



The Quarterly Newsletter of AFA Chapter 398

Jan-Mar 2026

The official newsletter of Chapter 398 of the Air & Space Forces Association (AFA).

AFA Mission

Our mission is to promote dominant U.S. Air & Space Forces as the foundation of a strong National Defense; honor and support our Airmen, Guardians, and their families; and to honor and respect our enduring Heritage

To accomplish this, we:

Educate the public on the critical need for unrivaled aerospace power and promote aerospace and STEM education for a technically superior and professional workforce to ensure national security.

Advocate and promote aerospace power to favorably shape policy and resourcing decisions to guarantee the strongest aerospace forces in the world.

Support Airmen, Guardians, and the families of the Total Air Force and Space Force, including Active Duty, National Guard, Reserve, civilians, families, and members of the Civil Air Patrol.

Chapter Officers

President – Dann Mattiza
Vice President – Nelson Arroyo
Secretary – Susan Ault-Davis
Treasurer – Dann Mattiza

State Officers

President – Michael Liquori
Vice President – Gavin MacAloon
Secretary – Sharon Branch
Treasurer – Tom Carney

AFA Chapter 398

Box 1220
Mary Esther, FL 32569

www.Hurlburt.AFAFlorida.org

AFA Chapter398 Steps Up to Support Deployed Airmen and Guardians

The Hurlburt chapter of the Air & Space Forces Association (AFA) has taken meaningful action to support deployed service members by applying for a \$1,000 grant through the AFA United Forces & Families (F2) program. The grant, if approved, will fund basic hygiene and personal-care items for Airmen and Guardians serving away from home—an effort aimed at easing daily burdens and reinforcing the chapter's commitment to those in uniform.

Recognizing that the need is immediate, the chapter chose not to wait for the grant decision. Instead, it made a proactive chapter donation of \$1,000 to ensure support could begin right away. Chapter Vice President Lt Col (ret) Eddie Arroyo formally presented the check to MSgt Darius Gamble of the Hurlburt Field 1st Sergeants Council, whose members will help identify and distribute essential items to deployed personnel.

This initiative reflects the chapter's ongoing dedication to the well-being of the force and their families. By combining national-level resources with local action, the chapter continues to strengthen the network of care that Airmen and Guardians rely on throughout their service.



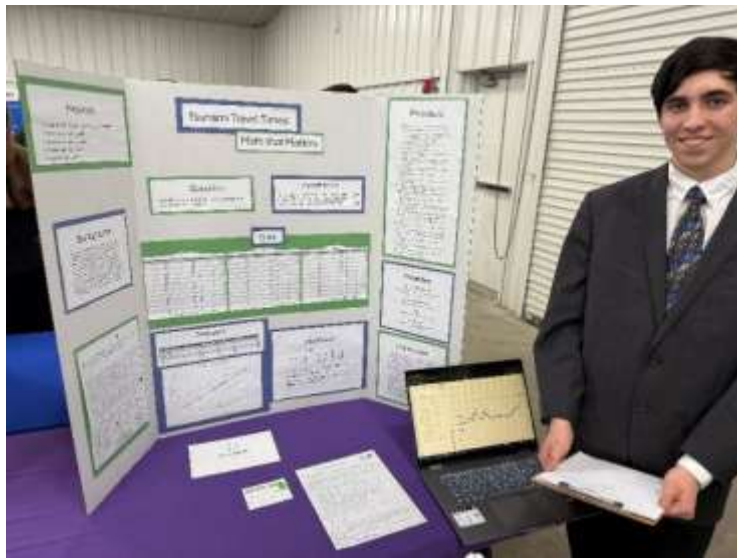
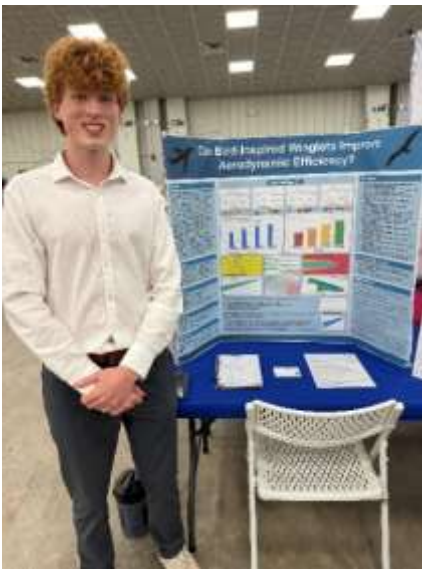
East Panhandle Regional Science & Engineering Fair

On 11 February Chapter 398 continued its annual tradition of judging STEM projects at the East Panhandle Regional Science & Engineering Fair held at the Northwest Florida Fairgrounds in Fort Walton Beach. Chapter members Max Friedauer, Susan Ault-Davis, Eddie Arroyo, and Mark Chapman reviewed numbers of project in both the Senior and Junior categories. The first place submissions in both categories received \$150 checks and second place \$75, from our Chapter President Dann Mattiza at the award ceremony held the following week. As always judges were impressed by the quality of the submissions and the intelligence and poise of the contestants.

