

GREATER TAMPA BAY BLUE STAR MOTHERS CHAPTER NEWSLETTER



April 2019

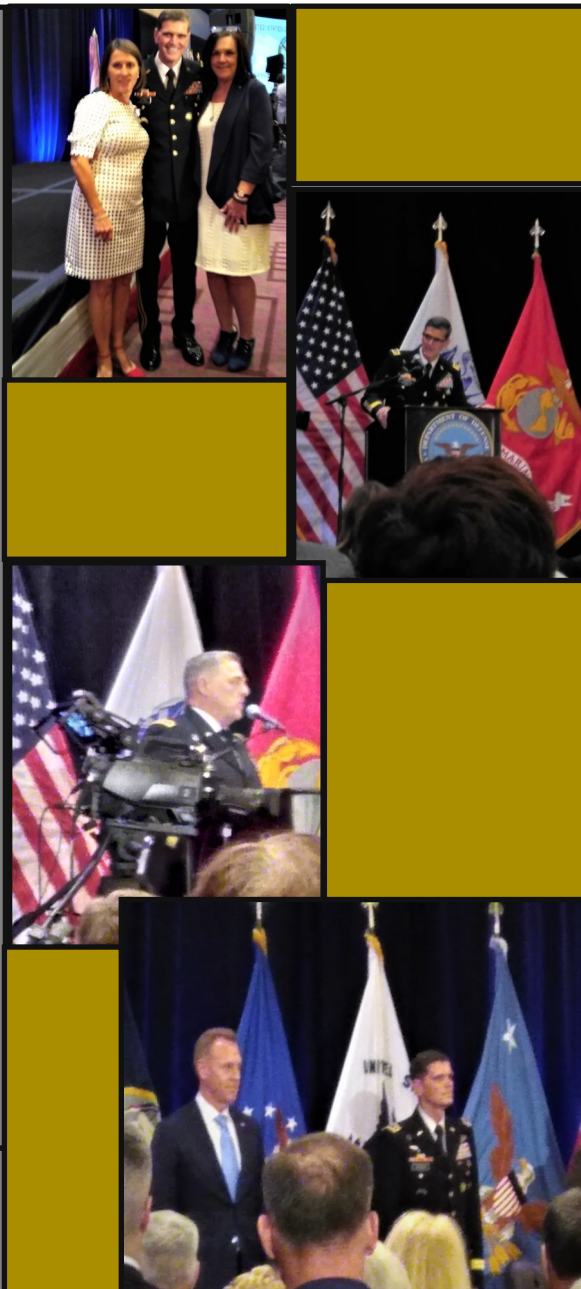
Change of Command—General Votel's Retirement Ceremony

At the end of March, General Joseph Votel with just one month shy of 39 years of service, retired from the US Army and turned command of Central Command (CentCom) to General Kenneth McKenzie, Jr. of the Marine Corps.

General Votel has led CentCom since March, 2016. Our Blue Star Mothers Chapter is honored to have not only MacDill AFB in our area of operation, but to also have CentCom and Southern Command (SoCom) and the distinguished leadership those two important facets of our military bring to our home town.

Born on February 14, 1958, in Saint Paul, Minnesota, General Votel attended the United States Military Academy and was commissioned in 1980 as an Army

As CENTCOM commander, General Votel oversaw the U.S.'s continued War on Terrorism in the middle east region, particularly the CJTF-OIR's fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. General Votel, an Army Airborne Ranger, has received many awards and medals of distinction including 8 overseas service badges. Greater Tampa Bay Blue Star Mothers President, Barbara McGreal was honored to attend General Votel's Retirement Ceremony and present him with a Blue Star Mothers Coin. Barbara also got to "return the favor" of a coin to General Mark A. Milley, Chief of Staff of the Army and who will succeed General Joseph Dunford as the 20th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff upon General Dunford's retirement. General Milley had previously presented Barbara with a coin and Barbara was pleased to be able to also present General Milley with a Blue Star Mothers coin at General Votel's ceremony.



More Recent Happenings

DONNA KISTEL AND SON, MICHAEL, ATTEND TRAVIS ATKINS' MEDAL OF HONOR AWARD CEREMONY

From US Army release; Joe Lacdan, March 27, 2019: WASHINGTON -- Travis Atkins didn't hesitate the June morning when he saw the insurgent reach for a suicide vest underneath his clothing. With his fellow Soldiers mere feet away, Atkins knew he had to act quickly before the enemy's bomb detonated.

The staff sergeant wrapped his arms and body around the insurgent to shield three Soldiers from the brunt of explosion.

"In his final moments on earth, Travis did not run," President Trump told a White House audience during Atkins' Medal of Honor ceremony today. "He shielded his men from certain death."

Those three Soldiers Atkins saved -- then-Pfc. Michael Kistel, Spc. Travis Robertshaw and Spc. Sand Aijo sat in the audience, wearing their military dress uniforms.

Atkins' actions took place during the height of the Surge, in the midst of some of the most vicious fighting of the Iraq War.

"He was stationed in a hotbed of terror," Trump said.

The morning of June 1, 2007, Atkins and his three-man squad patrolled through Abu Samak, Iraq, in the outskirts of Baghdad, when they received a report of two suspected enemy troops attempting to cross a nearby route.

