2026

Salute to Veterans

Honoring all who serve

The nation's veterans are worthy of recognition and gratitude for their dedication to preserving the freedoms of their fellow citizens. Each November, veterans are honored on Veterans Day. Recent U.S. Census Bureau data indicates there are roughly 15.7 million living military veterans in the United States. Texas has the highest number of living veterans in the U.S., with a population of approximately 1.4 million individuals who have served in the military.

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Veterans Day events planned throughout Hudson Valley

Communities throughout the Hudson Valley will mark Veterans Day with ceremonies, breakfasts, parades, school programs and other events honoring those who have served in the U.S. military. The observances begin Friday, Nov. 6, and continue through Sunday, Nov. 15.

Among the highlights is Walden's 16th annual Veterans Day and Brick Dedication Ceremony, scheduled for 1 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 8, at Walden Veterans Memorial Park, 150 West Main St. The ceremony, sponsored by the Walden Veterans Memorial Park Committee and Walden Community Council, will honor 11 veterans whose names will be added to the park through the dedication of memorial bricks. The new bricks will join 370 previously installed at the park.

The ceremony will include patriotic music and remarks honoring veterans and their families. Refreshments will be served following the ceremony.

Other events scheduled throughout the region include:

Friday, Nov. 6

The Hudson Valley Hospice Annual Breakfast will be held at Novellas in New Paltz beginning at 9 a.m. Reservations are required. You can check availability or reach out via the Hudson Valley Hospice Events Page or call 845-338-0220.

Meadow Hill School will host its 20th Annual Veteran's Day Breakfast Celebration, welcoming family and friends who have served or are currently serving. Call 845-568-6000 or 845-568-6603mto reserve a space

Saturday, Nov. 7

In Monticello, the Landfield Avenue Synagogue, 18 Landfield Ave., will host Veterans Shabbat at 9 a.m. The veteran-oriented service is open to everyone, regardless of religious affiliation, and will be followed by a Kiddush luncheon.

In Woodbourne, the Woodbourne Fire Department No. 1 will host its 26th annual Veterans Day Parade. Lineup begins at noon at 355 Fire House Road, with the parade stepping off at 1 p.m. A ceremony and refreshments will follow.

A Veterans Appreciation Day will be held at the Pine Bush American Legion hall, 4 Martin Street, from noon to 4 p.m., featuring resources and giveaways for veterans. The event will include gift card giveaways, ice cream sundaes and free hygiene products. Participants include American Legion Post 1308, Catholic War Veterans Post 1937, VFW Post 5492, Heroes, Cowboys and Companions, the Orange County Vet Center, and other Veterans programs.

At the National Purple Heart Hall of Honor in New Windsor, a special ceremony at 1 p.m. will commemorate the 20th anniversary of the dedication of the Hall of Honor. The program will include remarks by combat-wounded Purple Heart recipient Chief Master Sgt. Flavio A. Martinez and Mark Sollohub of the New York State Division of Veterans' Services, along with a historical retrospective on the museum's 20-year history.

Sunday, Nov. 8

Veterans breakfasts are scheduled at several locations.

The Gardiner Fire House, Route 44/55, will host its annual Salute to Our Veterans breakfast from 8:30 to 11 a.m. Veterans eat free, with donations welcome. The menu includes eggs, bacon, sausage, pancakes, French toast, fresh fruit, coffee, juice and desserts.

In Walden, the annual Veterans Day and Brick Dedication Ceremony will begin at 1 p.m. at Walden Veterans Memorial Park.

Tuesday, Nov. 10

West Point Middle School will present its annual Salute to Service program from 1:15 to 3 p.m. The program honors veterans and their achievements. Art Terwilliger is the contact for the event.

Wednesday, Nov. 11 – Veterans Day

A number of ceremonies and activities are planned for Veterans Day.

In Highland Falls, American Legion Post 633 will hold its annual ceremony at 9 a.m. at the Highland Falls Fire Department. Local Scouts and O'Neill High School students are expected to participate. Guest speaker David Wright will discuss his family's military service dating to the Revolutionary War.

In Monticello, a Veterans Day ceremony will begin at 10:30 a.m. in the Legislative Hearing Room at the Sullivan County Government Center, 100 North St. The program will include the New York State Police Troop F Color Guard Detail and the Troop 101 Scouts of America Honor Guard. The public is invited.

