

Shorelines



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Joseph Tavares (forefront) and his former classmates salute the now-deceased members of their 1969 officer training for combat engineers while in Washington, D.C., early last month.

Bill Shugarts for Shorelines

A WISH COME TRUE

Local man organizes reunion for Vietnam-era combat engineer class

By Amanda Durish Cook
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These days, Joseph Tavares can be spotted around Ponte Vedra Beach in a red cap emblazoned with a white "53" on the back.

The significance of the number is something Tavares, a Ponte Vedra Beach resident since 1991, holds dear. Tavares, along with 52 other trainees, attended an Officer Candidate School for combat engineers in 1969 in Fort Belvoir, Va., just outside of Washington, D.C., in preparation for the Vietnam War. The 53 are formally referred to as the U.S. Army Engineer Officer Candidate Regiment Class 22-Hotel-69.

"All of the fellas, one through 52, will be waiting to meet the last one in the beyond," Tavares explained. "We keep the 53 on our hats, each hoping that we'll be the 53rd one."

Tavares, 69, said he is trying to keep the

memory of Vietnam alive, "particularly for the veterans — what they went through and what they continue to go through."

"We were very close throughout our training and afterwards, and it was important to share our stories and recount our experiences," he said.

In that spirit, Tavares initiated a reunion for him and his former classmates last month in Fort Belvoir. The Aug. 8-10 reunion included a formal dinner at the Fort Belvoir Officers Club, a visit to the National Museum of the Marine Corps and a wreath-laying ceremony at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

"When you're at the wall ... the sheer number of names ... you think, 'God Al-



Special for Shorelines

Ponte Vedra Beach resident Joseph Tavares (second from left on third row from top) graduated in one of two company platoons from the combat engineer officer training in Fort Belvoir, Va., in August 1969.

mighty," Tavares said.

Tavares' meet-up was three years in the making. In 2011, he was working at the downtown Jacksonville office of the Army Corps of Engineers when he got the idea. From there, he enlisted the help of Wish of a Lifetime, a Denver-based foundation that assists senior citizens in fulfilling goals. The nonprofit was founded by Olympic skier and former NFL football player Jeremy Bloom in honor of his grandmother.

Sally Webster, director of community outreach at Wish of a Lifetime, assisted with locating the addresses, phone numbers and emails of Tavares' former classmates that were scattered from Oregon to Ohio.

After three months of online research, Webster came up with nearly 50 addresses and sent letters out. Of the 49 letters, 14 members of the 1969 class responded.

"Knowing that he took that contact information and initiated and organized a successful and, it seems, emotional reunion brings me so much joy. I really feel like our help locating his classmates empowered him to fulfill his wish of reconnecting with those men he trained and bonded with during the Vietnam War," Webster said.

"I thought I could never locate all of them," said Tavares. "It was a lot of fun speaking for the first time in decades. It was like those 45 years hadn't taken place. We just got in step with how we left off."

Of the dozens of former officers that

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"We were very close throughout our training and afterwards, and it was important to share our stories and recount our experiences"

Joseph Tavares,
Ponte Vedra Beach resident and Vietnam veteran

Green pest control methods gaining popularity at Beaches

By Ron P. Whittington
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Ponte Vedra-based Nature's Way, a pest control company that uses all natural ingredients to rid homes of insects, was launched in 1999, well before the green movement swept the country.

"We were green before green was in style," said company president and chief operating officer Gina McDonough. "We were making inroads with doctors, who were recommending us for treating the homes of special needs children. The next thing we knew, the green revolution hit and people were becoming more aware of the different products and the chemicals they were using in their homes."

David Miller, the founder of the company, had a history of developing safer pesticides well before he came up with the idea for Nature's Way. Miller, who attended Western Michigan University and Duke University, eventually ended up at the University of Florida. With a degree focus in biology and chemistry, he stayed in Gainesville and was put in charge of the city's mosquito control program in the 1970s.

"It was at that time that we started experimenting with a more eco-friendly approach," he said. "My contention then and now is that

we don't have to have all these pesticides to control pests and that we can use more of what is produced by nature in fighting bugs."

