



South Alabama Veterans Council

A Coalition of Veterans, Friends, and Organizations working Together to Further the Cause of Veterans in the South Alabama Area



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Treasurer
251-649-8459

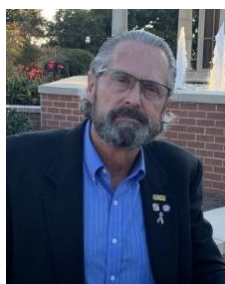
Lloyd Michael Austin
Chaplain
251-391-8176

Pete Riehm
Liaison Officer / MC
251-442-4349



The South Alabama Veterans Council was established in 1998 by Col Glenn Frazier and other Veterans in the Mobile Area. The first meeting was held in the Denton-Drake American Legion Post 88. Welcome Back.

Denton-Drake American Legion Post 88



Merry Christmas and Happy

Holidays to our Friends and Fellow Veterans! I hope all of you had a wonderful Thanksgiving with your families this past November...no doubt plenty of good food and drink were consumed while watching your favorite football teams play! Although we are not meeting in December, I want to take a moment to thank all of you who support our council and the veterans of our community! Each of you, whether a Veterans Service Organization (VSO) or one of our many healthcare providers, plays an important role in supporting our veteran causes, and it is an honor to serve alongside you! Veterans Day this year was a huge success despite the government shutdown, and the weather was absolutely perfect throughout the day...I am already looking forward to next year!

Our January meeting will be held at the Waterfront Restaurant in Daphne, Alabama...it is located at the site of the former Lake Forest Yacht Club. We hope we have a huge turnout...a pancake breakfast is planned, so come hungry! Our guest speaker will be Lieutenant Colonel (Ret) Chevelle Thomas, the Director of Army Instruction for the Mobile County Public Schools System where she oversees both the JROTC and LOTC programs. A graduate of Blount High School and a veteran of multiple tours overseas, she continues to do great things on behalf of our future leaders! She plans to give us an update on new initiatives for both programs.

I also want to take a moment to thank you for the support we received for the funeral of my father-in-law, former US Air Force Captain James L. Ellis, Jr. He passed away on 12 November

2025, after a brief illness. SAVC Chaplain Lloyd Austin conducted the service, the Patriot Guard escorted the funeral procession to Pine Crest Memorial Cemetery, and the P. L. Wilson Detachment #447 of the Marine Corps League conducted the honor detail. The Air Force provided a team to fold the flag and render Taps...my wife, Cheryl, and her brother, Charles, were deeply touched by the service and expressed their appreciation for making the celebration of life ceremony so special. The bond of the veteran community cannot be broken...thank you all for making this a memorable occasion!

Robert "Frank" Barrow
LTC (US Army Retired)
President, South Alabama Veterans Council



GREETINGS! Merry Christmas!

It's a Child is born, a Son is given
Read Isaiah 9:6

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."

God has given us the greatest gift of all time, his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Why would he do it? Because He loves us so much. God so loved the world that He gave his only SON to us as a sacrificial gift that keeps on giving us everything we need to succeed. His Name is JESUS, and He is: The Governor, Wonderful Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. So this Christmas, give God the gift of yourself, and make Him smile.

In the Name of JESUS!
Pastor Lloyd Michael Austin,
Chaplain SAVC



SAVE THE DATE

There will be NO SAVC meeting in December

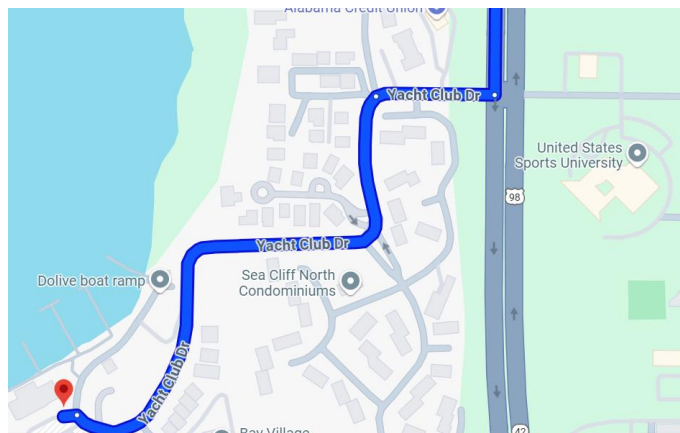
January 20, 2026 Meeting

The Waterfront Restaurant

1 Yacht Dr., Daphne, AL

Breakfast 9:00 am

Across the street from United States Sports University



GUEST SPEAKER

LTC Chevelle Thomas

ALCITE JROTC Section President and Director of
Army Instruction for
Mobile County Public School System



