event or because they pass a company’s medical screening and are accepted for coverage.

Companies monitor their Medigap business and make decisions based on their claims experience. Medigap Plans C and F are the two most popular Medigap plans. It’s unlikely that a company would close either of those plans to all new purchasers based solely on the federal prohibition, but certainly every company has the right to discontinue selling a Medigap. The effect on premiums for a Medigap plan is likely to occur slowly if a pool of covered lives shrinks because fewer beneficiaries have the right to choose a plan.

It’s important to note that policyholders often keep their policies long after a company stops selling them. By way of illustration, 3 percent of pre-standard Medigap plans that were sold before the 1992 change in the law are still in force.

Beginning in 2020, SHIP counselors will need to know the date of a client’s eligibility for Medicare Part A, regardless of whether they enrolled then or later, to provide correct information about which Medigaps a client can buy.

In each of these cases, those beneficiaries might be eligible to choose Medigap Plan C or F or high deductible Plan F during and after 2020.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has verified that Medicare cards will show the effective date of Part A eligibility for the purposes of MACRA, even in cases where Medicare benefits were delayed or granted retroactively. A person’s 65th birthday is an additional way to verify the date of Part A eligibility.

Bonnie Burns is a consultant with more than 35 years of experience in Medicare, Medicare supplemental insurance (Medigap), and Long-Term Care Insurance. She actively promotes improved consumer protection in state and federal legislative efforts affecting Medigap and Long-Term Care insurance products. She has served as a consumer representative to the National Association of Insurance Commissioners (NAIC) since the beginning of the program in 1992.
**Dear Judy,**

I am turning 65 in February 2019 and going on Medicare. Am I entitled to any preventive tests as a new Medicare beneficiary?

*Mr. New*

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**Dear Mr. New,**

Welcome to Medicare! Medicare Part B helps cover many preventive services. During the first 12 months that you have Part B, you can get a “Welcome to Medicare” preventive visit. Your doctor will do the following:

- Record and evaluate your medical and family history, your current health conditions, and prescriptions;
- Check your blood pressure, vision, weight, and height to get a baseline for your care;
- Make sure that you’re up-to-date with preventive screenings and services, like cancer screenings and shots; and
- Order further tests, depending on your health and medical history.

If you have had Part B for longer than 12 months, you can get a yearly “Wellness Visit” to develop or update a personalized plan to prevent disease or disability based on your current health and risk factors. This visit is covered by Part B once every 12 months, you can get a yearly “Wellness Visit” to develop or update a personalized plan to prevent disease or disability based on your current health and risk factors. This visit is covered by Part B once every 12 months, you can get a yearly “Wellness Visit” to develop or update a personalized plan to prevent disease or disability based on your current health and risk factors. This visit is covered by Part B once every 12 months.

Additionally, Medicare Part B covers the following preventive services:

- Abdominal aortic aneurysm screening—a one-time ultrasound for people at risk
- Alcohol mis-use screening and counseling
- Bone mass measurement (bone density)—test covered once every 24 months or more often if medically necessary
- Breast cancer screening (mammogram)—once every 12 months or more often if medically necessary
- Cardiovascular disease (behavior therapy)—one visit per year
- Cardiovascular disease screenings—three testing sessions once every five years
- Cervical and vaginal cancer screenings—once every 24 months or once every 12 months if at high risk
- Colorectal cancer screenings, such as:
  - Multi-target stool DNA test—once every three years
  - Screening fecal occult blood test—once every 12 months
  - Screening flexible sigmoidoscopy—once every 48 months
  - Screening colonoscopy—once every 120 months unless high risk
  - Screening barium enema—once every 48 months unless high risk
- Depression screening—one per year
- Diabetes screenings—up to two if at risk
- Diabetes self-management training—diabetes diagnosis and doctor’s order
- Flu shots—one shot per flu season
- Glaucoma tests—once every 12 months if high risk
- Hepatitis B shots—for people at medium or high risk
- Hepatitis C screening test—if you are high risk, or had a blood transfusion before 1992, or you were born between 1945-1965
- HIV screenings—once every 12 months
- Lung cancer screening—one per year if at risk
- Medical nutrition therapy services—if you have diabetes or kidney disease or if referred by a doctor or provider
- Obesity screening and counseling—if you have a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or higher
- Pneumococcal shot
- Prostate cancer screenings—covers a PSA test and a digital rectal exam once every 12 months
- Sexually transmitted infection (STI) screening and counseling—one every 12 months
- Smoking and tobacco cessation—covers up to eight face-to-face visits in a 12-month period
- If you choose to enroll in a Medicare Advantage Plan instead of Original Medicare, most Medicare services that are offered by Original Medicare are offered by the plan. Consult your plan for details.

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**JUDY ARCHEY**

Judy Archey is the Area Coordinator for Putnam, Alachua, Bradford, and Union counties. She also serves as a statewide trainer for the Department of Elder Affairs’ SHINE Program.

If you have a question you would like answered in our new Dear Judy column, please send an email to information@elderaffairs.org. You may also send a question by regular mail to:

Elder Update: Dear Judy
Florida Department of Elder Affairs
4040 Esplanade Way
Tallahassee, FL 32399-7000

A response will be in a future issue.

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(Serving Health Insurance Needs of Elders) is an award-winning volunteer-based program at the Department of Elder Affairs that provides information and free, unbiased counseling for people on Medicare, their families, and their caregivers. Trained counselors provide personal and confidential assistance over the phone or at local counseling sites. To speak with a SHINE counselor, call our Elder Helpline toll-free at 1-800-96-ELDER (1-800-963-5337). If you have internet access, you may visit our website at FLORIDASHINE.ORG for more information or to find a SHINE counseling site near you.
Earwax and the Elderly: 
Buildup, Blockage in Ears Poses Unrecognized Risk in Long-Term Care

JoNel Alecicia
Kaiser Health News

Of all the indignities that come with aging, excessive earwax may be the most insidious.

Don’t laugh.

That greasy, often gross, buildup occurs more often in older ears than those of the young, experts say. And when it goes unrecognized, it can pose serious problems, especially for the 2.2 million people who live in U.S. nursing homes and assisted living centers.

“The excessive amount [of earwax] can cause hearing loss or ringing in your ears. Some people experience vertigo, which increases the risk of falling,” said Jackie Clark, a board-certified audiologist who is president of the American Academy of Audiology. “Right now, we see some correlation between hearing loss and cognitive decline.”

Earwax — which is not really wax at all, but a substance called cerumen that binds with dirt, dust and debris — is normally produced by the body as a way to clean and protect the ears. In most people, the self-cleaning process works fine.

But in others — including about 10 percent of young children, 20 percent of adults and more than 30 percent of elderly and developmentally disabled people — the wax collects to the point where it can completely block the ear canal.

Up to two-thirds of people in nursing homes may suffer from that condition, known as impaction, according to 2017 guidelines for removal of impacted earwax issued by the American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery Foundation.

In 2016, federal Medicare recipients logged nearly 1.7 million earwax removal services at a cost of more than $51 million, according to payment records analyzed by Kaiser Health News.

“In elderly patients, it’s fairly common,” said Dr. Seth Schwartz, a Seattle otolaryngologist who led the most recent update of the guidelines. “It seems like such a basic thing, but it’s one of the most common reasons people present for hearing-related problems.”

It’s so bad that Janie York, of Omaha, Neb., started Hear Now mobile hearing solutions, one of a growing number of businesses devoted to cleaning hearing aids and checking the ears of elderly people living in residential care settings.

“It’s epidemic,” said York, whose clients now include 10 local centers. “About 3 in 5 people I see have some degree of impaction and most are completely impacted.”

Julie Brown, assistant director of nursing in the memory support unit at SilverRidge Assisted Living in Gretna, Neb., said impacted earwax can be a particular problem for patients with dementia. It exacerbates hearing loss, which can impede communication and worsen aggression and other difficult behaviors.

“As soon as the earwax is cleared up, even their behavior has calmed down,” Brown said.

Excessive earwax sends about 12 million people to see health workers every year, including about 8 million who require wax removal, according to the otolaryngology association.

