

A Publication of the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired

# FOCUS

Volume 30 | Spring 2019



## The Story of a Blind Artist

Artist uses imagination to guide himself through his creativity.

# FOCUS

**FOCUS** is an official publication of the **Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired**.

Current newsletters and annual reports are available by mail, in Braille, e-mail, on disk, audio cassette or on our website. If you prefer to receive future editions of our publications in one of these alternative formats, call CABVI at (315) 797-2233 x1303.

[www.cabvi.org](http://www.cabvi.org)

**Publisher/Editor**

Michael Marrone, Public Relations and Events Manager

**Editor**

Allison Kollar, Marketing and Design Associate

**Contributing Editor**

Tara Caponni, Media Relations and Outreach Coordinator

**Contributing Editor**

Steve Gannon, Director of Development

**LIKE AND FOLLOW US**



If you are receiving this publication in error, please contact CABVI's public relations department at (315) 797-2233 x1303.



**Rudy D'Amico**  
President and CEO

Exciting things are on the way for CABVI. Our Vision Health and Wellness Center is moving along smoothly, our programs and services are expanding to offer a more comprehensive approach to vision rehabilitation, and technology is adhering to individuals who are blind and visually impaired.

We honor three remarkable employees who earned their way to Employee of the Year and we look back at how far we came since 1929.

In a few short months, I will have to pass the torch to a new leader of CABVI. This is not goodbye, though. This agency is near and dear to my heart, and I will always be a part of the CABVI family.



**DIRECTORS**

- Edward P. Welsh, Chair
- James B. Turnbull, IV, 1st Vice Chair
- Richard Dewar, 2nd Vice Chair
- Barry Sinnott, Treasurer
- Margaret G. Brown, CPA, Secretary
- Paul J. Drejza, Hon. Ralph J. Eannace, Gen. Richard Evans, USA Ret., Joseph P. Gale, M.D., Joanne M. Joseph, Ph.D., Shawn Kelly, Cynthia J. Parlato, M.D., Barton R. Rasmus, Col. Paul A. Steves, USA Ret., John Tracy, Thomas P. Webb, O.D.

**EMERITI**

- Mrs. Robert H. Fearon, Jr., Charles A. Gaetano,
- Mrs. Emlyn I. Griffith, Mrs. James P. O'Donnell, Kenneth C. Thayer

**C.A.B. FOUNDATION**

- Hon. Michael J. Misiaszek, Chair
- Pondra Bowen, Vice Chair
- Steve Cater, Secretary/Treasurer
- Ray O'Brien, Dana Olney, Barton R. Rasmus, Edward P. Welsh, Michael Wicks, Ph.D., Steve Roefaro, Phil Burkart

**EMERITI**

- Remi Charlebois
- William L. Corrigan
- Jim Robinson

**CNY VISION FOUNDATION**

- Gary D. Scalzo, Chair
- Matt Sisti, Vice Chair
- John Calabrese, Treasurer
- Debbie Kessler, Secretary
- Mindy Barstein, John Dillon, Paul Drejza, Peter H. Emery, Sr., R.Ph., Gary Heenan, Ralph Imundo, Kyle Strife, Michelle Ward

# 2019 EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR AWARDS



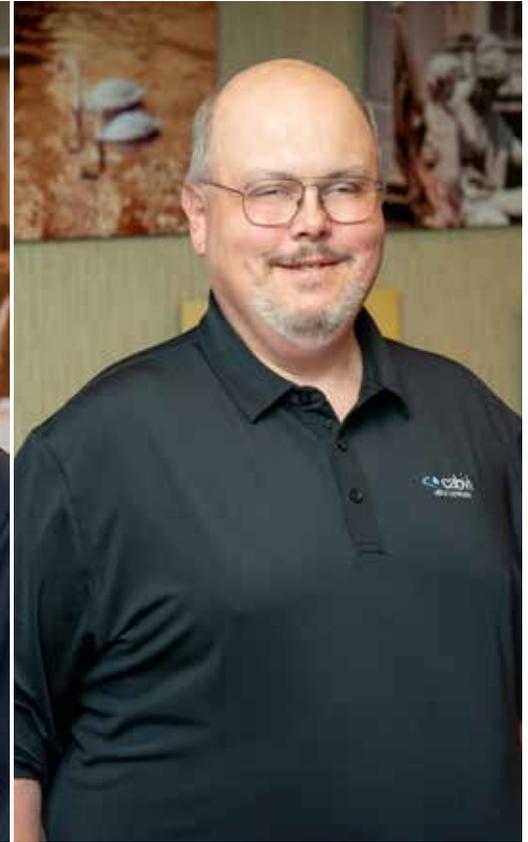
**Sean Dwyer**  
Warehouse Worker II  
2019 NYSPSP Employee of the Year

