



BLUE RIDGE TORCH CLUB OF LEESBURG VIRGINIA

Celebrating 18 Years in Lansdowne

July 2025

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Treasurer's Report

As of June 11, 2025, the Blue Ridge Torch Club had a balance of \$4,778.

Coming In September:

Dennis Spriggs, "The Mountain Gorillas of Rwanda"

Happy 4th of July



Never forget why we fought.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal..."

Past President's Column

Last month I thought that my June column in our Torch newsletter would be my last, but the new powers-to-be encouraged me to write one final column, highlighting some of our activities over the past two years, particularly for our newer members.

Torch Club program years 2023 and 2024 were challenging, but filled with promise as we finally ended our long, sad journey out of the pandemic that prevented our members from gathering together and sharing meals and ideas. I credit my predecessor Brenda Brohard and her team for keeping the club together through those difficult times, especially during 2023 when we had no on-campus restaurant and had to meet at the Belmont Country Club. Some Torch clubs did not survive the Pandemic.

In December 2023, we returned to LWVA with the opening of our new on-site restaurant, Marie's, and began to rebuild our roster from 47 to our current 63 members. The most recent issue of the Torch Magazine (Spring 2025) lists us as the third largest Torch Club in the country, behind only second place Frederick (MD) with 59 and first place Saginaw Valley (MI) with 68. We may already have overtaken the Frederick Club with our seven new members inducted since April.

If you have not received the Spring 2025 issue of Torch Magazine, please contact me at donawolf@aol.com.

More important than the quantity of members, however, is the quality of our programs. We have had some wonderful – and quite varied -- talks in the last two years. With 16 Torch talks ranging from "Plastic Nano Particles" to "The History of Breakfast Cereal," and from "Zionism's Impact on Present Day Israel" to the "Persecution, Power, Promise, and Plunder in South Africa", our members have been exposed to a broad range of ideas and events, with substantive discussion following each program.

Our most popular talk was quite unconventional: Mike Leavitt's "The Life and Lyrics of Tom Lehrer," a brief narrative of Lehrer's political musings interspersed with four of Mike's cronies belting out a selection of Lehrer's infamous ditties. His Torch "talk" attracted 40 guests in addition to 30 of our regular members!

(Past President's Column continues on page 2)

Scenes from the Blue Ridge Torch Club 2026 Annual Picnic



Welcoming attendees are former Torch Club Treasurers Kent Hamaker and Judy Kory and greeter Jerry Frola



Anne H. Thomas, Kathleen Hughes, and Steve Creskoff having fun.



Kathleen Hughes and Catherine Shepard in their party dresses.

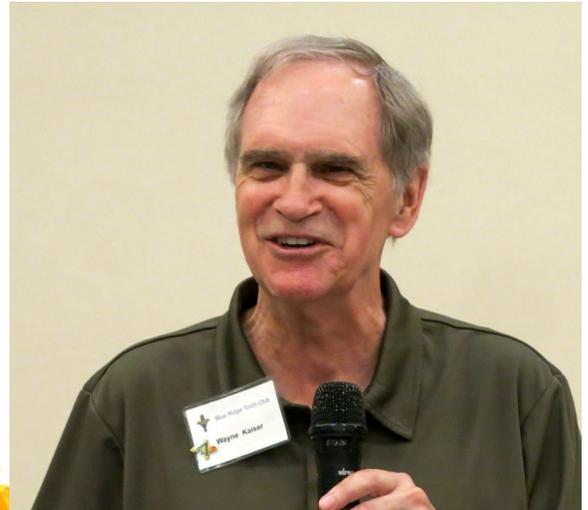


Dennis Spriggs previewing his upcoming talk.

Scenes from the Blue Ridge Torch Club 2026 Annual Picnic



Jeannie Raddatz in her party hat.



New Torch Club President, Wayne Kaiser announcing plans for the Club's future.



Welcoming new member Tom Devaney and his wife Marcia.



New Torch Club Vice President Crash Konwin smiling big!