Atkins left the Humvee and approached one of the men. As Atkins searched the man for weapons, the insurgent resisted, Trump said. During the struggle, the enemy reached for his vest. Atkins, quickly realizing the man wore a suicide bomb, covered and shoved the insurgent to the ground. The blast killed Atkins instantly, the president said.

"He rose to the highest calling," Trump said. "He laid down his life to save the lives of his fellow warriors."

Days before his passing, Atkins called his son, Trevor Oliver, in the United States to wish him a happy 11th birthday. It would be the final time Atkins spoke to his son. Now 22, Trevor took the podium to accept the medal on his father's behalf.

"It's something that I can't really put into words," Oliver said as he looked at an audience that included Atkins' parents, Jack and Elaine, his sister, Jennifer, and his extended family. Fifty members of his father's unit, the 10th Mountain Division, also were there.





BARBARA'S CORNER

I am excited to be sending all of you our inaugural Greater Tampa Bay Blue Star Mothers Newsletter. With each new edition, we hope to include not only recent happenings, event updates and calendars but also a member spotlight in each subsequent newsletter so we can all get to know each other better. I will be sending a Member Spotlight form to each of you to fill out as you feel comfortable and tell us about yourself, your family and your military service member(s). This is your forum. I am excited to hear your comments and suggestions as well as anything you would like to contribute. We are all "correspondents" for this newsletter. Thank you to Cindy Thomas for volunteering to create our newsletter layout and to continue as our Editor on future issues.

I would also like to encourage all of you to invite anyone you know who may be interested in joining our chapter and to provide ideas and feedback for things you may like to do, fundraising, community outreach, whatever is on your mind or in your heart.

Please be sure we know if your child or children are currently deployed or have recently returned from deployment. Thank you all for all you do and especially for being a part of our special community. We are all truly sisters.

Barbara

UPCOMING EVENTS

April 13, 2019—Field of Honor (Veterans Memorial Park) at 10 am. Blue to Gold Ceremony. All attending please arrive no later 9:30 am.

April 14, 2019—Tribute to the Troops, lunch served at Veterans Memorial Park. Silent Auction/Dinner & Concert at Crown Westshore Hotel following

May 4, 2019—Lunch Meeting/Social at the home of Francine Levine, 16332 Gulf Blvd. Reddington Beach. Bring a beach chair, sunscreen and a dish to share and be sure to let Francine know if you are coming.

May 18, 2019—Patriots Welcome Home. Service for Airman Isaac W, Anderson.

June 5, 2019—Dinner for Fisher House I & II. Please note this is a change moving November's dinner to June.

June 16, 2019—Deployed Troops Packing Party, American Legion Post 5

June 21-June 30, 2019—Wounded Warrior Games Tampa (see article below)

July 4, 2019—July 4th Safety Harbor Parade

Wounded Warrior Athletes Children's Backpack

We are exciting to be participating this year as the Wounded Warrior Games come to Tampa at the end of June. We have taken on the labor of love of creating 300-400 backpacks for children of athletes participating in the games. We've had a wonderful start collecting items (see our Thanks To Our Donors) from members and donors, but we still have a way to go. Melissa Matos has a wonderful craft for all you crocheters out there creating little stuffed manatees. Please email Melissa for plans. They're super simple and sure to delight teens and little ones as well. If you, your business or anyone you do business with has promotional items such as pens, hand sanitizer, flashlights, keychains etc. any and all donations would be appreciated. We are also looking for teen Zen coloring books, gel pens, crayons, small water bottles, wipes, sunscreen, lip balm, individually packaged crackers/cookies/chips/gummies/fruit snacks to include as well as fun Florida inspired items like the manatees (we are all set on beads) or small balls, frisbees, or other amusements. Thank you all for all you do to make our fundraising and projects such a success.

A HEARTFELT THANK YOU TO OUR RECENT DONORS

It takes a village and we are so grateful to be part of such a warm giving community here in the Tampa Bay area. Big, big thank yous to:

St. Mark The Evangelist Parish, New Tampa—Father David DeJulio Pastor, Darlene Fritz , Accounting for their donation of \$1,174.72 for Warrior Games Children's Backpacks.

Tampa Palms Bible Fellowship for their donation of \$1,000 for Warrior Games Children's Backpacks

Tampa Palms Womens Club—for their donation and collection from their most recent meeting of a "trunkful" of items for Warrior Games Children's Backpacks

Dee Heger and Heger Imaging—Leann Reynolds connector for giving us a fantastic price of \$1.38 for imprinted backpacks for Warrior Games Children's Backpacks and donation of overstock items to help fill backpacks

American Legion Post 5 USS Tampa for their donation of 400 American Legion coloring books

Patricia Delgado who personally donated crayons, beach pails with shovels, frisbees, balls, and squirt guns.

Nikki Smith and Hostess for their generous donation of snack cakes

Melissa and Michael Matos for their \$40 donation

If you have received or made any donations—please let Cindy Thomas know by emailing her at rthoma10@tampabay.rr.com

**PLEASE BE SURE TO SUPPORT THOSE THAT SUPPORT OUR TROOPS,
VETERANS AND OUR BLUE STAR MOTHERS!**