Since 2007, Sean has been a face for the agency in the Kenneth Thayer Production Facility located on Bleecker St. Each day, he ensures that products are being shipped on time, makes sure that they are up to ISO standards, and safely packages them for transport. At the time of the announcement, Sean could not believe he won the New York State Preferred Source Program award. He stated, "It was quite a surprise that I won this award, but I do not come to work for the award, I come to work because I like what I do."



**Amos Ackerman**  
E-Commerce Sales Associate  
2019 Peter Salmon Direct  
Labor Employee of the Year

Amos's career at CABVI started in 2009. His first position was packaging gloves and working on the production line. Since then, he was promoted to the Contact Center and, in his current position as an e-commerce sales and business development associate, he is the face for CABVI Supply, an online store that sells more than 40,000 office supply products. Amos helps create business relationships with potential clients, processes orders, and provides customer service to his accounts. When asked about the award, he stated, "The more risk I take in my life and the further I get outside of my comfort zone, the more reward life gives me. I am truly honored to be recognized for such a prestigious award."



**James Martino**  
Expeditor/Product Management  
2019 Milton J. Samuelson Career  
Achievement Award

Jim started working at CABVI in 2015. He was hired as one of the mail sorters at the DMV, and during his time with the agency, Jim has moved up to his current job title, expeditor/product management. He is responsible for monitoring bids and solicitations for products, identifying new opportunities and developing new products, fulfilling ISO standards, and so much more. He is currently enrolled in the National Industries for the Blind's Business Management Training program and is a graduate of CABVI's Quest program. When asked about the award, Jim stated, "I was surprised, and the one quote I live by is 'Don't work for recognition, but do work worthy of recognition.'"

# Vision Health and Wellness Center Making Progress



Since the Vision Health and Wellness Center broke ground last May, construction progress has seen a roller coaster of emotions. From the wet fall ground, to the snowy winter, CABVI leaders were unsure if the new center would be completed in 2019.

Although doubt filled the air, construction crews made sure that those doubts did not become a reality. Day after day, workers concentrated on finishing the project on schedule and making sure CABVI had a center where they could expand their services for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

It is projected that over the next decade, the number of individuals who will need services provided by CABVI will increase by at least 64%.

The new Vision Health and Wellness Center will be able to accommodate twice as many patients who require low vision evaluations in three suites, fitted with the most advanced vision examination equipment. As the level of need increases, the center will have the capabilities to handle the abundance of patients who need services.

As low vision treatment increases, so will research to try to combat certain types of vision loss. In the new center, a research laboratory will be an integral part in learning how to prevent certain types of vision loss.

## So, where does the building stand today? Here are the most current updates:

- The entire exterior has been constructed
- The roof has been put on
- Concrete base floor has been poured throughout the entirety of the building
- The therapy pool has been lined and tiling has begun
- All of the interior rooms have been framed, insulated, sheet rock has gone up, and painting started
- The exterior storage garage has been constructed
- 100% of the exterior windows have been installed
- The front entrance pergola frame has been installed

If you drive down Elizabeth Street in Utica, you cannot miss the construction site with a large brick building being completed. That brick building, aka the Vision Health and Wellness Center, will be the home to CABVI's rehabilitation staff and to every consumer they serve.

It will be the only center of its kind in the US.



\$1 million to meet the \$500,000 challenge—the largest challenge grant in The Community Foundation’s history. I am proud that CABVI’s supporters, which included many of The Community Foundation’s fund holders, exceeded the goal.”

“Central New York is extremely generous,” said Alicia Dicks, President & CEO of The Community Foundation. “We hoped to inspire community members to support the mission and vision of CABVI and the work they are doing to transform our community—the final result is overwhelming.”

