



TENN VALLEY FLYER

Tennessee Valley Flyer 3rd Quarter 2012



Chapter Hosting Alabama's AFA State Convention, 4 Aug



Michael Kersjes, author of "A Smile as Big as the Moon," will speak at the AFA dinner event.

The AFA Tennessee Valley Chapter is hosting this year's Alabama AFA State Convention on Saturday, 4 August, at the Downtown Holiday Inn (401 Williams SW). The dinner will feature author, special education teacher, and motivational speaker, Michael Kersjes. Mr. Kersjes published "A Smile as Big as the Moon," in 2002, which documents his struggles and victories when he sent his first class of learning disabled and emotionally impaired children to Space Camp in Huntsville. The book was also made into a Hallmark Hall of Fame movie that was first aired earlier this year on television.

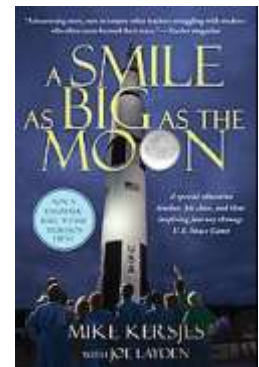
All AFA (Ala) members are invited to attend the business meeting from 1-5 PM at no charge. Spouses are encouraged to attend the no-host social from 5-6 PM, and a 3-course dinner which runs from 6-8 PM. Dinner costs \$27.50 per person.

To sign-up, send a check payable to AFA Chapter 335 to 1207 Rison Ave. NE, Huntsville, AL, 35801; or call Russ Lewey at (256-425-8791).

(See Page 3 for more information about Michael Kersjes.)

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Members Lay AFA Wreath at Memorial Day Event

According to reports, hundreds braved the warm temperature and relatively high humidity to pay tribute to the men and women who gave the ultimate sacrifice in wartime at Huntsville's Annual Memorial Day Commemoration at Maple Hill Cemetery on 28 May. Among the attendees, were seven members of our own Tennessee Valley AFA Chapter.

Small American flags graced approximately 1,200 grave-side markers to honor deceased veterans. The program featured patriotic music, a Color Guard, the traditional placement of wreaths (to the soulful sound of a lone bagpiper) by representatives of many local patriotic and veteran's organizations, a rifle salute, and more.

Guest speakers included Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle, Redstone Arsenal Commander Major General James Rogers, and State Representative Phil Williams.



Chapter members Al Kemmet (left) and Guy Broadhurst (right) prepare to lay the AFA wreath during the Memorial Day Commemoration at Maple Hill Cemetery recently.



At left, Diane Broadhurst, wife of Guy Broadhurst, turned an ordinary wreath into a patriotic, AFA work of art. Their son, Matt, a photographer, designed and produced the center part of the wreath with the AFA Logo. Thanks, all!



**Tell your AF-Retired Friends
about the Benefits of
AFA Membership!**

Chapter Presents Teacher of the Year (TOY) Awards

Dr. Sylvia Dean, Chapter & State TOY,
Jones Valley Elementary



Rick Driesbach (right), President of the Tennessee Valley AFA Chapter, presents Dr. Dean with an AFA tote bag and a \$250 check. Dr. Dean will compete next year for National honors.

Ms. Jennifer Kennedy, Chapter Secondary TOY,
Athens Middle school



John Phillip (right) presents Ms. Kennedy with Teacher of the Year (at the Secondary-level). Ms. Kennedy received a check for \$100. Both teachers received a complimentary Civil Air Patrol Aerospace Education membership as well.

Congratulations to both!

CYBER- PATRIOT V Update



New training materials have been posted for CyberPatriot-V! Check them out at: <http://www.uscyberpatriot.org>.

CyberPatriot is the premier national high school cyber defense competition created to inspire high school students toward careers in Cybersecurity or other Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines critical to our nation's future.

Space Camp's "Aviation Challenge"

Are you looking for a unique camp this summer that will do more than give your child a good time? If you're interested in your child gaining self-confidence and learning teamwork, then look no farther than right here in Huntsville at Aviation Challenge co-located with the U.S. Space and Rocket Center.

In May, members of the AFA Tennessee Valley Chapter's Executive Council, along with Ms. Jennifer Kennedy, the Chapter's Secondary School Teacher of the Year, were treated to a tour of Aviation Challenge by Ms. Jen DiCarlo, Aviation Challenge and Corporate Programs Manager.

According to Ms. DiCarlo and other staff members, Aviation Challenge campers also learn about leadership through age appropriate interactive activities that are challenging, educational and fun. The primary programs for campers are Mach I, for 4th graders to middle schoolers; Mach II, which is for middle school students; and Mach III, for attendees in high school. Generally, the camp consists of six days of learning aviation principles, using flight simulators, building teamwork, and becoming skilled in land survival techniques in the Mach I and III programs. Cost varies by specific date, with an average week's cost running about \$850.

