Chapter Contacts

President: Joanne Hirschlcpinstr@verizon.net434-361-9035
Vice President: Liz Leukrothliz278so@verizon.net434-361-2470
Secretary: Nancy StewardNancy-NARFE@comcast.net434-589-4760
Treasurer: Elise Oydna,434-823-7685
Newsletter Editor: Bob DrakeRobbSdrake@msn.com434-202-2685
Membership: Bob Drake
Legislation: Ed BerkowitzEBerkowitz@sbcglobal.net434-975-9001
Alzheimer’s: Iseca Wittichcelia5633@embarqmail.com434-589-8498
Service Officer: Paula Dansker540-856-2506
Sunshine: Bunny Jones,434-977-7641
Programs: Liz and Rich Leukroth434-361-2470
WebMaster: Bob Drake

Chapter Meetings

Our Chapter meets at:
The Wood Grill Buffet,576 Branchlands Boulevard,Charlottesville, VA (434) 975-5613
On the second Thursday of every month at 10:00 am except for the Months of June, July, & August.

Typical Agenda:
10:00—10:45 Program
10:45—11:15 Business Meeting
11:15—12:00 Lunch

President’s Message

Welcome back to a New Year of NARFE Chapter 135 meetings – 2018. Liz Leukroth has a new lineup of interesting and timely programs. I hope you had a joyful holiday season sharing the best of celebrations with family and friends.

At our October meeting, I stated that our Chapter 135 needed a volunteer to replace me by assuming the President’s role. There was no lack of pleading on my part – nonetheless resulting in no candidates willing to come forward. In November, when I again posed the request, a motion was made that I continue as your President for another year to which I agreed. At the end of one more year, one of our members (nameless at this time) will seriously consider the Presidency. The motion was approved and passed. The wonderful Board members that have been serving over the past many years – listed in the column to the left – will be installed at our upcoming January meeting. I am pleased that we will not face closure, as so many other NARFE chapters have had to do because of lack of leadership and/or board support. Our involvement as NARFE members is critical to our survival and mission to protect us from cuts to our benefits.

The NARFE VFC (Virginia Federation of Chapters) Convention will take place from April 8 - 11, 2018 at the Doubletree Hotel in our own Charlottesville, VA. Anyone is eligible to attend and you are encouraged to do so even if just for one day. We as a chapter have agreed to volunteer at the Doubletree prior to and during the convention with the many administrative tasks. We will pursue this effort at our upcoming meetings to identify those who will be able volunteer.

I look forward to seeing you on January 11th at the Wood Grill Buffet as we begin our new 2018 season!

Joanne Hirschl, President, Chapter 135
National Legislation

TSP Modernization Act of 2017 Passes Congress

The Senate passed the TSP Modernization Act of 2017, H.R. 3031, by unanimous consent and sent the bill to the president for final approval. Passage of this bill grants federal workers and military personnel greater control over their retirement and is an overall win for the federal community.

The legislation allows multiple, partial post-separation withdrawals, which participants can time to their individual needs, and would provide multiple, age-based withdrawals for participants who are still working and are older than age 59-1/2. The TSP Modernization Act also provides greater flexibility by allowing the election of quarterly or annual payments and permits periodic withdrawals that can be changed at any point during the year. Payments could be stopped while leaving the account balance in the TSP. Finally, the bill eliminates the withdrawal election deadline.

The Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board, which oversees the TSP, has two years to issue regulations necessary to implement the expanded withdrawal options. While a window for implementation has been set, an exact timeline has yet to be announced.

Once signed by the president, NARFE encourages the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board to issue the regulations necessary to make these options available as soon as possible.

Make Your Voice Heard in Congress

NARFE members are encouraged to use the NARFE Legislative Action Center to quickly and easily send letters to members of Congress on a variety of NARFE issues, sign up for action alerts and track NARFE-related bills and votes. The website is: http://www.narfe.org/legislation/votervoice.cfm

No Cuts to Federal Pay and Benefits in Joint Budget Resolution

The House passed a fiscal year 2018 joint budget resolution, concurring with the Senate and ending the budget reconciliation tax reform threat to the federal community. The joint budget resolution DOES NOT include cuts to federal pay and benefits.

Passage of this joint budget resolution is a big win for active and retired federal employees. Instructions to cut federal benefits by $32 billion, initially in the House budget, were not included in the final resolution. Instead, the budget resolution would allow the Senate Finance and House Ways and Means Committees to add $1.5 trillion to the deficit over the next 10 years as a means to achieve tax changes.

Lawmakers will now move forward with a highly anticipated tax bill, which NARFE will closely monitor for potential effects on the federal community.

Of note, On Dec 7, Congress approved a two-week stopgap measure on Thursday that will avoid a government shutdown. The measure, which the House and Senate passed in quick succession, would fund the government through Dec. 22. President Trump is expected to sign it...

Federal Health Insurance Cost in 2018

Fedsmith recently published an online article that does an excellent job in analyzing the cost of Federal Health Insurance Costs in 2018. You can read the entire article at:


OPM’s Retirement Backlog

The backlog of outstanding retirement claims at the Office of Personnel Management spiked in October, jumping just over 12% to a total of 18,860.

