



LUKE AIR FORCE BASE

GLENDALE, ARIZONA



RETIREE ACTIVITIES OFFICE NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 1 | ISSUE 1 | JAN-MAR 2026



March 21- 22, 2026
Luke AFB,
Glendale, Arizona

***Thunder Returns to the
Desert Skies!***



Mark your calendars and get ready for another unforgettable weekend at Luke Air Force Base! Click on the Facebook Event Page and mark yourself as attending, invite friends and family, and stay up to date on announcements and tips!

LUKE DAYS 2026 ON FACEBOOK

<https://www.facebook.com/events/1378332893311826>

VOLUNTEER CENTRAL

<https://www.lukedays.com/coming-soon-03>



RETIREE ACTIVITIES OFFICE (RAO) AT LUKE AFB: We, the volunteer staff of Luke AFB RAO, connect retirees of all military and uniformed services, and their surviving spouses / family members / next of kin, with information and assistance on matters pertaining to their benefits and entitlements. Our goal is to provide guidance and referral assistance on military and uniformed service retiree matters.



LUKE AFB RAO 2025 VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

On 10 Dec 2025, COL John Ryan, Deputy Commander, 56 Fighter Wing, presented

FREDERICK J. ABRAKE, CAPT (RET), U.S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE (USPHS)

with a letter and certificate signed by Lt Gen Darryl Roberson, USAF

(Ret) and CMSAF Joanne S. Bass, USAF (Ret) of the USAF Retiree Activities Council, who wrote that Fred's "continued devotion reminds us all what it means to be **"Still Serving."** Fred also received a spectacular USAF statue that hopefully will remind him that he's a terrific mentor to many.

Fred is that rare individual with a can-do spirit, work-hare ethic, and empathetic outlook. Since 2022 when he started as a RAO volunteer, Fred has demonstrated enthusiasm and initiative in assisting retirees with DFAS, SBP, casualty and TRICARE for LIFE. If he doesn't know the answer, he finds it. In addition to his weekly shift, he fills in when gaps in office coverage occur, often at the last minute. In 2025, he stepped up and became RAO Deputy Director and employs his talents to organize and execute missions. He is the driving force behind onboarding and training new volunteers. He manages admin duties from staff rosters to training binders and procuring supplies. Fred even keeps the RAO office stocked with bottled water. He also volunteers at the Navy RAO on base.

During his career, Fred, a 1963 graduate of the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy, worked as a pharmacist with the US Public Health Service from 1964 to 1996. He served as a staff, deputy chief, and chief pharmacist in the PHS and as a Senior Regulatory



Management Officer and Secretary to 3 FDA public advisory committees in the Food and Drug Administration. In the 1980's, he was the PHS pharmacist lead in collaborating with NASA biomedical staff to produce the first medication kit for "Columbia" and future space shuttles. Fred is married to MaryLou. Father of 3. Grandfather of 6.

SSA ANNOUNCES 2.8 % BENEFIT INCREASE FOR 2026

Oct 24, 2025, Baltimore, MD – The Social Security Administration (SSA) announced today that Social Security benefits, including Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance (OASDI), and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments for 75 million Americans will increase 2.8 percent in 2026. On average, Social Security retirement benefits will increase by about \$56 per month starting in January. Social Security begins notifying people about their new benefit amount by mail starting in early December 2025.

For complete article:

<https://www.ssa.gov/news/en/press/release/s/2025-10-24.html>

NEWSLETTERS FROM DEFENSE FINANCE & ACCOUNTING SERVICE (DFAS)

Stay up to date on changes.



DFAS SURVIVOR SBP NEWSLETTER

Retiree pay, Gray Area retirees, askDFAS suite of on-line tools, ID Cards, and more.

<https://www.dfas.mil/RetiredMilitary/newsheets/news/Survivor-SBP-Newsletter/>

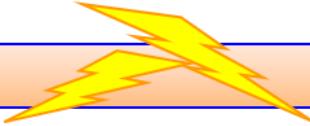
DFAS RETIREE NEWSLETTER

Updating DEERS, How Remarriage before age 55 Affects SBP Eligibility, Prepping for Tax Season, Request 1099-R and more.

