



BLUE RIDGE TORCH CLUB OF LEESBURG VIRGINIA

Celebrating 19 Years in Lansdowne

December 2025

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Treasurer's Report

On November 27, 2025, the Blue Ridge Torch Club had an operating balance of \$8,420.

December Holidays of Light



Coming January 13:

Syed Ahmed:

"Technical Innovations in Cardiology"

BLUE RIDGE TORCH CLUB Dinner, Tuesday, December 9, 2025 LWVA Auditorium (Happy hour 5:15 BYOB). Dinner at 6:00.

Holiday Party and Book Exchange

The last Torch Club Dinner this calendar year and Annual Holiday party will be held in the LWVA Clubhouse auditorium on Tuesday, December 9 at 5:15. There will be no speaker at this event, but instead we will have the club's traditional Book Exchange. In this game, each couple or individual member who brings a wrapped book will be selected through a drawing to choose someone else's wrapped book. It's a fun game for the holidays.

This event is for Torch members only (including spouses or significant others), but potential members may obtain a membership application from any club officer and return it to the officer by Thursday, December 4. Contact Interim Membership Chair Joline at ijnmat@gmail.com for more information.

Menu for December Holiday Dinner. The dinner buffet will be catered by La Villa Roma and include: Green and Caesar salads; Chicken Parmesan; Meatballs in Sauce; Pasta Marinara; Pasta Alfredo; Garlic knots and rolls, with Cannoli for dessert. The meal cost is \$40 and drinks are BYOB.

Price is \$40 for members and guests. Please leave a check with your building representative, or pay with check or cash at the door. For reservations go to blueridgetorchclub.org. Click on the red icon "December 9th Meeting." The deadline for RSVP or cancellation is Thursday, December 4.

Torch Speakers for Winter and Spring 2026

The Torch Club is set for talks in January through May of 2026. Authors and topics are here.

January: Ahmed Syed, "Technical Innovations in Cardiology"

February: Page Bradley, "My Father's Experiences in World War 2"

March: Hugh Sockett, "Analysis of *The Way We Live Now*" 1975 and 2025"

April: Mike Leavitt, "Climate Change Skepticism"

May: Joe Dockery, "The Evolution of Chiropractic"

Summary of November Torch Meeting

Jim Grefer and Steve Creskoff: “What Do We Expect From the New Tariff Policy?”

Since WW2, America has been a “free-trade” country, leading the world in low-tariff trade agreements. Tariffs have been below 5% of the value of imports for over 80 years. Under the Administration’s new economic policy, U.S. import tariffs have risen to over 20% and are expected to go up. Is this good or bad for America?

Jim Grefer and Steve Creskoff explained economic and legal issues that govern answers to these questions.



Jim, a retired economist, presented a primer on how tariffs work, with charts that illustrated the flow of tariff costs through the American economy.

The American importer pays the foreign shipper for the goods, and pays the tariff directly to the government. Since the tariff raises his cost of goods, the importer raises its price to wholesalers, who raise their prices to retailers, who raise their prices to consumers. Thus, a tariff is a *direct* tax to the U.S. importer, and an *indirect* sales tax to U.S. businesses and consumers.

Further, higher prices reduce demand for imported goods, hurting foreign economies.

So, who benefits from tariffs? The Federal government receives some revenue, though demand fluctuations make this an unreliable revenue source. Tariffs can protect American factories and increase U.S. manufacturing. But tariffs are a blunt instrument for that. Do we really need to make shoes in the U.S.? Targeted subsidies are a much more effective tool to promote needed manufacturing.

Tariffs act as a sales tax. Many politicians and businesses seek to change the U.S. income tax system to a sales tax system because income taxes are highly progressive and sales taxes are highly regressive. Perhaps this is why tariffs are popular among some of our leaders.

Steve Creskoff talked about the Administration’s trade and tariff policies. Steve -- an international trade lawyer who worked in more than fifty countries to help conform their laws to the agreements of the World Trade Organization-- pointed out that the U.S. is now predominantly a service economy and runs a large trade surplus in exported services, even if we run a deficit in traded goods. But trade in goods statistics are misleading. The “substantial transformation” rule holds that the origin of imported goods is where the last significant change takes place. This means that goods imported from countries that do final assembly, such as China and Mexico, are credited with 100 percent of the value even if their actual contribution is much less.

The Administration’s reciprocal tariffs program’s ostensible objectives are to (1) counter discrimination against U.S. exports, (2) raise additional tax revenue, (3) counter foreign policies deemed injurious to the US, such as China’s exportation of fentanyl precursors, and (4) return high-end manufacturing to the U.S. The Supreme Court case, however, challenges tariffs imposed under the International Economic Emergency Powers Act (IEEPA) and pointed out that even if the Court finds that the Administration doesn’t have the power to impose tariffs under that law, other laws exist that could be used to the same effect. Steve hopes that the Administration’s trade and tariff policy is only a short-term deviation from the multilateral rules-based regimes that have led to the huge expansion of trade and relative peace over the last 80 years.



