

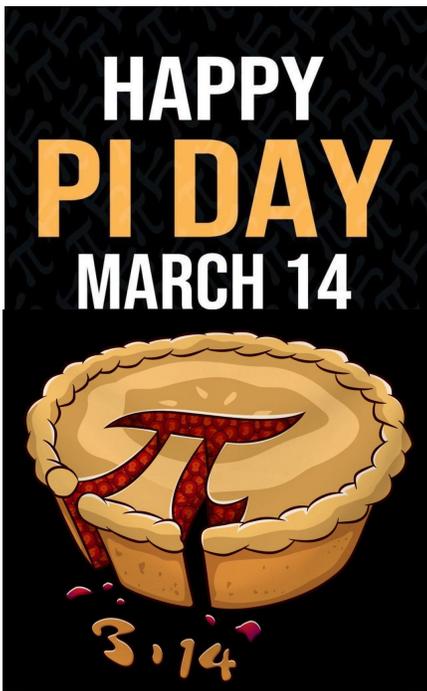


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Treasurer's Report

On February 9, 2026, the Blue Ridge Torch Club had an operating balance of \$4,735.



Coming April 10:

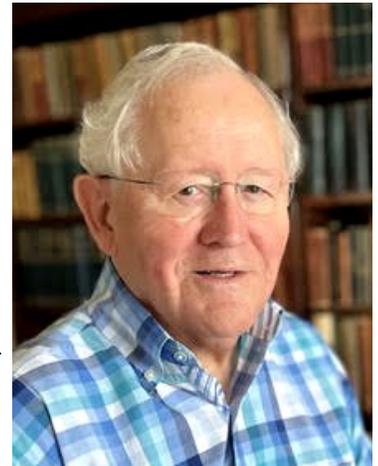
Mike Leavitt: "Climate Change Skepticism"

Coming May 12:

Joe Dockery: "The Evolution of Chiropractic Treatment"

BLUE RIDGE TORCH CLUB Dinner, Tuesday, February 10, 2026 Ambiance Banquet Restaurant Doors open at 5:30. Dinner at 6:00. Hugh Sockett: "The Way We Live Now"

The Way We Live Now draws on Anthony Trollope's 1875 novel of this title and a 1995 social analysis by Richard Hoggart under the same title. Both books raise significant questions for our present social life in terms of personal and social morality. Hugh selects four themes out of many from each book. In Trollope's, he includes: financial corruption, decadent aristocracy, greed and deceit, and anti-semitism. Hoggart's overarching theme is the dominance of moral relativism and its manifestations in individual insecurity, irresponsible communicators, degrading mass culture, and the absence of common ground in politics. Hugh explores what has changed, what is worse, what is better by 2026.



Hugh moved to Potomac Ridge with his wife Ann in December 2017, shortly before his retirement from George Mason University where he had been a professor since 1986. Previously he had held positions at the universities of Cambridge, Ulster and East Anglia (Norwich) in England where he was Dean of Education. He graduated in Modern History from Christ Church, Oxford in 1959. His London Ph.D. is in Philosophy of Education. He has published 6 academic books and 32 journal articles. Since retirement he has been writing fiction: *The Estella Trilogy* and *The Gargery Trilogy*, sequels to Dickens' *Great Expectations*, and more recently. *The Lawyer and the Slave*, and *Canal Fever: A Love Story*. Ann died in June last year.

Menu for March Dinner. Dinner begins with ChickPea Salad (Romaine, Tomato, Cucumber, Red Onion) with a Lemon Parsley Vinaigrette. Entrees are either Grilled Beef Chunks with Garlic Butter and Mushrooms, or Grilled Chicken with Lemon Caper Sauce. Veggies include Mashed Potatoes & Roasted Brussels sprouts. A vegetable dish will be made available.

Price is \$45 for members and \$50 for guests. Please leave a check with your building representative, or a check or cash at the door. For reservations go to blueridgetorchclub.org. Click on the red icon "March 10th Meeting." The deadline for RSVP or cancellation is Thursday, February 5. Those who cancel after the deadline will be responsible for payment.

February Torch Talk

Soul of a Soldier by Page Bradley

Soul of a Soldier is a story of my father's (Francis Riggs) coming of age in the Army in WWII. He grew from a young man on a farm, to joining the Army in 1941 and, through much effort, became the pilot of a B-24 bomber. When he first entered the Army's flight school, his goal was to become a fighter pilot. But bomber pilots were what the Army needed at that time.

He served as an instructor of "90 Day Wonders," a euphemism for student pilots, for over a year, something he also never wished for, but what the Army needed.

In late 1944, the Army sent him orders to report for overseas duty. He and his crew sailed across the Atlantic in early December, and through the Mediterranean and docked at Naples, a harbor that the Germans had almost destroyed. From there he and his men were sent by train (in boxcars!) to the boot heel of southern Italy.

It was there that he began to understand the culture of another country. He was repulsed by the poverty of the populace, and the language was a barrier to getting to know anyone. Slowly, but surely, he found friends in the town near the air base – mostly because he needed his clothes washed and ironed and a kind lady named Maria took care of this. She became a friend, offering him an orange or a glass of wine whenever he came to collect his laundry. He never forgot her.



