

Steel Valley Dolphins

March 2020



The official newsletter of the
USS Requin Base of the USSVI
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

USSVI Creed:

"To perpetuate the memory of our shipmates who gave their lives in the pursuit of duties while serving their country. That their dedication, deeds, and supreme sacrifice be a constant source of motivation toward greater accomplishments. Pledge loyalty and patriotism to the United States of America and its Constitution."



Meetings held on the second Saturday of the month normally in BADen at the American Legion Post and quarterly meetings held around our membership area.

- **Make a difference, get to a meeting!**

----- Pride Runs Deep -----

Next Meeting: CANCELLED due to COVID 19

USS Requin Base Officers

Base Commander	Hubert C. Dietrich	412-486-2635	hueyfromglenshaw@aol.com
1st Vice Commander	Carl Stigers	412-995-8028	carstenstigers@verizon.net
2nd Vice Commander	Rick Elster	412-751-7967	Relster565@comcast.net
Secretary	Jeff Simon	724-502-4505	jeffsimon@zoominternet.net
Treasurer	Lee M. Bookwalter	412-795-8337	booky143@verizon.net
Storekeeper	Frank Nicotra	412-835-6540	nicotrafrank@gmail.com
Chaplain	Carl Stigers	412-995-8028	carstenstigers@verizon.net
Past Base Commander	Joe Campisi	412-322-3201	jcampisi1@comcast.net
Newsletter Editor	Jack Sutherin	330-420-8064	jack.sutherin@comcast.net
Webmaster	Lee M. Bookwalter	412-795-8337	booky143@verizon.net
COB/Historian -	Clyde Porter, jr.	740-635-3179	candspporter@comcast.net
Photographer	Peter Foster	724+980-7657	gopetro2000@gmail.com
SVD Hard Copy	Rick Elster	412-751-7967	relster565@comcast.net

----- Pride Runs Deep -----

Diesel Boats Forever.



Bernard's Obituary

Bernard A. Sigler of Hermitage passed away peacefully on Friday, March 13, 2020, with his family by his side. He was 86. Mr. Sigler was born December 7, 1933, in Erie, a son of the late Joseph P. and Catherine (Dempsey) Sigler. A 1951 graduate of Sharon High School, he attended the University of Louisville and served in the U.S. Navy Submarine Service during the Korean War.

Bernie retired in 1999 from the Mercer County Domestic Relations Office where he was a deputy sheriff and hearing officer for twenty years. He previously worked for the Sharon Police Department as head of the Juvenile Bureau for twenty years, retiring in 1979.

Bernie was a member of the Church of Notre Dame, Hermitage, and a former member of St. Joseph Church, Sharon. He was a member and past president and recording officer of the Fraternal Order of Police, Rose of Sharon, Lodge #3. He was also a member and past quartermaster of the Veteran of Foreign Wars, Post # 1338, Sharon; and was a member and officer of the United States Submarine Veterans Organization, Pittsburgh chapter.

Bernie enjoyed hunting and fishing and belonged to various bowling and golf leagues.

Surviving are: his wife, the former Dorothy "Dottie" Gilliland, whom he married December 7, 1996; a daughter, Sandra J. Hoover, of Sharon; three sons, Bernard M. Sigler (Monica), of Sharpsville, Gary F. Sigler (Kate Byrne), of Hermitage and Joseph B. Sigler (Sylvia Hatterer), also of Hermitage; nine grandchildren, Erica Fusco (Josh), Shane Sigler (Jocelyn), Nathan Sigler (Julie), Alyssa Hoover, Alexa Hoover, Braeden Hoover, Brendan Sigler, Sierra Sigler and Austin Sigler; and three great grandchildren, Jase Hassan, Judah Fusco and Norah Fusco. He also leaves three step-children, Pam Reagle (Chuck), of Transfer, James Hittle, Jr. and Thomas Hittle (Becky Knickerbocker), all of Siler City, NC; and his "adoptive son," Donald "Soupy" Campbell.

The family suggests memorial contributions be directed to Requin Base Memorial Fund, c/o Lee M. Bookwalter, 2291 Chaparral Dr., Pittsburgh, PA 15239-2357; or to the Mary Alice Sigler Memorial Fund, c/o Community Foundation of Western PA and Eastern OH, 7 West State St., Suite 301, Sharon, PA 16146.