In Cornwall, American Legion Post 353 will hold its Veterans Day service at 11 a.m. at the Veterans Triangle. Post Commander Peter Kurpeawski will offer remarks and lead the service. The public is invited.

The Town of New Windsor will hold its Veterans Day ceremony at 11 a.m. at Walsh Road and Route 9W. A wreath-laying ceremony will be followed by lunch.

In Wurtsboro, American Legion Post 1266 will host a Veterans Day service at 11 a.m. at Veterans Park, at the intersection of Sullivan and Third streets.

In Highland, the Lloyd Rod and Gun Club, 65 Clearwater Road, will host a Veterans Day breakfast for U.S. veterans and one guest. A Girl Scout color guard will participate in an opening ceremony at 8:45 a.m., with breakfast served afterward. The menu includes eggs, ham, sausage, pancakes, toast, coffee, tea and juice. Reservations are requested by calling or texting Ed Miller at 845-943-0562.

In Liberty, the Liberty Elks Lodge No. 1545 on Darbee Lane will serve a spaghetti and meatball dinner beginning at 5 p.m. and continuing until sold out. Veterans eat free; the cost for others is $17.

Frank Guido's Little Italy will hold its annual Veterans Day Buffet from noon to 3 p.m. A Veteran of the Month presentation will be held at noon in the main dining area. The meal is free for veterans, while guests are charged $25.

The National Purple Heart Hall of Honor, 374 Temple Hill Road in New Windsor, will be open to the public on Veterans Day. Visitors can tour the galleries, explore the interactive enrollment registry and visit the historic grounds. For information, call 845-561-1765.

Saturday, Nov. 14

The Town of Newburgh Post to Post Run for Veterans will begin at 8 a.m. at American Legion Post 1420, 1171 Union Ave., and finish at VFW Post 973 at Hudson Valley Professional Plaza.

The 5K run/walk is open to people of all ages and abilities. It is organized by local veterans' organizations to raise awareness and support their operations and programs. Prizes will be awarded to top runners by age group and gender, as well as the top male and female active military member or veteran. The race costs $25 for those who preregister, with the price increasing for later registration. T-shirts will be given to the first 100 participants.

Sunday, Nov. 15

The New Windsor American Legion Post 1796, 29 Walnut St., will host a Veterans Breakfast from 9:30 a.m. to noon. The event is presented by the Sons of the American Legion. Menu includes bacon, eggs, sausage, potatoes, French toast and more. Admission is $10. Veterans and kids under 5 eat for free.

Hospice brunch brings veterans together to share experiences, resources

Veterans from several generations and branches of the military gathered Sept. 23 at The American Grill at Stony Ford Golf Course in Thomas Bull Memorial Park for a brunch honoring their service and highlighting resources available to former members of the armed forces.

Hospice of Orange & Sullivan Counties organized the Veterans Brunch: A Salute to Service, bringing together veterans, family members and community organizations for a morning of conversation, fellowship and a panel discussion on continuing to serve after military retirement.

The program opened with a medley of military service songs, with veterans standing as their respective branches were recognized.

Eric Gatsik, president and CEO of Hospice of Orange & Sullivan Counties, said outreach to veterans is an important part of the organization's mission.

"Our veterans program is an incredibly important part of Hospice of Orange & Sullivan Counties. It's not something that we think of as just another program that we offer. It really is a part of who we are," Gatsik said.

He reported that Hospice cared for 132 veteran patients last year and reached another 190 veterans through veterans cafés at 17 facilities throughout Orange and Sullivan counties.

The organization also held several veterans events this spring, including making keychains for Vietnam veterans at the Newburgh Armory Center and a Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans commemoration at the Cornwall Yacht Club.



Army veteran attendee sharing his story.

Taylor Sterling, station manager at WTBQ Radio, moderated a panel discussion featuring veterans who described how they have continued serving their communities following their military careers.

Marine Corps veteran Jose Morales Jr., who served during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm and now serves as Veterans of Foreign Wars District 2 commander, discussed challenges veterans face in accessing benefits, health care and housing.

"Our responsibility is to listen without judgment, serve without hesitation and make sure no veteran is forced to navigate these challenges alone," Morales said.



Panelists Jose Morales Jr., Jeanette McMahon, and Kevin Clardy with Nam Knights and Lynn Crevling and Eric Gatsik of HOSPICE.