Francis Riggs is the third man from the right



L to R: Wingate, navigator; Olson, copilot; Francis Riggs, pilot and commander



Page at the Podium



Page's Family (L to R): Ridgely Robison, granddaughter; Caroline Robison, daughter; Murray Bradley; Page Bradley; Griffin Robison, grandson; John Riggs, brother

President's Message, March 2026

As we move forward through another season, I want to take a moment to thank each of you for your continued commitment to the Blue Ridge Torch Club and to one another. Our strength lies not only in our collective professional expertise, but in the relationships, collaboration, and shared purpose that defines our club.

This year, we remain focused on delivering high-value programs and strengthening member engagement. Through our educational dinner presentations, networking, and community outreach, we aim to provide meaningful experiences that support your accomplishments and elevate our collective achievements.

I encourage each of you to get involved – attend an event, mentor a fellow member, or bring forward new ideas. Your participation is what transforms this club into a thriving professional community.

On behalf of this year's Torch Officers, thank you for your dedication and support. I look forward to working with you as we continue building a dynamic, forward-thinking club that reflects the excellence of its members.

Wayne

St. Patrick and the Pot O' Gold

By Jim Grefer

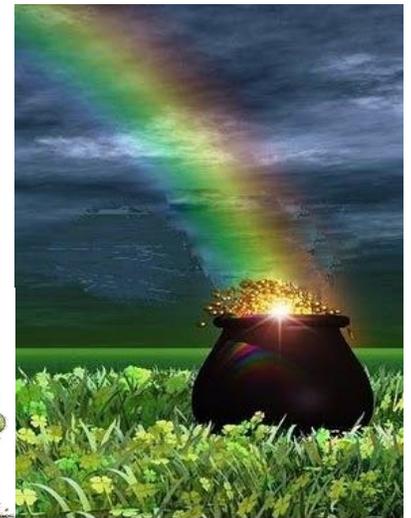
We often associate a leprechaun and Pot of Gold with St. Patrick Day. Of course, these are Irish cultural symbols. But other than that, we don't often think about what it has to do with St. Patrick Day.

The myth may stem from the story of Patrick and the rich landowner, Daire. Patrick needed land to build churches, and Daire generously donated his land. After Patrick built his church, Daire moved his horses to graze on the grass there. This infuriated Patrick, who went to Daire's house to tell him that the land was sacred and to take the horses away. Daire understood the power that Patrick held in his hand, and complied. Shortly after, in order to make amends, Daire sent his servants with a gift for Patrick, an extraordinary bronze cauldron. It's large size and uniquely wrought construction made it rare and valuable.

When the servants returned, Daire excitedly asked what Patrick said after receiving such an awesome gift. They told him that Patrick merely said "gratius agamus," or simply "thank you." Well Daire was angered by this lukewarm response and sent his servants to take the bronze cauldron back. When the servants returned Daire asked them what Patrick said, and replied simply, "gratium agamus."

When Daire realized that Patrick was unmoved by such gifts, he became remorseful, and returned the cauldron to Patrick.

Now I have no proof that this story led to the Pot of Gold myth. But, the "pot" here is a cauldron, and Pot O' Gold rolls off the tongue better than Cauldron O' Bronze... Yes?



Torch Club Officers wish everyone a happy St. Patrick's Day

- Wayne Kaiser, President: wkaiser2367@gmail.com
- Ken "Crash" Konwin, Vice President: kkonwin@aol.com
- Jim Grefer, Secretary/Newsletter Editor: greferjames@gmail.com
- Fred Bishopp, Co-Treasurer: fredbishopp@hotmail.com
- Joline Matheson, Co-Treasurer: jjmat@gmail.com
- Dona Wolf, Past President: donawolf@aol.com



March: Science, the Scientific Method, and Freedom

By Jim Grefer

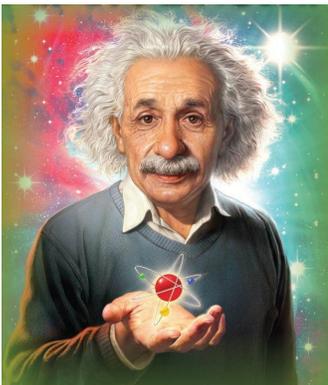
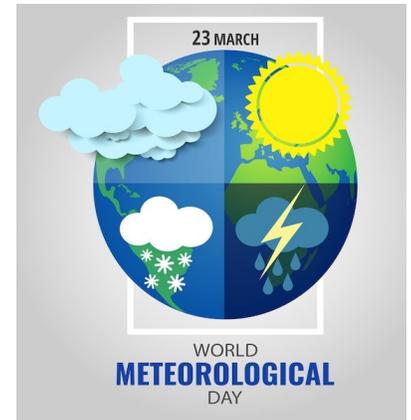
The month of March we celebrate science and its undertakings. There are a number of science holidays, anniversaries, and birthdays in March.



Topping the list is *National Science Appreciation Day*, celebrated on March 26. Established by the Center for Inquiry (CFI), it commemorates the day in 1953 when Jonas Salk announced the first successful clinical trials of his polio vaccine. Within a decade, polio had been nearly eradicated in the U.S. Now, polio is nearly eradicated in the world.