LTC Chevelle Thomas will talk about the JROTC/LOTC Program in the Mobile County Public School System

LTC Thomas is an experienced military professional and educator with over 28 years of leadership in the U.S. Army and education. She currently serves as the ALCITE JROTC Section President and Director of Army Instruction for Mobile County Public School System, where she has direct oversight of 12 JROTC high school Army and Navy JROTC programs and 15 LOTC middle school programs. Before moving to the district level, she was the Senior Army Instructor for Murphy High School in Mobile, Alabama, where, under her leadership, the program earned Honor Unit with Distinction for five consecutive years.

A dedicated advocate for education and youth development, Chevelle has mentored hundreds of students, helping them secure ROTC and academic scholarships while fostering leadership, discipline, and civic responsibility. Her military career includes key roles in strategic communications, media relations, and crisis management, notably as the Director of Communications and Public Affairs at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, where she led media initiatives for the Army-Navy game, achieving a 23-year high Nielsen rating. She also served as the Division Public Affairs Officer for the 101st Airborne Division, Air Assault, while deployed to Iraq in 2016; media chief for the Presidential Inauguration Committee in 2012; and Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs Officer for the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division in Afghanistan in 2008.

Chevelle earned a Master of Science in Administration from Central Michigan University and a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science from Xavier University of Louisiana. She is also a certified Army JROTC Instructor and has completed extensive professional development in leadership, education, and public affairs. She has received numerous honors over the years, including the Golden Apple Teacher Award and the Ancient Order of Saint Gabriel Medal for Public Affairs, recognizing her outstanding contributions to education and service. She is also a two-time Bronze Star recipient for her deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq in support of the Global War on Terrorism.



**Veterans Day Parade
MCPSS JROTC Honor Guard**



South Alabama Veterans Council VETERANS SPOTLIGHT

Cathy De La Garza, President, Uniti Fiber



**Cathy De La Garza,
President Uniti Fiber**

Uniti Fiber is a premier insurgent fiber provider dedicated to enabling mission-critical connectivity across the United States. With a steadfast commitment to customer service, operational excellence, and superior network capabilities, Uniti builds, operates, and delivers critical fiber-based communications services to connect and empower people and businesses.

Before she began her career with Uniti Fiber, she was a United States Air Force F-15C Fighter Pilot. One of the first women to fly a fighter aircraft in the U.S. Air Force.

Cathleen “Cathy” De La Garza’s journey is one of remarkable determination, breaking boundaries, and courageously embracing opportunities. From her early dream of becoming a fighter pilot to her current role as Chief Development Officer at Uniti Fiber, her story is an inspiring testament to the power of resilience and the pursuit of one’s passions.



As a commissioned officer in the United States Air Force, De La Garza was among the first female combat pilots in the US military, serving as an F-15C fighter pilot for twelve years. Her tours of duty included Operation Southern Watch and Operation Noble Eagle in the Middle East and stateside. De La Garza joined the team at Southern Light after leaving the service in 2005. Breaking barriers on land and in the skies! Cathy De La Garza, President of Uniti Fiber and former F-15C pilot, is

honored as one of Alabama’s Top Women in Tech for 2025.

Before her current role, De La Garza held several positions at Uniti, including chief development officer, where she managed strategic growth initiatives, SVP of order management, service delivery, and product. She was responsible for customer experience and revenue enablement teams.

A native of Austin, Texas, De La Garza earned a bachelor’s degree in government from the University of Texas at Austin and a master’s degree in organizational management from George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

Active in her community, De La Garza currently serves as a member of the Board of Directors for the Women’s Foundation of Alabama, as a Regional Council member for Leadership Alabama, and a member of the Lower Alabama Bayhawks Lacrosse organization. Cathy participates in various veterans’ organizations throughout South Alabama, including serving as an executive sponsor for Uniti’s diversity and inclusion group for Veterans and First Responders, Proud to Serve. She is a member of St. John Catholic Church (Bromley, AL), serving on the finance committee and as a religious education leader.