Retired Army Col. Jeanette McMahon, a 1983 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, spoke about her experience as a Gold Star family member following the death of her husband, Lt. Col. Michael McMahon, in a 2004 military aircraft crash in Afghanistan.

After retiring from the Army, McMahon served as development officer for a nonprofit organization supporting Gold Star families, working to provide debt-free college education for children who lost a parent in the line of duty.

"We all learn how to take care of each other," McMahon said. "All of us serve our country and serve our local communities. It's just what we do."

Navy veteran Kevin Clardy, who served during the Persian Gulf War, described finding a renewed sense of camaraderie through the Nam Knights of America, Orange County Chapter.

"I had family out there that I never knew I had," Clardy said.

The informal conversations among attendees were another important part of the gathering.

Veteran James Van Duzer said he appreciated the opportunity to meet veterans from different generations and hear about their experiences.

"The best part of the brunch was the informal opportunity to meet other veterans," Van Duzer said. He described sitting alongside a 96-year-old Korean War Army veteran and a nurse who served during the Vietnam War.

Christian Farrell, director of the Orange County Veterans Service Agency, outlined the agency's assistance with veterans' benefits and encouraged veterans to share information about available services.

"I think as veterans, we all need each other," Farrell said. "We can help one another just as far as camaraderie goes, just letting people know what resources are available to each other."

Air Force veteran Ralph Colon, a volunteer with Hospice's Vet-to-Vet program, encouraged other veterans to consider volunteering. Colon said his uncle, also an Air Force veteran, received hospice care last year.

"If you want to help fellow veterans, I encourage you to join our Vet-to-Vet volunteer team," Colon said.

Lynn Crevling, Hospice's director of advancement, thanked the panelists and led a moment of silence in remembrance of those who had died. She also recognized the work of hospice caregivers.

"Their stories remind us that service does not end when a military career ends," Crevling said. "It continues in the ways veterans lead, volunteer, advocate and strengthen their communities."

Hospice's Vet-to-Vet Volunteer Program pairs veteran volunteers with veteran patients for companionship and support. The organization's Honor Salutes recognize patients' military service, while its Veterans Committee coordinates outreach and special events.

Veterans interested in volunteering can call Hospice of Orange & Sullivan Counties at 845-561-6111 or email volunteerdept@hospiceoforange.com.

Newburgh resident retires after 38 years with Air National Guard

New York Air National Guard Col. Kristopher Geis, a Newburgh resident who spent nearly four decades in uniform, retired Aug. 2 during a ceremony at Stewart Air National Guard Base.

Geis concluded a 38-year military career that began when he enlisted in the Air National Guard in 1987 and included deployments in support of Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, as well as numerous leadership positions with the 105th Airlift Wing.

Geis most recently served as deputy commander of the 105th Airlift Wing, where he was responsible for helping ensure the combat readiness of the wing's assigned units by providing the equipment, supplies and facilities needed to accomplish their missions.

His career with the 105th Airlift Wing included a role in one of the unit's major transitions. As commander of the 105th Maintenance Squadron, Geis was instrumental in the wing's conversion from the C-5A Galaxy to the C-17 Globemaster III.

His leadership during his career earned him recognition from the Air Force, including the Maintenance Effectiveness Award.

Geis enlisted in 1987 and earned his commission in 2002 after graduating from the Academy of Military Science at McGhee Tyson Air National Guard Base in Knoxville, Tennessee.

Two years later, he became commander of the 105th Airlift Wing's Mission Support Flight. Under his leadership, the flight was named Mission Support Flight of the Year in 2005 and 2007.

Geis subsequently served as commander of the 105th Force Support Squadron and held a series of increasingly senior positions with the wing.

His assignments included commander of the Force Protection Squadron, commander of the Maintenance Squadron, chief of staff, deputy commander of the Maintenance Group, commander of the Maintenance Group and, most recently, deputy commander of the 105th Airlift Wing.

He also served as director of staff for the New York Air National Guard Joint Force Headquarters in Latham.

During his commissioned career, Geis deployed overseas in support of Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, adding combat and operational experience to his years of leadership with the 105th.

Geis earned a bachelor's degree in finance from the State University of New York at New Paltz in 2001. In 2014, he earned a master's degree in military operational art and science from Air University at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama.

His military decorations include the Legion of Merit, Meritorious Service Medal with three oak leaf clusters, Air Force Commendation Medal with two oak leaf clusters, Army Achievement Medal and Air Force Achievement Medal with an oak leaf cluster.

