

DECEMBER 2023 | ATLANTA COMMISSIONED OFFICERS ASSOCIATION



First and foremost...

You guys rock! Thank you for making the Atlanta Commissioned Officers Association great! We couldn't do the things that we do without your interest and enthusiasm.

The Signal is here to raise up the voices of our members and the community. We want to hear from you.

If you have a specific topic that you would like to research, a passion that you would like to highlight, and etc. reach out to ACOACommunications@gmail.com

Inspiration Corner

"Find out who you are and do it on purpose." — Dolly Parton



Communications Leads:

LCDR Michtta Jean-Louis
LT Charles Edge

Editors:

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LT Arlene Page

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In Officio Salutis

President's Corner

Atlanta officers,

I am humbled to lead ACOA this year as its president. In stepping into this role, I have reflected on the mission of ACOA: to advance the US Public Health Service (PHS) Commissioned Corps by uniting and serving Atlanta-based commissioned officers and advocating for their interests through leadership and communication and to encourage and foster proper and helpful relationships between commissioned officers, their respective professions, other public health workers, and the community.

There is a lot packed into that mission statement, but for me, at the heart of what I value most as an officer is the camaraderie and the relationships that I've built over the years with other officers in Atlanta and across the nation.

I hope as president to focus on what it means to enjoy being an officer. In the past year, ACOA reinstated ACOA traditions and brought back opportunities for officers to connect. I very much hope to follow in CDR Rachael Cook's footsteps in ensuring that we have opportunities to foster relationships with fellow officers and to have fun - in addition to all the wonderful things Atlanta officers do to support the health of the nation.

Thank you to our members who were able to complete the membership survey this year. We will incorporate your preferences and suggestions into the events and activities we plan in the upcoming year to support connection and esprit de corps. Based on membership preferences, the ACOA executive committee plans to host the Anchor and Caduceus dinner every other year starting in 2025.



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President's Corner

I am looking forward to meeting many more of you over the next year! How you can connect:

- Visit <https://atlantacoa.com>
- Contact ACOA Secretary LT Jamiko Cooper at atlantacoa@gmail.com if you are not receiving listserv emails
- Connect with us on [Facebook](#)
- Reach out to atlantacoa@gmail.com at any time - we want to hear from you!

Respectfully,
CDR Marie Johnston



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ACOA Executive Committee

2023-2024

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AtlantaCOA@gmail.com

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Communications Committee

The Signal is back! The ACOA Communications Committee, LCDR Michtta Jean-Louis and LT Charles Edge, is revitalizing and relaunching ACOA's signature publication. The Communications Committee is committed to providing articles of interest to officers, highlighting ACOA activities and membership spotlights, and we want to hear from you!

Send in articles for ACOA activities, photos, and even story ideas to ACOACommunications@gmail.com.

All articles must be authored by ACOA members, and any officers highlighted by name must also be current ACOA members. If you're not already a member of ACOA, this is a great opportunity to sign-up now!

The Communications Committee and its team of editors and writers also submits select articles from The Signal to the monthly national COA publication, The Frontline. ACOA members interested in writing an article for The Frontline should reach out to ACOACommunications@gmail.com.

In addition to publishing The Signal on a quarterly basis and submitting articles to The Frontline, the Communications Committee also maintains the ACOA website throughout the year. Be sure to visit the site to learn more about upcoming events, opportunities to volunteer and participate in ACOA activities, and purchase USPHS merchandise from the ACOA Pride Store or donate lightly used uniform components to the ACOA uniform store.

Uniform Store Committee

Did you know ACOA has a Uniform Store? Did you know the ACOA Uniform Store offers used uniforms at 50% off of Navy NEX prices? If you're in need of new or gently worn uniform components, visit one of our pop-up events to get the uniform items you need at discounted prices. ACOA hosts quarterly pop-ups for officers to shop our inventory.

Retired? Promoted? If you have uniform and/or rank devices that you no longer wear or need, the ACOA Uniform Store accepts donations! Donations must be within regulation and in serviceable condition. You can also exchange your donation for the same item(s) in other sizes/ranks in the inventory.

Contact Us:

Women's Uniform Store - ACOAWomensUniforms@gmail.com

Men's Uniform Store - ACOAMensUniforms@gmail.com

Events Planning Committee

The Events Planning Committee manages the process of official ACOA in-person events from inception to implementation. This committee is co-chaired by two Members-at-Large.