Business Alabama named her one of the 25 Top Women in Technology for 2025.

She describes herself as “determined” and says her secret to success is “Moving forward, even in the face of failure.” She gets daily inspiration from her children, seeing how they learn and become resourceful, kind, and mature young men. She hopes to inspire young women in all walks of life by sharing her story of work/life balance. De La Garza says her long-term professional goal is to “Leave every organization better than I found it.”



Uniti Fiber “Proud 2 Serve” at Historic Oaklawn Memorial Cemetery

www.facebook.com/UnitiGroupInc/videos/575365761594638

SAVC November meeting – Chaplain Lloyd Michael Austin delivered a presentation on drug overdoses and the use of Narcan. Troy Carico, the founder of Veteran Nation, was the guest speaker. QOV Mobile presented a quilt to Col. John Kilpatrick, and SAVC awarded a grant to QOV-Mobile. Sue Lee from the Azalea City Quilters Guild crafted the quilt given to John Kilpatrick.




This is Warrior Legacy Ranch

It is not funded by the VA; it is supported solely by grants and donations from caring individuals and organizations. Patrick Jump has dedicated his life and soul to this project along with brothers and sisters he served with during the GWOT. Its location is ideal for those seeking to escape everyday worries and reconnect with military friends and family. Suicide affects all of us. This facility is WLR's way of offering support and healing.

The groundbreaking Monday was a major event, as Patrick said, "Twenty chairs are not going to be enough!" People kept pouring in, making it a significant day for WLR.



- **Mission:** To help veterans reconnect and heal by reuniting them with their brothers and sisters from their time in service.
- **Inspiration:** Founded by two Marine veterans who realized the healing power of their own virtual and in-person reunions during the pandemic.
- **Activities:** The ranch will provide a setting for group-sharing sessions, communal living, and recreational activities like bonfires and sports. It also aims to offer 24/7 peer-to-peer services and crisis response through the new resource center.
- **Facilities:** The 20-acre property will include lodging for veterans, communal areas, a commercial kitchen, and various recreational spaces.
- **Funding:** As a non-profit, it relies on donations and fundraising to support its construction and operations. 





MOBILE BAY AREA VETERANS COMMISSION PRESIDENT'S REPORT



Steve Carey, Col USAF (Ret)

MCPSS students showed their support for service members on Veterans Day. JROTC and LOTC cadets took part in the Veterans Day parade downtown Mobile, and the Murphy High School Color Guard displayed the colors during the Veterans Day luncheon at Fort Whiting, where they met Mobile's new Mayor, Spiro Cheriogotis.



Mobile Bay Area Veterans Commission

2025 ESSAY WINNERS

Fourth Grade Students Honoring Those Who Serve

BALDWIN COUNTY

1st Place: Snook Christian Academy

2nd Place: Bayside Academy

3rd Place: J. Larry Newton Elementary

MOBILE COUNTY

1st Place: Eichold-Mertz Elementary

2nd Place: Council Elementary

3rd Place: Corpus Christi Catholic School

Thank you to everyone who participated in the writing contest.

The Veterans Commission events surrounding Veterans Day wouldn't have been such a huge success without the support of our sponsors.



SPONSORS

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REGIONS



In-Kind Sponsors



Mobile Bay Area Veterans Commission
P O Box 2187, Mobile, AL 36652

E-mail: VetsDayCommission@gmail.com



DATES TO REMEMBER

December

Holiday/Observance/Event	Date
Civil Air Patrol (USAF Auxiliary) Birthday	December 1
#GivingTuesday	Tuesday after Thanksgiving (December 2, 2025)
National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day	December 7
U.S. National Guard Birthday	December 13
National Wreaths Across America	December 13
Hanukkah Begins	December 14 – December 22, 2025
Christmas Day	December 25
Kwanzaa	December 26 – January 1, 2026
New Year's Eve	December 31, 2025

**SAVC, CAVC, NAVFOC, AND RRVC
THE VETERANS VOICE
VETERANS UNITE**

In addition to the South Alabama Veterans Council, which covers seven counties in southern Alabama, three similar groups are currently active elsewhere in the state: the Central Alabama Veterans Collaborative (CAVC) in Birmingham, the North Alabama Veterans & Fraternal Organizations Coalition (NAVFOC), and the River Region Veterans Coalition (RRVC) in and near Montgomery, AL. SAVC, CAVC, NAVFOC, and RRVC can collaborate to advocate for the state's large veteran community.