That’s not counting the people who try DIY treatments to get rid of earwax, nearly all of which are frowned on by the professionals.

“People put everything in their ears: Q-tips, bobby pins, pencils, fingernails,” Schwartz said.

Usually, the best way to control earwax is to leave it alone, Schwartz said. But that advice can backfire when families or caregivers neglect to check the ears of elderly people in residential care.

Hearing-aid users should have regular ear checks every three to six months, the guidelines suggest. People with dementia should also have earwax removed regularly.

It can take a professional with an otoscope — a device that can look deep inside the ear — to tell if cerumen is blocking the ear canal. Usually, earwax can be safely removed by softening it with water, saline or commercial ear drops and then through gentle syringing or manual extraction with a device called a curette.

The effects in the elderly can be immediate. A small 2014 study by Japanese researchers found significant improvements in hearing and cognitive performance in elderly patients with memory disorders when impacted cerumen was removed.

Too often, though, earwax in the elderly goes unnoticed.

“I’m seeing 15 people here, but what about the other hundred?” York said. “Nobody’s looking. I don’t know why it’s been neglected for so long.”

— KHN’s coverage of these topics is supported by Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation and John A. Hartford Foundation.
PSC OFFERS ELECTRIFYING WAYS TO GET MOVING IN 2019!

Bev DeMello
Florida Public Service Commission

If you were to do just one thing to reduce your odds of developing dementia, diabetes, heart disease, or obesity, research suggests it should be: Move more! You probably know this, just like you know your daily energy habits can affect your electric bill. If you’re bored with mall walking to expend energy and have let your energy-saving habits slide, the Florida Public Service Commission (PSC) offers some fresh, energizing alternatives for seniors to move more and save more in 2019!

“We’re suggesting some creative ways to get moving and also take charge of your energy habits in the New Year. We hope you’re moved to try something new!” said PSC Chairman Art Graham. “These ideas complement our work with seniors to help them learn about beneficial programs to save money on monthly utility bills and add a twist to possible New Year’s resolutions.”

Schedule an energy audit in 2019
Just as you would consult your primary care physician or health care provider before beginning any exercise program, consult your utility for a home energy check-up. Hopefully, this will get you a green light from your doctor to “move” more and a personalized utility report on how to move toward energy – and money – savings. During a home energy check-up, a trained energy analyst will do the following:

- Assess your home’s energy use,
- Recommend energy-saving home improvements and energy use habit changes, and
- Install energy-saving products to help you start saving money right away.

Here are some tips to get you moving to conserve energy and save money:

MANAGE YOUR THERMOSTAT Heating and cooling are energy hogs in most homes. Raise the thermostat by 1 degree for cooling and lower the thermostat by 1 degree for heating.

SEAL LEAKS Seal leaks in the attic, fireplace, and electrical outlets. If you have a wood burning fireplace, keep the damper closed unless it is in use.

LOWER SHADES During the summer, lower shades to save on cooling costs, and during the winter, raise shades to save on heating costs.

TURN IT OFF Don’t forget to flick the switch when you leave a room. Also turn off your desktop computers, game consoles, televisions, etc.

After you’ve made the move to conserve energy on the home front, try these energizing ways to move more in 2019!

Walk a Watt
Walking your neighborhood with friends is great exercise and can also be used to exercise your energy know-how. Check your kWh usage on your electric meter when you begin your walk and check it again at the end of your walk to track your energy use for a specified time period. How does your energy use compare to your friends? Healthy competition can help lower utility bills and reduce the waist line! Take the challenge to “walk a watt” with friends in 2019.

Pushing for Efficiency
Pushing a shopping cart can burn some extra energy – pushing it for 60 minutes will even burn some calories! When you’re shopping in 2019, why not also sneak in a workout? While at a large box store, such as Home Depot or Lowes, push your shopping cart up and down the aisles at a good pace, ending up in the lighting section. Residential lighting consumes about 10-12 percent of a home’s energy use. Purchase some Compact Fluorescent Light (CFL) or Light-emitting Diode (LED) bulbs to replace your incandescent bulbs. These consume up to 75 percent less energy and last longer, too.

Planning Your Landscape to Conserve Water
Water conservation is especially on people’s minds during Florida’s dry periods, but it’s important all the time. One way you can save water is by using low-maintenance plants and environmentally sustainable practices. This principle is called, “right plant, right place.” Get moving and visit your local nursery. You can walk around with your nursery representative and select plants whose needs match the conditions of your landscape. You’ll definitely get some exercise when planting your new plants, and you’ll conserve water and money on your water bill. For more information, contact the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) extension offices in each of Florida’s 67 counties.

Whew! After you get moving in 2019, you’ve earned time to relax. Look for more information about energy and water conservation on the PSC’s website, floridapsc.com. The PSC hopes to see you on the move, and look for our outreach materials on the move in your community this coming year!
As we commemorate the 100th anniversary of the signing of the armistice ending World War I, Floridians are pausing to reflect and thank our state’s more than 1.5 million veterans who have defended the principles upon which our country was founded.

More than 42,000 Floridians served in the “the war to end all wars,” which ended on Nov. 11, 1918. The enlistment numbers in Florida were significant at the time for a state with fewer than one million residents. More than 116,000 Americans were killed in World War I, including 1,134 Floridians.

Yesterday’s Armistice Day has become today’s Veterans Day, honoring the service of all our nation’s men and women who served in uniform throughout our history. From our network of award-winning state veterans’ homes to connecting veterans to their earned benefits and services, Florida is the most veteran-friendly state in the nation.

One important way to help honor our state’s veterans is to help us connect them to their earned benefits. Our state’s veterans bring more than $18.4 billion federal dollars annually into Florida’s economy. As impressive as that sounds, there are many thousands of our veterans and their families who, for whatever reason, are not taking advantage of benefits earned through their military service.

Help us reach out to our veterans. Let them know of the many federal, state, and local benefits available to them as a result of their selfless service and sacrifice.

A consolidated list of earned benefits and services available to Florida’s veterans, including our network of state veterans’ homes and access to the annual Florida Veterans’ Benefits Guide, is available at our agency’s website at FloridaVets.org or by calling (850) 487-1533.

You can also connect with us via social media on Facebook at facebook.com/floridaveterans and on LinkedIn at linkedin.com/company/fdva. Our free mobile application, offered in the Android and Apple markets, integrates with our website and offers veterans updates about available benefits, services and support.

It’s truly an honor and privilege to serve our veterans, their families, and survivors. Thank you for your service.

Karen L Bauer, RN
Army Nurse Corps, 2 Lt.
1972-1974
Gov. Scott Has Awarded More Than 15,000 Veterans With the Veterans Service Medal

At the end of August, in Ocala, Governor Rick Scott and First Lady Ann Scott visited the National Guard Armory in Ocala to award 219 veterans with the Governor’s Service Medal. Since 2013, Governor Scott has awarded more than 15,000 veterans with the Governor’s Veterans Service Medal.

At the Ocala event, the following veterans were highlighted by the Governor:

**Chuck Farson**
On October 10, 1944, Chuck Farson joined the United States Navy one day before his 18th birthday. He served abroad during WWII, making three trips to Hawaii, as well as Guam, Bikini Island, and Japan during the campaign. Among his many awards and achievements, he has received the Victory Medal, the American Area Campaign Medal, and the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal. Chuck will be turning 92 later this year.

**Sergeant Major Raymond R. Douyard**
Sergeant Major Douyard joined the United States Army in 1979 and served our country for 26 years. Among his many awards and commendations, he has received the Legion of Merit, the Army Achievement Medal, and the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal. Today, he continues to serve his community as an instructor at the Westport High School Junior ROTC program in Ocala.

**Sergeant David Castro**
Sergeant David Castro was born in Cuba and joined the U.S. Marine Corps in 2001. He served in the Marines for 13 years, including serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom, before joining the Florida Army National Guard in 2014. Among his many awards and commendations, he has received the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, and the Iraqi Campaign Medal.

**Sergeant First Class Shawn Penick**
Sergeant First Class Shawn Penick joined the Army in February 1998. During his career he has served in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, and he continues to serve in Ocala where he is currently assigned. Among the many awards and achievements he has received are the Bronze Star, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, and the Iraqi Campaign Medal.

