



- Photo by Bill Granger

North Carolina Veterans Events Continue to Impact

-Written by [Steven B. Brooks](#)

In 2017, U.S. Army retiree Marc Stratton was suffering various symptoms, including sleeplessness, when his wife urged him to get checked for PTSD. He didn't want to because he was "embarrassed," but he did so anyway. Then his wife told him she wanted him to get evaluated beyond that. "She told me 'I want you back the way you were,'" said Stratton, whose military career included multiple tours in the Middle East.

Stratton was convinced by family members in Virginia to come east to what was then Cary, N.C., American Legion Post 67's Veterans Experience Action Center (VEAC) – a three-day event that brought veteran service officers and staff from the Department of Veterans Affairs face to face with veterans seeking to file or check on pending benefits claims, enroll in VA health care and tackle other issues involving VA.

At the VEAC, Marc found out he had service-connected claims with the Department of Veterans Affairs he didn't know were available to him. And he left with a little more than that, saying he was "feeling confident I'm going to get the help that I need. If that's compensation, so be it. But the first thing I want to know is what's wrong. I want to know what's going on because money's not going to fix that." It turns out in the veteran community, it's a small world.

After a two-year break because of the global pandemic, American Legion Post 67 again was able to put on a similar event, staging what now is called Veterans Benefits Live (VBL) on March 17-19 at the Herbert C. Young Community Center. And attending the VBL's Day 1 were Stephen Stratton, Marc's brother, and Stephen's wife Sharon. Both are veterans – Sharon of the U.S. Air Force and Stephen the Army – and both came seeking information on VA benefits they are seeking.

For Sharon, attending the VBL and meeting in person someone from the Veterans Benefits Administration "was very valuable. I got information today that I've been trying to get the last couple of years. That was accomplished today."

It was the same for her husband, who said similar events are not available where they live in Virginia's

Eastern Shore. Post 67 providing an event such as the VBL shows the Legion cares "about the veterans, to make sure we get the help and the information we need to be productive the rest of our post-military service."

Post 67 Commander Richard Spyrison, who coordinated all three VEACs and now the VBL, said being able to stage the event after the two-year hiatus "was fabulous. To see a veteran walk in the door with a chip on their shoulder and exit with a smile on their face – whether they got their rating or not, he knows what he's got to do to finish, he's got the answer he needs. That's a big weight off their shoulder."

The VBL also had various agencies set up with tables in the waiting area, including Humana, VA's Vet Center and the Durham VA Health Care System. Veterans were not only able to enroll in the VA health-care system, but also get ID cards printed out on the spot. More than 200 veterans were able to get cards through the VBL. Spyrison, who still is waiting to get official numbers from VA officials, estimates around 400 veterans attended the VBL's opening day on Thursday, while another 650 came during Friday's and Saturday's sessions.

Those kinds of numbers ease the workload for North Carolina's Department of Military and Veteran Affairs, said Terry Westbrook, the department's deputy director for Veterans Affairs. Westbrook made it a point to stop by Day 1 and was impressed with what he saw.

"It's hard to emphasize just how important (the VBL) is, because the big thing that this event does is it takes a strain off the entire system," Westbrook said. "In three days, they do the same thing that it might take the rest of us a year to get done. Our VSOs, they're about nothing more than getting claims developed and processed. That's what we want to do, and we want to do it for every single veteran there is."

Westbrook said the VBL allows veterans who might otherwise fall through the cracks to get the help they need. "(They) are a piece of the population in North Carolina that we may or may not ever get to see again," he said. "They're rural veterans. They're people that are out and about. It's incredible how much the collaboration means. The American Legion does a fantastic job with this one. Richard Spyrison and his post are really, really good at what they do with this process."

It also gives Westbrook's staff an opportunity to meet with veterans in person, rather than over the phone or via email. "I tell our folks all the time that we are about public contact. That's what we want to do," he said. "We don't want to talk on the phone. We don't want to do virtual meetings. We're 100 percent about ... getting to see these veterans. Having it happen face to face ... is how to do it."

A similar sentiment was expressed during the VBL by Jim Wartski, executive director of Veterans, Family and Community Engagement in VA's Veterans Experience Office. "I am a true believer in working with the community in in-person events," he said. "That's what we live for – when we know we're serving veterans."

Wartski said teaming up with The American Legion helps VA perform its mission. "We're a partnership, and really, the way I look at it ... we depend so heavily on our community of partnerships," he said. "The way I look at it, the community always runs the show, and I'm pleased that at the dinner table they invite the VA."

Legionnaire Derrick Mitchell, a member of Post 284 in Colonial Heights, Va., and an American Legion-accredited veteran service officer, came to a previous VEAC, bringing with him his father and some other veterans to receive assistance. Two of those veterans left the event with a 100-percent disability rating; the results had Mitchell bringing more veterans this year. And this time, the retired Army veteran decided to help at the VBL all three days.