Calling hours will be from 5 to 7 p.m. Wednesday, March 18, 2020, in J. Bradley McGonigle Funeral Home and Crematory, Inc., 1090 E. State St., Sharon.

Funeral Mass of Christian burial will be 11 a.m. Thursday, March 19, 2020, in the Church of Notre Dame, Hermitage, with Very Rev. Richard J. Allen, E.V., as celebrant.

Military honors will be rendered by the West Middlesex VFW, Wheatland American Legion and Farrell VFW Honor Guard immediately following the Mass.

Interment: St. Mary's Cemetery, Hermitage.

COMMANDERS CORNER:

Our last base meeting was a traveling meeting that was held in Canonsburg, Pa, at the VFW Post 191. There were over 50 members and guests in attendance and the food was GREAT. Thanks to our submarine hosts for a job well done. Eric & Marge Bookmiller, along with Brian Siege who supplied the wonderful cake. Brian had his son with him, who is going into the ARMY ----boy! Did he take a ribbing.

Not only is the VFW a wonderful place to visit and hold one of our traveling meeting, they are also a BOOSTER to the base. I can't say enough about the members of the club who treated us so well. Thanks again to Eric for his help and assistance on precuring their booster donation.

New Member - Keith Small qualified in 1971 on board the USS Daniel Boone SSBN629 as a MM3(SS). Keith left the navy in 1975 as a MM1(SS). Keith lives in W. Alexander, Pa with his first mate Connie Please e-mail Keith and welcome him aboard –kandcsmall@gmail.com He join as both a life member for USSVU & BASE!

BIRTHDAYS

ANNIVERSARIES

Member

Spouces

Bookwalter, Lee 4/2053

Nancy Clark 4/29

Mike & Linda Allen 4/1

Campbell, Ron 4/19/46

Sandy Dunlop 4/16

Greg & Mary Bayne 4/16

Crocker, Justin 4/01/75

Christine Gains 4/10

Eric & Connie Bruce 4/24

Gaylor, Gerry 4/15/30

Beverly Geyer 4/08

Bob & Nancy Clark 4/06

Guntang, Ric 4/04/41

Patricia Goron 4/02

Bob & Amy Goldman 4/29

Holzworth 4/25/56

Liz Harris 4/25

Jeff & Heidi Iliff 4/03

Ireland, Garry 4/19/52

Helga Liden 4/10

Blaine & Jacquelyn Kuhn 4/13

Johnson, Doug 4/30/52

Susan Ireland 4/23

Josh & Cassandra Sewell 4/14

Kudlic, Evelyn 4/11

Jacquelyn Kuhn 4/12

Chuck & Debby Shrump 4/27

Larson, Merlin 4/14/44

Debby Shrump 4/28

Lawrence, Jared 4/03/87

Virginia Sutherin, 4/28

Mach, John 4/07/52

Barbara Zdarko 4/18

Simpson, Dick 4/10/45

Shipmates- there are a lot of birthdays and anniversaries that we do not have any records. If there are any additions or corrections, please let me know.

APRIL BASE MEETING – is **CANCELLED** due to the CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC Our next base meeting is scheduled for May 09, 2020 at the American Legion in Baden, Pa.

I want to take a minute to wish everyone a healthy and happy time during this trying time that the WHOLE world is experiencing. Please remember everyone is part of our brother hood. Would it be great if we all met at dock side and take a patrol on one of our submarines and ride out this pandemic together.



Our dear bother Bernie Sigler sailed on eternal patrol this week. It is really sad to say good-by to such a great shipmate.

Bernard A. Sigler Obituary

It is with great sadness that we announce the death of Bernard A. Sigler (Hermitage, Pennsylvania), born in Erie, Pennsylvania, who passed away on March 13, 2020, at the age of 86, leaving to mourn family and friends. Family and friends are welcome to leave their condolences on this memorial page and share them with the family.