Three Generations of Florida Servicemen

Three generations of Air Force Floridians gathered for a photo in early June.

Dr. Frederick Mickler, age 94, is a lifelong resident of Florida currently living in Advent Christian Village. He served as a B-24 bombardier in World War II. After the war, he was a medical doctor in Jasper, Florida, from 1958 until his retirement in 2002.

Dr. Mickler’s son Jon Mickler is also a lifelong resident of Florida currently living in Tallahassee, and he is an Air Force vet.

Finally, Alex Mickler, Jon’s son, grew up in Florida, and is now living on Malmstrom Air Force Base, adjacent to Great Falls, Montana.

Thanks to all three for your service!

**ABOVE:** Frederick Mickler (center) served as a B-24 Bombardier in World War II. Son Jon (right) served as a Computer Technician in the mid-1980s. Grandson Alex currently serves as a Missile Chef at Malmstrom AFB, Mont.
These days in basketball gyms around the country, Harry Carothers steps behind an arched line 19 feet and 9 inches away from a goal and launches a three-point satellite toward the basket. More times than not, he’s successful.

His days of launching three-point satellites began long before he began competing in Florida Senior Games basketball shooting events in 1999. During a portion of his 28-year Air Force career, leading to retiring as a Colonel in 1993, he flew C-130 aircraft into small spots like a basketball hoop and was a member of teams that launched satellites from Delta II rockets.

His path to becoming a successful Air Force Colonel began during his college years at Lehigh University where all freshmen and sophomores were required to participate in Army or Air Force ROTC. After completing the mandatory two years of the program, Carothers continued in the program for his junior and senior years, and upon graduation, was commissioned into the Air Force as an officer.

“I knew I was going to be drafted by the Army once I finished college,” Carothers said, “so I chose this Air Force program.”

Prior to graduating in 1964, a new Air Force-funded flying program made possible a year of flying lessons for Carothers during his senior year. He showed his athletic prowess early and was one of only six candidates to pass the required Air Force physical exam to qualify for the program. After the lessons and a year of Air Force pilot training, Carothers became a C-130 airlift pilot.

“It was extremely versatile and fun to fly,” he said. “Even though it was a big plane, it was made to land at small airfields, even on dirt runways. It was a very rugged airplane. It had anti-skid brakes which were new at the time but almost all cars have them now. When you flew into a small airfield, you applied full pressure on the brakes and pulled the throttles into full reverse to stop.”

For two years, Carothers was stationed in Taiwan and flew missions into Vietnam to resupply Army and Marine ground troops, oftentimes taking on enemy fire.

“Sometimes we would fly in at 20,000 feet and spiral downward, rollout, and come around into some really small airstrips,” Carothers describes in a calm, non-chalant voice. “It was really fun flying.”

On one such mission, Carothers describes a dramatic story of turning the C-130 plane around for an emergency landing just after taking off over a trap set by enemy troops. As the aircraft was taking off and climbing over the end of the runway, machine gun fire from the ground began filling the bottom of the plane with holes. Carothers and his crew escaped injury because of the lead-lined seats equipped on the plane.

An empty, external fuel tank was hit and exploded. One engine quit operating and its propeller was feathered. With fumes still in the fuel tank, it caught on fire and the fire spread to the wing. Carthers and crew turned the C-130 around and landed at the airfield which was under attack. Once on the ground, the crew and passengers evacuated, and the airplane continued burning on the runway. Once the fire burned itself out, a bulldozer pushed the charred plane off the runway, allowing other flights to come and go.

After his service in Vietnam, Carothers was stationed in Hawaii for five years and flew classified C-130 missions to support satellite space missions related to intelligence gathering.

“It was highly classified stuff,” he said. “It’s not done any longer.”

After 12 years of flying, he became involved in Air Force acquisition management, buying new airplanes from manufacturers like Lockheed-Martin and McDonnell-Douglas for the Air Force. Finally, he moved to Los Angeles where he became involved in Air Force Space Division programs. He became part of a team launching Delta II Rockets with GPS satellites into orbit. Carothers shared responsibility for 15 successful rocket launches at Cape Canaveral and served as media spokesperson for the first launch of a production GPS satellite.

He retired as a Colonel in 1993 and moved from the West Coast to the Tampa Bay area to be close to MacDill Air Force Base and his parents.

During his time in the military, Harry was always conscious of fitness. He spent time at the gym almost every day. Air Force personnel were given an annual fitness test where they were required to run one-and-a-half miles in a certain time, depending on their age. In Carothers’ final test before retirement, he finished the one-and-a-half mile run within the required time for the fastest category of the youngest age group, under 10 minutes 15 seconds.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11
SENIOR GAMES ATHLETE…
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

“I always encouraged others to focus on fitness and spend as much time in the gym as possible,” he said. “If it took time out of their work in the middle of the day, I told them to make up the time missed at the end of the day.”

Now competing in the 75-79 age group in the Florida Senior Games, Carothers plays half-court, 3-on-3 basketball. When not in Florida Senior Games events, Carothers plays full court basketball with “players in their 20s and 30s, three times a week at the YMCA.”

He has been competing in the Florida Senior Games Basketball Shooting competition since 1999 and as a member of the Clearwater Aces 3-on-3 team since 1998. Over the last 19 years, Carothers has collected 56 state championship gold medals. He has won the gold medal in his age group for Timed Field Goal Shooting – where athletes try to hit as many shots as possible in three one-minute periods – for 19 consecutive years.

Carothers, who specializes in the three-point shot, had a Florida Senior Games Time Field Goal Shooting record score in 2005 of 152. The score represented a total of 30 successful three pointers in three one-minute periods.

Given Carothers’ prowess on the basketball court, Florida Senior Games Basketball Sports Director, Richard Blaylock, of Gainesville was unfazed when he found out the extent of his military service.

“It doesn’t surprise me at all that Harry had such an interesting and successful career in the Air Force,” said Blaylock, who has known Carothers for more than 10 years as an athlete. “The discipline it takes to be as successful as he was in the Air Force is a reason why he is still so active and successful in athletic competition. Every year, I make sure to go over any rule changes with him because he knows them better than anyone else playing. If I’m wrong on something, he’ll call me out on it.”

On Saturday, December 8, Carothers will be on the court at the Highland Recreation Center in Largo, launching three-point shots en route to what will certainly be a Florida Senior Games gold-medal winning performance.

For more about the Florida Senior Games, visit floridaseniorgames.com.

BROTHER HONORS CAPTAIN JOE LYONS

Sam Lyons
Bureau of Long-Term Care and Support
Florida Department of Elder Affairs

My brother, Capt. Joe Lyons, is currently a pilot serving in the United States Air Force and is stationed in San Antonio, Texas, at Laughlin AFB. He is transitioning from the 69th Bomb Squadron at Minot AFB to the 87 Flying Training Squadron where he will be an instructor pilot in the T-38 jet. This is the jet trainer that students fly during their second half of the year of pilot training.

Joe graduated from the Brock School of Business at Samford University in the Spring of 2012 and was accepted into the Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training (ENJJPT) Program at Sheppard AFB in Wichita Falls, Texas. He holds an MBA from Texas A&M and a certificate in Nuclear Deterrence from Harvard University.

The past six years of experience in the USAF led him to this assignment, and he was selected to become a B-52H pilot while in the ENJJPT Program. He moved to Shreveport, Louisiana (Barksdale AFB) for a year to learn to fly the BUFF (B-52). A year later, upon finishing the B-52 course he moved to Minot, ND, and joined his first operational squadron, the Fightin’ 69th Bomb Squadron. Over the next four years, he deployed to Guam and Qatar, did short term training in Hawaii, Australia, and Vegas, conducted multiple nuclear exercises with real warheads, and flew missions into all four hemispheres. Here are highlights from those missions:

Northwestern: Canadian air defense penetration exercise where he simulated a hostile bomber approaching from the Arctic Circle.