Being able to meet face to face with a VA rep allows "you to cut down on a lot of the red tape," Mitchell said. "You can't beat the in person, obviously. When you see (veterans) walk out you see them smiling, like they have this big weight lifted off them. They learn what they need to do and get pointed in the right direction."

That's the mission of the VEACs and now, the VBL. "If we can help one veteran, just one, we've done our job. If we can help two, that's gravy. And that's our objective," Spyrison said. "We're veterans helping veterans. If we don't do this and don't take the initiative to get something like this going ... nobody's going to do it. Nobody's going to help these people, and they're going to continue to get lost in the system. They need it so much. Yeah, it's a lot of work. But the reward of seeing them get something accomplished and get some answers ... that's why we do it."



- April 1-30: "Beer for a Cause" fundraiser at Tobacco Wood Brewing Company (2500 Meridian Parkway). Be sure to ask for the "False Motivation" IPA
- Tuesday, April 5th – Social hang at Tobacco Wood Brewing Company (2500 Meridian Parkway), 4-6pm(ish)
- Tuesday, April 12th – April membership meeting (no dinner, business meeting starts at 7:00pm)
- Tuesday, April 19th – Social hang at Tobacco Wood Brewing Company (2500 Meridian Parkway), 4-6pm(ish)
- Tuesday, April 26th – Spring BBQ Chicken Dinner planning meeting (business meeting starts at 7:00pm)
- Wednesday, April 27th – Cornhole Tournament fundraiser at Tobacco Wood Brewing Co (2500 Meridian Parkway). Registration at 6pm, bags fly at 6:45pm.
- Saturday, April 30th – American Legion baseball BBQ chicken dinner
- Tuesday, May 3rd – Social hang at Tobacco Wood Brewing Company (2500 Meridian Parkway), 4-6pm(ish)
- Saturday, May 7th – District 12 meeting at Mebane Post, 11am start.
- Tuesday, May 10th – May membership meeting (dinner at 6pm, business meeting at 6:45pm)
- Tuesday, May 17th – Social hang at Tobacco Wood Brewing Company (2500 Meridian Parkway), 4-6pm(ish)
- Saturday, May 21st – Spring BBQ chicken dinner. Carryout only, pickup between Noon-2pm
- Tuesday, May 24th – May membership meeting #2 (no dinner, business meeting at 7pm)
- Sunday, May 29th – PlayNC softball tournament fundraiser for Vets-to-Vets at Piney Wood Park (10am-6pm)

Post 416 Hosts North Carolina State Senators

We had an awesome March membership meeting at Post 416! Pictured in the photo are (from L to R): 2nd Vice-Commander Johnny Clinton, guest speaker NC Senator Mike Woodard (D-22), Commander James Lowe, and guest speaker NC Senator Natalie Murdock (D-20). Thanks to our guests for taking time out of your schedule to visit with us and share your vision of how we can all serve community, state, and nation!



Vets-to-Vets Dog Jog

One of the post's favorite charities, Vets-to-Vets United, is holding their 5K9 Dog Jog on Sept 25th, 2022. Please follow the registration links below should you wish to participate!

Vets To Vets United 5K9 Dog Jog!!
 Invite friends and family to participate to Honor our Veterans!

We pair veterans with disabilities with rescued dogs for an enhanced quality of life.

Why we are so passionate about Veterans and rescue service dogs:

- * Approximately 20 Veterans commit suicide every day.
- * PTSD is associated with higher suicide rates in Veteran and Active Duty service members.
- * Increased # of Veteran and Active Duty suicides due to pandemic.
- * Evidence shows service dogs are associated with lower PTSD symptoms among Veterans including suicidal thoughts and attempts.
- * 1.5 million animals in the US are euthanized annually at shelters.
- * NC ranks 3rd in the US for animal shelter euthanasia.

Registration is now open. Virtual race option also available!
 Register at <https://www.vetstovetsunited.org/vets-to-vets-united-5k-dog-jog>




SPONSORSHIP PACKAGES AND VENDOR SIGN UP ARE AVAILABLE NOW!! CLICK THE LINK ABOVE TO LEARN MORE

Sunday, September 25
 Check-in begins at 9:00AM
 Race Time: 10:00AM

Run, jog, or walk with, or without your dog!

There will be dog activities, and plenty of local vendors!

Join us at the WakeMed Soccer Park 5K Course:
 Soccer Park Dr, Cary, NC 27511

CORNHOLE TOURNAMENT

Entry fees to benefit community programs supported by Lowe's Grove American Legion Post 416

AMERICAN LEGION

WEDNESDAY APRIL 27, 2022
 REGISTRATION AT 6:00PM
 GAMES AT 6:45PM

Tobacco Wood Brewing Company

Cornhole Tournament

Post 416's newest community partner, [PlayNC Inc](#), is sponsoring a cornhole tournament fundraiser to benefit our community programs. The event will be held on Wednesday, April 27th at Tobacco Wood Brewing Company (2500 Meridian Parkway). Registration starts at 6pm and bags fly at 6:45pm. Members of Post 416 who identify themselves at registration as such will be able to play for free.