<https://www.dfas.mil/RetiredMilitary/newsheets/newsletter/>

CONNECT WITH RAO ON FACEBOOK

LUKE AFB RAO OFFICE (623) 856-3923



SERVICES RETIREE NEWSLETTERS

Each Armed Service publishes a quarterly retiree newsletter to update retired military members, surviving spouses, and Families on their benefits and entitlements, developments within the Service, and how they can support their Services in their civilian communities. Online at the following links:

AIR FORCE: "AFTERBURNER"

<https://www.retirees.af.mil/library/afterburner/>

ARMY: "ARMY ECHOES"

<https://soldierforlife.army.mil/Army- Retirement/Post-Retirement/Army-Echoes- Newsletter>

NAVY: "SAILOR FOR LIFE"

<http://www.mynavyhr.navy.mil/Media- Center/Publications/Shift-Colors/>

MARINES: "SEMPER FIDELIS"

<http://www.hqmc.marines.mil/Agencies/Manpower- Reserve-Affairs-MMSR-6/>

Scroll down page to latest issue, click on link (e.g. VOL 69 NO 1 JAN-MAR 2025)

COAST GUARD: "LONG BLUE LINE"

<http://www.longblueline.org/>

2026-LUKE AFB RAO MEETINGS

Join us & find out more about volunteering.

3rd Weds of each month, 11 AM – noon
Navy Reserve Center, Bldg 300, Luke AFB

Jan 21, 2026 meeting

Feb 18, 2026 meeting

March 18, 2026 meeting

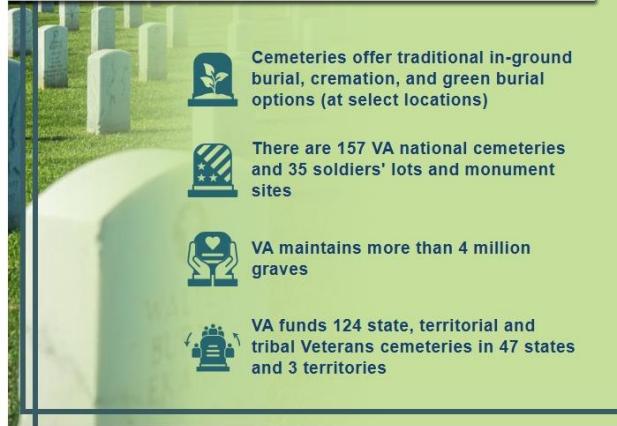
April 15, 2026 Volunteer Picnic, Fowler Park

May 20, 2026 meeting

June 17, 2026 meeting

PLAN. HONOR.

Key Facts About VA National Cemeteries



-  Cemeteries offer traditional in-ground burial, cremation, and green burial options (at select locations)
-  There are 157 VA national cemeteries and 35 soldiers' lots and monument sites
-  VA maintains more than 4 million graves
-  VA funds 124 state, territorial and tribal Veterans cemeteries in 47 states and 3 territories

From Natl Cemetery Admin: Veterans of every war and conflict, are buried in VA's national cemeteries. For Veterans not buried in a VA national cemetery, **VA provides headstones, markers, or medallions to commemorate their service**. Nearly 5.3 million people — including 4 million Veterans from the Revolutionary War to the war in Iraq and Afghanistan — are honored with a burial in a VA national cemetery.

PLAN IN ADVANCE: Planning in advance for a Veteran's or loved-one's final resting place can eliminate unnecessary delays and reduce stress on a family at a difficult time. Submit application to determine Pre-Need Eligibility.

MEMORIAL BENEFIT

Furnished in lieu of a traditional Government headstone or grave marker for those Veterans who served on or after April 6, 1917, and whose grave in a private cemetery is marked with a privately purchased headstone.

