



Never stop serving!



Banner & client Eric

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### Star Spangled Banner Chapter of MOAA

## January 2026 Newsletter

**Contents:** Feb 2026 Dinner Meeting, President's Message, Nov 12 Annual Dinner Meeting Recap, JROTC & ROTC news, Legislative & Membership Update, paws4vets update, Future Event Dates

### *Dinner Meeting*

*Pappas Restaurant, Cockeysville*

***Wednesday, February 25, 2026, at 6:00 pm***

***“Artificial Intelligence and Cyber Force Generation”***

**BRIGADIER GENERAL REID J. NOVOTNY**



Brig. Gen. Reid J. Novotny is both the U.S. Cyber Command's Chief Artificial Intelligence Officer, and the Department of War's Cyber Force General Lead. In this dual role, he is responsible for forging America's dominance in the next generation of warfare. By integrating the nation's unmatched commercial innovation with advanced military capabilities, his leadership ensures the United States remains the world's preeminent power in the digital domain by developing the tools, talent, and training necessary to defend the homeland and project American strength against any adversary. Prior to his current position, General Novotny served as the Air National Guard A2/6 Director where he oversaw a portfolio to include intelligence, cyber forces, and systems architecture supporting and enabling over 108,400 Air National

Guard Airmen and civilians across 90 wings and 180 installations in 159 communities throughout the 54 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Virgin Islands. Furthermore, General Novotny served as the Maryland National Guard J6 on the State's Joint Staff. He was responsible for coordinating the employment of Maryland National Guard service component forces and equipment providing communications, cyber, and information management capabilities in support of joint domestic operations and exercises. While on Active Duty, he was the Director of Staff for the Chief, Information Dominance and CIO for the United States Air Force. Preceding this role, he commanded the 35th Communications Squadron at Misawa Air Base, Japan where he oversaw 225 personnel and sustained Misawa's 318-million-dollar communications infrastructure. General Novotny received his commission through Detachment 130 Howard University Reserve Officer Training Corps as a distinguished graduate.

**DINNER RESERVATIONS:** **PAPPAS RESTAURANT & SPORTS BAR.** 550 Cranbrook Road, Cockeysville, MD 21030. (410) 666-0030

\$50.00 per person, including three courses, coffee, tea, non-alcoholic beverages, gratuities, and tax. Cash bar is available for cocktails, wine, and beer.

**Please make your reservation today.** The final count is due on **21 Feb**

**SOCIAL TIME: 6:00 PM. DINNER: 6:30 PM.** DRESS: Military Uniform or Business Casual.

**MENU SELECTIONS** (at seating)

Entrée Selections (Select 1 entrée.)

**Pappas' Famous Crab Cake**, eight ounces.

**Orange Roughy**, filet broiled in lemon butter sauce.

**New York Strip Steak**, eight ounces, Angus steak.

**Chicken Marsala**, chicken breast with sauteed mushrooms in Marsala wine sauce.

All entrees are served with garden salad, baked potato, a fresh vegetable, and dessert.

**All members PLEASE register online for the meeting at:**

**<https://www.starspan.org/Chapter Info/Calendar/UpcomingEvents> and click on the Feb 25 Dinner Meeting, EVEN IF YOU PLAN TO PAY BY CHECK. (Our site is now secure; make sure you type in the https:// if you are having trouble)**

**Reservation Form: FOR MAIL IN ONLY**

You MUST mail the reservation form below by **17 Feb**. We need a firm count by **21 Feb**. MAIL CHECKS TO TREASURER RITA M. KUREK at the address below. (410) 294-4913

For more information: Phone George Stakias, President. 443 707-6947; or email [georgestakias@yahoo.com](mailto:georgestakias@yahoo.com). Please call Rita Kurek if you have doubts about your mailed reservation arriving by 21 Feb.