President's Column

The Blue Ridge Torch Club is, and has been, graced with incredibly remarkable people. Our members, both past and present, have come from all over the United States. In fact, they have come from all over the planet. Their careers and lives have contributed to the greater good. We are impressed by the stories of your services, experiences, and accomplishments.

Our membership is comprised of prominent figures across sectors such as the military, government, education, healthcare, entertainment, civic, and corporate industries. Service at all levels, from those dedicated to their jobs to leaders in their fields. Our club has attracted leading talent with spectacular, impressive, and truly remarkable careers.

We are a highly interactive club where our members participate and discuss stimulating subjects ranging from current events, historical significance, folklore and much more. Our members are professionals with a broad range of experience. We have a great program planned with speakers lined up for the Winter and Spring of 2026. This newsletter provides a list of their names and the topics they cover. Of course, we always welcome additional speakers. If you are interested, contact Crash Konwin.

Of course, we also welcome new members. Our club continues to grow. We just inducted Joe and Marylynn Dockery as our 61st and 62nd members.

As a friendly reminder, do not forget about our holiday dinner for members. Nancy Downey will be hosting our annual book swap event again this year, as she has in the past.

And finally, many of us live here to be close to our families. Enjoy them during this holiday season.

Happy Holidays to all!

Wayne

Our Newest Members

Joe and Marylynn Dockery recently moved into Blue Ridge. He is a graduate of the Palmer College of Chiropractic in Davenport, IA. He moved to Stanton, VA where he had a long practice as a chiropractor. Marylynn grew up in upstate New York. They first met in Iowa when she went to his high school as an exchange student from Utica. They lost touch over the years. Marylynn eventually moved to Purcellville where she worked as an office manager. She accidentally ran into Joe's sister in O'Hare Airport and reestablished contact with her.



Joline Matheson (right) inducts Joe and Marylynn Dickerson as our newest Torch members.

Joe is quite a musician. Soon after, when his band had a gig in Purcellville he decided to invite Marylynn and her husband to come. When it turned out that she no longer had a husband, the casual evening turned into something more. And the rest is history.

After retirement they decided to stay in this area to be close to their children. They are enjoying the atmosphere and activities in Lansdowne and hope to be active members of Torch Club.

Authors in Our Midst Part 3

By Dona Wolf

This third in a series of articles about published authors within our Blue Ridge Torch Club will briefly showcase two of our current members: Janet Taliaferro and Hugh Sockett.

Janet Taliaferro, a member of the Torch Club since 2010, aspired to be a poet and writer while still in her teens when she won first prize in a Shakespeare essay contest. Despite writing many poems and short stories in those early years, Janet was busy as a political activist and later running a family business in Oklahoma. She earned her MA degree in Creative writing in 1988, winning the Geoffry Bocca Award for Graduate Writing based upon her Master's thesis, *Wakonta Calendar*, a collection of short stories.

Even while continuing to write, Janet was not serious about being published until she returned to Virginia in 1999. Her first novel, *A Sky for Arcadia*, won honorable mention in the Oklahoma Center for the Book Award in 2002. Her second novel, *Virgin Hall*, and her collection of short stories, *CitiScapes*, were published later. The first two novels are main-stream women's fiction, one dealing with addiction and the other about abortion in 1950 Texas. Two other novels, *A Reasonable Lady* and its sequel, *An Unreasonable Daughter*, followed.

Janet has just completed writing a non-fiction memoir *Finding My Voice: A Personal History of the Silent Generation*, and continues to write poetry and belong to a number of writing groups. She has moved from the Magnolias and now lives in Waltonwood in Ashburn.

Hugh Sockett, who lives in Potomac Ridge, has been a member of the Torch Club for almost six years. He began his career as a teacher in a large London high school and rose to become a full professor and university administrator in North Ireland and East Anglia after completing his PhD in Education in London. Immigrating to the U.S., he joined George Mason University's Schar School of Policy and Government in 1986 where he initially taught teaching to teachers and later political science to undergraduates.

Hugh, a prolific writer, has devoted his time and talents to a wide range of eclectic writing styles. In a nod to his profession of education, Hugh published two writings: *The Moral Base for Teacher Professionalism* (1993) and *Knowledge and Virtue in Teaching and Learning: The Primacy of Dispositions* (2018).

His foray into classical writing resulted in a trilogy of sequels to Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* - *The Estrella Trilogies*: (1) *Pip and Estella*, (2) *Better Expectations*, and (3) *The Star That Would Not Dim*. While Hugh would be the first to say that undertaking a task to emulate "one of literature's most revered stories by a most beloved author" would be "a bit cheeky," critics concluded that "Sockett has proven equal to the task". A second trilogy followed the first: *The Gargery Trilogy*, continuing the saga of the families, friends, and acquaintances of the main characters in *Great Expectations*.

