



gilchrist

Live Every Moment

A photograph of a pair of sunglasses with an American flag pattern on the lenses, resting on a surface next to a string of pearls.

We Honor Veterans Newsletter

January 2026 Edition

Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans

Save the Date!

Gilchrist's 8th Annual Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day Celebration is

Sunday, March 22, 2026

Event is in-person at 11:30 a.m. at Martin's West, Baltimore, MD.

Registration opens January 19, 2026! If you are receiving this newsletter, you will receive an announcement when registration is open. Be sure to register early!

The Keynote Speaker will be Karl Arthur Marlantes, USMC:

Join us to hear Vietnam War hero Karl Marlantes, recipient of the Navy Cross, Bronze Star, and two Purple Hearts. Bestselling author of *Matterhorn* and *What It Is Like to Go to War*, he will share unforgettable stories of courage, sacrifice, and resilience.

We need your help! Please spread the word about this event. We would like to reach as many Vietnam veterans as possible.

This free event is 100% supported by community donations. If you know of someone who would like to become a sponsor or if you would like to make a donation, please visit the Gilchrist website below and then click on "Donate to the 2025 Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day Celebration," or call Kim McDonnell at 443-849-8337.

[Welcome Home Celebration for Vietnam Veterans | Gilchrist](#)

We Hope to see you there!

Ed Kaplan - Proud Veteran and Passionate Volunteer

Ed Kaplan was drafted into the Army in 1966 and was stationed in Germany with the Quartermaster Corps. Ed was honorably discharged in 1968. After leaving the military, Ed pursued a career in human resources.

Ed met Eileen Thacker in 1980. They were married in 1984 and have four sons Douglas, Brian, Michael, and Daniel. They also have seven grandchildren and four great grandchildren.

Volunteering has always been an important part of Ed's life. In 1988 he became a volunteer with Hospice Services of Howard County. Ed was a volunteer assisting with patients at the end of life. In 1997, Gilchrist partnered with Hospice Services of Howard County, becoming Hospice of Baltimore and Howard County. In 2008, the organization was renamed Gilchrist Hospice Care. Ed continued to volunteer during these years.

In about 2013, Ed worked with Diane Sancilio and others at Gilchrist to establish the We Honor Veterans (WHV) program at Gilchrist. Ed's primary focus was on conducting Salute to Service Tributes for veterans under hospice care. Not only was Ed a team leader, but he also helped mentor other veterans who were interested in being part of these very important tributes.

One veteran volunteer commented that "Whenever you were on Ed's tribute team, you knew there was going to be singing. Ed has a wonderful voice and always concluded his tributes with the singing of God Bless America."

Ed Kaplan recently announced that due to health reasons it was time to retire. Ed had a positive impact on the lives of so very many people. Kim McDonnell, the Gilchrist WHV Coordinator, estimates Ed and his team conducted about 400 tributes between 2013 and 2025. Kim added that she worked closely with Ed and loves his dry sense of humor.

When asked about his most memorable tribute, Ed said "We conducted a tribute for a 100-hundred-year-old WW II Army combat nurse whose recollections of the wounded and dying were inspiring and vivid as if they had occurred yesterday."

Army veteran Art Grau has been on Ed's team for many years and said "Ed was a great team leader. He was always organized and set the highest standards for his team

members to follow.”

Marine Corps veteran Rick Sullivan describes his most memorable tribute on Ed’s team. “Before going into the room, the veteran’s wife told us her husband had been nonresponsive for several days. Their son, also a veteran, and his wife and family were in the room. The wife is sitting next to the bed holding her husband’s hand. As we concluded the tribute, we presented an honor salute. At the command ‘Present Arms’ the veteran returned our salute. Everyone in the room was in tears. Following the tribute, the wife commented that she would remember that salute for the rest of her life.”

A group of Gilchrist staff and veteran volunteers recently had lunch with Ed and Eileen Kaplan. The purpose of the lunch was to thank Ed for his many years of volunteering dedicated to honoring veterans. Ed accepted praise during the luncheon on behalf of his team notably the late Vietnam War combat Army veteran and Purple Heart recipient Captain Don Kyle, the late Marine Corps Vietnam War veteran Jim Sandoz, Navy Veteran John Gonnella, and Army Vietnam War veteran Art Grau.