South Alabama Veterans Council

www/savc.info



Central Alabama Veterans Collaborative
(CAVC) www.facebook.com/AlabamaCAVC/



North Alabama Veterans & Fraternal
Organizations Coalition (NAVFOC)
www.navfoc.com



River Region Veterans Coalition –
Central Alabama in and near Montgomery, AL RRVC
www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61574462792355
RRVC is a non-profit/apolitical coalition of public and private sector organizations that serve military veterans in the River Region of central Alabama.



**SAVE THE DATE
Family Wreath Day
Saturday, December 13th at 10 AM
Alabama State Veterans Cemetery
Spanish Fort, AL**

An invitation is extended to all Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and all those young at heart to help honor our veterans resting in this beautiful place by placing a Flag with a wreath at their headstone... please share this invitation....we need as many little and big hands as we can get to help not only honor the veterans buried there, but their families also...



PLEASE JOIN US FOR
**WREATHS ACROSS
AMERICA**
CEREMONY

FOLLOWED BY LAYING OF THE WREATHS

DECEMBER 13, 2025

9AM

SERENITY GARDENS

8951 OLD PASCAGOULA RD

ALL ARE WELCOME

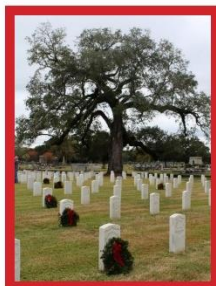


**HONORING VETERANS
ONE WREATH AT A TIME**

WREATHS *across* AMERICA

★ **KEEP MOVING FORWARD** ★

MOBILE
NATIONAL
CEMETERY
*December 13,
2025*



Let us honor the brave men and women who served our country. Help show your gratitude and appreciation by sponsoring a wreath to be placed the second Saturday in December. The deadline to sponsor wreaths for this year is December 1st.

We are offering the following sponsorship tiers. Sponsors who reach Platinum or Diamond level will have the option to have a company logo in the program.

Bronze - 5 wreaths	Platinum - 50 wreaths
Silver - 10 wreaths	Diamond - 100 wreaths
Gold - 25 wreaths	

PLEASE HELP BUILD THE NORTHERN CALIFORNIA COASTAL VETERANS MONUMENT



AT THE POINT ARENA LIGHTHOUSE



This monument will be a tribute to veterans - past, present, and future. Some were called to duty. Others volunteered. In battle or from behind a desk, our veterans experienced what most Americans never have and never will. **The creation of this monument honors their service to us all.**

- ◆ There is no coastal site on either the Mendocino or Sonoma coasts that recognizes the selfless service to this nation of our veterans.
- ◆ The Northern California Coastal Veterans Monument will be a powerful, eternal, peaceful tribute to our nation's veterans.
- ◆ The Point Arena Lighthouse is a unique location that provides contemplation and solitude while being in harmony with natural surroundings.

Your generous donations will build this worthwhile project to honor our veterans.

Please mail donations to:
NCCVM
PO Box 14 Point Arena, CA 95468

Visit vetsmonument.org or call (925) 437-1101 to learn more.