“CABVI continues to advance opportunities for individuals who are blind or visually impaired, from early intervention through services for seniors, in innovative ways that also promote economic development and neighborhood revitalization,” said Alicia Dicks.

Rehabilitation services will expand, nutritional education will increase, physical fitness education will blossom, and CABVI is hopeful for finding ways to detect early signs of vision loss so individuals can maintain the vision they have.

## The Community Foundation Challenge to Raise \$500,000 is Complete

On February 28, CABVI and the Community Foundation of Herkimer and Oneida Counties announced that the challenge to raise \$500,000 was met, and exceeded, with a total of \$1,057,908 raised. As a result, The Community Foundation awarded CABVI with a \$500,000 grant to go towards the construction of the Vision Health and Wellness Center.

In addition to the Community Foundation, the challenge grant was made possible by the Albert E. Trask, Jr. Memorial Fund, the Faxton Street Home Fund, the Frank W. Baker Fund, the Rosamond G. Childs Fund, and the Wesley and Marion Small Fund.

“To declare that ‘Central New York came through in a big way’ would be an understatement,” said Rudy D’Amico, President & CEO of CABVI. “CABVI raised over

### The \$500,000 challenge is one component of CABVI’s Focus on the Future Initiative which has three major components:

- Construction of the 23,000-square-foot Vision and Wellness Center in Utica
- Renovations to CABVI’s headquarters in Utica
- Purchase and renovation of a building for CABVI Syracuse Industries in DeWitt

# CABVI Hosts 5th Winter Camp Abilities

Children Learn Skills for Independence Through Recreation



**W**inters in upstate NY are cold and bitter. Most people who live here tend to find activities to keep them busy inside, but not the Camp Abilities campers!

From February 7 through February 10, CABVI held its fifth annual winter Camp Abilities. The campers started their long weekend with skiing and snowshoeing at McCauley Mountain in Old Forge. From there, they traveled to Raquette Lake to trek over a mile across the frozen lake to be

welcomed by the glowing torches of Camp Huntington. Their weekend was full of activities, such as hiking, ice fishing, tactile board games, and ice hockey.

The campers were also joined by CABVI's good friend, Nature Dave, who taught the kids outdoor survival techniques, like how to build a shelter and fire with only materials found in the wilderness.

The weekend closed out with skating and hockey instruction at

Hamilton College with the men's and women's hockey teams.

Camp Abilities is designed for children, ages 8-16, who are blind or visual impaired to experience camping in the Adirondacks. The camp focuses on various skills such as orientation and mobility, independence, communication, vocational training and self-advocacy that are incorporated into fun recreational activities.

"Camp Abilities promotes independence and it allows kids



**“Look to the sky. We’re not alone. The universe is friendly to us and conspires to only give the best to those who dream and work!”**  
**- Faith Murray**

with visual impairments to be with others like them,” said Faith Murray, Camp Ambassador. “I always look forward to coming to camp each year.”

CABVI’s winter Camp Abilities is the only program in the country that is designed for children with vision loss. Each year, the camp hosts approximately 20 children who travel across the state to attend.



# The Story of a Blind Artist





attending various summer camps in Buffalo, rock climbing, logging, playing the guitar, and consistently sharpening his pencils to continue to hone in on his passion.

Ethan's artwork has been on display in several places, such as his high school, Herkimer Community College, Munson Williams Proctor Arts Institute, and CABVI headquarters. Most recently, a few of his original drawings were displayed at the Utica Public Library at the "Seen & Unseen: Art of the Visually Impaired & Blind" exhibit that included work from both national and local artists.

"I was very proud and inspired by that exhibit," Ethan said. "It made me want to start drawing more and find other places that would display my art. Showing it means a lot to me, and for people to be interested makes me feel like I'm doing something right."

One way Ethan stays busy is by drawing existing pictures for people. He strives on emulating them to be as close to the picture as possible. "It's a different type of motivation for me when my customers give me a picture to draw," he said. "When I'm offering my work as a service, I'm motivated to do a great job for my customers. However, when I'm motivated by my inspiration, I draw what inspires me, like my mood or situation, or even my thoughts."

Ethan's future goal for his work is to create comic book art. The challenge of drawing in color will increase his skill level and open up a new world for his talent.