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RESERVATION FORM (mail in)

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Guests \_\_\_\_\_

DINNER RESERVATION at \$50.00 per person..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_

DUES FOR 2026 \$30.00 (if not paid already) .... \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Donation for Army Officer's Guides (gift to ROTC Cadets) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Donation to paws4vets (our annual fundraising cause) ..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL.....\$ \_\_\_\_\_

Make Checks payable to: **Star Spangled Banner Chapter of MOAA**

Mail check to: Treasurer, Rita M. Kurek, 1231 Engleberth Rd, Essex MD  
21221

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### **President's Message**

COL (Ret) George Stakias, USAR

***Happy New Year!! Hoping everyone had a restful holiday season!***

**Increasing our membership is how we will sustain this outstanding Chapter. Please consider inviting a colleague to our next meeting or giving them a recruitment brochure (available online) and encouraging them to join our organization. Col Rita Kurek did just that and we are happy to welcome new member LTC Linda Piazza USAF ANG to our ranks!**

**We have several dinner meetings and the paws4vets event planned for 2026 but we are also pursuing a possible road trip to the National Museum of the US Army outside of Ft. Belvoir VA in May or June. Our 1st VP & wife, Frank & Ann Hilsher, visited recently and said it is remarkable and a "must see"! The Maryland Military Historical Society will be sponsoring a Unit Tribute and Symposium on May 23-24, 2026 at the Army Museum in which we have an opportunity to participate. We will discuss this more at the February meeting for interest and dates.**

Our major fundraiser for the *paws4vets* foundation is soon approaching and I encourage every member to attend this very fun event for such a worthy cause and I'm hoping many members once again will sell a table of ten for which you will receive our superb event coin.



Front



Rear

Please see the *paws4vets* event flyer in this newsletter. Tickets ARE AVAILABLE NOW via mail using the flyer below, online via check or PayPal or *may be purchased at the February Dinner Meeting!!* You need tickets for this event!! NO TICKETS SOLD AT DOOR!!!! SAVE THE DATE!!! Gather your friends and family to support a great cause! Our Grand Raffle tickets are also now available and will be sent to Active Members for sale! Three fantastic prizes for a \$10 donation! Drawing at the event on April 25.



## *Recap: Annual Meeting, November 12, 2025*

*The Annual Meeting was conducted including a recap of events in 2025 with our milestone “60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration” and speaker MG Janeen Birckhead, Adjutant General of the Maryland National Guard in January. We had two additional dinner meetings in May and September with outstanding and informative speakers, Mrs. Cheryl Glang, MD Council Surviving Spouse Liaison and Glenn Williams, PhD, Military Historian. The SSBC Chapter and Maryland MOAA was represented at the “Our Community Salutes” event in April at the Greektown Square Center and several JROTC & ROTC Leadership Awards were presented by SSBC members. ROTC and Legislative reports were given. Changes are on the horizon for ROTC & JROTC with a possible merger of these programs. Priorities for the next legislative session are being determined but will include many of the bills on taxation and survivor benefits from the previous year but the current deficit in the Maryland State Budget may impede efforts again. The Treasurer’s report was given with a balance of \$3684.32.*

*Our guest speaker LTC Joseph A. Mucci, Commander, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 175<sup>th</sup> Infantry, gave the following presentation.*



Recent Operations of the Battalion included African Lion 2024 in 3 phases in Tunisia, Ghana and Senegal, the largest overseas training deployment in over a decade. Future deployments will be to Kosovo and the Horn of Africa. The Army is transitioning the Infantry Brigade Combat Teams (IBCTs) to Mobile Brigade Combat Teams (MBCTs) to make them more lethal, mobile and survivable against modern threats like drone and electronics warfare. Challenges are the Dual Higher Headquarters alignment with both Commands from PA & MD. There are fewer opportunities for cross-training and there is a limited pool of experience and lack of qualified personnel due to lack of upward mobility. There are opportunities however with

their proximity to NGB and the Pentagon and the State partnerships with Estonia and Bosnia for training. There is also a robust 175<sup>th</sup> Regimental Association that connects unit veterans with resources and activities, mentorship and camaraderie.

*The following photos were from the 12 Nov 2025 Annual Meeting*



*Randy Everett (pictured with Rob Paolucci) reads the significance of the Fallen Soldier table. CAPT John Backer (oldest member) and Major Nicholas Riesett (youngest attendee) cut the ceremonial 61<sup>st</sup> Anniversary cake.*



*The SSBC Board welcomes speaker LTC Joseph Mucci and EXO Major Nicholas Riesett. LTC Mucci addresses the group with a detailed powerpoint presentation.*



*The Loyola ROTC Color Guard enjoys dinner with the SSBC members. Members Tom Lowe, Bill Bilo and Mike DeHaemer listen intently to LTC Mucci's presentation.*



*The Loyola ROTC Color Guard retires the colors at the conclusion of the meeting.*



*President George Stakias presents the appreciation "Francis Scott Key" Bust to speaker, LTC Joseph Mucci.*

## **ROTC & JROTC News: Col (ret) Frank Hilsher, ROTC Chairman, Col (ret) Rob Paolucci, JROTC Chairman**

Col (r)Frank Hilsher was the guest speaker at the ROTC Commissioning at the Loyola-Towson Universities on Dec 19, 2025.