When asked about volunteering, Ed replied “It is critical for a purposeful life; it is important to give back.”



Eileen and Ed Kaplan (center) with Gilchrist staff and veteran volunteers



Gilchrist veteran volunteers saluting Ed Kaplan

U.S. Army Veteran Ralph Sellers

Ralph E. Sellers was born on December 23, 1936. He enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1959 and served as an infantryman in the 3rd U.S. Infantry Division in Washington, D.C., until completing his tour of duty in 1962.

After the military, Ralph spent most of his working career at Hagerstown Auto Parts where he was well respected by his co-workers and customers. He was a humble man whose priorities were his wife, family, and church. Ralph was proud to be a veteran but never said much about his own accomplishments, choosing instead to brag about the accomplishments of his family and friends. He lived a life of boundless energy, humility, kindness, and unconditional love.

Four members of the Hospice veterans' team in Washington County; Laura Marfut, Tom Mooningham, Barry Kerstetter, and Cliff Schramm, had the honor of conducting a Salute to Service for Ralph last March. The ceremony took place at Doey's House, Washington County's inpatient facility for Hospice patients. Ralph's wife Scherry, daughters Kim Cook and Kris Burgan and their husbands, along with the extended family were by his bedside during the Salute. Several of the family members shared memories and humorous stories of Ralph's life. His oldest grandchild, Sarah – "Sarah Sunshine" to Ralph – held his hand during the ceremony and said that her Pappy had a way of always making her feel happy and special.

The ceremony began with a prayer, the National Anthem, and Pledge of Allegiance, followed by a discussion of the significance of Ralph's service. Since he had not said much about his service in the elite 3rd Infantry Division, the veterans' team filled in some details of what Ralph's service with that division meant. Known as the "Old Guard," the division is the U.S. Army's official ceremonial unit, serving as escort to the president, conducting military funerals at Arlington National Cemetery, guarding the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and responding to crises in the capitol as needed. Basically, the Old Guard is the face of the Army for the general public, and as such, each of its soldiers must maintain strict standards in fitness, appearance, and discipline. Ralph had to have been a top-notch soldier throughout boot camp and infantry training to be selected for the assignment.

Though Ralph didn't talk much about his military service, one point of pride was that he had marched in President John F. Kennedy's inauguration parade. His family had shared that fact with the Hospice veterans' team prior to the ceremony, and the team was able to find a photograph online of the 3rd Infantry Division marching in the parade on January 20, 1961. The family had not seen the photo before, but they identified Ralph in the formation right away, marching past the reviewing stand with President Kennedy looking on!

Ralph was then presented with a veteran's pin, a certificate of thanks, and an American flag. The ceremony closed with a rousing rendition of The Army Song in honor of Ralph.



Infantryman Ralph Sellers marching past President John F. Kennedy during the inauguration parade, January 20, 1961 (second soldier in from the reviewing stand directly below the President)

Navy Veteran Bernita Spore

Bernita Bridges was born in 1934 in Cumberland, Maryland and grew up in Beans Cove, Pennsylvania. Bernita was the eleventh of thirteen children. She graduated from Ursuline Catholic Girls High School in Cumberland in 1952.

Bernita was destined to join the military given that so many of her siblings were also in the military including

- Robert Bridges, Army, WW2
- Richard Bridges, Army, WW2
- Lucy Bridges, AF, WW2
- David Bridges, Navy, WW2
- Luke Bridges, Navy, WW2
- Paul Bridges, Army, Korean War
- Matthew Bridges, Army, Korean War