After 38 years of service, Geis' retirement marks the end of a career that took him from an enlisted Air National Guard member to senior leadership of the 105th Airlift Wing, while contributing to the wing's transition to the C-17 and its missions at home and overseas.



Col. Ryan Dannemann, commander of the 105th Airlift Wing (left), presents Col. Kristopher Geis a certificate of appreciation from the president at his retirement ceremony held on Aug.2, at Stewart Air National Guard Base, Newburgh.





Whitley retires after 35 years of Army service

After 35 years in uniform, New York Army National Guard Chief Warrant Officer 4 Victoria Whitley ended her military career Oct. 1 during a retirement ceremony at Camp Smith Training Site.

Surrounded by family, friends and fellow soldiers, Whitley was recognized for a career that included service in Iraq, a deployment to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and nearly a decade overseeing more than $1.3 billion worth of Army equipment across upstate New York.

Whitley, a Washington, D.C., native whose family is originally from North Carolina, enlisted in the active-duty Army in 1991 and eventually made her home in New Windsor. Since 2016, she served as the senior property book accounting technician for the 53rd Troop Command, overseeing the day-to-day accountability of vehicles, weapons, communications equipment, electrical systems and other military property.

Brig. Gen. Jason Lefton, commander of the 53rd Troop Command, presided over the ceremony and described Whitley as an exceptional officer whose meticulous work helped ensure the command's readiness.

"For the last decade, she's been a pivotal part of the 53rd Troop Command as the senior property accountable officer," Lefton said.

When Whitley assumed the position, she brought discipline and consistency to property accountability throughout the organization, Lefton said.

The equipment under her oversight, he noted, represented far more than an inventory of government property.

"It represents combat power," Lefton said. "It represents capability and soldier care."

Whitley's attention to detail meant commanders could count on knowing where their equipment was and whether it was ready for use, Lefton said.

"When our soldiers are called on, we know they are ready, that they have their equipment accounted for, and that they are ready to do their job," he said.



Photo provided

U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer 4 Victoria Whitley, senior property book technician with the 53rd Troop Command, New York Army National Guard, retired after more than 35 years of service during a ceremony at Camp Smith Training Site, Cortlandt Manor, N.Y., Oct. 1, 2026. Whitley is a New Windsor resident who grew up in Washington, D.C.

For Whitley, the retirement ceremony was less about closing a chapter than expressing gratitude for the people and experiences that shaped her career.

"As I prepare to retire, I know I'm leaving behind a profession that has been a huge part of my life for 35 years," Whitley said.

She said she would miss the camaraderie and the people she served alongside, as well as the sense of purpose that came with military service.

"I'm going to miss the camaraderie, I'm going to miss the people," she said. "But most of all, I will miss being part of something bigger than myself."

Whitley said she did not view the ceremony as a final goodbye.

"Today, I don't see this as saying goodbye to the Army as much as I am saying thank you for the opportunity, thank you for the friendship, and thank you for the memories," she said.

Throughout the ceremony, Whitley was recognized for her leadership, mentorship and dedication. She also used the occasion to honor others who had influenced her career.

She presented the Charity Adams Leadership Award, which she created in honor of Charity Adams, the first African American woman to command a Women's Army Auxiliary Corps battalion. The award was presented to retired Brig. Gen. Isabel Smith, Lt. Col. Phyonne Reynolds and Maj. Simone Adams Mitchell.

Whitley also presented tokens of appreciation to warrant officers and noncommissioned officers who supported her during her career, with special recognition for Lt. Col. David Myones and Chief Warrant Officers 4 Ruben Rodriguez and Peter Padilla.

Whitley's Army career began May 13, 1991, when she enlisted as an automated logistics specialist. During an overseas tour in South Korea, she maintained logistics supplies supporting combat service operations.

After leaving active duty, Whitley joined the North Carolina Army National Guard and reclassified as a civilian supply specialist.

She deployed to Iraq in 2004 in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, providing technical communications support and keeping computer and radio networks operating in combat conditions.

In April 2007, Whitley was appointed a warrant officer in the New York Army National Guard. She was promoted to Chief Warrant Officer 2 in 2009, Chief Warrant Officer 3 in 2015 and Chief Warrant Officer 4 in 2020.