He was predeceased by : his parents, Joseph P. Sigler and Catherine Sigler (Dempsey). He is survived by : his wife Dorothy "Dottie" Gilliland; his children, Sandra J. Hoover of Sharon, Bernard M. Sigler (Monica) of Sharpsville, Gary F. Sigler (Kate Byrne) of Hermitage and Joseph B. Sigler (Sylvia Hatterer) of Hermitage; his grandchildren, Erica Fusco (Josh), Shane Sigler, Nathan Sigler (Julie), Alyssa Hoover, Alexa Hoover, Braeden Hoover, Brendan Sigler, Sierra Sigler and Austin Sigler; his great grandchildren, Jase Hassan, Judah Fusco and Norah Fusco; and his step-children, Pam Reagle (Chuck) of Transfer, James Hittle, Jr. of Siler City, NC, Thomas Hittle (Becky Knickerbocker) of Siler City, NC and Donald "Soupy" Campbell.

Visitation will be held on Wednesday, March 18th 2020 from 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM at the J. Bradley McGonigle Funeral Home and Crematory, Inc. (1090 E State St, Sharon, PA 16146). A mass of christian burial will be held on Thursday, March 19th 2020 at 11:00 AM at the Church of Notre Dame (2325 Highland Rd, Hermitage, PA 16148).

The family suggests memorial contributions be directed to Requin Base Memorial Fund, c/o Lee M. Bookwalter, 2291 Chaparral Dr., Pittsburgh, PA 15239-2357; or to the Mary Alice Sigler Memorial Find, c/o Community Foundation of Western PA and Eastern OH, 7 West State St., Suite 301, Sharon, PA 16146.

Late last week, Edie and I traveled up to Sharon Pa to pick up our candy order. Bernie made all the arrangements and notified me that he would meet us at the Candy Store. (Bernie gave me a call and said that he and Dottie would meet us there. We were shopping in the store for extra goodies when we spotted them outside. We left the store and followed them to the candy factory. Bernie set up a

tour of the facility for Edie and me. As we were going thru the process, Bernie had to be taken to the emergency department of the nearest hospital.

The next day, Dottie called us and informed us that he was admitted! Over the course of the next few days, he was being evaluated. Then Dottie e-mailed us and informed that Bernie was being sent home with hospice care! (We had such a feeling that we would not be seeing our shipmate again). On March 13, Diesel Boat Forever Bernie sailed on ETERNAL PATROL!

On Wednesday, March 18, a group of shipmates from the Requin Base were headed up to Sharon, Pa to send Bernie on Eternal Patrol with full military honors with our National Chaplin. On the way up to Sharon, we received a phone call that the Funeral Home limited visitations to the immediate family only. Everyone tried to call those who were on route to Sharon. Thankfully, we were successful on notifying everyone and they all turned around and came home.

Sometime in the not so distant future, we will attempt to schedule, with Dottie, a base Memorial Service to properly send Shipmate Bernie on Eternal Patrol

Requin Base Meeting Minutes

March 7, 2020

Canonsburg, PA

Base Commander Huey Dietrich called the meeting to order.

Attendees: Mike Allen, Eric & Marge Bookmiller, Lee & Patsy Bookwalter, Clair & Nancy Bouts, Don Bright, George Brown, Joe Campisi, Huey & Edie Dietrich, Sandy Ellis, Gerry & Linda Gaylor, Dick & Beverly Geyer, Lou Hamill, George & Barbara Harrah, Mark Hoag, Ronnie Horton, Bill Lindsey, Chuck & Nancy Loskoch, Bat Masterson, Vince Metz, Frank Nicotra, Mike Pelegrino, Brian Peltier, Chuck Shrumpp, Bryan & Alex Siege, Jeff & Eileen Simon, Carl Stigers, Keith Small, Chad Underkoffler, Mike & Tina Wyckoff

Base Commander Huey Dietrich: Quotes of the day: "If the officers that skipper my submarines can't go outside of protocol or bend the rule book then they are not needed in my submarine fleet (Nimitz)"

Base Commander Huey Dietrich: Let us at this time, with a moment of silent prayer, remember our Shipmates who made the supreme sacrifice that we may gather here in Peace. We dedicate this meeting to our Shipmates on Eternal Patrol, to perpetuate their memories in our lives and to honor our Shipmates on active duty in the service of the first line of defense of our Nation.