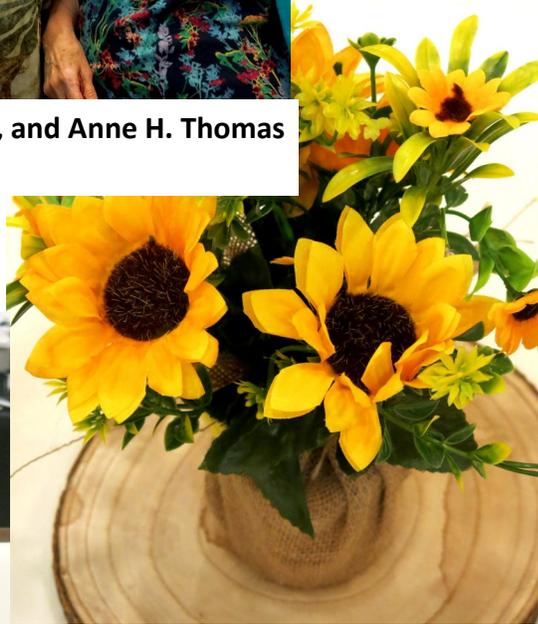
Scenes from the Blue Ridge Torch Club 2026 Annual Picnic



Jerry Frola, Past President Dona Wolf, and Anne H. Thomas smiling for the camera.



John and Nancy Downey having fun.



Nancy shows off her party pedicure.

All these pictures were wonderfully snapped by Dave Thomas.

Welcome New Torch Club Members

We would like to introduce the two new Torch members inducted in the last couple of months.

Madelon “Maddie” Eisenberg - Maddie was born in Brooklyn, NY but grew up in Central Florida. She attended Florida State University earning her BA and MA in special education followed by a career as an elementary teacher working with visually impaired children.

After her husband passed away a year or so ago, Maddie moved into LWVA last December to be closer to her son, his wife, and his baby daughter who live in Brambleton. Maddie also has a daughter in California who presented her with her first grandson just a few months ago. Maddie loves being a grandma and is now expecting her third grandchild.

She has embraced the LWVA lifestyle with great enthusiasm and has sampled nearly every activity here including bowling, walking, hiking, music events at the clubhouse, bingo, Mahjong and local excursions. But her favorite is swimming in our LWVA pool which she thinks is terrific, especially in this torrid weather.

Tom Devaney – Tom grew up and graduated from high school in New Jersey before attending college at the University of Detroit with degrees in History and English. He received his law degree from St. Joseph’s University in New York City before embarking upon a career in commercial real estate.

After working in New York and New Jersey, he moved to Virginia where he joined the Mills Corporation, providing legal services in all aspects of developing, owning and managing super-regional shopping centers. During his career, Tom practiced law on projects all over the East Coast, including Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Georgia, as well as Virginia.

He and wife Marcia married in 1984 and raised their blended family of 4 kids (3 daughters born in 1977; imagine raising 3 teenage daughters of the same age!) Tom and Marcia moved into Lansdowne Woods on May 14 and he was joined Torch on June 10, less than 4 weeks later, eager to become a member of our wonderful group. He has a particular interest in classic military history and is taking courses at OLLI (Osher Lifelong Learning Institute) affiliated with George Mason University.

We welcome the 2025-2027 Blue Ridge Torch Officers

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

Past President's Column (continued from page 1)

A few other highlights: we significantly strengthened our club treasury, from slightly anemic to quite healthy; produced a substantive and quite attractive monthly newsletter (kudos to Jim Grefer); and one of my favorites, replaced those gawd-awful pinned name tags with magnetic badges that won't tear our clothes. In sum, our club is resilient, energetic, and brimming with new talent, and I am extremely proud of our officers and all the speakers and club members who contributed to our two highly successful years.

Our new club officers are eager to get started and begin planning for next season's programs. I am pleased to hand over the gavel, and wish them congratulations and the best of luck.