After successfully implementing some of his ideas in Gainesville, Miller moved to the Jacksonville area in the 1980s and was hired to oversee Duval County's Mosquito Control Program. It was in the early 2000s that he converted the kitchen at his Ponte Vedra home into a laboratory and started experimenting with different formulas and mixtures to come up with natural ways to fight bugs. Miller initially tested each one at the homes of family and friends until he came up with natural solutions that worked.

Dr. Austin Frishman, a world-renowned pest management consultant who lives in Boca Raton, says that using natural elements to ward of insects dates back thousands of years.

"A reference was made to it in the Old Testament story of Daniel, and the Chinese were using the method 400 years prior to that, so it's not new," he said. "Synthetic pesticides were widely adopted for use as they were developed because they're quicker and broader acting."

In the mid-1980s, when the DDT pesticide was banned because it was found building up in the fatty parts of animals, the industry

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Ron P. Whittington for Shorelines

Nature's Way technician Bill Small points out an ant infestation on the corner of a home's exterior wall that was exposed during a backyard renovation. Instead of chemicals, the green pest control company relies on a mix of mineral dust and powders used in combination with natural baits, along with modern insect growth regulators and plant essential oils, to target and destroy insects, fungi and bacteria.

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News

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practice. It takes dedication and perseverance to be a swimmer, but the hard work pays off. Last season, the Sharks won the district title for the third year in a row.

This season finds the team with a brand new coaching staff. Head coach Jessi Schacht has coached in the Jacksonville area for nearly 18 years. In addition to coaching at PVHS, she will be starting her ninth year coaching at Bolles. Assistant coach Jess Totten swam competitively for 15 years and was captain of the swim team at Davidson College. She has been coaching for five years and coached some of the PVHS swimmers when they were younger. Assistant coach Lauren Liston swam competitively from age five through college.

Schacht's goals for the team include helping those who are new to the competitive side of swimming, improvement in stroke mechanics and aerobic capacity, opening the door to collegiate level swimming, and giving each athlete a greater self-esteem and a pursuit of excellence in all areas of life.

Upcoming home meets include Sept. 18 vs. Matanzas and Sept. 23 vs. Nease. All meets start at 5 p.m. and are held at the Winston YMCA, 170 Landrum Lane, Ponte Vedra Beach.



The Ponte Vedra High School swim team at a recent fundraising event.

Special for Shorelines



The Ponte Vedra Beach division of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce hosted a ribbon-cutting in early August at VyStar Credit Union's new location at 212 Ponte Vedra Park Drive in Ponte Vedra Beach.

Special for Shorelines

New youth groups established in Jax Beach

Two new Christian youth groups have been established in Jacksonville Beach. For boys, the new group is called Trail Life USA; for girls, the new group is American Heritage Girls. Both are service-, character- and leadership-development programs for youth ages 5-18, dedicated to the mission of building adults of integrity through service to God, family, community and country.

TLUSA Troop FL-316 and AHG Troop FL-316 are the first troops of their kind in Jacksonville Beach. Both are chartered locally at Church of Our Savior, which holds

Sunday services in the historic Beaches Chapel located at the Beaches Museum and History Park off of Beach Blvd.

AHG was founded in 1995 in Cincinnati and has grown from 10 troops and 100 members to more than 30,000 members across four countries and in 48 U.S. states. With an emphasis on faith and service, girls choose from more than 240 badges, participate in service projects, leadership opportunities and outdoor experiences. Troops are led by adult volunteers who facilitate the AHG program while encour-

aging girl leadership.

TLUSA was founded in 2013, and has grown to more than 500 troops and more than 13,000 members nationwide. It is an adventure, character and leadership program for young men, centered on outdoor experiences.

Beginning in September, both troops will meet once a week, three weeks a month, at the same time so siblings can all attend. Meetings will occur in the Church of Our Savior administrative building located at 511 Pablo Ave in Jack-

sonville Beach, and activities will take place on the grounds and in the buildings owned by the Beaches Museum and History Park located at 381 Beach Blvd.

Upcoming activities include campouts at Kona Skate Park and the Jacksonville Zoo, along with BB gun, archery, laser tag, and paintball excursions.

For more information or to enroll a child, contact Chris McCarthy at (904) 885-6478.

Aqua East Wake Event slated for Sept. 20

Aqua East Surf Shop along with other sponsors have joined together to produce the 17th annual Aqua East Wake Event at Outback Crab Shack, 8155 County Road 13 N. St. Augustine, on Sept. 20.