Southwestern: Counter-narcotics mission in which he did a low pass over drug runners 300 miles out to sea. They threw $42M in cocaine overboard, which was recovered, and Joe and his crew directed the Coast Guard to their position.

Northeastern: Soon after the Chinese declared that the South China Sea was their sovereign airspace, Joe’s unit flew two B-52s in formation overhead to let them know we did not agree with the Republic of China’s position regarding airspace.

Southeastern: He did a formation flyover of the capital of Australia in honor of Vietnam veterans who had died in the battle of Long Tan 50 years prior. Some of the men on the ground who had survived said it was the first time they had heard or seen a B-52 since the battle 50 years ago.

Joe was deployed for nine months in Qatar and participated in Operation Inherent Resolve (US military’s operational name for the military intervention against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIL) and returned in April 2018. He is soon facing a promotion to the rank of major and has an opportunity to pursue a PhD in nuclear deterrence from Harvard University. The Air Force is encouraging and hoping that he takes the opportunity that Harvard has for him.

Joe married Alexis Marjianian on September 15, 2018, in Birmingham, Alabama, and honeymooned in Jamaica for two weeks of much-needed relaxation.

I am very fortunate to have a brother like Joe, and we are all fortunate that we have individuals such as he who protect our skies on a regular basis.

Hopefully FSU or the Jacksonville Jaguars will extend an invitation for him to fly over a game one day!

LEFT: Photo taken at Shepard AFB, May 2012. Pictured left to right: Captain Joe Lyons of the 69th EBS and his brother, DOEA Long-Term Care and Support Analyst Sam Lyons.
DOEA VETERAN RECOGNITIONS

Although the following words never seem enough as you say them to a veteran, they are the most sincere and genuine words we can say to those who have sacrificed so much for us: Thank you for your service. On this Veterans Day, DOEA staff members would like to recognize loved ones, colleagues, and friends who are veterans and thank them for their service and commitment to our wonderful country. Thank you to those courageous men and women who have fought, are fighting, and will fight for our continued freedoms.

Jack Thomas, Jack McGuinn, and William F. Napier
I would like to give a special thank you to my Paw Paw Jack Thomas and Grandpa Jack McGuinn who both served in the Marines during the Korean War. Both were drafted in 1952 and trained at Paris Island, SC. I would also like to thank my great-great-grandfather, William F. Napier, who fought in WWI. They taught me that each military branch is instrumental for implementing self-discipline and respect.

~ Malarie Barineau
Office of Communications

A

Daniel B. Marshall III and Blake Chambers
I would like to recognize my father, Lt. Daniel B. Marshall III, who served in the U.S. Navy. He served in the Pacific Fleet and was sent to Vietnam with nine other photojournalists on a mission to document the Navy’s role in Vietnam for the Chief of Naval Information. He has always modeled for me what “love of Country” means, and I respect him immensely for his service.

~ Thomas Salter
CARES 04A

Deborah Hamilton, Angela Cook, and Ramona Key
The CARES 04A office would like to honor three veterans of the US Navy. These ladies are part of Jacksonville’s rich military tradition, and since transitioning to civilian life, they have continued to serve the community as dedicated public servants.

~ Thomas Salter
CARES 04A

Roy Bassett
I am proud to have Roy Bassett as my father. He served 26 years in the Marine Corps, including a tour in Vietnam when he was 18 years old. He instilled in me a deep love and respect for our country and for the men and women who serve in the military. His example is an inspiration to me.

~ Melissa Vergeson
CARES Bureau Chief

Airman Samuel Singleton and Gerard Singleton
I would like to recognize my father-in-law, Airman Samuel Singleton, who served in the Air Force from 1951-1955. He served as a member of the 1607th Air Terminal Squadron (MATS) and was awarded several medals including the United Nations Service Medal, National Defense Service Medal, and the Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation Medal.

My husband, Gerard Singleton, also served in the Air Force from 1979-1985. He was a member of the 363rd Supply Squadron and the Combat Support Group. He later served in Korea at the Gimhae Air Base. We are all very proud of them.

~ Glorie Singleton
CARES 06A
Arthur Ruel Stevens, Robert W. Cochrane, John Foley, Stephen Foley, and Donald Stevens

My grandfather, Arthur Ruel Stevens, graduated from high school in 1915. In 1916, he participated in the Mexican Border uprising against Pancho Villa. He later served in World War I. My paternal grandfather, Robert W. Cochrane, was in the Navy in World War I.

Arthur Stevens’ grandfather fought in the Civil War. There is a medallion on his grave at Oak Grove Cemetery in Springfield, Mass., that recognizes this.

The Stevens family had four other veterans in the family: Arthur’s great uncles, John Foley, who lost his left arm in WWII in Germany, and Stephen Foley, who served in the Army in WWII, and Arthur’s son Donald Stevens who survived yellow fever in the Marines in WWII. Additionally, Arthur Stevens’ grandfather fought in the Civil War. There is a medallion on his grave at Oak Grove Cemetery in Springfield, MA.

~ Bob Cochrane
Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, East Central

Mike Phillips

I would like to give recognition to Mike Phillips of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP), for his service in the Navy. Mike joined the Navy in 1968 at a very young age and served until 1972. The experience as a young family man gave Mike the opportunity to support his growing family, his dreams, and his future. He traveled the world on a ship for several years and learned that there were many benefits of joining the service. When he left the Navy in 1972, he remained in the Navy Reserve until 1980.

Mike grew up in Pensacola and always wanted to return to the area as a retiree. Well, he found that he was bored with retirement and searched for work. With his great knowledge of the law and his experience as a teacher/philosopher, he found a job that is a perfect fit for him. In April of 2006, he applied with DOE to assist with the LTCOP. This job allows him to use his past experience to better the lives of residents living in nursing homes. Mike is compassionate about his work and is very helpful to many of the staff and volunteers. We appreciate Mike for his dedication, professionalism, and humor that he shares with so many. Mike is the best “Captain,” and all his “mates” think he is a phenomenal person and coach who deserves much recognition, not only for his service in the military, but also as a civilian.

~ Kim Wiedeman
Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, Northwest

Mike Milliken

Michael Milliken is currently serving as the State Ombudsman of the Florida Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP), administratively housed at the Department of Elder Affairs. He served in the United States Coast Guard from 1982-2001 in Jacksonville, FL; Juneau, Alaska; and Cleveland, Ohio. He began his military service in the United States Navy from 1978-1982 and was stationed in Fort Benning in Georgia and Aschaffenburg, Germany.

~ Angelique Witmer
Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program HQ

Tony Wilson

I would like to recognize my coworker, Tony Wilson, who served in the United States Navy and was based in Turks and Caicos. He is the most wonderful person you could ever meet; his smile lights up a room, and he is always there to lend a hand when someone is in need.

~ Vimarie Perez
Planning and Evaluation

105 QM Unit in Juana Diaz

My name is Vimarie Perez, and I served with the 105 QM Unit in Juana Diaz, Puerto Rico (US Army) as a combat medic. I was honorably medically discharged because of an injury I received while overseas.

I had the pleasure and honor of working alongside wonderful females from all over Central and South America. It is true, if given the opportunity, girls will rule the world. I believe women are incredible soldiers, and I am extremely proud of being one.

~ Vimarie Perez
Planning and Evaluation

ABOVE: SGT Rivera-Colon, SPC Cruz, PFC Rodriguez, SGT Cintron Perez, SPC Sanchez, and SGT Rivera-Flores
BELOW: SGT Cintron Perez, SPC Sanchez, SGT Rivera-Flores, SPC Torres, and SGT Rivera Colon

ABOVE: 1956 wedding photo including Stephen Foley (far right).
Vivian Abalon
U.S. Air Force Veteran

Vivian Abalon, age 94, served in the U.S. Air Force from 1944-1946 and continues to serve as an Honor Guard at Lady Lake, Florida, American Legion Post 347. This is the letter she shared with the Elder Update:

I joined the Army Air Force November 20, 1944. Back then you had to be 20 years old with your parents’ consent.

My girlfriend kept after me to join with her, and they separated us and then she was sent to Germany and we lost contact. I, with ten others, was sent to clerk typist school. This was all at Ft. Oglethorpe, Georgia.