Two Years of Torch Talks October 2023 to May 2025

- September 2023, Steve Sasson (IATC Regional Director): "May You Live to Be 120: Blessing or Curse?"
- October 2023, Bill Thomas (PR): "U.S. Nuclear Weapons Policy and Programs."
- November 2023, Jim Grefer (PR): "How Do You Solve a Problem Like Social Security."
- January 2024, Pat Monahan (BR), Joyce Mitchell, Bill and Anne H. Thomas (PR): "History, Geography, Geology, and Tourism in Newfoundland Canada."
- February 2024, Mike Leavitt (PR), "The Life and Music of Tom Lehrer." with John Downey (PR), Jim Grefer (PR), Dave Thomas (BR), and Marianne Tagge (BR).
- March 2024, Judy Kory (RB): "History and Democracy in South Africa."
- April 2024, Hosny Khordagui (PR): "Global Water Scarcity, Conflicts and Solutions."
- May 2024, Dennis Spriggs (RV): "Theory and Evidence for Evolution."
- September 2024, Bill and Anne A. Thomas (PR): "The History of Breakfast Cereal in America."
- October 2024, Jim Grefer (PR): "The Economic and Constitutional Causes of Southern Secession and the Civil War."
- November 2024, Ann Schmitt (ME) and Kathleen Hughes (MN): "Women's Suffrage and the League of Women Voters."
- January 2025, Dave Thomas (BR): "Lansdowne Woods Backyard Stories in Pictures."
- February 2025, Steve Creskoff (MN): "Our Man in Moscow, and the World Bank Project."
- April 2025, Mike Leavitt (PR): "History of Zionism."
- May 2025, Hosny Khordagui (PR): "Plastic Journey From Crude Oil to Nano Particles in Our Bodies."

We Thank the 2023-2025 Torch Officers for Keeping the Blue Ridge Torch Club Great!

- Dona Wolf (RV), President, donawolf@aol.com
- Anne A. Thomas (PR), Vice President, anneathomas@gmail.com
- Jim Grefer (PR), Secretary & Newsletter Editor, greferjames@gmail.com
- Judy Kory (RB), Co-Treasurer, jjkory@comcast.com
- Kent Hamaker (RV), Co-Treasurer, kdhamakerjr@gmail.com
- Brenda Brohard (RB), Membership Chair, jnjmat@gmail.com

Current Members

Charlene Ahmed	Carol Hall-Veit	Elsa Moustafa
Syed Ahmed	Kenton Hamaker	Andrew Norton
Ray Beery	Peggy Hamaker	Bill Phillips
Barry Berger	Neelam Henderson	Pat Phillips
Fred Bishopp, Jr	Wes Henderson	Memory Porter
Murray Bradley	Kathleen Hughes	Jeannie Raddatz
Page Bradley	Fran Hurley	Michael Raddatz
Brenda Brohard	Wayne Kaiser	Travis Sample
Steve Creskoff	Maria Kelly	Ann Schmitt
Kay Curley	Peggy King	Catherine Shepard
Tom Devaney	Ken "Crash" Konwin	Hugh Sockett
John Downey	Judith Kory	Dennis Spriggs
Nancy Downey	Eva Leavitt	Janet Taliaferro
Madelon Eisenberg	Michael Leavitt	Anne A Thomas
Hosny El-Khordagui	Barbara Leone	Anne H Thomas
Jerry Frola	Joline Matheson	Bill Thomas
Joe Gibson	Doug McCollum	Dave Thomas
Rosa Gibson	Sue McCollum	George Viener
Jim Grefer	Sue Merk	Britt Wilford
Steve Gross	Joyce Mitchell	Terry Wilford
Trudy Gross	Pat Monahan	Dona Wolf

"Patriotism is not short, frenzied outbursts of emotion, but the tranquil and steady dedication of a lifetime. This is a mighty assignment, for it is often easier to fight for principles than to live up to them."

Adlai Stevenson

The Nature of Patriotism, August 27, 1952