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KEMMERLY**
Attorneys at Law




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The bakery department provides SAVC pastries at SAVC meetings, 9124 Cottage Hill Rd. Mobile, AL

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SOUTHERN ALABAMA AHEC INVITES YOU TO

VIBE

VETERANS IN BETTER ENVIRONMENTS


GROUP MEETING

12.05.2025

GROUPS GOALS & PURPOSE


1. REACH OUT TO A VETERAN WHO IS NOT AFFILIATED WITH VHA (VETERAN HEALTH ADMINISTRATION).
1. IMPLEMENT STANDARDIZED BASELINE MENTAL HEALTH SCREENINGS FOR EACH VETERAN TO ASSESS RISK AND GUIDE CARE PLANNING.
2. ENSURE EVERY VETERAN AND THEIR FAMILY RECEIVE INDIVIDUALIZED ASSISTANCE BASED ON SPECIFIC CHALLENGES AND NEEDS.
3. INCREASE AWARENESS OF AVAILABLE VA AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES.
4. BUILD A STRONG PEER SUPPORT NETWORK THAT FOSTERS CONNECTION AND BELONGING.
5. IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING FOR ALL GROUP MEMBERS.
6. OFFER AN OPEN FORUM FOR ALL VETERANS TO EXPRESS THEIR NEEDS AND PRIORITIES.

ALABAMA CAREER CENTER
10AM-12PM
 515 SPRINGHILL PLAZA COURT,
 MOBILE, AL, 36608



PLEASE SCAN TO RSVP

CONTACT: ISMATH FERDOUS
 ISMATH.JIM@SAAHEC.ORG




SAVC Minutes November 18, 2025

Breakfast provided by Love Me Anyway Ministries, Pastries provided by Publix West Mobile, McFarland, and Cottage Hill

- 1. Welcome and Call to Order:** President Frank Barrow, LTC USA (Ret), called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m., with 66 in attendance. The location was American Legion Post 88.
- 2. Opening Prayer & Pledge:** Chaplain Lloyd Michael Austin offered the opening prayer.
- 3. Pledge:** Col Pat Downing, VP.
- 4. Welcome and introduction of new attendees:** Frank Barrow welcomed new attendees and introduced the guest speaker, Troy Carico, USN (Ret). QOV Linda Tipp and Sue Lee, Azalea City Quilters, presented a QOV to Col John Kilpatrick.
- 5. Newsletter & Minutes:** Fran Barber-Bruyn, Secretary - The September meeting minutes were included in the newsletter. The minutes were approved as read. Thanks to Judy and Sophie for breakfast.
- 6. Treasury:** Pass the Hat \$2480.expenses, Income 614. Grant presentation to QOV Mobile; Linda accepted the grant

on behalf of Joyce Reed, who was unable to attend. Don Payne was unable to attend. Lloyd Michael Austin of Vets Recover gave a presentation on administering Narcan. Megan Jones gave a history of the construction of the Veterans Monument in Northern CA.

7. Introduction of Guest Speaker: Troy Carico, USN (Ret)

8. Navy & Veteran News, Pete Riehm: Reported on parade, 250 Anniversary Celebration @ BMP. Dec 9th Navy League Celebration.

9. Current Veterans Activities and AL News: Jim Jeffries is out. Keep him in your prayers.

10. AL Veterans Cemetery Foundation: Joe Buschell reported on the Cemetery, hired a new caretaker, and participated in the Veterans Day Parade. Second committal shelter construction to start in Dec. Internments 4652.

11. USS Alabama Battleship Memorial Park: Genavese Harris reported upcoming veterans events.

12. Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs -

13. VMRT: Fran Reported on cleanup efforts by Keep Mobile Beautiful, continuing to look for veterans. Vets Recover, and MPM Asso.

14. J Gary Cooper, MPM Chapter 33: Cynthia House reported on chapter events, name change, 250th birthday ball, and Veterans Day Luncheon.

15. Alabama Chapter 92nd Buffalo Soldiers: Reported on Dec 17 Dinner, Guest Speaker CWO Averheart, Salute to PGR.

16. Topics of Interest: CDR Taylor reported on AL Post 199 grand opening. Ross Sykes reported on IGY6 Gulf Coast Ruck Run. Kent Davis reported on the Iron Ruck March and on creating a Fisher House in Birmingham, and Vets Recover can now accept VA referrals; they also have a VR Endowment fund to help cover uncompensated services. Keshia Chambers reported on Medicare.

17. Good of the Order: There will be NO SAVC meeting in December, January 20, 2026 Meeting The Waterfront Restaurant, 1 Yacht Dr., Daphne, AL, Breakfast 9:00 am, Across the street from United States Sports University.

18. The meeting adjourned at 10:00 a.m.

Fran Barber, Secretary.