Boats Lost:

USS PERCH (SS 176)	March 3, 1942
USS GRAMPUS (SS 207)	March 5, 1943
USS H-1 (SS 28)	March 12, 1920
USS TRITON (SS 201)	March 15, 1943
USS KETE (SS 369)	March 20, 1945
USS F-4 (SS 23)	March 25, 1915
USS TULLIBEE (SS 284)	March 26, 1944
USS TRIGGER (SS 237)	March 26, 1945

We also honor our departed shipmate of the Requin Base lost in March, George Elder and Matt Holzer. Finally let us remember all the brave submariners who died performing their duties aboard submarines, some individually and some in groups, but where the submarine itself was not lost.

Chaplain Carl Stigers gave the Invocation.

Members introduced themselves and the boats they qualified on.

Base Secretary Jeff Simon reported that Minutes of the previous meeting were published in the SVD and on the Requin Base website. With no objections, the minutes were approved as published.

Treasurer Lee Bookwalter gave an accounting of base assets, expenditures, and deposits are available upon request. With no objections, the report was approved.

Other Reports:

Binnacle List: Jack Sutherin, Luke Walker, Mary Ann Knotier, Eileen Simon, Bernie Sigler, Captain Swinney, Mike Pellegrino, Rick Elster

Membership stands at 196.

Storekeeper Frank Nicotra reported on available small stores.

Vince Metz reported on Eagle Scout presentation activities

Memorials, Ceremonies, Social Events

Members are encouraged to see the Calendar on the Requin Base Website for upcoming activities, events, birthdays and anniversaries.

St. Patrick's Day parade - cancelled

Carnegie parade – Sunday May 24

Sewickley parade – Monday May 25

Coraopolis parade – Monday May 25

Leetsdale parade – Saturday July 4

Canonsburg parade – Saturday July 4

Veterans Appreciation Dinner in Leetsdale VFW on March 28.

Vietnam Memorial dedication, Baden PA March 29 1600-1700 at Legion #3

Old Business:

Requin Base Life Memberships are now available. Under 45 \$250, 45-55 \$150, 55-65 \$100, over 65 \$50.

New Business:

Christina Lonigro (guest speaker) offered to provide monthly column in SVD.

Motion to hold joint meeting with Keystone Base on May 9th was approved by the members present.

Motion to donate to the USSVI Charitable Foundation was approved by the members present.

For The Good Of The Order:

Veteran X program was discussed.

Motion to hold Pearl Harbor Day ceremony on December 7 at Soldier & Sailors was approved by the members present.

Letter from Navy League regarding USS Pittsburgh artifacts was read.

Chaplain Carl Stigers gave the Benediction and blessing of today's meal.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned.

Next meeting: Baden PA American Legion at 1230 hours on April 11, 2020

Coronavirus

Update 01: Potential Impact on U.S. Drug Supply

As the coronavirus continues to be among the major news stories each day, attention has turned to the drug supply in the U.S., not because of the cost but because of the vulnerability of the supply of prescription drugs for use in the nation. The U.S. depends on China for thousands of chemicals needed to make prescription drugs. That's because it turns out that pharmaceutical companies have outsourced our generic medicine manufacturing to China. In fact, generic medicines represent around 90 percent of all prescriptions dispensed in the U.S., and we depend on China for 80 percent of the core components to make our generic medicines.

With China taking drastic measures to try and contain the spread of the disease, including quarantines and shutting down some industries, production to supply America's pharmacies and medicine cabinets is at risk of interruption. For instance, sedatives such as fentanyl and propofol, which are administered to people placed on ventilators to help them breathe, are made with core ingredients from China. Medicines to treat shock, such as epinephrine and dopamine, are also made with chemical components from China. Antibiotics to treat sepsis, a life-threatening bloodstream infection, are made with raw materials supplied by China. In addition, other medical supplies, including masks, gloves, and gowns are also made, in large measure, in China.