Her National Guard assignments included serving as senior property book technician for the 42nd Infantry Division Headquarters Company, where she managed property logistics during a 2015-16 deployment to Guantanamo Bay.

At Camp Smith, Whitley established command-wide regularization training, transitioned property records to global computer systems and mentored newer property officers.

She earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from Trident University in 2012 and completed the Warrant Officer Advanced Course.

Her military decorations include the Meritorious Service Medal, Joint Service Commendation Medal, three Army Commendation Medals, Armed Forces Reserve Medal with "M" device, Joint Meritorious Unit Award and Driver and Mechanic Badge with wheeled vehicle clasp.

She also received the New York State Long and Faithful Service Award and New York State Medal for Humane Service.

During the retirement ceremony, Whitley received the Meritorious Service Medal. She is also scheduled to receive the Legion of Merit in recognition of her career accomplishments.

After 35 years, Whitley's military service may be ending, but the legacy she leaves behind is measured not only in the billions of dollars of equipment she helped safeguard, but also in the soldiers she mentored and the readiness she helped maintain.

Local residents promoted in New York National Guard

Several area residents were recently promoted in the New York Army and Air National Guard.

The promotions recognize soldiers and airmen for their performance, leadership abilities, professionalism and potential for additional responsibility.

In the New York Army National Guard, **Odett Contreras Moreno** of Middletown was promoted to private Aug. 25; **Rhandy Fernandez** of Middletown was promoted to private Aug. 27; and **Raymond Polanco Madera** of Middletown was promoted to private first class Aug. 29. All three are assigned to Alpha Company, New York Recruiting and Retention Battalion.

Christian Flores of Bloomingburg, assigned to Charlie Company, 119th Division Support Sustainment Battalion, was promoted to specialist Aug. 1. **Isaiah Carthy** of Middletown, assigned to Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion, 108th Infantry Regiment, was promoted to private first class Aug. 29.

Shaznay Mitchell of New Windsor, assigned to Alpha Company, New York Recruiting and Retention Battalion, was promoted to private first class Aug. 15. **Marilyn Zhunio** of New Windsor, also assigned to Alpha Company, was promoted to private Aug. 11.

Quianna Biggs-Bullard of Marlboro, assigned to the 53rd Troop Command, was promoted to sergeant first class Sept. 11. **Luis Cruz** of Pine Bush, assigned to Bravo Company, New York Recruiting and Retention Battalion, was promoted to private Sept. 20.

David Herbert of Newburgh, assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 1st Battalion, 258th Field Artillery Regiment, was promoted to specialist Sept. 20. **Ana Cortes Pliego** of Newburgh, assigned to Bravo Company, New York Recruiting and Retention Battalion, was promoted to private first class Sept. 11. **Anthony Gallo** of Newburgh, assigned to Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion, 108th Infantry Regiment, was promoted to private first class Sept. 26.

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1st Lt. Christian LoBiondo, U.S. Air Force, Pilot, McGuire Air Force Base

Henry Stephen of Goshen, assigned to the 1156th Engineer Company, was promoted to specialist Sept. 19. **Alexander Aquino** of Middletown, assigned to Alpha Battery, 1st Battalion, 258th Field Artillery Regiment, was promoted to private first class Sept. 23. **Collin Tash** of Middletown, assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 1st Battalion, 258th Field Artillery Regiment, was promoted to staff sergeant Sept. 14. Cruz was also included in the Sept. 23 promotion announcement.

In the New York Air National Guard, **Aaron Carroll** of Maybrook, assigned to the 105th Airlift Wing, was promoted to airman first class July 1. **Michael Smith** and **Nathan Long**, both of Middletown and assigned to the 105th Airlift Wing, were promoted to staff sergeant July 1. **Christopher Nunez** of Walden, also assigned to the 105th Airlift Wing, was promoted to master sergeant July 1.

William Krumm of Milton, assigned to the 109th Airlift Wing, was promoted to senior airman July 15.

Army National Guard promotions are based on a soldier's overall performance, demonstrated leadership abilities, professionalism and future development potential. Air National Guard promotions similarly recognize airmen for their performance, leadership, professionalism and potential for increased responsibility.

The New York National Guard is part of the New York State Division of Military and Naval Affairs, which oversees the state's military forces, including the Army National Guard, Air National Guard, Naval Militia and New York Guard.

The New York National Guard has nearly 20,000 members serving the state and nation.