**A**rt is an expression. Many people believe that you need to see the artwork in order to interpret it. Whether it is a painting, photography, or sculpture, the vision is through the eyes. Then there are artists like Ethan Comstock, a CABVI employee, who uses his imagination to guide him along with his creativity.

Ethan draws in black and white; not because he chooses to, but because that's what he sees. Ethan is legally blind and colorblind, and has been drawing since the age of 14.

His favorite subject was art and he learned many forms of it, including molding clay and painting, but he chooses to use pencil as his preferred tool for his creative drawings.

At the age of five, Ethan's family began to notice that he was not seeing the world as they did. Soon after, he began receiving services at CABVI. Those services helped him live a full, independent life and helped him thrive in many things, such as teaching art classes at the Olmsted Center for Sight, as well as

# Aira™ Access App Introduced at Syracuse Hancock Airport

Technology has made leaps and bounds in the last few years to make everyone's lives easier, especially for those who are blind or visually impaired. Many individuals rely on technology to transform what can be a non-accessible world, into an accessible one. The Aira app is one of the many tools that individuals who are blind or visually impaired can use to make their lives much easier while traveling in airports.

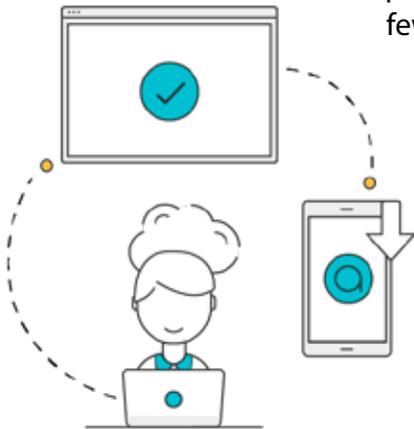
Aira is a service that connects blind or visually impaired consumers to trained, remote agents through the Aira app, available on both Android and Apple operating systems. The consumer can use this service via connecting a smartphone, or through a pair of Horizon smart glasses that link to a smartphone. The Horizon smart glasses are the first pair of glasses to be specifically designed for visual assistance. Providing a 120° visual field, Aira agents can see more with the smart glasses, compared to a smartphone camera.

The company has partnered with many public places where the service will be specifically helpful. Airports, Walgreen Pharmacies, federal buildings, and AT&T stores, to name a few. This past February, Aira's service was introduced at Syracuse Hancock International Airport. Syracuse is the first airport in the region to introduce the service to passengers who can benefit from visual assistance during their travels.

Travelers using the Aira app are able to check flight status, find gates and luggage, use self-service kiosks, navigate through TSA checkpoints, and locate restaurants and services independently. According to the company's website, the app also assists consumers in navigating through work, parenting, reading papers, or just for everyday life.

## How does Aira work? It's simple.

1. Download the free "Aira" app and sign up or call 1-800-835-1934
2. Connect with a certified Aira agent
3. Receive real-time assistance





**Registration at 12 PM | Start at 1 PM**  
.....  
**\$20 per Rider | \$25 with Passenger**

**Start from Harley Davidson of Utica •**  
**Arrive at Hart's Hill Inn in Whitesboro**

Sponsored by



*Harley-Davidson  
of Utica*

**June 9, 2019**

**Vehicles for Vision  
Invitational Car Show  
& Cruise-In**

**Classic • Antique • Muscle Cars**

presented by

**VILLAGE MOTORS  
AUTO SALES**

Sanctioned by



**3:00 - 5:30 PM**  
**Harts Hill Inn**

**135 Clinton St, Whitesboro, NY 13492**

**Food & Refreshments Available**

to benefit



Central Association for the  
Blind and Visually Impaired

**Contact Allison Kollar • 315-797-2233 • [allisonk@cabvi.org](mailto:allisonk@cabvi.org)**



On February 16, 1929, community leaders met at the Utica office of attorney Francisco Penberthy to present the certificate of incorporation and bylaws of a new not-for-profit agency to serve blind people in central NY. With the call to order, the Central Association for the Blind (CAB) was born.

In the early days of CAB, jobs included chair-caning, piano-tuning, racket-stringing and rug-weaving. By 1945, CAB moved to a larger building, 301 Court Street, to accommodate their growing organization. For several decades, they stayed afloat, but did not become wildly successful as they had hoped. CAB needed something to really expand their opportunities.