Wakeboard, wakeskate and wakesurf riders of all skill levels are invited to compete. The event begins at 11 a.m. and concludes with an awards ceremony at 5 p.m. Riders can register at Aqua East Surf Shop locations in St. Augustine and Neptune Beach. Early bird registration by Sept. 1 is \$35 and includes a free T-shirt, swag bag, lunch voucher and a ticket to the VIP Pre Party on Sept. 19 at Nippers Beach Grill to meet the other athletes and enjoy a cold drink.

Last year's tournament featured professional riders from all over the country converging on St. Augustine to demonstrate their skill for local riders and audience members.

For more information about the event, go to www.aewakeevent.com. Aqua East Surf Shop in Neptune Beach is located at 696 Atlantic Blvd.

VyStar opens in Ponte Vedra Beach

St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce - Ponte Vedra Beach Division held a ribbon cutting in early August at VyStar Credit Union's new location at 212 Ponte Vedra Park Drive, Ponte Vedra Beach.

Submit announcements, news, photos (with identification) and other submissions for publication in Shorelines to Shorelines@Jacksonville.com.

Vietnam

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Tavares and fellow volunteers tracked down and contacted, 23 attended the reunion. Six were deceased and another four couldn't be located. None of the 53 graduates perished in combat.

"And, quite honestly, we had a couple of, I think, protestors. They acknowledged that we had the right person, but declined to participate. Nevertheless, we sent them a souvenir packet," Tavares said.

The packet contained a DVD of photos, small flags made to commemorate the 1969 company, the signature red caps and pages of printed memories. One of Tavares' fellow officer candidates found typewritten accounts of daily activities at Fort Belvoir titled "The Days of 22 Hotel."

The reunion planning was handled in military fashion; an anniversary reunion committee was shortened with an acronym - ARC - and bulletins and itineraries were sent out.

"This is very typical of military-trained people," noted Tavares, who was elected ombudsman of the committee and reunion presentation and attended the reunion with his wife, Madeline.

The six-month class that Tavares and other officer candidates attended began in March 1969 and ended in August 1969, about a week before the Woodstock Festival. A typical day in combat engineer training began at 5 a.m. with physical drills. Classes included topics on bridge building, barracks construction and how to prepare dynamite.

Tavares remembered that, on one occasion, the company was shown a small atomic bomb - small enough to fit in a backpack - with enough power to blow a mountain top off.

"It was just like on TV," he remembered. "They rolled it out of a vault and they opened the top; it had a small keypad and lights on it."

Tavares also recalled 15-mile marches and particular field lessons on escape and evasion.

"[Commanding officers] just dropped you into a swamp with a flashlight and a canteen of water, and you had to get back to base." Tavares said that teachers and enlisted men were in the area to "capture" the trainees by putting them in a box and throwing mustard and feathers on them.



A color guard presents during the combat engineer officer training school in 1969 in Fort Belvoir, Va.

Special for Shorelines



The August reunion of the 1969 officer training for combat engineers was capped with a dinner at Fort Belvoir Officers Club.

Bill Shugarts for Shorelines

"You still had to find base after that," he added. "By the time you showed up, you were stinking."

Tavares referred to the men in his company as "really close friends" by the end of the school.

After the completion of the class, the now-second lieutenants were given separate orders that took some to Germany and South Korea, to Fort Lee and Fort Eustis and to Vietnam.

"We all went our separate ways after that," Tavares said. "Some couldn't wait to get to Vietnam, and they went. Some went there after some more officer training," Tavares said.

Tavares himself was assigned to go to the country in 1971 after completing orders at West Point. On arrival, he met up with some of his classmates who had arrived days before.

"I thought, here we are two years later and I found some of my classmates. The military has strange ways. We only had that brief encounter coming in to the country."

By 1972, Tavares was a captain and he would leave Vietnam within the year.

At the August reunion, a resolution was passed to put together a scholarship fund. The former US Army Engineer Officers also agreed to meet again in five years' time at a 50th anniversary reunion.

"Not a moment went by where somebody didn't have something to say," Tavares said. "It exceeded my wish, coming together the way we did. It was beyond my expectations."

Amanda Durish Cook: (904) 359-4665

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