MEDALLION: (pictured)



GREEN BURIAL: NCA accepts both cremated and intact remains that are prepared naturally for interment in green burial sections at its open national cemeteries.

For more info: <https://www.cem.va.gov/>

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RECOGNIZE THIS BUILDING ON LUKE AFB?

by CMSgt Daniel Hall, USAF, 56 Fighter Wing



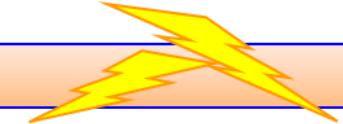
Have you ever driven by the Blockhouse and said to yourself, "That's a strange-looking building"? If so, you're not alone — and there's a good reason for it. Building 1150, better known as the Blockhouse, is one of Luke Air Force Base's most historic and uniquely engineered structures. Its appearance tells a story that spans decades of innovation, vigilance, and mission evolution.

Origins: A Cold War Shield During the height of the Cold War, the United States developed an air-defense network capable of detecting and responding to potential Soviet bomber threats. Luke AFB played a key role in that mission.

In 1959, the base was activated as Direction Center 21 (DC-21) for the Semi-Automatic Ground Environment (SAGE) system.

The Blockhouse — a three-story, heavily reinforced concrete structure — was built to withstand immense blast pressures and protect sensitive early-generation electronics. Inside, it housed the AN/FSQ-7, one of the largest computers ever built, using miles of wiring and thousands of vacuum tubes to process radar data. It integrated radar inputs from sites across the region, creating a real-time air picture to direct fighter aircraft toward unknown or hostile contacts. In its time, the Blockhouse represented the cutting edge of American defense technology.

Transition to Today's Mission The SAGE system was deactivated in 1983, and the massive



computer equipment was removed soon after. Rather than demolish the building, the Air Force repurposed it.

The Blockhouse became the central administrative and support hub for Luke AFB.

Over the years, its internal layout was transformed from a massive computer bay into offices, conference rooms, and mission-support spaces.

The building's characteristic "bunker-like" exterior remains, a reminder of its original purpose and engineering.

Even today, the Blockhouse's thick walls and rugged design set it apart from every other structure on base.

Why the Blockhouse Matters The Blockhouse isn't just an odd-looking facility you pass on the way to work — it's a living piece of Air Force history. It embodies the evolution of American air defense from radar scopes to integrated networks. It connects Luke AFB's past missions to its current role as the world's premier fighter-pilot training installation.

It stands as a monument to the Airmen, technicians, and operators who served within its walls during a pivotal era of global tension.

Every day we walk past it, we are reminded that our mission is built on the legacy of those who came before us.

EXPRESS SCRIPTS

Prescriptions Delivered to Your Home

- Cost-effective
- Convenient
- Secure
- Avoid lines and exposure to illness
- Medications are delivered to you in a plain, weather-resistant packaging
- Save money



For details:

<https://militaryrx.express-scripts.com/home-delivery>

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EVERY VETERAN HAS A STORY

VA |  U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
National Cemetery Administration

YOUR STORY, YOUR LEGACY

VA's Veterans Legacy Memorial (VLM) is the nation's largest online memorial site dedicated to America's Veterans, honoring the service and sacrifice of more than 10 million Veterans.

VLM's new [Living Veterans](#) page allows Veterans to tell their military and life stories today, in their own words.

-  Add images
-  Write your autobiography
-  Share military and life milestones
-  Upload historical documents

Once the Veteran passes away, their content will appear on their publicly visible VLM Memorial page.

PRESERVE YOUR LEGACY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

The Living Veterans feature is available to those Veterans who have been approved for pre-need eligibility for burial in a VA national cemetery. Complete the simple, online VA pre-need burial eligibility application today.

 Want to write your own story? Complete your pre-need application and start sharing your Veteran journey today. www.cem.va.gov/veterans-and-families/#VLM



"This is something that you're building for your family and your loved ones—your children, your grandchildren, their grandchildren—to be able to see long after you're gone."