The Events Planning Committee is responsible for the following logistics:

- Timeline
- Location
- Managing budget
- Catering of the event
- Speakers (if applicable)
- Invitations/Announcements for event
- Volunteers
- IT Service Requests
- Rehearsal

If you would like to get involved, contact LT Alexis Roberts and LT Leigh-Ellyn Preston at ACOAEventsPlanning@gmail.com.

Professional Development Committee

The Professional Development (PD) Committee provides guidance to officers on proper uniform wear, personal grooming standards, career development, officer evaluation, promotion, professional training and education, leadership development and mentoring, understanding USPHS policies, and other relevant topics.

Thus far, the PD committee has planned the following events for 2023-2024:

- Officer Portrait Sessions
- Clinical Practice Hours Lunch & Learn
- Lunch & Learn with the Producer of the USPHS Documentary
- Proper Uniform Wear Lunch & Learn

The PD committee hopes to engage as many Atlanta-area officers as possible with these and other professional development events.

For more information, please reach out to acoaprofessionaldevelopment@gmail.com to get involved.

Membership Committee

The goal of the Membership Committee is to increase and maintain active membership for Atlanta PHS Officers in the Atlanta Commissioned Officers Association (ACOA). This can be achieved through highly visible events, membership recruitment drives, reinstatement of inactive members, and member recruitment through word of mouth. In addition to Commissioned Officers Association (COA) dues, local annual dues are required to maintain an active membership with ACOA. From the list of active members that is maintained by the committee, members will be contacted with reminders to renew their membership commitment, at least two months before it expires. This will give officers a chance for renewal before their membership lapses. The committee will follow up with friendly, bi-weekly reminders if the dues are not received so that officers don't inadvertently forget to maintain their membership.

The Membership Committee is also responsible for planning various events throughout the year to educate, engage and involve officers. We are responsible for maintaining a log of participants for the events that the ACOA conducts. In addition, we are responsible for sending out the annual thank you letters to ACOA committee members after verifying via the event logs that document the members' involvement. For more information, please contact ACOAMembership@gmail.com.

Community Service Committee

Did you know that helping others is one way to increase the “happy” hormones in your body? Being active with your local COA chapter and helping your community in the process is a great way to release these hormones. Not only will you have the opportunity to make a difference within your community but you also have the opportunity to do something fun and exciting!

Are you looking to get involved in your local community? Would you like fellowship with other PHS officers? Well, look no further! ACOA’s Community Service Committee provides regularly scheduled community service activities.

Past events include:

- Volunteering with Trees Atlanta
- Winter social at the USO lounge in Hartsfield Jackson
- Cooking and serving meals at St. Francis Table

For more information, contact LT Sergio Rodriguez and LT Koffi Amegadje at ACOACommunityService@gmail.com

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Inclusivity + Innovation = Positive Health Outcomes for Officers

by: LT Sophia Ajoku, LT Ayayi Ayite, LCDR Ramsey Terrin and LT Koffi Amegadje

Soccer exercises all parts of the body by improving heart health, regulating blood pressure, positively impacting mental health, and building camaraderie. All of these are goals of the USPHS Soccer Social, created by LT Koffi Amegade, LT Sophia Ajoku, LT Ayayi Ayite, and LCDR Ramsey Terrin. Officers have space to come together for physical fitness, social engagement, and befriending other officers.

As one of the first post pandemic activities, the first soccer game was held on Saturday, July 29, 2023 at the Terrell Mill Park in Marietta, GA with 9 officers and 12 family and friends in attendance. The success of this event continued with monthly arrangements for additional soccer socials.

To continue improving the soccer social events, on September 30th, 2023, LT Ajoku presented a breast cancer awareness session following the game. This session brought light and shock as she presented breast cancer affects both men and women.

We are truly pleased about the outcome of this event and are looking forward to seeing more officers at the upcoming soccer socials!

Officers have shared their positive impact of attending the event. Below are some significant statements:

“After 14 years, the USPHS Soccer Social Event gave me the opportunity to play soccer again and to overcome the doubt that I had on my ability to play soccer again. After participating in several soccer social events, I’m now confident that I can play all 90 minutes running in the field. It is a good wellness feeling and thanks to USPHS Soccer Social Event”. – LT Ayayi Ayite

“It has been great to resume playing the sport that I love and to have another opportunity for exercise. Playing soccer in the Atlanta summer heat is a different experience though. The heat of the turf field during the August game even caused the soles of my cleats to fall off, so the games here involve frequent water and cooling breaks (and occasional shoe changes)”. – LCDR Kyle Moller

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Inclusivity + Innovation = Positive Health Outcomes for Officers (cont.)