So it turns out that we have an important choice to make as a country. We can continue down the current path, increase our dependence on China, and accept the risk to our survival. Or we can invest in domestic manufacturing of a minimum level of production of essential medicines to prevent a situation where our supply is severed. This is a new issue that has popped up on our radar and TSCL will be studying it in greater depth as we learn what might be done to insure lower prices and greater security for the prescription drugs that are so important for so many of us, especially the nations senior citizen population. [Source: TSCL Weekly Update | February 21, 2020 ++]

Coronavirus

Update 03: What Heart Patients Should Know About Covid-19

The coronavirus should have everyone's attention by now, health experts say. And people with heart disease have extra reasons to be alert. COVID-19, which was first reported in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December, has sickened tens of thousands of people and killed hundreds around the globe. On 25 FEB, Dr. Nancy Messonnier, director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said its spread in the United States seemed certain. "It's not so much a question of if this will happen anymore, but rather more a question of exactly when this will happen and how many people in this country will have severe illness," she told reporters during a news conference.

For people with underlying heart issues, the concerns are serious enough that the American College of Cardiology issued a bulletin this month to warn patients about the potential increased risk and to encourage "additional, reasonable precautions." Based on early reports, 40% of hospitalized COVID-19 patients had cardiovascular disease or cerebrovascular disease (which refers to blood flow in the brain, such as stroke), according to the bulletin. "That statistic doesn't mean people with heart disease are more likely to contract the coronavirus," said Orly Vardeny, associate professor of medicine at the Minneapolis VA Health Care System and University of Minnesota. "It just means that those folks are more likely to have complications once they do get it."

Vardeny, an adviser on the ACC bulletin, said the virus could affect heart disease patients in several ways. The virus's main target is the lungs. But that could affect the heart, especially a diseased heart, which has to work harder to get oxygenated blood throughout the body, she said. "In general, you can think of it as something that is taxing the system as a whole." That could exacerbate problems for someone with heart failure, where the heart is already having problems pumping efficiently. Someone with an underlying heart issue also might have a less robust immune system. People's immune systems weaken as they age, Vardeny said. And "in those with chronic medical conditions, the body's immune response is not as strong a response when exposed to viruses." If such a person catches a virus, she said it's likely to stick around and cause complications. A virus also may pose a special risk for people who have the fatty buildup known as plaque in their arteries, Vardeny said. Evidence indicates similar viral illnesses can destabilize these plaques, potentially resulting in the blockage of an artery feeding blood to the heart, putting patients at risk of heart attack.

Vardeny emphasized that information about COVID-19 is changing almost hourly. But previous coronaviruses, such as SARS and MERS, offer insight. They were linked to problems such as inflammation of the heart muscle, heart attack and rapid-onset heart failure, the ACC bulletin said. COVID-19 also has similarities to influenza, Vardeny said. At the moment, she said, "We don't think the actual risk is any higher per se. It's just that the spread is quicker." And unlike the flu, there's no vaccine. COVID-19 numbers change rapidly. The World Health Organization reported the fatality rate from the illness was between 2% and 4% in Wuhan, and 0.7% outside Wuhan. By comparison, as of mid-February, the CDC estimated there had been at least 29 million flu illnesses, 280,000 hospitalizations and 16,000 deaths from it in the United States this season.

Many of the same precautions that work against the flu should be helpful against COVID-19, Vardeny said, because it appears to spread the same way – through droplets in the air when someone coughs or sneezes. For now, she suggests people defend themselves by hand-washing, keeping surfaces clean and avoiding travel to areas with outbreaks. The ACC bulletin recommends people with cardiovascular disease stay up to date with vaccinations, including for pneumonia. The ACC also supports getting a flu shot to prevent another source of fever, which could potentially be confused with the coronavirus infection. In the news conference, Messonnier summed up her advice as, "Stay home if you're sick; cover your cough; wash your hands." She also warned that people need to prepare for the possibility of closures of work, school and more. "I understand this whole situation may seem overwhelming and that disruption to everyday life may be severe," she said. "But these are things that people need to start thinking about now." [Source: U.S. News & World Report | February 27, 2020 ++]

Vet Suicide

Update 46: The Problem with Doctor-Assisted. Hippocratic or hypocritical?