Calendar Reminders

- April 5:** Gold Star Spouses Day
- April 6:** US enters WWI (1917)
- April 9:** Former POW Recognition Day
- April 12:** US Civil War begins at Ft. Sumter, SC (1861)
- April 17:** Easter
- April 19:** Battle of Lexington/Concord, MA (1775)
- April 21:** Spanish-American War begins (1898)

Website Wins State Award

At the latest American Legion Department of North Carolina Midwinter Conference held February 18-19 in Raleigh, our very own Lowe's Grove American Legion Post 416 website was awarded 3rd place in the Best Post Website category.

"I'm just thrilled that our post continues to improve and expand our public relations tools," stated website creator Bill Granger. "I was excited when we recently updated our website to be more mobile-device friendly, and this just reinforces that we're on the right track. It's always a great day when someone outside of your organization recognizes the effectiveness of your public relations products and how it communicates our value to our community."

With this award, this brings the number of statewide recognitions for the post's public relation tools to two: the Post 416 website and the monthly newsletter "The Sentry". Post 416 is well positioned to meet the communication needs of our potential audiences well into the future!

Anyone can visit the award-winning website and download past issues of The Sentry at <https://al416nc.wixsite.com/al416nc>.



The Sentry is a free, monthly newsletter of the Lowe's Grove American Legion Post 416, NC.

Commander, James Lowe
 Adjutant/Communication Cmte Chair/The Sentry Editor, Bill Granger

American Legion Post 416, P.O. Box 12202,
 Research Triangle Park, NC 27709



<https://al416nc.wixsite.com/al416nc>
 E-mail: al416nc@gmail.com

BBQ Chicken Dinner Tickets on Sale!

Tickets for the spring BBQ chicken dinner remain on sale during the month of April. The meal will include all the usuals, such as slaw, potato salad, roll, and the best doggone barbeque chicken this side of heaven. All members are encouraged to sell advance tickets. If you would like to obtain tickets and cannot attend an in-person meeting, please email AL416NC@gmail.com or contact Finance Officer Jim Snyder directly to work out alternate arrangements.

Lowe's Grove American Legion Post 416
 5419 S. Alston Ave • Durham, NC 27713

BAR-B-QUE CHICKEN DINNER

Saturday, May 21, 2022
 12:00 'til 2:00 PM
\$10.00 Per Plate - Cash or Check
\$10.50 Per Plate - Credit Card
 CARRY OUT ONLY

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Like recent editions, the meals are carryout only, and dinner prices will be \$10/each (cash or check) or \$10.50/each (credit). Get your appetite ready, because it's going to be awesome!

Cookies for the Troops



1st Vice-Commander Larry Strickland presents a check from Lowe's Grove American Legion Post 416 to Langdon Jenkins from Durham, NC Girl Scout Troop 4874 to support their "Cookies for the Troops" initiative. Everyone loves Girl Scout cookies, especially those deployed overseas!

Don't forget to visit Tobacco Wood Brewing Company throughout the month of April. Post 416 will receive \$1 from every pour of their best-selling FALSE MOTIVATION IPA.

TOBACCO WOOD BREWING COMPANY AND
LOWE'S GROVE AMERICAN LEGION POST 416
PRESENT



BEER FOR A CAUSE

APRIL 2022

TOBACCO WOOD BREWING COMPANY
2500 MERIDIAN PARKWAY, DURHAM NC 27713

\$1 FROM EVERY POUR OF FALSE MOTIVATION
DURING APRIL 2022 WILL BE DONATED
TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY PROGRAMS
SPONSORED BY
LOWE'S GROVE AMERICAN LEGION POST 416

LOWE'S GROVE AMERICAN LEGION POST 416

SOCIAL GATHERINGS

Tuesday, April 5th
Tuesday, April 19th
Tuesday, May 3th
Tuesday, May 17th

4-6PM @ TOBACCO WOOD BREWING CO.

2500 Meridian Parkway, Durham NC 27713



presents

CORNHOLE TOURNAMENT

Entry fees to benefit
community programs
supported by Lowe's
Grove American Legion
Post 416



WEDNESDAY APRIL 27, 2022
REGISTRATION AT 6:00PM
GAMES AT 6:45PM

Tobacco Wood Brewing Company
2500 Meridian Parkway, Durham NC 27713



BBQ CHICKEN DINNER

Saturday, May 21

(Advance Reservation Required)



LOWE'S
GROVE
POST 416

\$10/meal (cash, check)

\$10.50/meal (credit)

Carryout from Noon-2pm

5419 S. Alston Avenue, Durham NC 27713
AL416NC@gmail.com | (334) 505-0123

