



December 2023

Williamsburg Chapter 685 – Celebrating 65 years!

Elected Officers for 2023



Hazel Braxton, President

rbraxton7@cox.net

Penny Kell, Secretary

pzkell@cox.net

Larry Leiby, Treasurer

larrydavidleiby@gmail.com

Mary Grace Dorsey, 1st Vice President

dorseyspencer008@gmail.com

Will McElfresh, 2nd Vice President

Willcelfre86@gmail.com

See chapter website for appointed program chairs and officers.

Reading the Chapter Newsletter Online

To go directly to our Chapter 685 web page, type in browser or click on:

<https://vanarfe.org/Chapter-685/>

Using the above link, you can read the **Williamsburg Chapter 685** newsletter with color pictures at the VFN main page. You can also **log into** (using your email and password) FedHub (www.narfe.org), and go to the **NARFE Newsletter Exchange community**. Look for the FedHub Start Up Quick Guide to log on.

Chapter Website: <https://www.vanarfe.org/Chapter-685/>

President's Message *by Hazel Braxton, Chapter President*

Fall 2023 has been filled with beautiful days and only a few nights when the temperature has dropped to near freezing. We are thankful for those Chapter 685 members who stepped up and volunteered to take on several positions on our Chapter Executive Committee. Please welcome our new EC members:

Judy Talley, Alzheimer's Chair,
Venessa Trent, Membership Chair
Evette Conwell, Newsletter Editor

They will provide new perspectives, fresh ideas, excellent service to the entire chapter in 2024. We hope that you will have a GREAT Holiday season and consider what you can do to make the Chapter even greater in 2024 and beyond.

Secretary's Corner by Penny Kell, Chapter Secretary

A quick reminder of our chapter events schedule for 2024...

Join Us for Lunch and Other Chapter Events

Chapter 685 has monthly, lunch meetings at Colonial Heritage on the second Tuesday of each month, September through May. A social gathering begins at 11:00 a.m. Lunch starts at 11:30 a.m. with a guest speaker program and general chapter business meeting.

There are two, informal meetings at different locations during the summer, usually one breakfast and one lunch. For details, contact Penny Kell, Secretary, at pzkell@cox.net.

For all other inquiries contact Hazel Braxton, President, at rbraxton7@cox.net

Program Chair

Here are the scheduled guest speakers for the first quarter of 2024. We hope to see you at the January, February and March 2024 luncheons.

January 9, 2024 Laurie Hesser from Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at William & Mary (formerly the Christopher Wren Association)

February 13, 2024 Scott McCoy from Bodhi Bee Farms LLC, Williamsburg

March 12, 2024 Kevin Ernst from The Wild Bird store in Williamsburg

Membership News By Dave Riggs, Membership Chair

New Members

We are pleased to welcome three new members: **Carolyn Ruhle, Greg Spaulding, and James Tripp**. All of them joined NARFE and the Williamsburg chapter since our last newsletter. Welcome to Chapter 685! Please be sure to greet Carolyn, Greg, and James personally at our meetings.

Names of new members are obtained from membership statistics and the chapter roster, which are posted on the officer portal of the NARFE website. Our apologies if we have additional new members and we have not recognized you. Please let us know.

Five and Ten-Year Chapter Membership Gains and Losses – and Our Future

This year concludes my fifth year as membership chair. We have welcomed 10 new members through November of this year. It's an impressive total, and it's wonderful to have gained that

many members. But there's a negative side to the story: Despite having that many persons join the chapter, a larger number have left. Yes, some of our losses were deceased members, but the majority of our decrease was caused by members who dropped their membership. Sadly, in most cases they dropped both their chapter and national membership, despite NARFE's proven record for benefiting federal employees and retirees.

We won't have final figures for this year until December 31, but through November 30 our chapter membership total is 130. Yes, in 2023 we gained 10 members but we started the year with 139. This means that we lost more members than we gained, for a loss of 6% of our total membership this year. The story is even more disappointing for the past five years, during which we gained 48 members but started 2019 with 170 members (still losing more members than we gained), for a five-year decline in chapter size of 40 members, or 24%.

Now for the most astonishing comparison of all, as we glance back a full decade. Chapter membership in 2013 was 288, which is more than double our current membership – a loss of 158 members. That's a ten-year decline in membership of 55%.

As if our chapter membership decline was not alarming enough, this is a national trend. If you read the annual report in *NARFE Magazine* and follow the figures for subscribers, income from dues, and other indicators, you have perhaps noticed that NARFE has lost membership nationwide. The puzzling aspect of this is that it's occurring while the assault on federal employees and the benefits of both employees and retirees is becoming even more drastic in Congress. Under consideration is the Public Service Reform Act (HR 3115/S 1496, Rep. Chip Roy, R-TX, Sen. Rick Scott, R-FL) which "would make all federal employees at-will and enable workers to be removed for good cause, bad cause or no cause at all" and "abolish the Merit System Protection Board" among other things (see *NARFE Magazine*, November 2023, p. 14, and *NARFE Magazine*, December 2022, p. 13). Separately, proposals have been made to reduce benefits for employees and retirees.

What this says about Chapter 685 is up to us. Our monthly meetings are enjoyable and informative – as they should be – but we also must remember that NARFE is not a social club. Our national membership dues support not only us but federal employees and retirees everywhere, and our chapter dues enable us to meet and function within our community. Despite our chapter's membership losses, we've been fortunate to have new members continue to join. Let's all do what we can to retain current members and welcome new ones.

A Fall Trip You Might Consider by *Ginny Taylor*

Ginny Taylor, her husband, and their friends from Arizona took a road trip to Staunton, Virginia (home of the Statler Brothers). Staunton was a pleasant surprise! We stayed in the center of the historic area in an historic hotel. Parked the car and walked everywhere even though there was a trolley car.