In 1969, Donald LoGuidice was hired upon former Executive Director Helen McBride's retirement. The agency's budget was a modest \$129,000 and offered limited services. Two years after LoGuidice's arrival at the organization, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act (JWOD), which provided opportunities for individuals who are blind, allowing them to work in manufacturing jobs and sell products to the Federal Government. The JWOD program still provides employment opportunities to Americans who are blind, or have other disabilities, by orchestrating government purchases of products and services provided by non-profit agencies employing such individuals throughout the country.

# 2019 Marks CABVI's 90th Anniversary

## A Glimpse Back Into Our Past



Under LoGuidice's direction, CAB became a \$17 million agency with 151 professional and support staff, 72 of whom were blind. In 1981, General Electric donated the 72,000 sq. ft. building that became CAB headquarters at 507 Kent St., Utica. In 1989, the words "visually impaired" were added to the agency's name, making it CABVI. Growth continued consistently over the years in staff size, budget, and within several counties in New York State.

In 2008, LoGuidice retired and handed the torch to the current President and CEO, Rudy D'Amico. In just 11 years, CABVI opened a facility in Syracuse, NY, increased the operating budget from \$27 million to over \$60 million dollars, increased the number of consumers served from 1,038 to 1,666 and, employs over 260 individuals, 114 of whom are legally blind.

Later this year, CABVI will open its doors to a new, 23,000 square foot Vision Health and Wellness Center that will consist of a research laboratory, fitness center, therapy pool, low vision suites, and create 20 new jobs. The new center will also assist with serving over 1,600 individuals who are blind or visually impaired within the eight-county region that CABVI services.



# CABVI *tributes* THROUGH 3/31/2019

## Gifts In Memory

### **Nicholas Androulidakis**

Laura O'Donnell

### **Matthew Barone**

Rudy and Anne D'Amico  
Joseph Taurisani and Leta Laukaitis

### **Annabelle Calabrese**

Rudy and Anne D'Amico

### **Jeanne Castle**

Laura O'Donnell

### **Luca Esposito**

Richard and Carol Benedetto  
Stephen and Patricia Gannon  
Mitch and Margaret Hansen

### **Janet Black Fox**

Charles and Elizabeth Black

### **Walter Graham**

P Daniel and Cindy Freudenberger  
Daniel and Gail Gorczynski  
Patrick and Alison O'Leary

### **Wanda Hammon**

Rudy and Anne D'Amico

### **Amelia Ameduri-Houston**

Marie Turi

### **Dorothy Hughes**

Dorothy Hughes

### **Anne Koscinski**

Joseph Taurisani and Leta Laukaitis

### **William and Jean LaClaire**

Michael LaClaire

### **Robert Lasowski**

Laura O'Donnell

### **Linda Leogrande**

Joseph Asselta

### **Dale Lewis**

Glenn and Linda Weaver

### **Matthew Lichorowic**

Francis and Theresa Candella

### **Sally Mather**

Christine Sobolewski Abdelhak

### **Theodore Max**

Melva Max

### **Eleanor May Hart McLean**

Rudy and Anne D'Amico

### **Pat and Sally Orsaeo**

Jerry Orsaeo

### **Mildred Paine**

James and Mary Jones  
Robert and Diane Kullmann  
Ernst and Carol Kunz  
Suzanne Petrie  
Robert and Michelle Shauger  
Ronald and Catherine Stouffer  
Robert and Sandra Targosz

### **Angela Pappas**

Laura O'Donnell

### **Jack Phelps**

Frank and Ellen Scharf

### **John Phelps**

Frank and Ellen Scharf

### **Sallene Phyllis Reich**

Rudy and Anne D'Amico

### **Adeline Rosato**

Anthony and Diane Talerico

### **Teresa Scalzo**

Sam and Laine Berardino  
Ray Cardinale  
Charles A Gaetano Construction Corp  
Rudy and Anne D'Amico  
Keith and Debra Landman  
Vincent and Gloria Palmiero

### **Mary Ann Williams**

Philip Williams

### **Woodrow Winston**

Mitch and Margaret Hansen

## Gifts In Honor Of

### **Monica Durr Davis**

EPIC Meetings & Production

### **Paula Flisnik**

Loretta Wu

### **Charles Gaetano**

Melva Max

### **Dr. Joseph and Anne Gale**

Daniel Gale  
Daniel Gale

### **Dr. Joseph Gale**

Elizabeth Kelley

### **Mrs. Ruth Turnbull**

Ann Coupe



# Spring Appeal

This year marks the 90th year of operation for the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired. For nine decades we've provided vision rehabilitation services to thousands of people who are blind or visually impaired throughout Central New York.