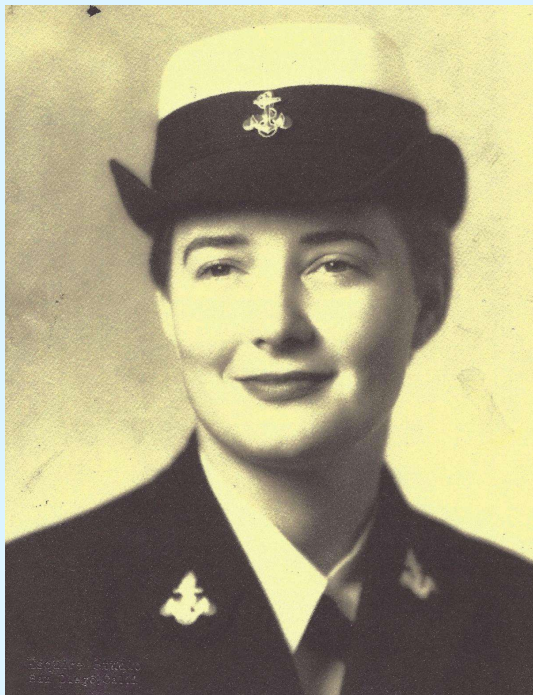
Bernita enlisted in the Navy in August of 1952. After completing her training in San Diego, California she was sent to Quonset Point Naval Air Station in Rhode Island. Bernita was trained as a cook, working in the main dining hall as well as the hospital kitchen. Bernita was honorably discharged from the Navy in 1955.

After leaving the military, Bernita worked as telephone switchboard operator. She then attended secretarial school in Washington, DC and over the years worked in a District Attorney's office, for the Shell Oil Company, and for SMECO (Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative). While at SMECO, she was awarded a certificate of appreciation for nine years of service.

Bernita had a son who sadly passed due to cancer in 1995. Bernita was so moved by the care her son received while under hospice, that she became a volunteer.

Bernita and her husband David Spore were active in the Arc and Doves Square Dance Club, the Chesapeake Kennel Club, and were volunteers for Hospice of St Mary's County, Maryland for 21 years. Bernita was also a certified cloth doll maker.

Bernita was recently honored with a Salute to Service Tribute by a team of Gilchrist Volunteers. The tribute opened with a prayer, the singing of the National Anthem, and the Pledge of Allegiance. Bernita was presented with a certificate from Gilchrist, a We Honor Veterans pin from the Veterans Administration, a patriotic blanket made by a Gilchrist volunteer, and a thank-you card made by a school student. Surrounded by family, everyone sang several patriotic songs including the Navy song. The uniformed veterans then presented Bernita with an honor salute, which she proudly returned. The tribute concluded with a prayer.



Bernita in uniform



Bernita on duty in the hospital



Bernita Spore with the Gilchrist Team

Army and Vietnam Veteran Michael May

Michael May was born in 1947 in Baltimore, Maryland. Mike graduated from Loyola High School in 1965 and entered the United States Army in 1966.

Mike was sent to Vietnam in 1967. He was an MP assigned to the 4th Military Police Company of the 4th Infantry Division. Mike achieved the Rank of Sergeant (E5) and returned to the United States in 1968. Mike was discharged from the Army in 1969.

After leaving the military, Mike went to school on the GI Bill attending Loyola College. After completing his degree, Mike went to work for the Baltimore City Police Department. Mike continued his education, completing a Master's Degree in Criminal Justice at the University of Baltimore. Mike went on to complete a law degree at the University of Baltimore.

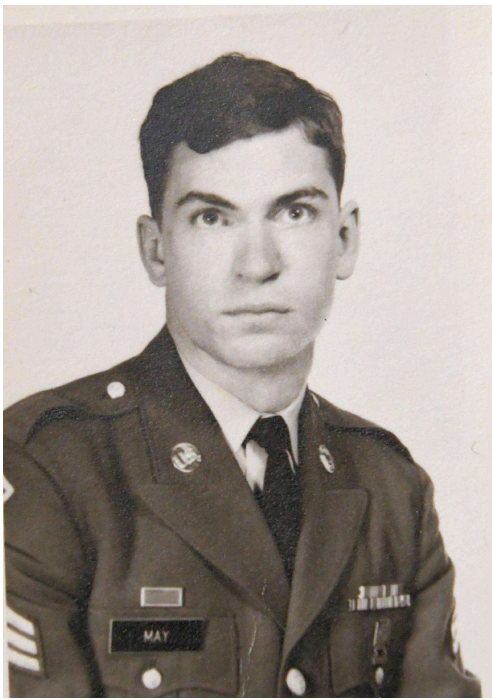
Mike left the Baltimore City Police Department to practice law. Mike worked as an attorney for many years until he retired.