Senior:

1st Place: Jackson Despard, Magnet Innovation Center, "Can Bird-Inspired Winglets Improve Aerodynamic Efficiency?"

2nd Place: Samuel Hess, Rocky Bayou, "Tsunami Travel Time"



Junior:

1st Place Ely Haley, Rocky Bayou, "How Does Weight and Balance Affect Flight?"

2nd Place Kenzie Peters, Okaloosa STEMM Academy, "Pea Plants in Space"



Chapter Supports 479th FTG Awards Program

Col Joe Kinego, USAF (Ret), Chapter VP for the Pensacola Area, presented a \$500 check from the Chapter 398 to Col Shane "Shamus" Muscato, commander of the 479th Flying Training Group on 16 January 2026. The check will be used by the 479th FTG for plaques and trophies to recognize their top unit instructors."

The 479th, based at Pensacola Naval Air Station conducts Undergraduate Combat Systems Officer (CSO) training. The group is an operational component of the 12th Wing, flying the Beechcraft T-6 Texan II and T-1 Jayhawk.



AIR & SPACE FORCE ASSOCIATION HURLBURT CHAPTER 398 AND 1 SOW UNSUNG HERO AWARD PRESENTATION FOR 2025

by Max Friedauer, VP for Unsung Hero Programs

The Hurlburt Chapter 398 of the AFA has been honoring the "Unsung Heroes" of the 1st Special Operations Wing and its units for the past 28 years. Approximately 68 people attending the awards luncheon at the Hurlburt Soundside Club on Friday, 20 March 2026. We recognized and honored 20 of Hurlburt's finest Airmen, six were unable to attend because they were deployed or otherwise committed. With the continued support of our co-sponsor, the Boeing Company, we recognized these "Unsung Heroes" (E1-E4) who contribute to the mission by always going above and beyond what is expected of them and we were honored to have them as our guests for lunch.

The emcee for the luncheon was SSgt Micah Balisbisana-Kaalakea from the 8 SOS/CCE. SrA Rowin Pabala sang the National Anthem after the Eglin Honor Guard presented the flags. Chaplain Black provided the invocation.



The guest speaker for the lunch was the Senior Enlisted Leader from the 1st Special Operations Logistics Readiness Squadron, Chief Master Sergeant Karren Fisher. She said today, we pause to recognize the people who keep the mission alive, even when no one is watching. These are the "Unsung Heroes" of the 1st Special Operations Wing and Team Hurlburt. She also emphasized that these Airmen never ask for credit, they never ask for recognition, they just do their jobs, quietly and professionally. And she went on to say that these awards recognize something incredibly special. It recognizes Air-men whose actions may not always be visible, their contributions may not always make headlines, but their work is absolutely essential to the mission and its success. "So today we pause, we pause to recognize you, we pause to celebrate your impact, and we pause to remind you that the United States Air Force will not be the greatest air force in the world without the work that you do every single day." Chief Fisher re-reminded the audience that "Special Operations Forces are not built on assembly lines. They are forged in the fires of relentless training, honed over years of sweat, sacrifice, and unwavering

commitment. To rush the process is to invite disaster, for the true capability that lies within the shadows cannot be rushed. That's who the men and women of the Special Operations Wing are. They live the warrior ethos. They are tough. They are ready. And when that call comes, I have to ask who will go? And whom shall I send? But they don't hesitate. They step forward and they say, "Here I am, Send me." She concluded by saying that these Airmen make the mission happen when nobody's watching, these Airmen make the team stronger, these airmen represent every best of what it means to serve. To our "Unsung Heroes" here today, your leaders see you, your teammates appreciate you, and this Wing is stronger together because of you. You represent the quiet professionalism, the relentless dedication, and the warrior spirit that makes the United States Air Force the most capable, most lethal fighting force on the planet.



Following Chief Fisher's remarks, the 1st Special Operations Acting Wing Commander, Col Clayton W. Schuety, assisted by the 1st Special Operations Wing Command Chief, CMSgt Ralph E. Oliver, presented each "Unsung Hero" with a Certificate and AFA Chapter Vice President for Unsung Heroes Max Friedauer presented each with a treasured Chapter RMO (round metal object). SSgt Micah Balisbisana-Kaalakea read a few of each Airman's accomplishments as they came forward to accept their award.