A great deal of our appreciation for science is because of the medical technologies that follow scientific discoveries. We celebrate National Doctors' Day on March 30 to celebrate the men and women who provide these medicines to us. The date commemorates the first use of anesthesia during surgery in 1842 by physician Dr. Crawford Long.

March 23 is *World Meteorological Day*, established in 1950 by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), an agency of the United Nations. Today the WMO and the U.S. Weather Service have massive data on atmospheric and oceanic patterns, and computer programs that forecast weather and climate with remarkable accuracy.

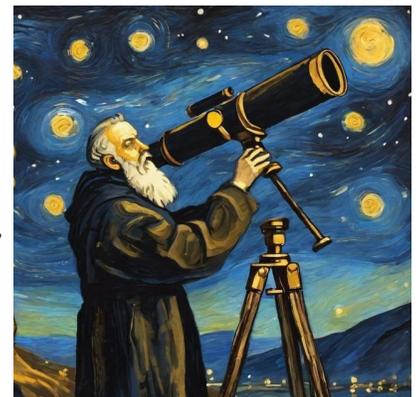


Albert Einstein's birthday is March 14. Einstein's scientific theories represented what scientists call a paradigm shift in our thinking about space and time. Einstein's equations, part of his theory of relativity, showed that time and space, rather than being independent, are connected and curved by gravity. His discovery that time slows with the speed of objects through space, facilitated space travel and the invention of Global Positioning Systems (GPS) technology that can track a cell phone signal with incredible accuracy.

But science is more than just useful technology. Science gives humanity extraordinary levels of freedom. We often take for granted that science is both a field of study and an investigative methodology, referred to as "the scientific method." The scientific method is a system of repeated observation, data collection, hypothesis testing, and confirmation or falsification that opened humanity to accurate, albeit tentative, knowledge of the material world.

It wasn't always this way. In March of 1610, Galileo published his initial telescopic astronomical observations in a brief treatise entitled *Sidereus Nuncius* (*Starry Messenger*). Here, Galileo revealed that the Earth's moon had mountains and that the four "stars" near Jupiter were actually moons revolving around Jupiter. This was contrary to the teachings of the philosophers and the Catholic Church, which held that the moon and stars were perfect, unchanging, revolved around the Earth, and were made of an immaterial quintessence.

In March 1616, the Church issued a statement denying Copernicus and Galileo's heliocentric models of the Solar System, condemning and prohibiting all related research as heretical, placing Galileo and his theories in jeopardy.



Today, because of science and the scientific method, we need not depend on authority figures to provide and mandate their interpretations of "revealed" knowledge. Today knowledge is discovered, tested, confirmed, and updated by professionals who compete for the most accurate models of the physical universe.

So, let's celebrate the great technological inventions and useful tools that science has given us. But, let us not take for granted the great freedom of knowledge and information that science provides to humanity.

Current Members: January 2026

Charlene Ahmed	Lyn Green	Joyce Mitchell
Syed Ahmed	Jim Grefer	Pat Monahan
Barry Berger	Carol Hall-Veit	Elsa Moustafa
Fred Bishopp, Jr	Kenton Hamaker	Andrew Norton
Murray Bradley	Peggy Hamaker	Bill Phillips
Page Bradley	Neelam Henderson	Pat Phillips
Brenda Brohard	Wes Henderson	Memory Porter
Christine Caldwell	Kathleen Hughes	Ann Schmitt
Sheila Cramer	Fran Hurley	Catherine Shepard
Steve Creskoff	Wayne Kaiser	Hugh Sockett
Kay Curley	Maria Kelly	Dennis Spriggs
Tom Devaney	Peggy King	Anne A Thomas
Beckham Dickerson	Ken "Crash" Konwin	Anne H Thomas
Tina Dickerson	Judith Kory	Bill Thomas
Joe Dockery	Eva Leavitt	Dave Thomas
Marylynne Dockery	Michael Leavitt	George Viener
Nancy Downey	Barbara Leone	Janet Walker
Madelon Eisenberg	Joline Matheson	William Walker
Hosny El-Khordagui	Jenny Mayberry	Britt Wilford
Jerry Frola	Sam Mayberry	Terry Wilford
Joe Gibson	Doug McCollum	Dona Wolf
Rosa Gibson	Sue McCollum	

Bring Checks to Your Building Representative

The line at the Torch Dinner will go more smoothly, and you will get to your seat more quickly if you drop your check under the door of your building representative in the days before the dinner.

Here are your representatives:

Riverbend	Fred Bishopp	711	Magnolias	Barry Berger	MS 206
	Joline Matheson	106	Potomac Ridge	Brenda Brohard	221
Blue Ridge	Joe Dockery	221	Riverview	Ken Hamaker	906

"All religions, arts, and sciences are branches of the same tree. All these aspirations are directed toward ennobling man's life, lifting it from the sphere of mere physical existence and leading the individual toward freedom."

From: Out of My Later Years: The Scientist, Philosopher and Man Portrayed Through His Own Words

—Albert Einstein