After, I was off to the Pentagon on detached services. Fun riding in a shuttle back and forth on the Potomac River from Bolling Field to work. Sent on to Westover Field, Massachusetts, where I answered crash calls of service people coming back injured. Often worked double shifts. Later assigned to Seymour Johnson in North Carolina where everything was off limits, and I was at that field a year. Back then we could only stay in two years.

I went on to Mitchel Field, Long Island, and was scheduled to go to Japan and who knows how long I’d be there with paper work. My brother was home on furlough, and with the way we felt about the Japanese back then, he was determined I shouldn’t go. So, my buddies told me only the chaplain could help, and he made me chaplain’s assistant with long hours taking care of the three chapels on the post.

My discharge was in July 1945 at Fort Dix, New Jersey. I have been with the Legion 42 years and just moved to Sarasota where my daughter lives. Legion 347 is the largest in the world, and I think being smoke free is the reason. I sure miss it. I belonged to the Honor Guards and said a poem by heart about 600 times at the Bushnell National Cemetery.

~ Vivian Abalon
Village of Rio Grande
The Villages, Florida

Unforgettable experience

Village's World War II veteran flown to nation's capital as part of Volusia Honor Air program
MANAGEMENT ANALYST REMEMBERS FATHER

Rick Burnham
Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles

Tom Austin was 12 years old the day two uniformed men knocked on the door of his New York home.

Tom and his mother and brother lived in the Empire State while his father, U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Joseph C. Austin, completed a tour in Southwest Asia. The elder Austin was a West Point graduate and commander of the 34th Tactical Fighter Wing at Korat Air Base, Thailand. He was also a highly decorated fighter pilot, having flown many of the aircraft of the day. Among those: the F-105D Thunderchief, considered to be one of the primary attack aircraft of the Vietnam War because of its ability to deliver large payloads of bombs – as much as the B-17 bomber did in World War II.

For all its accolades, though, the F-105 was not immune to enemy groundfire, and thus the conversation between the two visitors and his mother quickly took on an ominous tone. Is he dead or just missing?

More than 41 years later, Tom Austin, now a Management Analyst with the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles, speaks candidly about that day, about the pain and frustration of never really knowing his father’s fate, and about the man who never came home from the war.

“He was an All-American lacrosse player at West Point,” Tom said. “His name is still in the record books, all these years later, for scoring the most goals in one game – 10. He was later an assistant coach there, and I would go with him to lacrosse practices.”

Joseph Austin also held three master’s degrees – one each from Carnegie Mellon, New York University, and George Washington University.

“He was a student quite a bit.”

On March 19, 1967, Lt. Col. Austin and his aircraft were part of a four-ship bombing mission heading toward a sprawling industrial complex built by China and owned by North Korea. The flight would take them through the Ben Karai Pass, along the mountainous border of Vietnam and Laos. It was there that they encountered anti-aircraft gunfire, and there that Austin’s plane went down. The weather was bad, so the second pilot could not give any details of the crash. The third pilot reported seeing fire, but little else.

No one saw the plane on the ground with the canopy intact.

Just as foreboding, the area where the crash took place was perilously close to the infamous Ho Chi Minh Trail, a road used by enemy troops to move material and personnel. Such a crash would almost certainly have gotten the attention of enemy troops. If Austin did by chance survive, he would have been taken away rather quickly.

Lt. Col. Austin was initially declared missing in action, and with that designation came the hope that when the shooting stopped he would be released from captivity. But he was not part of the initial 591 Americans brought home as part of Operation Homecoming in early 1973. By 1979, his status had been changed to “Killed in Action.”

But they never really knew for sure, only that he was – and still is – one of 1,594 people unaccounted for from the Vietnam War.

Tom initially developed a disillusionment with the U.S. military and the U.S. government.

“I was very distrustful of the government in general,” he said. “I became a member of National League of Families for POW/MIAs in Southeast Asia back in the early ’70s. I was pretty adamant about them not leaving people behind – not just my father but others who were unaccounted for.”

He mentioned the Missing Persons Act of 1942, which essentially states that at some point after armed conflict ends, everyone who is unaccounted for is now considered deceased, and that everyone should just move on.

“They never go back and straighten these things out,” he said.

Some degree of hope of finding his father alive still remained in the ’70s, but that has all but faded away. Nowadays, it is all about closure. But even that seems distant and unlikely, even though the United States and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam have improved relations.

“Vietnam is very restrictive in terms of this kind of effort,” he said. “They say it has to be all joint operations, using Vietnamese aircraft and transportation. They only allow five or six digs in certain provinces each year. You are better off as a tourist than trying to do something as a military unit.”

Tom Austin is left with a handful of mementos, including a list of his father’s medals, and a framed picture of the fighter pilot who went away to war and never came home.
VETS’ HOME CONSTRUCTION BEGINS IN PORT ST. LUCIE

Progress continues on the new 120-bed Ardie R. Copas State Veterans’ Nursing Home in St. Lucie County following the March 20, 2018, groundbreaking ceremony.

“We’re finishing the leveling and drainage of the 28-acre property and are preparing to pour the foundation in anticipation of construction,” said Steve Murray, spokesperson for the Florida Department of Veterans’ Affairs. “We hope to complete the home in late 2019 and open to residents in early 2020.”

The veterans’ home is named in honor of a Medal of Honor recipient from the Vietnam War – Fort Pierce and St. Lucie County native Sgt. Ardie R. Copas, who was killed in Cambodia in May 1970.

The veterans’ home will feature a total of 120 beds in two neighborhoods each consisting of three houses of 20 beds. One neighborhood of 60 beds will be devoted to residents with Alzheimer’s/dementia. Most residences are two-person semi-private rooms, with separate living areas and a shared bathroom. Included in the overall design are six bariatric rooms and six private rooms.

Once opened, approximately 175 health care, food service, maintenance, and administrative staff will oversee the skilled nursing facility. Information on hiring of staff and admission of residents will be released in the months leading to the opening.

The Florida Department of Veterans’ Affairs operates six award-winning veterans’ nursing homes in Daytona Beach, Land O’ Lakes, Pembroke Pines, Panama City, Port Charlotte, and St. Augustine and one veterans’ assisted living facility in Lake City.

Former VA Facility to Be Converted to Veterans’ Home

The former VA Community Living Center on the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Campus at Lake Baldwin in Orange County is being converted to a 114-bed state veterans’ home. The Florida Department of Veterans’ Affairs accepted title of the facility in August 2018 and is preparing a nine-month refurbishment to prepare the facility for residents.

The building, dedicated in 1999, was converted to clinical and office use by the VA approximately six years ago, when a newer community living center was opened at the VA’s new Lake Nona campus.

“No timeline has been set for reopening the Lake Baldwin facility to local area veterans, as inspections, federal and state budgeting, and upcoming renovations must be considered,” said Steve Murray, spokesperson for the Florida Department of Veterans’ Affairs. “The new home will eventually be renamed for an eligible Florida Medal of Honor recipient, as with other facilities in our network of state veterans’ homes.”

Information on hiring of staff and admission of residents will be released in the months leading to the opening.
Senior Residents at East Ridge Retirement Community Share Their Secrets for Successful Travel

Janis Ehlers
The Ehlers Group

Travel may be one of the best gifts you can give to a senior member of the family, or perhaps they are treating themselves. The trip may be to visit other family, or it may be an adventure to a destination, aboard a cruise ship or even a return to a home of long ago.

For Miami’s East Ridge life plan community residents Gary Sisler (84), Fran Plummer (79), and Cynthia Kay (73), traveling is fulfilling their bucket list as they satisfy their wanderlust spirit, each in his/her own way. Age isn’t a deterrent to their travel. They want to see the world and have new experiences, and travel offers the ability to fulfill these dreams.

Ms. Kay, for example, has always wanted to hear someone say, “Hello, mate” and visit the Sydney Opera House. Sisler and Plummer both have a desire to experience the raucousness of a carnival somewhere in the world. Sisler and Plummer typically travel together, while Kay typically travels as a single woman.

Residents of East Ridge have the advantage of the community’s maintenance-free lifestyle and the ability to lock their door without worrying about their residence.