Since 1985 I've been privileged to serve people with vision loss as a member of CABVI's Board of Directors, as an agency Vice President and, for the last 11 years, as President and CEO.

I have first-hand experience seeing the impact that CABVI's programs have had on the lives of people who are blind or visually impaired. Throughout our long history, the CABVI has improved programs and services, responding to changing needs and new opportunities.

The CABVI of today is dramatically different from the agency that community leaders started in 1929. I might add that it is also dramatically different from when I became involved 34 years ago. The one constant is our mission: to assist people who are blind or visually impaired to achieve their highest levels of independence.

I am retiring this year and handing the reigns of this organization to new leadership. You can be assured of two things. First, CABVI will continue to pursue its mission. Second, you will always occupy a place in my heart, for without your generous support, many people in need would have gone without the resources that:

- Allowed aging consumers to remain in their homes maintaining their independence and dignity
- Restored confidence to the working-aged adult, enabling them to receive specialized training and return to the workforce
- Demonstrated to the parents of a child with visual impairment that success in school, and life, is attainable with the right help.

I am proud of our services and programs, and the fact that we are a nationally recognized comprehensive vision rehabilitation and employment agency, serving people of all ages throughout a large area of central New York.

The agency's success during my tenure as President would not have been possible without the commitment of outstanding boards of directors – wise and knowledgeable people I knew I could call on for guidance and advice - our professional staff, our many volunteers and a generous public.

I am writing to ask you to continue to give to CABVI. Your gift will help a senior learn the skills to live an active and fulfilling life. Your gift will help the blind student to succeed in the classroom. Your gift will help train the visually impaired person who wants to work and, with employment training, will see that dream fulfilled. Your generosity makes these free services available to all in need.

I will continue to support this agency – OUR agency – because I know that as we live longer, the need for vision rehabilitation services will grow. I know, that as doctors make strides to save the lives of children born prematurely, the need for vision rehabilitation services will grow. I know, that as diabetes continues to claim the vision of youthful and productive adults, the need for vision rehabilitation services will grow.

I know that CABVI will need our support. Thank you for helping to make my career at CABVI successful and rewarding.

Sincerely,



Rudy D'Amico  
President & CEO

507 Kent Street Utica, NY 13501

Electronic Service Requested

---

# EDWARD WELSH

---

## Board member profile

Ed Welsh has been a part of the CABVI family since 1994, serving on either the CAB Foundation, CNY Vision Foundation or CABVI's governing board. This spring, he will be stepping down as the Board Chair, after holding that position for nine years.

Ed was born and raised in New York City and moved to Utica in 1972, where he now calls home. In his new hometown he has made quite a career for himself, serving as part of AAA Senior Management for the past 34 years, in his 32nd year as a broadcaster with his radio show Auto Talk on WIBX 950, and as an Oneida County Legislator for 18 years.

He has always had a passion for helping others and, in 1994, jumped at the opportunity to help a local organization in need. He was approached by Ken Thayer, former CABVI board chair, regarding an issue the CAB Foundation was having with their Vehicles for Vision program. Being a car enthusiast and having an executive management background, Ed knew he could help, and hasn't looked back. "As I learned about the



Edward Welsh

agency's mission and saw first-hand the dedication of the people who work and volunteer at the agency, it inspired me to become deeply involved," said Ed.

During his time with CABVI, Ed has been heavily involved with many accomplishments. He has seen the agency almost triple its sales volume, expand into new markets, and build a new rehabilitation center, in just the past decade alone.

"I am most proud of two groups of people at the agency. The first are our blind and visually impaired employees who come to work every day, contributing greatly to the agency's success," said Ed. "The second are our sighted employees and management team. I am so proud of how the agency works and the dedication I see every time I am at the agency."

When he is not serving CABVI, his community or company, Ed enjoys riding his snowmobile, learning about military history, cooking, and all things automotive."