Col (r) Frank Hilsher addresses the cadets at the Loyola-Towson Universities Dec 19, 2025 ROTC Commissioning and received a thank you gift from the Greyhound Battalion Executive Officer.



Attending is Mr. Terrance Sawyer, J.D., President of Loyola Univ., Dr. Melanie Perrault, Towson Univ. Provost, and Dr. Milton Bravo, Invocation/Benediction speaker. LTC Westgate swears in 3 Towson graduate Cadets at the Evergreen Campus, Loyola University.

***We welcome Col (R) Rob Paolucci to the SSBC Board, who has so graciously accepted the Chair of the JROTC Program! He will coordinate awards for our High School JROTC programs and will be looking for volunteers to present the awards at ceremonies this spring.***

## **Legislative Update: LTC (ret) Bill Gray, Chairman**

The 2026 Session of the Maryland General Assembly began on January 14th in Annapolis. Since there are serious budget issues facing the state, we are moving cautiously to promote our long-range goals.

The [Star Spangled Banner Chapter](#) website Legislation Section has been updated and will continue to be updated throughout the session. In addition, the Maryland Military Coalition subsection have added their 2026 priorities with an easy to read and interesting one page item.

The list of legislative items will be updated soon. As in the past, you may receive emails on certain legislative bills as the session progresses.

## **Membership Update: LTC (ret) Bill Gray, Chairman**

Please pay your dues for 2026 promptly! A reminder that dues for 2026 should be updated as soon as possible on the website. Some of you have prepaid for several years so you can find out if your dues are up to date by keying into Chapter Info, Membership, Members Only on the website at [www.starspan.org](http://www.starspan.org). You will be directed to make certain that you are properly signed in, and then your membership status will appear. If it does not show "Paid", you may go to the "Renew your membership online" or notify our Membership Director.

Under the Chapter Info, Recruiting heading, the Recruiting Brochure has been updated. It is easy to print and deliver to prospective members. If the individual has questions, refer them to Bill Gray or if they want to send in their dues, refer to Rita Kurek, Treasurer.

If you have questions on any of this, please call, drop an email or text me.

LTC (Ret) Bill Gray, 2<sup>nd</sup> VP, Legislative & Membership Chairperson  
Email: graybillo@verizon.net  
Cell: 410-746-2861

Pay Dues Online or mail to:  
Col (Ret) Rita M. Kurek, Secretary-Treasurer  
1231 Engleberth Rd.  
Essex, MD 21221  
rmkurek@aol.com  
Cell: 410-294-4913

**Look who's in the News! Our first **paws4vets** sponsor dog, Banner, and his client Eric Thompson!!!!**

**One Legend Meets Another**



Eric Thompson, USMC Veteran with BANNER and John Legend.

What a legendary night. **paws4vets** Client Eric Thompson, USMC Veteran, and his Service Dog, BANNER, got the chance to meet the one and only John Legend during his concert at Live Oak Bank Pavilion on Oct 29<sup>th</sup>, 2025.

We are very appreciative that Eric continues to help **paws4vets** spread our mission of transforming lives.



**Star Spangled Banner Chapter  
Military Officers Association of America**



Find us at [www.starspan.org](http://www.starspan.org)  
"Never Stop Serving"

*Presents our*  
***Annual paws4vets Fundraiser***  
**Bull, Shrimp & Oyster Roast**  
**Saturday, April 25th, 2026**

**4-8pm**

**Columbus Gardens**

**4301 Klosterman Ave, Nottingham, MD 21236**

**Music by: "Double Play"**

**Delightful Buffet, Cash Bar, Raffles, Auctions, Wheels of Chance**

**Tickets are \$60.00 per person or \$550 for a table of ten.**

**Call Colonel (ret) Rita M. Kurek, chairperson for tickets.**

**410 574-5330 (H) or 410 294-4913 (C)**

**or mail order form below with check**

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**Name: \_\_\_\_\_**

**#Tickets @\$60 \_\_\_\_\_ or Table(s) of 10 @\$550 \_\_\_\_\_**

**Address: \_\_\_\_\_**

**Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_**

**I would like tickets mailed \_\_\_\_\_ or pick up at will call \_\_\_\_\_**

**Make Checks Payable to: Star Spangled Banner Chapter of MOAA**

**Mail to: Rita M. Kurek, 1231 Engleberth Rd., Essex MD 21221**

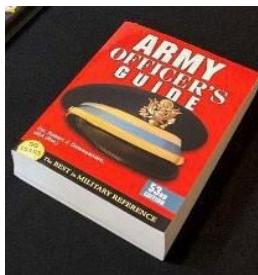
# Attention all members!



