

# MOAA National Staff Brief Council Presidents

Council leaders from across the country met Thursday, April 6, at the Crowne Plaza Old Town in Alexandria, Va., to hear about updates to national MOAA's initiatives during the 2017 Council Presidents' Seminar.

To jump-start the event, Lt. Gen. Edward Hanlon Jr., USMC (Ret), who chairs the Council and Chapter Affairs Committee of MOAA's board of directors, introduced Lt. Gen. Dana T. Atkins, USAF (Ret), MOAA's president and CEO. Atkins described the success of the previous day's storming of Capitol Hill and recapped pivotal events of his tenure as MOAA's president and CEO, such as a bottom-up review that resulted in internal restructuring of MOAA and refined financial priorities.

Key members of MOAA's national staff then provided council leaders with information regarding MOAA's ongoing and upcoming initiatives. Kathy Partain, vice president of membership and marketing, described the challenges and strides in membership and marketing efforts. While ultimately rewarding, increasing membership can be challenging; grit and innovation will be necessary to maintain a healthy membership, she said.

"The key to our success, I believe, is collaboration," she said. "The more we can work together at the national and chapter level, the better it will be."

Partain implored chapter leaders to take advantage of the "[Why MOAA?](#)" video as a way to increase awareness of MOAA among prospective members — especially those from younger generations.

Recommendations from friends are the No. 1 reason people join MOAA. With this in mind, the video has the potential to serve as a powerful engagement tool.

Col. Jonathan Withington, USA (Ret), vice president of communications, updated council leaders on MOAA's communications initiatives, which ultimately aim to increase engagement to better tell the organization's story.

"You do the heavy grassroots lifting, and we want to give you the tools to be successful," he told council leaders. One such tool is the monthly "White Label" newsletter, which recently completed a six-month pilot

program. Composed by national MOAA staff in Microsoft Word, the newsletter's contents can be repurposed by individual chapters, whether they take a single article or use the entire newsletter under the chapter's logo.

Withington also described efforts to engage more closely with younger cohorts of officers, such as a redesign of the home page of the association's website and an upcoming redesign of *Military Officer* magazine. Dr. Samir Husni, director of the Magazine Innovation Center at the University of Mississippi, School of Journalism, will serve as a consultant in the latter, currently slated to launch in the first quarter of 2018. *Military Officer* soon will boast a stronger brand identity, bold covers, and more infographics, while still offering engaging and thoroughly researched articles.

Col. Terri Coles, USA (Ret), vice president of councils and chapters, announced the winners of the four- and five-star awards.

After a lunch break, Col. Mike Turner, USAF (Ret), vice president of development, briefed the crowd on a new pilot program from the MOAA Military Family Initiative (MMFI), a 501(c)(3) organization. The program will award grants to MOAA councils and chapters providing assistance to military families in their local communities. In 2017, at least five grants of not greater than \$5,000 year will be distributed. The council or chapter will control disbursement of the funds and perform a management role. Supported programs must serve military families or veterans of all ranks, support direct assistance for them, and have measurable outcomes.

Appropriate endeavors include those related to housing, food assistance, employment, health, family strength, community reintegration, and financial/legal assistance.

Maj. Gen. Joe Lynch, USAF (Ret), general counsel, outlined the legal relationship between MOAA's affiliated chapters and the national. Chapters are separate legal entities, he reiterated; they make their own decisions through their own officers and directors, raise their own funds, and plan their own activities.

Coles discussed trends revealed by a survey recently distributed to council and chapter leaders. For example, the most popular way for leaders to get their news from national MOAA is via email, followed by the website. Also, 67 percent of council and chapter leaders identified recruitment and retention as their biggest challenges. Many chapters expressed a desire for national MOAA to help with recruiting efforts and

improve automated tools.

“We’ve invested some time and monies and communications ... to improve the automation processes and data processes you are using for your rosters,” Coles said.

A more extensive survey will be sent to all chapters in 2017.

Coles also updated leaders on the Quarterly Leaders’ Training Workshops. Workshop goals are to share best practices among chapter leaders and equip them with a takeaway workbook, which will cover topics such as chapter management, advocacy, best practices for recruiting and retention and leadership succession, revenue generation, and ideas for community impact. The next workshop will take place in Atlantic City, N.J., May 5-6, serving councils and chapters in the Northeast Corridor.