Derek White,
U.S. Air Force
Veteran

VA's Veterans Legacy Memorial (VLM) is the nation's largest digital platform dedicated to the memory of more than 10 million Veterans, and makes it easy to share, remember, and connect. Family, friends, and the public can search for Veterans, leave tributes, and preserve memories for future generations.

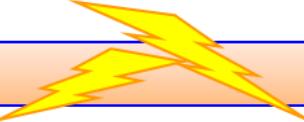
Find Your Veteran on Veterans Legacy Memorial

https://www.vlm.cem.va.gov/?utm_source=dis&utm_medium=web&utm_campaign=VLM

Living Veterans feature

share your own stories, photos, military timelines, and historical documents.

https://www.vlm.cem.va.gov/livingveteranhome?utm_source=dis&utm_medium=web&utm_campaign=LV



NEXTGEN ID CARD

As a veteran, military retiree, spouse or family member of a service member, you may be eligible for a Next Generation Uniformed Services ID card (USID).



This military ID proves your identity to the DOD and gives you access to bases, military services, and programs. From DMDC: "Legacy USID cards remain valid through their expiration date, however, individuals with an indefinite (INDEF) expiration date on their legacy USID card may replace those ID cards with a Next Generation USID card."

For details: <https://www.cac.mil/Next-Generation-Uniformed-Services-ID-Card/>

CLUB FIVE SIX IN 2026

January 9 – Fighter Wing 1st Friday, Scotch & Cigar Specials

January 16 – **MLK Lunch Special** with Complimentary Cake

January 29 – Members Mongolian Night

February 6 – Fighter Wing 1st Friday, Scotch & Cigar Specials

February 13 – **George Washington Lunch Special** with Complimentary Cake

February 13 – Valentine's Sweetheart Dinner

February 26 – Members Night

March 6 – Fighter Wing 1st Friday, Scotch & Cigar Specials

March 17 – **Leprechaun Lunch Special**

March 26 – Members Night

More info:

<https://www.facebook.com/ClubFiveSix/>

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LUKE AFB VETERINARY CLINIC

We offer wellness exams for puppies, kittens, adults, and seniors, including vaccines, microchips, and general health or chronic illness questions. We do sick pet exams with non-urgent illnesses like ear or skin infections, allergies, UTI, limping, or gastrointestinal upset. Diagnostics we offer include bloodwork, radiographs, and limited ultrasound. We also perform international and domestic health certificates and dental cleanings. We are on base in building 1146, next to the lightning gate and the block house, open Monday-Wednesday and Friday, 0800-1600. To register or make an appointment, please call 623-856-6354 or email at: Lukeafbvet@gmail.com.





**Luke AFB
Veterinary Services**

13725 W Lightning Street, Bldg 1146
Luke AFB, Arizona 85309
(623) 856-6354 | Lukeafbvet@gmail.com

Pets Seen By Appointment Only | Registration W&J Ins Web

DOGS AND CATS

- Veterinary clinic registration
- Vaccinations for dogs and cats
- Microchip
- Annual heartworm test
- Monthly heartworm/flea and tick prevention

Questions or concerns?

Clients eligible for services include active duty members, reservists, 100% disability, retired veterans, and their dependents

- See reverse side for a more detailed price list!
- You can email us your previous pet records at: Lukeafbvet@gmail.com

SERVICES OFFERED AT VETERINARY CLINIC

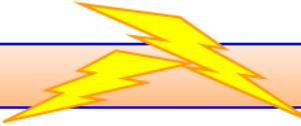
- ❖ Wellness exams
- ❖ Sick pet exams
- ❖ Diagnostic blood-work
- ❖ Radiographs and limited ultrasound
- ❖ International & domestic health certificates (Need advanced notice)
- ❖ Dental cleanings

POLICIES

- On-Post housing requirements must be registered with base veterinary facility.
- Cancellations must be 24 hours in advance or will be considered a no-show. Late arrival may result in no show or doctor discretion
- No-show policy: 3 no-shows = no services for 6 months

Call us to schedule an appointment!