Mike met Sarah Nagel in 1968 and they were married in 1970. Mike and Sarah have two sons, Joseph and Andrew.

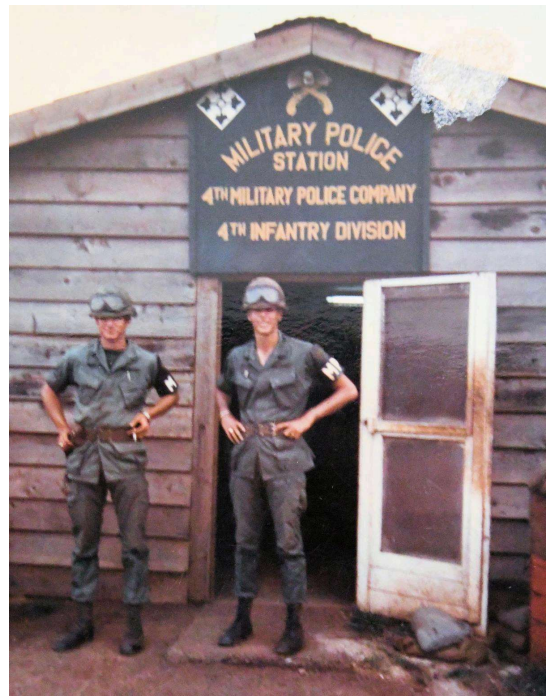
Helping others was a big part of Mike's life. Here are just a few of the organizations and groups that benefitted from Mike's time and talents:

- Maryland Defense Force – Commanding Officer of the Judge Advocate Corps
- Baltimore City Retired Police Benevolent Association
- Immaculate Conception Church
- National 4th Infantry Division Association
- The Friendly Sons of St. Patrick
- The Ancient Order of Hibernians
- Board of the St. Thomas More Society of Maryland
- Board of the Catholic Men's Fellowship of Maryland

Michael May was recently honored with a Salute to Service Tribute conducted by a team of Gilchrist military veteran volunteers. The tribute opened with a prayer, singing of the National Anthem, and the Pledge of Allegiance. Mike was presented with a We Honor Veterans pin and a Vietnam Veteran pin from the Veterans Administration, a certificate from Gilchrist, a patriotic blanket made by a Gilchrist volunteer, and a thank-you card made by a school student. Mike's wife Sarah was presented a Proud Wife of a Veteran pin and a patriotic scarf. Everyone sang several patriotic songs and then the Army song. The military team presented Mike with an honor salute, which he sharply returned. The tribute concluded with a prayer.



Michael May in Uniform



Michael May (left) on duty in Vietnam



Michael May with the Gilchrist Team



Michael May returning an honor salute

Vietnam Veterans Talk to Students

A team of Gilchrist military veteran volunteers were recently invited to speak to over 70 students at Monarch Academy in Glen Burnie. The mission of Monarch Academy is to prepare students for citizenship by developing critical thinking skills, creative problem-solving skills, self-discipline, and a commitment of service to others in the community in which they live.

The eighth-grade students were reading about the Vietnam War. The teachers invited a team of five Vietnam veterans to talk with the students about their experiences before, during, and after serving in Vietnam. The veterans also described the turmoil of the 1960s including the draft and protests. The veterans also described the impact of serving in the military had on their lives.

The students were highly engaged and also shocked to learn that back then there was no Internet, no cell phones, and only a few television channels. The students were surprised to learn about the pressures on young men when they turned 18 and that many were given no choice but to enter the military. The students asked a lot of very good and often challenging questions.