When we arrived, we first went to the Visitor Center and met Gloria, who was a tremendous help with suggestions of where to eat, things to do, and where to park. The first morning there, we

took the **guided** trolley car around the city, which is known for its architectural designs. We learned that T.J. Collins built over 200 structures in the area, and most are still standing!

During the warm months, Staunton closes off part of a main street for walking and dining. Staunton is a progressive city with many places to visit—glass blowing studio, camera heritage museum, winery, cidery, fantastic restaurants, little shops with items from local artists, Frontier Culture Museum, Woodrow Wilson’s Presidential Library, which we toured, and the American Shakespeare Center at which we saw “Much Ado About Nothing.” The talent was superb, and the actors kept the show moving, funny, and more in tune with present day.

The highlight of the trip was our trip to Goshen (Victoria Station) to ride the N&W J Class 611 steam engine train to see the fall colors. As luck would have it, it rained when we left, but on the return trip, the sun came out. We spent 3 ½ days in Staunton and kept busy the entire time. There is so much more to see there that we’re talking about going back in the spring...Happy Travels...

Keep Your Records Up-To-Date With NARFE

Remember: If you move, change your email address, or change your telephone number, notify NARFE. This enables you to receive *NARFE Magazine* and email communications from both national headquarters and Chapter 685.

The three ways to notify NARFE are:

- 1) Online, at the NARFE website www.narfe.org – log in and click “My Account”
- 2) Email NARFE at memberrecords@narfe.org
- 3) Telephone toll-free 1 800 456-8

Chapter 685 welcomes 10 members in 2023!

New Members Who Joined When Becoming NARFE Members

Charles Caldwell
Evette Conwell
John Primm
Carolyn Ruhle
Greg Spaulding
Debra Taylor
James Tripp
Allen Wesley

NARFE Members Who Joined via Transfer from Other NARFE Chapters, Etc.

Mary Ann Hodges
Glenn Rolph

The Police Dogs Steal the Show (September)



Two officers from the K-9 unit of the York-Poquoson Sheriff's office spoke and demonstrated the special abilities of their two very different dogs at the September 12 luncheon of the Williamsburg chapter of the National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association. Here Ghost, a German Shepherd, waits patiently while his handler, Deputy Ashley Octaviano, explains his special functions and abilities. Below two Maryann's, Mary Grace and Cheryl play with the cute puppies – when not on the job!





(Left photo) Bloodhound Sarge, leaps toward his special toy held by handler Deputy Nick Levindoski. Sarge is still a puppy and full of energy. (Right photo) Wearing a special protective sleeve, Deputy Levindoski allows Ghost to demonstrate his bite-and-hold ability. Deputy Octaviano provides the release command. Despite Ghost's ferocious appearance, both he and bloodhound Sarge were very friendly and enjoyed receiving the attention and pets from NARFE civilians.

Chapter Communications and Leadership Discussion (October)



A rare shot of Tom Kell, chapter photographer, in front of his camera. Thanks Tom!



Members of the Chapter Executive Committee lead the discussion of how best to provide chapter communications and key information. The program was led by Treasurer (Larry), Program Chair (Ginny), Chapter Secretary (Penny), and Past Chapter Presidents (Jeanne and Jeff). Member feedback received included:

1. Buy lunch for any **new** Chapter member who attends their first Chapter 685 luncheon. *
2. Explore ways to get “active” federal employees to join Chapter 685, (to be reviewed)
3. Consider having a Chapter 685 “booth” at gatherings involving potential NARFE members. *
4. Arrange and conduct field trips for current, Chapter 685 members. *
5. Continue Quarterly Newsletters delivered via email. (no change)

**Approved by the Chapter Executive Committee (11-30-2023)*

NARFE Williamsburg Walks to End Alzheimer's



Chapter members participated in Williamsburg's Walk to End Alzheimer's on Saturday, October 28. Shown (left to right) are Treasurer Larry Leiby and President Hazel Braxton. Larry and Hazel are holding the NARFE Chapter's banner. On Hazel's left is Alzheimer Chairwoman Sandy Lee-Bilski. Behind them are Cheryl Leiby, Jeff Fratter, Frances McElroy, Bob Spitzer, and Walter Bilski.

In 2023, Chapter 685 members contributed \$924.70 to support Alzheimer's Research. NARFE members, nationwide, began donating to Alzheimer's research in 1983. Since then, it has donated over \$16 million to support Alzheimer's research to find a cure!



Many thanks to Sandy, Alzheimer's Chair and Dave, Membership Chair for their fine work!

FEHP Open Season Discussion (November)



Chapter members received important health insurance information at their luncheon on Nov. 14. Representatives of three health insurance providers presented valuable information to aid decision making during the federal health insurance open enrollment period, which began Nov.12 and ends Dec. 11. Pictured from left are Nathan Smith (United Health Care), Michelle Griffin (Blue Cross/Blue Shield) and Patricia Wright (Aetna Health Insurance).



We begin all chapter events with *The Pledge of Alliance*.

Editor's Note:

After five years, this will be my final edition of the Chapter Newsletter. Many thanks to all those who contributed high-quality, articles (you know who you are) and outstanding photographs (thanks Tom), over the years.

Please welcome and give your support to our **new Chapter 685 Editor, Evette Conwell**. I know she will do a great job ensuring a quality, quarterly chapter newsletter.

Finally, look for the e-mail invite to our **Annual Holiday Luncheon on December 12, 2023!** This year, we are collecting food donations for the St. Olaf's Food Pantry.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS
2023