When planning a trip, residents at East Ridge offer up these tips and advice from their own personal experiences for seniors on the go.

RESEARCH THE DESTINATION BY ASKING FRIENDS: When Sisler and Plummer wanted to experience the Carnival season, they researched various counties known for their extravaganzas, and selected Trinidad known for its epic celebration. They asked everyone for recommendations—including their hairdressers. Through a friend, they learned of an apartment that they could rent, and the owner agreed to be their driver/guide for their week-long stay.

NEVER LEAVE HOME WITHOUT THE HOTEL’S ADDRESS AND TELEPHONE NUMBER, WHICH WILL BE REQUIRED AT THE AIRPORT: The couple learned this from experience when they couldn’t remember the name or address where they were staying, hoping the person meeting them at the airport in Port of Spain would handle everything. They couldn’t clear customs without the information.

SPLURGE ON A DRIVER WHO WILL MEET YOU AT THE AIRPORT: Hiring a driver offers the security that someone will escort you to your destination when you arrive.

USE A LARGE TOTE FOR TRAVEL: It’s perfect for the plane and can be used to hold medicine and jewelry, and a smaller soft-sided purse that can be used after you arrive at your destination.

CHOOSE AISLE SEATS IF TRAVELING AS A PAIR: If a plane has three seats in a row, take aisle seats across from each other.

CONSIDER WAITING TO BOOK EXCURSIONS: Despite the extensive tours offered on cruises, Kay found it a better option to meet others on the ship and then find an excursion that suited their interests, without a larger group.

USE A RIDE-SHARING SERVICE: Uber and Lyft are great solutions to renting a car and saving money on parking at a hotel.

STAY INFORMED: Read a daily newspaper wherever you are to learn local news and information. Sisler and Plummer learned of a terrorist threat in Trinidad during their stay, and the daily newspaper was more informative than rumors.

TRY THE LOCAL FOOD: The neighborhood where the couple stayed offered local restaurants, which gave them a sense of the country’s culture. Their host would also make restaurant recommendations.

KNOW YOUR COMFORT LEVEL: If you like the convenience of room service, an Airbnb or bed-and-breakfast isn’t suitable. Kay’s lack of a room service option during bad weather at a New York-based Airbnb convinced her to stay in hotels for future travel.

THINK SMALL: The smaller cruise ships are terrific for seniors since there are fewer passengers. You start seeing your fellow travelers at different activities and locations. For Kay, it was easier to initiate conversations. She found the ship she selected for a four-month world cruise ideal with only 700 passengers.

UNDERSTAND YOUR HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE AND CONSIDER TRAVEL INSURANCE: Especially when travelling out of the county, Medicare may not be accepted in foreign countries, and medical services may need payment in advance.

Sisler and Plummer are planning their next adventure to Long Island in the Bahamas, where he wants to teach her to bonefish; Ms. Kay is heading to Toronto for a wedding of a couple she met on one of her cruises.

They all concur that keeping an open mind, staying safe, and seeking new adventures is their best advice to seniors.
Advocate Celebrates 20 Years of Service to Long-Term Care Residents

Angelique Witmer
Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program
Florida Department of Elder Affairs

With so many great organizations to support, why should people choose to support the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program?

The Ombudsman Program is geared toward helping others, not in a financial way – most people think of helping in a financial way – the way of giving something tangible. It’s the little, simple gestures that make residents know others care about them. The Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program is about caring for people.

Why did you choose to become a long-term care ombudsman?

I went into this program to help the elderly. As a nurse, I saw the elderly’s need for advocates. Young people seemed to have a lot of advocates, but the elderly seemed to be left behind. Many seem not to realize the elderly’s contribution to society.

What do you feel you have learned about long-term care in Florida?

Rules and regulations need to be geared toward caring for people’s concerns and interests.

Over the years, what was most surprising about advocating for long-term care residents?

Some rules and regulations, in my opinion, were not in the best interest of the resident

Is there a moment or memory that stands out for you?

Several moments stand out to me over the years, especially involving situations in which I advocated for residents who were facing discharge, being evicted from their homes.

In one situation, a resident who was unable to walk did not have enough financial resources to pay for long-term care. The resident had no family able to help them. No one at the facility helped the resident apply for Medicaid and the facility prepared to discharge the resident for nonpayment. The resident was not informed about their right to a discharge hearing.

When I became involved, a hearing was scheduled. I was present for the hearing. When the facility said the resident had to go, I asked, “Where? They have no one to help.” I persisted in talking to court representatives and asked the administrator if anything could be worked out with their corporate offices. The administrator agreed to speak with corporate. Corporate determined the resident could not be discharged.

In a similar situation, a resident was facing discharge after experiencing financial exploitation and being unable to pay the bills. After I spoke with the administrator, the facility was able to find a way for the resident to stay.

A more unusual memory involves a resident experiencing conflict with another resident, a roommate. Neither wanted to move out of the room. Another ombudsman and I advocated for both residents, going back and forth, being careful not infringe on either’s privacy or rights to achieve a compromise.

Each case is different, but it warms my heart to know I helped residents be able to stay in their home.

When did you first hear about the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program?

I saw an ad in the paper to help the seniors. When I went in for the interview, the long-term care ombudsman said, “I think you’ll be very good here.”

What inspires you to continue advocating for long-term care residents after all these years?

I saw, and still see, the need for it – the advocacy. I said to myself, “Since we don’t have many advocates in Brevard County, I will continue to do it because the elderly here need someone.” Sometimes when I go, I can be there three or four hours because the residents stop me to talk. I have conversations with them and try to encourage them when I’m there. All the residents enjoy me attending their resident council meetings. I reinforce their rights and let them know we ombudsmen are here for them.

How has advocating for long-term care residents changed your life?

It has helped me grow to be more caring, compassionate, and respectful to others. When you go into a long-term care home and meet so many different people, you must learn how to respect people, their opinions, and their views. I don’t form opinions or judgments about others – I always hear the resident out.

How did you know when advocating for long-term care residents was a good fit for you?

I felt very comfortable in the interview and thought the long-term care ombudsman who trained me had a good approach in dealing with the complex situations we encountered during field training. Being a nurse, I know that observation is always important. I
An air conditioning system had been installed.

A wheelchair user did not have access to tools to create and strengthen councils.

Residents can demonstrate empowerment through the rights and input of residents regarding their care.

“Previously, Florida long-term care residents did not have access to tools to create and strengthen councils. They did not have access to the rights and input of residents regarding their care.

“Governor Rick Scott proclaimed October Residents Rights Month in Florida, and the Department proudly supported the efforts of the Ombudsman Program throughout October – and year-round – as they tirelessly advocate for residents of long-term care facilities,” said Jeffrey Bragg, Secretary for the Florida Department of Elder Affairs. “The creation of this resident council guide is an important step in equipping residents to self-advocate and is another example of how the program is resident-centered and empowering.”

The Resident Council Handbook: A Guide to Building a Long-Term Care Resident Council emphasizes the role of a resident council as a catalyst for improving quality of care and life within long-term care homes. A resident council is composed entirely of long-term care residents and is directed by them. While nursing and administrative staff may assist a council upon request, residents recruit council leadership, control council meetings, and determine council actions based upon consensus among members.

State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Michael Milliken spearheaded yearlong efforts to develop the guide upon recommendation by the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Council, an advisory body composed of long-term care ombudsmen elected by their peers throughout the program’s statewide service areas.

“Previously, Florida long-term care residents did not have access to tools to create and strengthen councils. We hope its use encourages collaborative efforts by long-term care administrators and staff to support the rights and input of residents regarding their care. Through the exercise of their rights, long-term care residents can demonstrate empowerment through self-advocacy,” stated Milliken.

A resident council functions as an instrument of self-advocacy and is the most effective starting point for addressing community-wide concerns regarding daily living within a long-term care home. The Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program shares the goals of resident councils to promote and protect residents’ independence, rights, and dignity. Long-term care residents, their loved ones, and concerned individuals who would like more information regarding developing a strong resident council and receiving a copy of the guide are encouraged to contact the program.