Col Schuety, then made some additional comments and thanked everybody that worked to put this all together. As we say, this doesn't really happen by chance. There's a lot of work that is put into an event like this, and there's a lot of people that had their hands into it. And again, thanks to our sponsorship, AFA and Boeing, also here today we have representatives from- Lockheed Martin and England Federal Credit Union. He then focused on our honorees and by saying "You are the innovators, the problem solvers, and the quiet professionals who ensure the mission gets done no matter the obstacle. Our motto any time, any place, isn't just a catchphrase. and discipline. When I say professionalism, what I really mean by that is it's the noun. It's who we are." He added that "...when the Secretary of War says, yeah, I've got a really challenging mission, and he says, well, who am I going to ask to do this mission? The first solution is AFSOC as part of the SOCOM enterprise. And why is that? Well, it's because he doesn't have to call down and say, hey, are you ready? He doesn't have to say, hey, do you have your beans counted? Have you gotten all of your training things done? It is, he knows you are ready, and he knows that if he asks us to do one of the most difficult jobs out there on the planet, that the 1 SOW, as a part of AFSOC, as a part of the SOCOM enterprise, we are ready anytime, anyplace, and that's a conscious decision each and every day, so thank you for doing that." He closed by saying "You are not unsung today. We see you, we value you, and we honor the service alongside you. So, thank you for that. One more round of applause for all of our heroes."



AFA Hurlburt Chapter Vice President for the Unsung Hero Program Max Friedauer asked Chief Fisher to come forward and presented her with a small token of our appreciation for being our guest speaker today. We had her name engraved on a brick paver and placed in the Garden of Hope at the Air Force Enlisted Village. He thanked Col Schuety for his comments and Chief Oliver for their support and taking part in the awards program. Max then invited all to join the Air & Space Force Association by simply logging in to AFA.org and elect the Hurlburt 398 Chapter for your home chapter. He encouraged all to continue our 80-

year legacy of supporting our Airmen, Guardians, their families, and our educators. He said a final thank you to our Wing team that did all the hard work of organizing and finalizing this annual event. MSgt Kate Vojtko (Who was called out on a deployment and she handed it over to her teammates who never blinked and simply adapted and carried on), Natalie R. Sockman, TSgt Justin Carroll, and SSgt Micah Balisbisana.

After all the presentations were made Col Schuety, addressed the group and said how are quiet professionals, we take the time to recognizing those people who are out just “jobing” it every day, who put their head down, getting the mission done, things that we could not do without them. Thanks to AFA for reminding us that we need to thank them more often. She thanked the families for coming out, He said “I love to see families out here, and thanks for coming up to get your picture taken, I will say take as many pictures as you can because it will mean a lot in 5, 10, 20 years from now, it’s gonna mean a lot to the little ones that I saw, and the ones on the way.” He thanked everyone again, but truly the quiet professionals, the Unsung Heroes and the AFA and all the AFA community partners and especially the Boeing Corporation for their sponsorship. He also thanked the entire team who worked tirelessly behind the scenes to put this all together, sending out e-mail requests for nominations, organizing and printing the award certificates, and coordinating the event with the 1 SOW Command Section, Wing Protocol, and the Hurlburt Soundside Club for the meals and room setup. Col Schuety emphasized that the Unsung Hero Program is his favorite event and will remain one of the Wing’s most important recognition programs.

AFA Chapter 398 Vice President, Mr. Friedauer asked Chief Fisher to come forward and thanked her for being our guest speaker and he presented her with certificate showing that the Chapter purchased a brick paver to be placed in the Garden of Hope at the Air Force Enlisted Village. He also encouraged all to join the Air & Space force Association by simply going to www.AFA.ORG and select the Hurlburt Chapter 398 as their home chapter. He encouraged all to help us continue the 80-year legacy of supporting our Airmen, Guardians, their families, and our educators. Mr. Friedauer again thanked our Community Partners without whom we could not afford programs like this. He closed out the program with a final thank you to the Wing Team for their hard work of organizing and finalizing this annual event. Specifically team lead MSgt Kate Vojtko, who got called out to deploy 30 days out from the luncheon, but her team never blinked, stepped up, accepted the challenge, and adapted immediately and never missed a beat. They are Natalie Stockman, 1 SOW Protocol; TSgt Justin Carroll 1 SOCONS/PKA, and SSgt Micah Balisbisana-Kaalakea, 8 SOS Executive Staff.

The luncheon was sponsored by a generous grant from the Boeing Corporation represented by Mr. John Hillsman. The Boeing Company is one of 19 Community Partners that support the many programs the chapter is involved in.