by: LT Sophia Ajoku, LT Ayayi Ayite, LCDR Ramsey Terrin and LT Koffi Amegadje



left to right: LCDR Ramsey Terrin (Nurse), LT Ayayi Ayite (HSO), LT Sophia Ajoku (Scientist)
floor center: LT Koffi Amegade (Pharmacist)

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DECEMBER 2023 | ATLANTA COMMISSIONED OFFICERS ASSOCIATION

Professional Development Committee: Recent Successes

by: LT Cashmere Miller, Past Professional Development (PD) Committee Chair

Edited by: CDR Rachael Cook, Past ACOA President

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, ACOA's ability to host in-person events was severely limited by concerns for officers and our community's safety. However, now that we're back to (relatively) normal, the Professional Development (PD) Committee is excited to offer ACOA members new opportunities. The PD Committee was thrilled to kick off 2023 with several events to enhance the growth and professional experience of Atlanta-area Officers.

In January, officers had the opportunity to take a professional portrait in their PHS uniforms at CDC's Portrait Studio. Professional photos give officers the ability to showcase their professionalism, particularly when it comes to submitting job applications and networking. Making a good impression and appearing professional are important for both in-person and online interactions. We were happy to have forty-five officers participate in the winter portrait session and we are hoping to offer another portrait session to Atlanta-area officers this fall after promotions are announced.

The ACOA PD Committee hosted a lunch and learn on opportunities for clinical practice hours and the related policies. This event was an opportunity for officers to gather in person and virtually to learn more about the USPHS requirements to maintain their clinical expertise and ensure that licensed health professionals have the competency and skills to perform well within their job and engage in clinical practice during a public health emergency. CAPT Nicholas Gaffga shared information about how to obtain clinical practice hours with the CDC's Occupational Health Clinic and LT Cashmere Miller provided an overview of the USPHS Clinical Practice Hours Policy and shared information about opportunities to obtain clinical hours within the Atlanta VA Medical Center. Officers had an opportunity to ask questions and engage in-person and online with 38 attendees.

In April, ACOA's PD Committee hosted another in-person and virtual lunch and learn about the USPHS documentary. This exciting event had 64 attendees. We heard from COA Executive Director, Jacqueline Rychnovsky, and learned about the latest initiatives National COA is making to afford Officers access to various benefits. Chris Schueler then gave us a sneak peek at what the production of the USPHS Documentary was like and whom he interviewed. Mr. Schueler also provided great insights about how the documentary, and smaller segments of it, can be shared with legislators and local community members. We are looking forward to viewing the documentary soon and hope to offer Atlanta-area officers an opportunity to attend a showing in-person later this year!

In case you missed it, here's a link to the recording: [ACOA April 11th Lunch and Learn](#).

Passcode to Access Recording: 7f?e@.8i

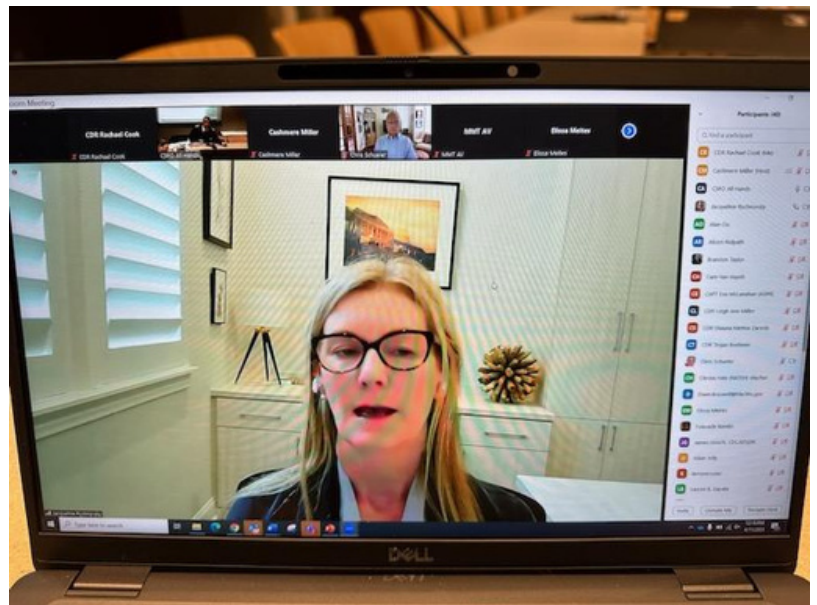
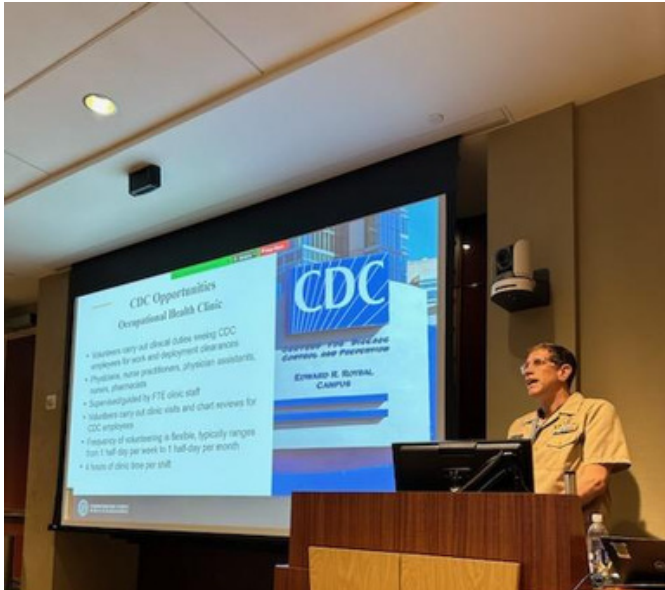
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Professional Development Committee: Recent Successes