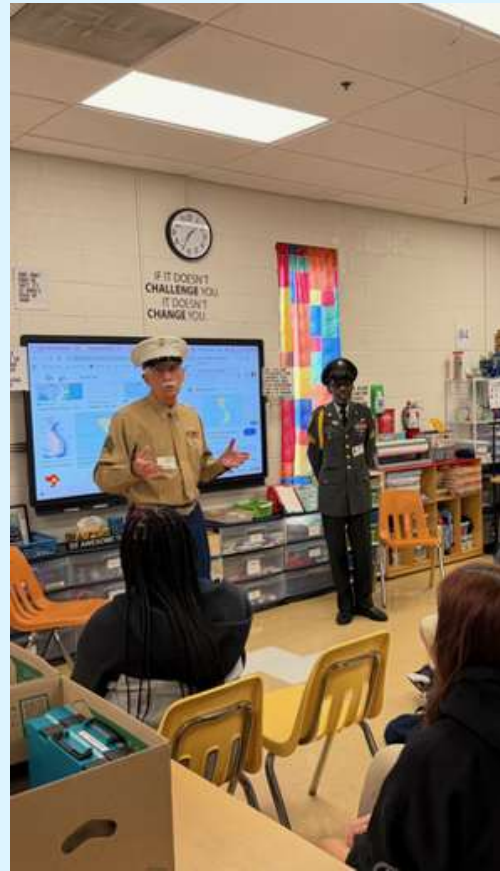
At the conclusion of the presentations, the students thanked the veterans with many of them coming forward to shake hands as they left the classroom.

On the way out of the school, one of the veterans commented that "While talking about some parts of my time in Vietnam was difficult, it felt good to share with these wonderful

young people.”



(L-R) Mike Lachance (Army), Paul Sullivan (Marine Corps), and Tim Price (Army)



(L-R) Rick Sullivan (Marine Corps) and Bill Hill (Army)

Reach Out and Show a Veteran You Care

You’ve probably heard the saying, “Don’t judge a book by its cover.” Or maybe, “Not all that glitters is gold.” Both remind us that things aren’t always what they seem. A steady job, a smile, showing up every day or even someone saying “I’m fine” can all hide a different reality. Just because a Veteran looks like they have it all together doesn’t mean they aren’t fighting against something invisible.

That’s why it’s so important to check in, especially with the buddy who never asks for help. A simple, grounded conversation can let them know they’re not alone. And that small step could save their life.

There is an excellent article about this on the VA website (link below). In this article, you will read about:

- Why checking in matters
- How to start the conversation
- You don’t have to be an expert
- When to check in with a veteran

[Check in—even when a Veteran says they’re fine - VA News](#)

Uniform Smiles

A Drill Sergeant had just chewed out one of his cadets, and as he was walking away, he turned to the cadet and said: "I guess when I die you'll come and dance on my grave."

The cadet replied: "Not me, Sarge...no sir!

"I promised myself that when I got out of the Army I'd never stand in another line."

Please Share

If you enjoyed reading this edition, please forward a copy to other veterans that you know so that they can also enjoy the newsletter. If you are reading a shared copy and would like to receive your own copy of future editions, please send an email with your request to kmcdonnell@gilchristcares.org.

Looking For a Few Good Volunteers

Would you like to be a Gilchrist volunteer? We are always looking for volunteers – especially those who have military experience. Our military veteran volunteers are involved in Salute to Service Tributes for veterans under hospice care, visiting public schools to talk about military service, meeting with veterans to talk about their military service, supporting our annual Welcome Home event for Vietnam Veterans, and many other activities.

If you would like to learn how to become a volunteer, contact Gilchrist at kmcdonnell@gilchristcares.org.

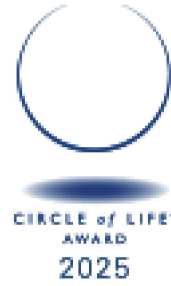
Gilchrist Cares

You may know Gilchrist best for the care we provide people near the end of life. But we offer so much more than hospice. Today's Gilchrist extends services to individuals with serious illness who need our care and support well in advance of hospice care. We also provide counseling and support before and after the loss of a loved one. Please visit the Gilchrist website to learn more.

[Gilchrist providing care at every stage of serious illness \(gilchristcares.org\)](http://gilchristcares.org)

We Want Your Input

If you have suggestions for content you would like to see in future issues of the Gilchrist We Honor Veterans Newsletter, please contact us at kmcdonnell@gilchristcares.org.



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