“No one is more qualified to speak about concerns within the long-term care home than residents themselves. Residents share unique challenges and understand long-term care more intimately than anyone else. They are bound together by a common home life. A council provides residents a forum to come together on a common cause and strengthen their community within the home,” Milliken said.

The Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program began distributing handbooks to over 4,000 long-term care homes throughout Florida in October, coinciding with National Long-Term Care Residents’ Rights Month. Residents’ Rights Month, which is celebrated each October to increase awareness of long-term care residents’ rights. This year’s theme is “Speak Up: Know Your Rights and How to Use Them” and emphasizes residents actively engaging as partners in achieving quality care within their homes.

“Residents call long-term care facilities home,” said Milliken. “Every resident should feel they are safe and have input into how they live and are treated. Being aware of their rights increases the ability for residents to exercise self-determination.”

During Residents’ Rights Month, here were celebratory and informational events throughout Florida, driven by local needs and efforts. Those interested in learning more about becoming an advocate may contact the program toll-free at 1-888-831-0404.

The Florida Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, administratively housed at the Florida Department of Elder Affairs, provides free and confidential services to long-term care residents, carried out by close to 300 volunteers, called ombudsmen. Long-term care ombudsmen advocate for residents’ health, safety, welfare, and rights; provide community education and consultations; investigate complaints made by or on behalf of residents; and conduct annual assessments of residents’ quality of care and quality of life. They work to resolve any concerns to the satisfaction of residents. During the last reporting year, staff and volunteer ombudsmen completed over 8,800 assessments and visitations, provided over 15,000 consultations, and investigated over 5,400 complaints.

Below are actual examples of long-term care residents’ exercising their rights leading to improvement in their quality of life.

EXAMPLE 1: A wheelchair user did not have accessible transportation for months, leaving the resident unable to attend doctor appointments. Though the resident was promised transportation on several occasions, time continued to pass with no action taken. After the long-term care ombudsman began advocating on the resident’s behalf, transportation continued to be unavailable. The ombudsman then arranged a meeting with corporate representatives of the long-term care home to advocate for the resident. Within a week, an accessible vehicle was delivered to the home.

EXAMPLE 2: An air conditioning system had been leaking water into a resident’s room for months, even after the resident had made the issue known to management. As time passed, the carpeting and furniture in the resident’s room became wet and damaged from the leak. A long-term care ombudsman noticed the conditions during a routine visit and advocated for the resident’s right to a safe and healthy environment. The leak was soon repaired, and water damaged items were replaced.

EXAMPLE 3: The long-term care ombudsman was contacted by several residents concerned about staff attitudes toward them, their requests for help not being answered, and their personal choices not being respected. Residents were surprised to learn about their right to file complaints, request care plan meetings, voice concerns, choose their own physician, and communicate with the home administrator. After speaking up, the residents expressed satisfaction with participating in their care and discovering their voices did matter.
As part of fraud awareness week, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) would like to share information regarding some of the most common scams that took place in 2017.

Seniors continue to be primary targets for scammers and criminals, and with so many new ways to “get connected,” fraudsters are constantly evolving their methods of coercing victims into providing them information that can be used to commit fraud.

The United States Senate Special Committee on Aging identified the top three scams of 2017 that targeted older adults. The most popular was the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) impersonation scam, where the target received a phone call from an individual who claimed they were from the IRS and were seeking payment of unpaid taxes. Usually the scammer threatens the target with arrest or in some cases deportation. Be cautious; the IRS does not initiate contact with an individual by email, text message, or social media to request personal/financial information. According to the United States Senate Special Committee on Aging: 2018 Fraud Book, in 2017 the total dollar loss was $3.51 million in Florida alone.

Sweepstakes scams were the third most common schemes targeting senior adults. The FTC calculated the percentage of sweepstakes scams rose 44 percent from 2013 to 2016. These scams started with a phone call from area code “876.” When the target answered, scammers informed the target he/she had won a lottery. To claim the winnings, the scammer often requested the targets pay a fee.

To help learn more about fraud prevention and how to avoid scams, the OIG offers the following helpful resources:

- HOME INSTEAD SENIOR CARE NETWORK
- SENIOR FRAUD PROTECTION KIT
caregiverstress.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/1_Seniors_Fraud_Protection_Kit_US.pdf

- UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE ELDER JUSTICE INITIATIVE
justice.gov/elderjustice

- NATIONAL COUNCIL ON AGING
ncoa.org/older-adults-caregivers
Happy Scam Season?

Pamela P. Epting
Interim Commissioner
Florida Office of
Financial Regulation

Like many of you, I plan to enjoy this holiday season surrounded by family and friends. There’s enough to worry about this time of year with travel plans, extra guests, and preparing lots of food! I sincerely hope that scams will be the furthest topic from your mind. However, this special season tends to draw out scammers and thieves who are targeting you.

Here are a few of the biggest scams of 2018. As we end the year, please be vigilant and safeguard your smart devices and personal information.

**Netflix Scam**
This popular video streaming service is the target of an email phishing scam, featuring the subject line “payment declined,” which may get your attention if you’re a subscriber. The email directs you to click on a link to update your credit card information. Don’t click on the link because it can be dangerous malware. Visit your Netflix account by typing the address in yourself to check your account as a safer means of verifying your account status.

**“Can You Hear Me” and “Yes” Calls**
Have you ever answered your phone and the person on the other line asks: “Can you hear me?” and you respond “Yes”? Your voice is being recorded to obtain a voice signature for scammers to authorize fraudulent charges over the phone. You can visit [donotcall.gov](http://donotcall.gov) to register your phone and block unwanted calls. The Better Business Bureau reports they received more than 10,000 complaints in 2018 about the “Can you hear me?” scam.

**Medicare Card Scam**
The federal government is mailing out new Medicare cards that now have an 11-digit identification number instead of an enrollee’s Social Security number to help protect seniors from identity theft. About 59 million people will receive the cards. Because of the update, scammers are calling unsuspecting individuals to trick them into giving them their new 11-digit identification number, so they can steal your identity. Never give out your personal information over the phone. For specific billing questions and questions about your claims, medical records, or expenses, log into [MyMedicare.gov](http://MyMedicare.gov), or call 1-800-MEDICARE.

**Tech Support Fraud**
In 2017 there were 11,000 complaints related to tech support fraud that resulted in claimed losses of nearly $15 million, an 86 percent increase in losses from 2016. These scams have prompted the Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) to warn consumers about criminals claiming to provide customer, security, or technical support as a cover in effort to defraud individuals. The scam can take place through a phishing email, phone call, pop-up ad, or even a locked screen on your device with a phone number to call to fix. Remember that legitimate customer, security, or tech support companies will not initiate unsolicited contact with individuals. If they call you, hang up.

Remember, if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. If you believe you’ve been victimized or to report suspicious activity, call the Florida Office of Financial Regulation (850) 487-9687 or file a complaint online at [flofr.com/sitePages/FileAComplaint.htm](http://flofr.com/sitePages/FileAComplaint.htm).

On behalf of the Florida Office of Financial Regulation, I wish you and your family a safe and happy holiday season filled with everything you enjoy most.

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*Comments

Or subscribe at [elderaffairs.org/doea/elder_update.php](http://elderaffairs.org/doea/elder_update.php)
Older Driver Safety Awareness Week: December 3-7

Helping Keep Floridians Active and Mobile, Even Beyond the Driver’s Seat

Gail M. Holley
Florida Department of Transportation

The Florida Department of Transportation’s Safe Mobility for Life Program and Coalition partners with The American Occupational Therapy Association’s national Older Driver Safety Awareness Week each year to promote the importance of knowing how to drive safely longer, and how to remain active and independent long after transitioning from driving.

Being able to get around easily to maintain an active lifestyle is critically important to your health and well-being. And, now, with more Floridians estimated over the age of 65 than under the age of 18 by the U.S. Census Bureau, it’s more important than ever for older adults to learn the three keys to achieve safe mobility for life.

The three keys are:

• Understand the impact aging has on driving.
• Be proactive about safe driving skills.
• Plan for a safe transition from driving.

