My Art Is My Portrait

A native of Coeburn in Wise County, Charlie McConnell grew up with a passion and talent for drawing and painting. Encouraged by his aunt, who was also an artist, McConnell pursued the arts as a hobby, although he did not consider it as a possible career path.

McConnell was drafted immediately after graduation from East Tennessee State University. His superior officers, once they became aware of his degree and his talent, both in basic training and in officer candidate school, put him to work creating military paintings.

“I was told to paint a combat scene of Vietnam,” notes McConnell. “This happened both during basic training and in Officers’ Candidate School. Although, once in Vietnam there was obviously little time for art.”

After his service ended, McConnell struggled to find his way. He initially tried to pursue a master’s degree in fine arts, but that path became financially impractical.

McConnell eventually found his way to work for the Wise County Redevelopment and Housing Authority, where he was able to marry his artistic talents with support for the community in which he was raised. McConnell’s art is not only his portrait, but also a portrait of Virginia, and a portrait of moments in time preserved for Memorial visitors today.

“You will see common themes in my work — my love of family and friends, my family’s deep roots in the life, culture, and landscape of Southwest Virginia, and my work serving my fellow Virginians.”

— Charlie McConnell
Our vision is that a global audience will recognize the valor and sacrifice of Virginia’s military veterans in the pursuit of liberty, democracy, justice, and peace for all. A simple marble plaque installed in the nave of a 12th-century stone Romanesque church in Ver-sur-Mer, France, is the perfect embodiment of that vision. In recognition and appreciation for the relief and restoration efforts provided by the Garden Club of Virginia to the Normandy village of Ver-sur-Mer, the sons and husbands of Garden Club of Virginia members are memorialized for their service during World War II.

Recently, Virginia War Memorial volunteer Bill Wheeler researched each of these 30 individuals — individuals wanting to live, but willing to die for the cause of liberty. Their stories, their photographs, when available, are now on our website and in a book recently published by the Virginia War Memorial Foundation.

There are nearly 12,000 other names etched on our Shrine of Memory — names of Virginia’s sons and daughters who died in combat in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, and the Global War on Terrorism. And whether their remains rest in hometown cemeteries or overseas, it is here at the Virginia War Memorial that the stories behind their names are preserved.

Through exhibitions, educational programs, lectures, and documentaries, we strive to preserve the stories of veterans who made the ultimate sacrifice, to honor all veterans and active-duty military, and to inspire love of country. I invite you to join us in this mission. Visit the Memorial. Listen to our interviews. Watch our documentaries. Make plans to place personal items here — photographs, letters, military-related documents, uniforms, and other objects. And please, make a year-end gift to our operating fund. It is only with your continued support that we can continue this important work. On behalf of the 700,000 veterans who call Virginia home, we are grateful for your support.

Pamela R. Seay  
PRESIDENT  
VIRGINIA WAR MEMORIAL FOUNDATION

The Legacy of Memory

January 27  
New Exhibition Opening  
“50 Years Beyond: The Vietnam Veteran Experience”

March 11  
K-9 Veterans Day

March 14  
Leadership in America Speaker Series  
Jon Scrggus, Founder of the Vietnam Wall

March 22  
Leadership in America Speaker Series  
Alex Kershaw — Against All Odds: A True Story of Courage and Survival in World War II

May 3  
Leadership in America Speaker Series  
Alex Kershaw — Against All Odds: A True Story of Courage and Survival in World War II

May 17  
Opening Night — War in Places

May 17  
Light reception and book signing follow the lecture.

June 23  
Hill of Heroes Day

September 11  
Commonwealth’s 9/11 Patriot Day Ceremony

September 22  
Sips on the Skyline

October 24  
Leadership in America Speaker Series

November 11  
The Commonwealth of Virginia’s Veterans Day Ceremony

December 7  
The Commonwealth of Virginia’s Pearl Harbor Day Ceremony

2023 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Please check our website and follow our e-news for details on these important events and dates to remember in 2023.

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Our Newest Board Member: Lacyn Barton

Lacyn Barton has been president of the Woody and Nelsen firms since 2019, and is Woody Funeral Home’s first female president since the firm was established in 1905. She has worked in the funeral profession for 38 years, serving as a director in communities in seven different states. A job opportunity with Nelsen Funeral Home brought her to Richmond from Pittsburgh in 2015. After a near fatal horse-riding accident, Barton, a world champion mounted shooter, was inspired to pursue a career in funeral service to help people who found themselves in that same dire situation. She earned a degree in mortuary science from Arapahoe Community College, a bachelor's degree in agricultural business administration from Fort Lewis College and an MBA in healthcare management from Regis University, all in Colorado. A citizen of the Chickasaw Nation, Barton received tremendous support from her Native American nation to complete her education, and she has been grateful to provide funeral services for many different Native American groups across the country. Barton is also an accomplished artist whose memorial portraits are displayed across the United States, most notably at the distinguished Joseph Gawler’s Sons Funeral Home in Washington, D.C., which has participated in state funerals for decades.

The Walkway of Honor

There are heroes among us worthy of recognition. There are people we have lost who should be remembered. There are dates that should be commemorated. You can purchase a brick to be placed on our Walkway of Honor for any of these (or other) reasons. Your brick purchase directly benefits our core mission programs.

To order a memorial brick, contact Annie Warman at awarman@vawarmemorial.org or (804) 780-2176.

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The Mighty Pen Project

CONGRATULATIONS to Robert Waldron, Charles Williamson, David Aldridge, David Robbins (instructor), and Rachel Landsee (pictured above) for being nominated for BEST ORIGINAL WORK for the 2022 Artsie Award. The nomination was for their one-act plays, comprising War In Pieces. The Artsie Awards are given by the Richmond Theatre Critics Circle (RTCC) to recognize excellence in theatrical work produced in Richmond. This year’s War in Pieces festival will be produced by VirginiaRep and will be presented on our stage at the Virginia War Memorial.

The Virginia War Memorial Foundation is proud to offer tuition-free creative writing instruction to veterans. Visit our website to register for a 2023 class.

Who They Were:
Lives Worth Knowing

Nearly 12,000 names, engraved in stone and walls of glass, represent men and women from a grateful Commonwealth. The cities, towns, and counties represented here by a flame of patriotism are remembering those to whom we owe so much.

If your city or county would like to support our efforts, please contact us at mmwachur@vawarmemorial.org or (301) 580-1488. Or visit VaWarMemorial.org/support/whotheywere.