by: LT Cashmere Miller, Past Professional Development (PD) Committee Chair

Edited by: CDR Rachael Cook, Past ACOA President

If you have any suggestions for activities or resources we can offer our members, please reach out at acoaprofessionaldevelopment@gmail.com.



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Atlanta-Area Officers Promote Public Health in Gwinnett County as School Gets Back in Session

by: LT Charles Edge

On Saturday, July 15, 2023, the Atlanta Commissioned Officers Association participated in a Prevention through Active Community Engagement (PACE) event in conjunction with Gwinnett-Newton-Rockdale (GNR) Public Health and the Lawrenceville-Duluth Alumni Chapter (LDAC) of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. Created in 2013, PACE is a chartered advisory group of the Office of the Surgeon General which leverages the expertise of Commissioned Corps officers to provide education about the benefits of prevention in their local communities.

Approximately 1500 children, adolescents, and adults attended this back-to-school event, which is one of the largest in the Atlanta metro area. Thirteen USPHS officers participated in the event, promoting the Commissioned Corps and providing public health materials and handwashing demonstrations to those in attendance. PACE-approved presentation topics included proper handwashing, healthy eating habits, proper dental care, safety in the sun, and mental health. GNR Public Health provided resources on similar topics and contact information for residents seeking care and assistance. They also provided giveaways for those who attended our tent.

The event was successful with outreach to community members in Gwinnett County and surrounding areas. Members of LDAC and others in attendance expressed their gratitude for ACOA's participation and welcomed us back for next year.



left to right: LT Cashmere Miller, LCDR Kathleen Tisdale, LCDR Esra Touissant-Barrett teaching children the importance of proper handwashing



left to right: LT Charles Edge, CDR Candis Hunter, LT Nicole Arguedas, CDR Danielle Mills, LCDR Marisa Hast, LT Dana Thompson

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Take Advantage of Military Discounts While Exploring Atlanta's Art Scene

by: CAPT David Hunter

Did you know that the High Museum of Atlanta offers free admission to active duty personnel, including USPHS Commissioned Corps Officers? Not only do all active duty and veteran military personnel receive free admission during regular admission hours you may also bring one additional guest and can take advantage of free parking in the Woodruff Arts Center deck with proof of service. Check out the [special offers page](#) for additional details.

The [High Museum of Art](#) is one of Atlanta's cultural gems and offers extensive permanent collections and exciting temporary exhibits and special collections that rotate throughout the year. There are all kinds of additional activities, such as Toddler Thursdays which includes creative activities geared for kids 15 months to 3 years.

While not all events are covered by the special offering for active duty and military personnel, the High offers numerous other special events, such as Oasis, a relaxing evening of yoga and art in an embracing community way on the second Friday of the month, and jazz night on the 3rd Friday of the month.

Be sure to take advantage of this generous admission offer (made possible courtesy of the Home Depot Foundation) and/or visit the High's other special events. In either case, you do not want to miss out on experiencing the wealth of art and culture that the High has to offer.

Contact info:

CAPT David Hunter, MPH, MSW
Exu5@cdc.gov
404-639-7021

USPHS ACOA Provides 6,353 Meals for Families

by: LCDR Arin Williams

Food insecurity impacts individuals and families across the United States. Food insecurity refers to USDA's measure of lack of access, at times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members. These households may also have a limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods. According to a recent report, 1 in 9 people in Georgia are food insecure. In Georgia hunger is widespread and impacts some of our most vulnerable populations at alarming rates. Thirteen percent of children and 8% of seniors are considered food insecure. As the holiday season approaches, efforts across the country hope for more volunteers and donations to continue to help feed families in need. USPHS Officers are taking action to assist in this effort. Helping and serving communities in need is not only the mission of the USPHS, but part of who we are as officers.