At the end of September, the backlog stood at 16,828. That was higher than it was a year ago when it was at 16,677 at the end of last October. In fact, the backlog spiked 10% in October 2016, yet it still was 13% lower at that time than it is today.

Historically, in October 2015 the backlog was 12,642, in October 2014 it was 14,137, and in October 2012 it was 37,086.

OPM has defined the “steady state” of the backlog to be 13,000. At that level, the staff will be able to adjudicate 90 percent of all the claims covered by this plan within 60 days.

Given that 13,000 appears to be the agency’s goal, it’s noteworthy that the last time the backlog was at or below that level was at the end of December 2015.

Ed Berkowitz, Legislation Chair
Apollo Reunion and Restoration Project

For years after NASA’s Apollo program the people who worked in the Mission Control Center in Houston have had a barbecue get-together on July 20, the anniversary of Apollo 11. As we retired and/or moved away, the Apollo Flight Operations Association (AFOA) was formed to hold reunions over 3 days in October at 3-5 year intervals. The July 20 events continued as well.

The Mission Operations Control Room (MOCR, the one always seen on TV) was designated a National Historic Site in 1985 by the National Park Service and the Johnson Space Center (JSC) had responsibility for it. At our October 2014 reunion we had a presentation on the MOCR at the formal dinner. We learned that not only had JSC not maintained it, they had sanctioned its deterioration to the point that the NPS had put it on their “threatened” list which meant it could lose its designation and protection. Some leading members of the AFOA were spearheading an effort to get JSC to restore it by the 50th anniversary of Apollo 11 in 2019. In the end, it took a concerted campaign with the help of external pressure by historical and political groups to get the project underway this year. It’s being done under the auspices of Space Center Houston, the non-profit visitor center. They have undertaken to raise $5 million for the restoration and manage the contractor doing the work, Cosmostphere. The city of Webster, Texas pledged $3.5 million (from hotel taxes on tourists) and $400,000 matching funds for a kickstarter campaign. More information is at this site: https://spacecenter.org/support/restore-mission-control/

Last year the AFOA decided to drop the October reunions, expand the one in July, and highlight the MOCR restoration project. The intent is to replicate its Apollo 15 configuration, down to notebooks, console logs, and even ashtrays and coffee cups. So much documentation, as well as hardware, has been lost that everyone who will participate is being interviewed for their memories of the place and their experiences, as well as any photographs and documents they kept. I was interviewed July 20 in the MOCR. As part of drawing attention to the project, AFOA arranged for four panels, on topics relating to Apollo operations, at Space Center Houston, open to the public. I was on a panel on Lunar Surface EVA Operations with two co-workers and Jack Schmitt, the astronaut-geologist on Apollo 17, the last moon landing. In preparation, I went through boxes to find what I had saved and was dismayed to realize how much I had forgotten. Then the AFOA attendees were given a briefing on the 30-day kickstarter campaign including a video explanation by Gene Kranz, the Flight Director well-known for Apollo 13. This was followed by an abbreviated showing of the film “Mission Control: The Unsung Heroes of Apollo” before a social. On July 21 we had the option of touring the MOCR, the International Space Station control room (what a difference!), and another facility. There was a lot more catching up and reminiscing before, during, and after the dinner.

The picture is of Fred Haise, the Apollo 13 lunar module pilot who saw the moon up close but didn’t get to walk on it, and me.

It was a whirlwind two days for me, as well as a hot and humid reminder of why I hadn’t gone in July for decades!

I’m involved in all this because, of my 31 years at NASA, 20 were at JSC, and 14 were in flight operations. I was in the branch that trained the flight controllers in simulations. The Simulation Control Room that they operated in is also being restored. For Apollo 15, 16 and 17 my task was training them for Lunar Rover navigation on the moon’s surface. Due to attrition, I worked on the Planning shift of the Lunar Surface EVA team during Apollo 17. After the geologists decided where they wanted the crew to go on each EVA, I plotted the route on the map and derived the directions for the crew. I worked in nearby rooms but not in the rooms being restored. I was the first and only woman in the division that ran Apollo operations.

by Anne Accola
Total Eclipse of the Sun

Nashville was close to the centerline of totality on August 21 for the total solar eclipse. My birthday was the 19th so I invited my sister and brother-in-law from Buffalo to join me and kill two birds with one stone. After doing everything we could in 2.5 days in Music City, we watched the eclipse from the terrace of our hotel’s rooftop bar. It was amazing to track the progress of the moon using special glasses. But being able to take them off and look right at the sun during totality was over the top. It went from being hot to cool, the sky looked like sunset, and lights came on all over town. This is an excellent picture of it but there’s nothing like experiencing it. The next one in the U.S. will be in April of 2024 and Buffalo is right on the centerline for it. We have plans!

By Anne Accola

Treasurer’s Report

In June of 2015, we had a total of $2,669.68 in our Treasury. It was steadily declining due to the printing of the newsletter. We made a concerted effort to get the membership onto the NARFE email system so we could send out the newsletters electronically.