Our 20 honorees and Unsung Hero Award Recipients were: SrA Jack Mott (15 SOS); A1C Oksana Tensen (1 SOSS); SrA Ralph Meza (8 SOS); SrA Cesia Navas (11 SOIS); SrA Xander Nichols (1 SOLRS); SrA Josiah Lancour (1 SOMUNS); SrA Dan Nguyen (1 SOMXS); SrA Caleb Keller (1 SOCPTS); SrA Justin Thompson (1 SOW A4R); A1C Cole Wiggins (1 SOMRS); A1C Brela McCord (1 SOFSS); SrA Swinston Abraham (1 SOCONS); SrA Kennedy Dover (1 SOHCOS); A1C Corey Byler (15 SOAMXS); SrA Darren Heyd (15 SOAMXS); SrA Robert Moody (4 SOAMXS); A1C Brody Troutt (8 SOAMXS); SrA Lucas Silver (1 SOSFS); SrA Andrew McCreary (1 SOCS); and SrA Tony Wheeler (1 SOCES).



**Florida State Convention
Jacksonville, FL
17,18 July**



AFA Chapter 398
Community Partner of the Quarter
First Quarter 2026

Emerald Coast Funeral Home
161 Racetrack Rd NW
Fort Walton Beach, FL 32547

Congratulations to Emerald Coast Funeral Home for being selected our Community Partner of the First Quarter 2026. A long-standing AFA Chapter 398 Community Partner since 2012 supporting our Airmen, Guardians, Air Force families, cadets, teachers, students and our entire community.

Emerald Coast Funeral Home provides funeral home, burial, and cremation services for Fort Walton Beach, Florida. Their friendly and professional staff is at your service 24 hours a day.



(850) 864-3361

Thank you!



CHAPTER 398 COMMUNITY PARTNERS

AFA Chapter 398 is very fortunate to have very supportive Community Partners. Through their generous funding and involvement, we were able to support our Wounded Warrior training camp, Teacher Workshops, Teacher of the Year recognition, Space Camp, student scholarships, Unsung Heroes Airmen recognition, Cyber Patriot competitions, regional Science Fair and much more.

Thank you to all current partners who renewed their commitment this year and went above and beyond with grants and other financial support.

Again, "Thank you" to all our Community Partners who supported us throughout the year. We are looking forward to a very busy and successful new year and with your support we will make it better than ever.

<u>Diamond</u>	
Emerald Coast Connected	OMNI Broadcasting
<u>Platinum</u>	
The Boeing Company – Ft Walton Beach	Lockheed Martin – Ft Walton Beach
Lockheed Martin Rotary and Mission Systems (RMS)	Lockheed Martin SOF Global Logistics Support (GLSS)
<u>Gold</u>	
Eglin Federal Credit Union	Lt Col Gerry & Kay Chapman Memorial
The Kinego Family Trust	Reisburg Institute
SA Technical Services Inc	
<u>Silver</u>	
Emerald Coast Endodontics	Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery Associates
<u>Bronze</u>	
Awards Plus Frames by Sharon	Aqua Pool and Patio Company
Emerald Coast Funeral Home	First National Bank and Trust (FNBT)
Preston Hood Chevrolet	
<u>Basic</u>	
Clubhouse Grill	Jimmy's Men's Store and Pawn

Community Sponsorship levels are: Commando - \$5000, Diamond - \$2500, Platinum - \$1000, Gold - \$500, Silver - \$300, Bronze - \$150, and Basic - \$100. If you know of any business interested in becoming a Community Partner, please contact one of our chapter officers.

"A COPY OF THE OFFICIAL REGISTRATION AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION MAY BE OBTAINED FROM THE DIVISION OF CONSUMER SERVICES BY CALLING TOLL-FREE WITHIN THE STATE. REGISTRATION DOES NOT IMPLY ENDORSEMENT, APPROVAL, OR RECOMMENDATION BY THE STATE." Call 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352) or visit WWW.FLORIDAConsumerHELP.COM. Chapter 398 registration number is CH32205

2026 COMING EVENTS

April

8 – Chapter Executive Board, Clubhouse Grill, Fort Walton Beach

May

6 – Navarre HS NJROTC Awards Ceremony, Navarre HS, 1800

13- Chapter Executive Board, Clubhouse Grill, Fort Walton Beach

16 – Armed Forces Day

25 – Memorial Day

June

10 - Chapter Executive Board, Clubhouse Grill, Fort Walton Beach

22,26 - JROTC Leadership School, Hurlburt Field

July

4 – Independence Day

8 - Chapter Executive Board, Clubhouse Grill, Fort Walton Beach

17,18 – AFA Florida State Convention, Jacksonville, FL