On Saturday, September 23rd, seven USPHS Officers from CDC, BOP, and FDA volunteered at the Atlanta Community Food Bank-Hunger Action Center. Collectively, USPHS Officers CAPT Darrlyn Cornelius-Averhart, LCDR Arin Williams, LCDR Jeffrey Walker, CDR James Dixon, CDR Johanna Gilstrap, LT Arlene Page, and LT Alexis Roberts, and civilian Mr. Haines, rolled up their sleeves and helped sort through food and other goods to help alleviate hunger in the metro Atlanta community. Many of the goods that officers sorted were donations received by the Atlanta Community Food Bank from grocery stores, and drug store retailers including Publix, Walmart, Kroger, and CVS.

The officers spent the morning checking food expiration dates, sorting goods, and using pallet jack to bring goods into the warehouse for sorting. Officers worked alongside several other volunteers, many of whom were teenagers from a local church. Officers immediately stepped into mentorship roles helping the teens sort the goods according to guidelines. The 7,624 lbs. of goods handled by the volunteer team equates to 6,353 meals provided to metro Atlanta families. The collaborative effort of ACOA and Atlanta Community Food Bank-Hunger Action Center serves as both an example and reminder of USPHS promoting the spirit of engagement, connectedness, and community dedication among USPHS officers.

Reference:

Gunderson, C., Strayer, M., Dewey, A., Hake, M., & Engelhard, E (2023). Map the Meal Gap 2023: An Analysis of County and Congressional District Food Insecurity and County Food Cost in the United States in 2021. Feeding America.

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USPHS ACOA Provides 6,353 Meals for Families (cont.)

by: LCDR Arin Williams



Officers displaying their hard work. left to right: LCDR Jeffrey Walker, LCDR Arin Williams, CDR James Dixon, CDR Johanna Gilstrap, LT Arlene Page, & LT Alexis Roberts



Officers CDR James Dixon & LT Alexis Roberts receiving instruction on how to inspect and sort



Officer LT Alexis Roberts working hard to sort through goods that will be distributed to communities in need

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Upcoming Events



ACO A
ATLANTA COMMISSIONED
OFFICERS ASSOCIATION

2024 Winter Social

All PHS officers and family are invited! Appetizers and 2 hours of golf will be provided by ACOA. Food and beverages will be available for purchase.

Where: Topgolf Atlanta – Midtown
1600 Ellsworth Industrial BLVD NW, Atlanta, GA
When: Sunday, February 25, 2024, from 1:00 to 3:00 pm

Points of Contact:

Please RSVP to [here](#) by Sunday, Feb 11 so we can plan accordingly.

Please send membership-related questions to acoamembership@gmail.com.

We hope to see you there!



Atlanta Commissioned Officers Association | AtlantaCOA.com | AtlantaCOA@gmail.com

Please RSVP [Here](#)

VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR MORE INFORMATION

<https://atlantacoa.com/events-%26-announcements-1>

Call for Articles

The Signal and FRONTLINE Publication Guidelines for COA Members

CRITERIA:

Frontline is a publication for and about COA members and COF donors. It is National COA policy that all officers mentioned in articles, authors of articles and “photo courtesy of “ individuals must be current COA members or COF donors; it is imperative that this be confirmed prior to submitting an article to COA; requests for exceptions to this policy should be addressed to COA/F’s Executive Director.

FORMAT:

- Submit as an email attachment
- Word format using Calibri, font size 10 (no exceptions)
- Title of article: Century Gothic, font size 14, italic and bold
- Body of article: Calibri, 10 point font
- Review articles for spelling, grammar, sentence flow and variety, truth in numbers, and etc.
- Limit articles to 1,000 words or less
- Include your rank, name, and credentials (if you have them)
- Email or preferred contact information
- Clearance approval by OP/DIVI (if applicable)

Each submitter will receive an email confirming receipt of the article; this is not an acceptance of your article.

PHOTOS:

Submission of photos is encouraged; action photos are preferred. All photos accompanying submissions must be in jpeg file format and attached to the same email submission (*please do not embed photo in word document*); provide a suggested caption, if a caption is desired. Caption sizes should be limited and are subject to editing by COA.

Send all article submissions to ACOACommunications@gmail.com