Presently we have 82% of the membership on email and send out printed newsletters to only twelve Chapter 135 members.

As of January 12, 2017, we had $3,242.36 in the NARFE Chapter 135 Treasury. Our current balance as of December 14, 2017 is $3,595.45.

Elise Oydna, Treasurer

In Memoriam

Chapter 135 expresses condolences to the families and friends of our members passing away this year:

- MARGIE LAREA BENT
- HERB CHRISTOFERSON
- BETTIE N MOHLER
- LAVERE A SHULTZ
- RYLAND C WATTS
- ERNEST P WITTICH

Members Accidentally Dropping NARFE Chapter 135 Membership

This year I have had to contact NARFE HQ to reinstate our chapter members that accidentally opted out of Chapter 135.

When you renew, make sure you scroll down to the “Renew My Membership” and check the box for Chapter 135 Membership, $46.00 shown in RED below.

Renew My NARFE Membership Today!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suffix</th>
<th>First Name</th>
<th>Your Last Name</th>
<th>Your Street Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Virginia</th>
<th>United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 22901    | xxxxxxx@MSN.COM
|          | xxxxxxx@MSN.COM

703-xxx-xxxx

Step 1: Choose Renewal Length

NARFE
Total Dues: $40.00
NARFE and Chapter 0135
Total Dues: $46.00

By Bob Drake, Membership
**Alzheimers Walk**

It was lovely fall morning on October 28 this year when hundreds of us gathered at IX PARK for the C’Ville Walk to End Alzheimer’s. Purple was the predominant color, banners floated in the light breeze, hugs and more hugs as old friends and new friends greeted each other. It was a wonderful uplifting event.

The guest speaker was a beautiful woman who was recently diagnosed with Alzheimer’s. She has given speeches all over the world as a woman’s health advocate—a wonderful speaker. I stood thinking that the saying “anyone with a brain is a target for this dreaded disease!” Needless to say, everyone hung onto her every word.

Research is the key but research takes a lot of resources which is largely covered by your donations. Thank you Chapter 135 for the generous donations to Alzheimer’s. All total, Jovial Joggers raised $3,473 at the event. Way to Go! Thanks to one and all.

My beloved was up in heaven cheering us on!

*Iscella Wittich, Past President*

**Chapter Membership**

Current membership is 167 as of December 13, 2017, with 82% of our members on e-mail. We have lost a few members because of the new NARFE “No Chapter” member option. Please make sure when you renew, that you are renewing your chapter dues as well. I have had to correct many of these over the last few months. Your renewal amount needs to be $46 including the chapter dues and not $40 for the National only option.

Also, let your fellow retirees know they can join NARFE by going to WWW.NARFE.ORG. If you have any questions, call me at 434-202-2685, or e-mail me at: 

**RobiSDrake.msn.com.**

**Please Check Your Medicare Statements**

I have the Federal Employees Health Benefit Program (FEHBP) as well as Medicare. In August 2017 I received a statement from my health insurance company that showed they paid $21.59 on a claim submitted by a physician in Waynesboro, VA. Neither my wife nor I had received medical services from that activity. I went into my Medicare account to look up the claim and it was for $210.00. I called the doctor’s office and inquired about my account and they said they had never seen me for any services. They asked me to call their billing office to see if they had any record of a visit. The billing office had never heard of us.

I sent a letter to Medicare (CMS) and explained the situation. I received a letter back from them that thanked me for bringing this to their attention. They said they protect the integrity of the Medicare system and appreciated concerned citizens bringing these matters to their attention.

It is a good idea to look over your medical billing statement to make sure you received the services showing on your bill. We need to help CMS preserve the integrity of the Medicare system and keep costs down.

**Bob Drake NARFE 135**

---

**To Contact Congress**

Sen Mark R. Warner (D)
202-224-2023
WWW.warner.senate.gov

Sen Tim Kaine (D)
202-224-4024
WWW.kaine.senate.gov

Rep Tom Garrett (R) District 5
202-225-4711
WWW.TomGarrett.house.gov

Rep David Bratt, (R) District 7
202-225-2815
WWW.brat.house.gov

---

**Inclement Weather Policy**

If Charlottesville Schools are closed or delayed due to inclement weather, our chapter meeting is cancelled.
Next meeting is on  
Jan 11 at 10:00 am  
Wood Grill Buffet  
576 Branchlands Boulevard, Charlottesville, VA

Jan—March 2018 Programs

January 11, 2018: Dr. George Bloom, Professor of Biology, Cell Biology and Neuroscience, UVA, will speak about Alzheimer’s Disease.

February 8, 2018: Cassandra Riggin, UVA Credit Union, will speak about the Data Breach and precautions you can take to protect yourself

March 8, 2018: John Hanny, US chef, author and political operative, will speak. He is best known for working as a chef at the White House during the presidencies of JFK and LBJ and as a visiting chef for Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton presidencies.

Liz Leukroth, Program Chair

If you are receiving the paper version of the newsletter, PLEASE send us your e-mail address to save postage!!