Several of the staff members have their private pilot licenses and said they strive to make the camp as realistic as possible—while always placing safety first.

It's not too late; just visit the Aviation Challenge website at <http://www.aviationchallenge.com> and see what they have to offer. (Continued on Page 3)

The chapter is looking for a POC to coordinate the **AF Birthday Celebration** in mid-September. For more info, please contact Rick Driesbach at President@hsv-afa.org

“Aviation Challenge” (Continued from Page 2)



Members of the Chapters Executive Council and Ms. Jennifer Kennedy, Chapter Secondary Teacher of the Year, recently toured Space Camp’s Aviation Challenge. Above are some of the simulators campers use for real-time dog fights.

Michael Kersjes Bio

After serving four years in the United States Navy, Michael Kersjes graduated from Grand Valley State University with a BS in Psychology and Special Education. He began his 22 years of special education teaching in 1979 at Forrest Hills Public School, where he also coached football at the high school and college level. He then went on to obtain a graduate degree in Administration and Secondary Education from Central Michigan University in 1980.

In 1987, Michael started the first self-contained program for Learning Disabled and Emotionally Impaired Children, which was implemented across seven school districts. It was during this time that he envisioned a world outside of the classroom for these special children. In 1989, he sent his first group of students to Space Camp in Huntsville, AL, which literally opened up a new world to them. He then became the Founder and President of Space is Special, Inc., which has sent nearly 2,600 special needs children to Space Camp since 1990. His work has led to grants from the National Science Foundation and NASA, along with several awards and letters of commendation from the United States Department of Education, Vice President George Bush, and a Lifetime Enrichment Award for Special Education. His story was then made into a documentary for the Discovery Channel in 1997.

His book, “A Smile as Big as the Moon,” is currently required reading at various universities and community colleges throughout the United States and was recently published in Japan. Michael has since relocated to Harvest, AL. He continues to use his passion for teaching and coaching by performing motivational speeches across the U.S. and Canada.

The Hallmark Hall of Fame movie, “A Smile as Big as the Moon,” is available in Hallmark stores across America and at other retailers.



Wayne Gardner and his Combat Control Team in 1975 are pictured above.

Combat Controllers — From the Early Days to Today’s Special Ops

On Thursday, 21 June, Wayne Gardner, provided the Tennessee Valley AFA Chapter insight into the history and today’s mission of Combat Controllers and Air Force Special Operations. From his early days following his being drafted in 1968, through his commissioning and retirement, Wayne served as a Combat Controller, to include being a member of the first Special Operations Combat Control Squadron assigned to the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC). He talked about how the mission has grown from its early inception in support of airlift and air drops, to today’s – where Special Tactics airmen have direct control of air-to-ground strike operations. The newly formed 24th Special Tactics Wing at Hurlburt Field is the parent wing of Combat Controllers but when deployed, an Air Force Special Tactics Team works as an independent Air Force unit, usually consisting of a combat control technician, pararescueman, combat weather technician, and a terminal attack controller. Fully versed in the intricacies of air power, (ordnance and capabilities), these Airmen are critical to the success of air and many special operations. As a result, within the last year, two combat controllers were recipients of the Air Force Cross. Today, Wayne lives here in Huntsville and is the CEO of T&W Operations, a service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business, specializing in information technology support.

“A Smile As Big As the Moon”

Book Synopsis

Besides being a football coach at a Michigan high school, Mike Kersjes taught special education classes. One fall, Kersjes got the outlandish idea that his students would benefit from going to Space Camp. There was only one problem: this program had been designed for gifted and talented students. Kersjes believed that, given a chance, his kids could do as well as anybody, and with remarkable persistence broke down one barrier after another until Space Camp opened its doors to Special Ed students on an experimental basis. After nine months of rigorous preparation, during which the class molded itself into a working team, they arrived at Space Camp, where they turned in a performance so startling, so surprising, that it will leave the reader breathless. A truly triumphant story of the power of the human spirit.



Last year's
"Santa's Pit Row" at the
Botanical Gardens

Mark Your Calendar for Future AFA Events!

- **4 Aug:** State AFA Convention, Huntsville, AL
- **13-16 Aug:** AFA Information Booth at Space & Missile Defense Conference, VBC.
(John Pennell is working sign-up for shifts; spouses welcome.)
- **15-16 Sep:** AFA National Convention, Washington DC
- **Fall:** Teacher Workshop (Date TBD)
- **11 Nov:** Huntsville Veterans Day Parade
- **December:** Quarterly Membership Meeting
- **December:** Volunteering at Botanical Gardens' Galaxy of Lights II

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