We need your help for donations, auction baskets, gift cards, event tickets, or corporate sponsorships for our paws4vets event in April. If you can donate items yourself, put together a themed basket, solicit your favorite theatre, jewelry store, golf course or like business to donate an item or two, please start soliciting now and let the Chairperson, Col (Ret) Rita M. Kurek know by March 25<sup>th</sup> the items you have received or wish to donate. If you have a business contact that will provide a corporate donation, see the attachment in the email that you can provide them with information on our cause.

We will also need several volunteers to work at least one hour before or during the event to help with set up, registration table, raffle sales, and auctions. ***This is a Chapter Fundraiser-please don't leave the work to a select few!*** Please call or email Rita Kurek to volunteer now!!!! [rmkurek@aol.com](mailto:rmkurek@aol.com) or 410-294-4913.

This has been a very successful event in the past-fantastic food, great entertainment, many fun chances to win prizes and the paws4vets service dogs and clients in attendance-gather your friends and family, join us and volunteer to help raise funds for our veterans in need of psychologically trained service dogs for PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injuries and Suicidal Ideation. Together we make this a SUCCESS for our vets in need!! **THANK YOU!!!**



**Please pay your 2026 Dues Now!!** Dues help pay for the Army Officer Guides we present to newly commissioned 2nd LTs each year at our three supported ROTCs.

**New Members are always welcome!!**  
**Recruit your colleagues!**  
**We welcome new member**  
**LTC (R) Linda Piazza, USAF ANG**

**Our next paws4vets event will be 25 April 2026. Tickets are available now!!!**  
**See the Flyer above in this Newsletter for more information.**

**Future Chapter Events for 2026:**

<b>DATE</b>	<b>EVENT</b>
<b>25 February 2026 6pm</b>	<b>Dinner Meeting</b> Speaker: BG Reid J. Novotny US Cyber Command's Chief AI Officer Venue: Pappas Restaurant & Sports Bar, Cockeysville, MD 21030 POC: George Stakias (410) 707-6947
<b>25 April 2026 4-8pm</b>	<b>Paws4vets Fundraiser-Tickets Needed! No Sales at Door!!</b> Venue: Columbus Gardens, Perry Hall, MD 21128 Band: Double Play POC: Rita Kurek (410) 294-4913
<b>16 September 2026 6pm</b>	<b>Dinner Meeting</b> Speaker:TBD Venue: Pappas Restaurant & Sports Bar, Cockeysville, MD 21030 POC: George Stakias (410) 707-6947
<b>11 November 2026 6pm</b>	<b>Annual Dinner Meeting</b> Speaker and Venue TBD POC: George Stakias (410) 707-6947

This letter is published by the Star Spangled Banner Chapter. It is a 501(c)19 nonprofit affiliate of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA). The Star Spangled Banner Chapter is one of more than 400-plus chapters affiliated with National MOAA. Our chapter is a non-partisan veterans' organization. MOAA and its affiliates are dedicated to maintaining a strong national defense and ensuring our nation keeps its commitment to currently serving retired and former members of the uniformed services, their families, and survivors. Our chapter supports national MOAA's federal legislative actions and MD Council's State legislative priorities.



\*\*\* Newsletter Online: [www.starspan.org](http://www.starspan.org) Newsletter Editor and Distribution: COL Rita M. Kurek, USAF (Ret) C: 410 294-4913 H: 410 574-5330 [rmkurek@aol.com](mailto:rmkurek@aol.com)

**The Star Spangled Banner Chapter** of the **Military Officers Association of America** is the oldest, continuously operating MOAA chapter in Maryland. Founded in 1964, we provide camaraderie with purpose and align with MOAA's national mission: a strong national defense, taking care of our country's veterans, and protecting the benefits of all who have served and currently serve. Our chapter membership is open to commission and warrant officers of all eight services.