The Safe Mobility for Life Coalition can help you accomplish all three keys with materials that will help you stay active, independent, and connected to your community for a lifetime. Here are just some of the materials that are available from our resource center that you can order for free:

• FLORIDA’S GUIDE FOR AGING DRIVERS guide provides resources and information on how to keep safe while driving; information on the impact aging has on driving; self-assessment tests; and tips and tools to help remain independent and mobile beyond the driver’s seat.

• FINDARIDEFLORIDA.ORG TIP CARD learn how to access local transportation options through this on-line resource.

• TRANSPORTATION NETWORK COMPANIES BROCHURE overview and tips on how to use companies like Uber and Lyft as a transportation option.

• PUBLIC TRANSIT BROCHURE tips on how to use transportation options in Florida.

You can also remain proactive about your safe driving skills by signing up to take AARP’s Smart Driver Course or AAA’s Mature Driver Improvement Course. Attending a CarFit safety event is also a great way to learn how to maintain a safe fit within your vehicle.

Florida residents and visitors are invited to join us during Older Driver Safety Awareness Week and learn how to remain safe, mobile, and independent. You can find more information on the classes, events, and activities going on during this week and beyond by visiting SafeMobilityFL.com.

ABOVE: 2017 Older Driver Safety Awareness Week CarFit event in Orlando

Florida’s Guide for Aging Drivers

If you would like a free copy of the Florida’s Guide for Aging Drivers or other materials, please contact The Safe Mobility for Life Resource Center, and they will be mailed to you:

Pepper Institute on Aging and Public Policy
Safe Mobility for Life Resource Center
PO Box 3061121
Tallahassee, FL 32306

Email: safe-mobility-for-life@fsu.edu
Phone: 850-644-8145
Access to information regarding elder services and activities is available through the Elder Helpline Information and Referral service within each Florida county. For the hearing or speech impaired, all Elder Helplines can be accessed through the Florida Relay by simply dialing 711 from anywhere in the state.

Information & Referral
1-800-96-ELDER
(1-800-963-5337)

FLORIDA ELDER HELPLINE DIRECTORY
Please call the telephone number below in your area for information and referrals.

Alachua ................ 800-262-2243  Lee ................ 866-413-5337
Baker .................. 888-242-4464  Leon ................ 866-467-4624
Bay .................... 866-467-4624  Levy ................ 800-262-2243
Bradford ............... 800-262-2243  Liberty ............ 866-467-4624
Brevard ............... 407-514-0019  Madison ........... 866-467-4624
Broward ............... 954-745-9779  Manatee .......... 800-336-2226
Calhoun .............. 866-467-4624  Marion ............ 800-262-2243
Charlotte ........... 866-413-5337  Martin ............ 866-684-5885
Citrus ................ 800-262-2243  Miami-Dade ...... 305-670-4357
Clay .................. 888-242-4464  Monroe .......... 305-670-4357
Collier ............... 866-413-5337  Nassau ........... 888-242-4464
Columbia ........... 800-262-2243  Okaloosa ........ 866-531-8011
DeSoto ............... 866-413-5337  Okeechobee .... 866-684-5885
Dixie ................. 800-262-2243  Orange ........... 407-514-0019
Duval ................ 888-242-4464  Osceola ........... 407-514-0019
Escambia ............ 866-531-8011  Palm Beach ...... 866-684-5885
Flagler ............... 888-242-4464  Pasco ............ 727-217-8111
Franklin ............ 866-467-4624  Pinellas .......... 727-217-8111
Gadsden ............. 866-467-4624  Polk .............. 800-336-2226
Gilchrist ............ 800-262-2243  Putnam .......... 800-262-2243
Glades ............... 866-413-5337  Santa Rosa ...... 866-531-8011
Gulf .................. 866-467-4624  Sarasota ........ 866-413-5337
Hamilton ............ 800-262-2243  Seminole ........ 407-514-0019
Hardee ............... 800-336-2226  St. Johns ........ 888-242-4444
Hendry ............... 866-413-5337  St. Lucie ......... 866-684-5885
Hernando ............ 800-262-2243  Suwannee ........ 800-262-2243
Highlands ........... 800-336-2226  Taylor ............ 866-467-4624
Hillsborough ....... 800-336-2226  Union ............. 800-262-2243
Holmes ............... 866-467-4624  Volusia ........ 888-242-4444
Indian River ....... 866-684-5885  Wakulla ........ 866-467-4624
Jackson ............. 866-467-4624  Walton ........... 866-531-8011
Jefferson ........... 866-467-4624  Washington ... 866-467-4624
Lafayette .......... 800-262-2243
Lake ................ 800-262-2243

Elder Helpline Can Assist Non-English Speakers

By calling the Elder Helpline, Florida’s elders can access information and referral services through a translation service. Telephone interpreters provide live, on-the-line assistance by translating from English into as many as 148 different languages.

Are you worried that an elder relative or friend may be the victim of abuse? You can report known or suspected cases of abuse by calling Florida’s Abuse Hotline at 1-800-96-ABUSE (1-800-962-2873).
Army Veteran Boxer Recalls an Eventful Life

Melissa Olguin
Florida Department of Elder Affairs

When Nikos Spanakos qualified for the 1960 US Olympic Boxing Team, he couldn’t possibly have known he’d be traveling with the future boxing champion of the world.

Spanakos, who was a senior in college at the time, had been boxing on a scholarship in every major city in the U.S. along with his twin brother. His final bout was fought in San Francisco where he and Cassius Clay qualified for the U.S. Olympic Team. Cassius, who would later change his name to Muhammed Ali, won the gold in Rome and went on to become a world-champion boxer.

Spanakos went to graduate school and became a travel journalist. He loved traveling and wanted to continue seeing the world. “It’s lots of fun. You meet a lot of interesting people.” Now, Spanakos can boast of having been to all seven continents, and keeps on going, having recently returned from a trip to Sudan, though he wouldn’t recommend the destination currently.

Spanakos sustained an injury in the neck and the back, cutting his army boxing days to a close. “That last fight took the gloves off me.” Being in the military only aggravated his injuries, and he became a Disabled Army Veteran.

The Spanakos twins had a good run. Though Spanakos’s twin didn’t make the Olympic team back in 1960, he was still a champion boxer, and together they won over 60 amateur championships such as the United States National Boxing Championship, formerly the Amateur Athletic Union or AAU. They were also inducted into six Halls of Fame.

Spanakos and Ali were in different weight classes, so they never sparred, but they ran together in the mornings for training and shared meals. “Eventually, we got to be friends. He was a decent human being.” Spanakos’s twin even wrote to Ali on occasion.

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After the Olympics in Rome, Spanakos wanted to see Greece, as both of his parents were Greek immigrants. He was then invited to a boxing match against the Champion of Greece. During the match, the Grecian crowd was, of course, cheering solely for their native champion. That is until someone stood up from the crowd and shouted, “Spanakos is Greek, too!” Spanakos chuckled at the memory, not expecting anyone to take his side.

His boxing career continued as he joined the Army boxing team, and from 1963-1964 he competed all over the place, eventually earning the title “All-Army Champion.” Unfortunately, Spanakos sustained an injury in the neck and the back, cutting his army boxing days to a close. “That last fight took the gloves off me.” Being in the military only aggravated his injuries, and he became a Disabled Army Veteran.

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Spanakos, now age 80, lives with his wife in Florida. “I love her; I don’t deserve her.” His brother lives in Brooklyn, NY, but they make sure to keep in touch. With a life full of adventures and travels, one might wonder if Spanakos has any regrets. Well, possibly one. Before leaving New York City for the Rome Olympics, Mayor Robert Wagner awarded Spanakos and the other athletes with Keys to the City. Unfortunately, he lost the key. “I’m still kicking myself about that one!”

Nick Spanakos (left) and Edilberto Medina (right) at the Worlds Fair, NY Olympic Trials. Photo courtesy of the Associated Press - [1], Public Domain, commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=61358529

Nick Spanakos (left) and Edilberto Medina (right) at the Worlds Fair, NY Olympic Trials. Photo courtesy of the Associated Press - [1], Public Domain, commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=61358529

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