A sample of his other books further proves Hugh's varied subjects. He recently wrote a biography about his father, *The Life of Benjamin Sockett, Priest*, and *The Lawyer and the Slave*, a novel about racism in Victorian England.

His most recent book, currently in press, is *Canal Fever*, a love story set in the Suez Crisis of 1956.

Perhaps I misspoke earlier when I said that Hugh Sockett had retired. Anyone who has written this many books is hardly "retired". It's a wonder that he has time to attend our Torch Club dinners! What a marvelous asset for our club.

Coming Next: Authors in Our Midst Part 4.

December 2025 Holidays: Stories of Light

By Jim Grefer

Winter Solstice December 21. The shortest day of the year in the northern hemisphere, people celebrate the return of the sun and the lengthening of the days, with bonfires, hero stories, and chants to gain the favor of the gods of light. Today, some make pilgrimages to Stonehenge, where the light from the sunset passes perfectly through its heart.



Stonehenge at Winter Solstice Sunset



Nine Candle Menorah

Hanukkah Dec 14 to 22:

Called the Festival of Lights, the Jewish people celebrate the victory of the Macabees over their Greek-Syrian oppressors, and the re-dedication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. Each evening, families light the eight candles on the menorah with the tall ninth “servant” candle, and let it burn until half an hour after night fall.

Christmas, Dec 25: Celebrated by Christians worldwide who refer to Jesus as the “Light of the World.” The holiday is celebrated by lighting the Christmas tree and burning the Yule log. Stories are told about the three Magi (astrologists of Jesus’s time) who followed the light from the Star of Bethlehem east from Arabia to Bethlehem and found and worshipped the child Jesus at His birthplace.



Christmas Tree and Lights



Seven Candles of Kwanzaa

Kwanzaa, Dec 26-Jan 1: A distinctly American holiday, it is celebrated by many African-Americans to honor their African heritage, values, and traditions. People celebrate Kwanzaa by lighting seven candles, representing the seven principles: unity, self-determination, collective responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith.



Yule Log Aflame

Yule, Dec . 21– Jan 1: Originally celebrated by the Germanic and Scandinavian people of Northern Europe, Yule begins at the Winter Solstice and continues for 10 days as a triumph of lightness over darkness after the long Winter. The people celebrate by burning the Yule logs and honoring their gods for the return of the sunlight.

Zarathosht Diso (Dec. 26): Zoroastrians honor the death of their prophet Zoroaster on this day by making pilgrimage to one of the Fire Temples of Zoroaster where temple priests tend to the Eternal Flame.



Eternal Flame of Zoroaster

For Non-Torch Members Who May Wish to Attend the Holiday Party

If any of our many “Friends of Torch” want to join the Torch Club, you can get a membership application from any officer (listed below) and submit it to the Executive Committee before December 4. For more information, contact Interim Membership Chair Joline Matheson at jnjmat@gmail.com.

Torch Club Officers wish everyone a very happy holiday season

- 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:
jnjmat@gmail.com
- Dona Wolf, Past President:
donawolf@aol.com



**“Ring the bells that can still ring;
Forget your perfect offering.
There is a crack in everything;
That's how the light gets in.”**
— Leonard Cohen, *Selected Poems, 1956-1968*

Current Members: December 2025

Charlene Ahmed

Syed Ahmed

Barry Berger

Fred Bishopp, Jr

Murray Bradley

Page Bradley

Brenda Brohard

Christine Caldwell

Sheila Cramer

Steve Creskoff

Kay Curley

Tom Devaney

Beckham Dickerson

Tina Dickerson

Joe Dockery

Marylynne Dockery

Nancy Downey

Madelon Eisenberg

Hosny El-Khordagui

Jerry Frola

Joe Gibson

Rosa Gibson

Jim Grefer

Carol Hall-Veit

Kenton Hamaker

Peggy Hamaker

Neelam Henderson

Wes Henderson

Kathleen Hughes

Fran Hurley

Wayne Kaiser

Maria Kelly

Peggy King

Ken "Crash" Konwin

Judith Kory

Eva Leavitt

Michael Leavitt

Barbara Leone

Joline Matheson

Jenny Mayberry

Sam Mayberry

Doug McCollum

Sue McCollum

Pat Monahan

Elsa Moustafa

Andrew Norton

Bill Phillips

Pat Phillips

Memory Porter

Ann Schmitt

Catherine Shepard

Hugh Sockett

Dennis Spriggs

Janet Taliaferro

Anne A Thomas

Anne H Thomas

Bill Thomas

Dave Thomas

George Viener

Janet Walker

William Walker

Britt Wilford

Terry Wilford

Dona Wolf