As Maryland lawmakers prepare to hold public hearings on whether the state should join nine others that allow terminally-ill patients to choose physician-assisted suicide, it begs a serious question with no easy answer: Is suicide wrong? Granted, the question of the humanity of physician-assisted suicide is a complicated one. For those who have completed Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training, which is the global gold standard for training in suicide first aid, they are asked to grapple with this question at the beginning of the training. The responses from participants are typically complex and illustrative of the moral ambiguity that is informed by the diversity of experiences, circumstances, and suffering that often lie beneath the question. According to a 2018 report, 2,217 people chose to die with the help of a doctor, with 1,459 patients dying in this manner as of February 2019.

However, the general consensus is a person with a terminal illness does not want to die. What he or she wants is an escape from pain and uncertainty, and likely prefers that this desire be satisfied without dying if given the option. Some argue that a dearth of options is precisely why an otherwise rational person may choose to die and justify supporting doctor-assisted suicide. However, the chief strategy officer for AMVETS challenges those who support doctor-assisted suicide to process their own thoughts and experiences, which may include periods of profound hardship, and consider the question of whether a life saturated with pain or suffering can still be meaningful.

If the answer is yes, then how do we find ourselves now in a place where human beings are not only not preventing suicide, but encouraging it for people who have hit the absolute height of vulnerability? We do our best to discourage at-risk military combat veterans, police officers, and firefighters, all of whom die at higher rates than their peers by age in other professions, from putting guns to their temples, hanging themselves, overdosing on medications, or jumping off bridges. One could argue they too have a

terminal illness, of a different sort, that leaves them dying inside. Yet, they rightfully don't enjoy the same option to escape from the pain that is offered to a terminal cancer patient, for example, in states that allow doctor-assisted suicide.

We tell these men and women that their lives do, in fact, have meaning. Then we allow members of our ostensibly civil society to facilitate self-inflicted death in one instance while criminalizing it in another. The problem with suicide in America isn't just in the statistics and its general prevalence. It is in the inconsistent standards we apply that masquerade as compassion for the select few who apparently deserve a permanent escape from pain with the help of a system that's supposed to support and sustain life. In other words, do no harm.

But mercy killing is harm, both biologically and principally. It's inhumane and undermines the human inclination to fight to live in the face of hardship. There's a reason why a sane person cannot choke himself to death with his own hands, or why she will instinctively fight for air when submerged underwater too long. Doctor-assisted suicide exploits the vulnerability of those who merely want freedom from pain by suggesting the capacity for perfect judgment, or the accurate prediction of certain disease-related death, is achievable by virtue of medical education. The suicide problem is bad enough in this country. To further codify, it is to promote it essentially. As earlier mentioned, veterans and service members die at higher rates per day on average than those who have never served in uniform.

More police officers die by their hand than in the line of duty. The suicide rate for children aged 10 to 14 had risen to more than twice the homicide rate in that age group. To combat these trends, we encourage these human beings to get support, seek treatment, reach out, and call someone when faced with a crisis. This, despite the fact that most of us cannot fathom the pain they feel or the experiences that brought them to the point of desperation. But this should also be the case where illnesses are involved, even terrible illnesses that no human being should have to endure. When they do, however, it's not the place of a doctor or system of care to help end that life — and get paid to do it.

Instead, find more cures. Develop more effective treatments. Enact better policies. No one who claims to be a healer should offer death as if it's an entree on a menu of options to choose from, depending on how one feels at the moment. Otherwise, helping someone die can be justified for all of us who live with the most incurable terminal condition: mortality. At best, we all have a natural expiration date that's hard enough to reconcile as we age. We ought to let nature do its job, the way human life was meant to end. No one should be profiting from or stealing credit for carrying out nature's work. We repeatedly tell veterans that their lives are worth living, whether they have missing limbs, brain injuries, severe mental deficits, or severe diseases as a result of military service. Proponents of doctor-assisted "self-killing," which is what it is, must stop clouding this message by anesthetizing our society to the pain linked to suicide. [Source: The Hill | Sherman Gillums Jr., (*Opinion*) | February 21, 2020 ++]

Vet Suicide

Update 47: New York Rate Doubles for Vets Aged 18 to 34

The suicide rate for New York state veterans aged 18 to 34 has "more than doubled," according to a January study by the New York Health Foundation. While the suicide rate for older veterans in New York State has recently declined, for younger New York veterans and for veterans nationally, the problem is worsening, the report found. The report by the private foundation states that "young veterans also have the highest rates of suicide of all veteran age groups as of 2017, and these rates have been increasing." In New York State, the report found, Livingston, Columbia and Wyoming counties had to highest rates of veteran suicide from 2015 to 2017.