Luke AFB OutDoor Recreation



Exploring the AZ Trail

Passage 16

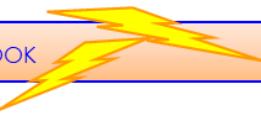
Gila River Canyons

31 JAN • 6AM - 6PM
KEARNY, AZ
\$60 per person | open to anyone with base access
Sign up by 28 Jan.
*event subject to cancellation if sign ups are not reached

This is Passage 16 of the ~800-mile Arizona Trail (AZT). All passages are point-to-point; this one is 26.1 miles with 4,140 ft of gain (we will not be doing the full passage) and is rated hard. The Gila River Canyons section is remote, rugged, and classic Sonoran Desert terrain—rocky trails, sharp plants, and possible wildlife encounters. Bring sturdy footwear, layers, sun protection, water, snacks, and trekking poles. Pack in, pack out.

Outdoor Recreation • Bldg. 247
623-856-6267
Facebook.com/LukeODR  

The staff at OutDoor Rec has been hard at work curating the 2026 calendar and it is bursting with opportunities to explore, connect, and experience the best of Arizona and beyond! Stay tuned!  More info at: <https://www.facebook.com/lukeodr/>



Snowshoeing & Cross Country Skiing

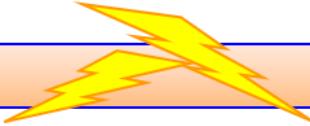
31 JAN • 7AM - 6PM
NORDIC VILLAGE, FLAGSTAFF, AZ
Skiing \$110 / Snowshoeing \$100
Sign up by 21 Jan.
*event subject to cancellation if sign ups are not reached

Arizona Nordic Village, at the base of the San Francisco Peaks, offers 35+ miles of groomed trails. We'll rent skis or snowshoes at Ft. Tuthill, then head over for a day of exploring at your own pace. Snacks and drinks are available in the lobby, and you're welcome to bring your own. Trip is 13+.

Outdoor Recreation • Bldg. 247
623-856-6267
Facebook.com/LukeODR  

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FALCON DUNES GOLF COURSE

Falcon Dunes: (623) 535-9334
56fss.com/falcon-dunes-golf/



Falcon Dunes Golf Course offers more than just a great place to play a round of golf. Stop by and try the grill for a great lunch and quench your thirst at the bar after 18 holes.

January 1, Thursday RED EYE OPEN

8:30 Shotgun/ 1:00 PM Luncheon
 Club Member \$70, Military/ DOD \$75,
 Guest \$80 (Active Duty 20% off)

February 16, Monday PRESIDENT'S DAY

8:00 Shotgun/ 12:30 PM Luncheon
 Club Member \$72, Military/ DOD \$77,
 Guest \$82 (Active Duty 20% off)

March 7, Saturday DEMO DAY

10:00 AM to 2:30 PM

March 15, Sunday ST. PATRICKS DAY

8:00 Shotgun/ 12:30 PM Luncheon
 Club Member \$72, Military/ DOD \$77
 Guest \$82 (Active Duty 20% off)

CONNECT WITH RAO ON FACEBOOK

LUKE AFB LIBRARY

LIBRARY HOURS

BLDG 219
 Mon: 9:00 AM – 7:00 PM
 Tues – Fri: 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM
 Sat: 10 AM – 4 PM



Retired military and their family members with a valid ID, may receive a library card, and gain FREE access to books, DVDs, audio books, & down-loadable e-books.

For information: call (623) 856-7191 or online at: daf.dodmwrlibraries.org/luke

STAY CONNECTED WITH ALL THINGS LUKE AFB!

Download the AF Connect app! Base events and announcements will be at your fingertips. Download **"USAF Connect"** from your app store and add **"56th Fighter Wing"** to your favorites.

Check out **Thunderbolt Connect** at www.luke.af.mil/Home/Thunderbolt-Connect/ Available to Airmen, GS employees, and spouses.

Luke AFB Retiree Activities Office (RAO) Hails & Farewells

FAREWELL & THANK YOU

Warnell Perry, SSgt, USAF (Ret) (2022-25)
 John Cholpek, MSG, US Army (Ret) (2023-25)

Gary Westrack, SMSgt, USAF (Ret)

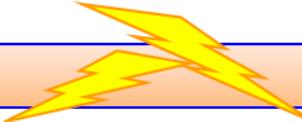
Please accept our sincere gratitude for your outstanding contributions in supporting the Luke AFB RAO from 2001 to 2025 — a 24-year record of service unmatched by any other volunteer.



WELCOME NEW VOLUNTEERS in 2025

Jose Arrellano, CPT, US Army (Ret)
 Chelsea Johnson, COL, USAF (Ret)
 Grayling Jones, SFC, US Army (Ret)
 Kim LeHane, USAF spouse

LUKE AFB RAO OFFICE (623) 856-3923



BASE GUIDE TO SERVICE NUMBERS

<https://mybaseguide.com/base/luke-afb>

Military & Family Readiness	(623) 856-6550
Airman's Attic (Thrift Store)	(480) 886-8715
Auto Hobby Shop	(623) 856-6107
Base Exchange	(623) 935-2671
Base Finance / Comptroller	(623) 856-7028
Casualty Assistance	(623) 856-6550
Chaplain	(623) 856-6211
Club Five Six	(623) 856-6446
Commissary	(623) 337-8374
DEERS	(623) 856-7875
DFAS	(800) 321-1080
Falcon Dunes Golf Course	(623) 535-9334
FAMCAMP	(623) 856-4891
Fighter Country Inn	(623) 856-3941
Firestone Car Care Center	(623) 271-8104
Fitness Center	(623) 856-6241
ID Cards	(623) 856-7875
Legal Assistance	(623) 856-6901
Library	(623) 856-7191
Medical Clinic-Central Appts	(623) 856-2273
National Archives (Records)	(866) 272-6272
Pharmacy - Activate Prescription	(855) 729-6500
Refill Prescription	(623) 343-1747
Retiree Activities Office (RAO)	(623) 856-3923
Security Forces	(623) 856-6322
Tickets & Travel (ITT)	(623) 856-6000
TRICARE	(623) 856-4217
TRICARE West (TRIWEST)	(888) 874-9378
TRICARE for Life (TFL)	(866) 773-0404
Veterinary Clinic	(623) 856-6354
Wood Hobby Shop	(623) 856-6566

64? 65? MEDICARE ELIGIBLE? TRICARE FOR LIFE BRIEFINGS

No Reservation Required

Briefings: **Tues, Feb 10, 2026**

Tues, Apr 29, 2026

Briefings start at 9:00 AM & 1:00 PM



Who: TRICARE Beneficiaries who are eligible for Medicare Part A and B

What: TRICARE For Life (TFL) briefings are for TRICARE beneficiaries that have questions or want to learn more about the TFL program

Where: Luke Air Force Base Theater: Bldg 1515

Questions? Please call Marlyn Shults at (623) 856-4300 or e-mail: dha.ncr.56th-MDG.mbx.56-mdg-bcac@health.mil

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

We welcome your suggestions for content. Contact Editor at 56FW.RAO@us.af.mil with "Newsletter" in subject line. The RAO Newsletter is published quarterly by the Luke AFB RAO. All information was accurate at date of publication and subject to change without notice.

For latest RAO newsletter:

Option 1 Luke AFB website:

<https://www.luke.af.mil/>

Go to blue table on far right. Scroll to Base Information then Retiree Activities Office. Scroll to bottom for link to RAO newsletter.

Option 2 RAO Facebook:

Link to latest newsletter is also available on Luke AFB RAO Facebook:

www.facebook.com/RAO56FW/

Luke AFB RAO Director:

beth Johnson, COL US Army (Ret)

Editor: Director & RAO staff

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