The recently appointed Director of Ulster County Veteran Services Agency, Mark Cozzupoli, said that addressing veteran suicide is a top priority for him. "It's an epidemic," said Cozzupoli, "and it's also a problem for active duty service people." Cozzupoli said that 22 vets die by suicide every day. "That's a known stat," he added. Cozzupoli's plans include developing a peer-to-peer support program, enlarging upon programs such as the Hudson Valley Center for Veteran Reintegration, creating a local spinoff of the Hudson Valley Veterans Task Force, plus a community call-to-action in September to raise awareness. "We're looking for ways to connect local veterans with the community," said Cozzupoli, who added that his first new veteran's coalition meeting recently brought in some 50 participants from across Ulster County.

"Isolation keeps coming to mind," said County Executive Pat Ryan, who is also an Army veteran who was deployed twice to Iraq. "You're surrounded by your family but you feel isolated because nobody around you understands what you experienced." Two veterans Ryan knew, one a soldier under his command and one a close friend and fellow officer, committed suicide, he said. "For me, having had that direct experience ... the urge to find solutions is even stronger," said Ryan, describing the experience of finding out about a suicide as "an absolute gut punch." While Ryan said that he has not struggled with these issues, he did speak of the veteran's tendency to be tough, to keep it all in. "It took a while to share some of my experiences with my wife," said Ryan, "but it helped me and brought us closer together."

Ryan is particularly enthusiastic about individual support for veterans, such as developing a peer-to-peer support program. "One thing I learned from counseling my soldiers," said Ryan, "each person has a different level of resiliency. ... Some programs seem to assume everybody needs the same thing." Cozzupoli said that the Veteran Services Agency is applying for a state grant for a "vet to vet" program widely used in other counties, the "PFC Joseph Dwyer Veterans peer to peer support program." Cozzupoli is a veteran of the U.S. Air Force, which in 2019 experienced the highest level of active-duty suicides in three decades, according to preliminary numbers reported by the Associated Press.

“In my opinion,” said Cozzupoli, “[veterans] go from being a part of something so great ... the honor of serving, the feeling they are making a difference, that what you do matters. ... When they leave, they’re lost.” But the stress of remaining in the military is tough, too, said Cozzupoli. “It’s not getting any easier,” he said. “There are dwindling resources; more is asked [of each person].” The best course of action for a veteran, he said, is to join the reserves after active duty. Cozzupoli himself, after four years of active service with two deployments, worked decades more at the Stewart Air National Guard Base, retiring as a Command Chief. “The Veterans Administration has [suicide prevention] programs and crisis lines,” said Cozzupoli, “and there are things that vets can do to find help, but we don’t know if [vets] are going to them.”

In fact, according to the New York Health Foundation report, nearly 70 percent of New York veterans receive care outside the Veterans Administration. What both Ryan and Cozzupoli seek is to anchor veterans more firmly to each other and to the community. “The most thanks you could give to our veterans,” said Ryan, “is to take the time to find somebody who is [a veteran] in your circle ... try to understand what they experienced ... that you care enough to listen. I think it’s really powerful.”

Veterans or their loved ones who are troubled can contact the Veterans Administration Crisis Line to connect with a trained responder by text: 838255, by online chat at <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net>, or by calling 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1. Veterans who need help with services and anyone who would like to volunteer can call the Ulster County Veteran Services Agency in Kingston (845) 340-3190. Veterans who would like to volunteer to help other vets can also contact the Hudson Valley Center for Veteran Reintegration in the Town of Ulster, info@hvcvr.org or (845) 389-6329. [Source: Daily Freeman | Celia Watson Seupel Twitter | February 22, 2020 ++]