

**USS TOPEKA CLG-8**  
**Reunion Association Newsletter**  
**Volume 35, No. 2**

**July 2024**



**Officers:**

Al Gustafson, Chairman Board of Directors and President;  
Arnold Hoel, Vice Chairman and Vice President  
Gary Baker, Secretary-Treasurer;

**Staff:**

Kathy Spatz, Newsletter Editor and Photographer;  
Gary Baker, Web Master:  
Pat Baker, Ships Store

**From Our President**

Greetings Shipmates

I hope all are well. I am looking forward to seeing everyone in Branson.

As I write this it is only 104 days to the reunion.

While I was thinking about what to say in this message, I could not help but think about what this group has meant to me and what great memories I have accumulated over the years. I first got involved when I received a phone call from an old shipmate who was taking the time to locate old friends. We then attended many Topeka Reunions together (I think 17) before his unfortunate early passing. I am so glad that we were able to get together for some of his last years.

So, I decided to spend a rainy Buffalo afternoon going down memory lane on the Topeka website reviewing all of our past reunions. There are many great pictures taken by Kathy Spatz and others going way back to when we were all younger. I recommend you try this as you make your plans for this years reunion.

What great memories, like when Cathy and I hosted in Buffalo and so many things went wrong. See me in Branson and I will tell you a few good stories.

I like to think reunions are a bridge between the past and present. So, if you are able, please try and come this year. Remember all are welcome. Bring family members or friends! We are trying to keep this going as long as possible and need your input. We have important decisions to make.

If you have any questions feel free to give me a call or E-Mail and please join your shipmates in Branson.

New Riddle -There is a word that starts and ends with T and contains tea as well. What is this word?

Answer to Last Newsletter Riddle- I am gentle enough to sooth the skin, light enough to reflect the sky, yet hard enough to crack rocks, what am I?

Answer- Water

As always, a special thanks to Pat and Gary Baker and also Kathy Spatz for all the work they do for the organization.

See you in Branson.

Fair Winds and Following Seas

Gus

## **New Members (Since March 2024)**

None

## **Taps**

Cecil Hankins FN 61-65

Kenneth Ewing CPL 64-66

Norman Altenburg SN 64-66

John Stark RD2 59-62

## **Reunion Dates:**

**September 16<sup>th</sup> – September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

## **2024 Branson Reunion**

We will be staying at The Lodge of the Ozarks, Branson's best hotel on The Strip. It is conveniently located on HWY 76, Branson's entertainment corridor. Your favorite Branson, Missouri shows, restaurants, and attractions are a short walk from Lodge of the Ozarks!

## **Transportation**

The closest major airport is Springfield - Branson International Airport (SGF) in Springfield, MO. It is about 75 minutes from the hotel. It is served by four major airlines: Allegiant, American, Delta, and United. Car rental companies at the airport are Avis, Budget, Enterprise, Hertz, and National. Uber and Lyft are also available.

Branson Airport (BKG) is about 15 minutes from the hotel. Sun Country Airlines is the only airline flying into Branson and they offer non-stop flights to and from Minneapolis - St Paul. Car rentals at the airport are Enterprise, National, and Alamo.

## **Tour A**

**Tuesday September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024 - Morning**

**The Veterans Memorial Museum** is composed of ten great halls covering the wars and conflicts fought during the 20th Century. Circulation and viewing starts in the World War I Hall, progressing through World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, and more.

**Grand Village** has a wide variety of shops. A good choice for lunch at Grand Village is Mel's Diner. The 50's themed diner is home to singers, songwriters, and musicians.

**Tuesday September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024 – Afternoon and Evening**

The Tuesday afternoon and evening tour will be a dinner cruise on Table Rock Lake aboard the showboat Branson Belle. There will be time for shopping at the white River landing before we board the Branson Belle for dinner and an exciting musical variety show. All cruises offer a unique experience aboard the 700-passenger paddle-wheeler as it cruises Table Rock Lake.

## **Tour C**

**Wednesday, September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

## **College of the Ozarks**

College of the Ozarks warmly welcomes all visitors to enjoy our beautiful campus!

**Ralph Foster Museum** has a wide variety of exhibits including: the Original Beverly Hillbillies Truck used in the television series, Native American Artifacts, cameo collection, doll collection, and memorabilia from country musicians.

**College of Ozarks Student Tour:** The College of the Ozarks is unique among American colleges and universities because students work, rather than pay, to help defray their educational expenses. Enjoy as one of the students takes your group on a tour of campus including Williams Memorial Chapel, Greenhouses, the Mill, and more.

**Lunch at Keeter Center** Deep in the Ozarks, the Keeter Center's rustic design and handsome furnishings are a perfect complement to the well-maintained landscaping. The restaurant's dining room prides itself on serving some of the finest dining in the Branson Area.

**Shepherd of the Hills Homestead** Shepherd of the Hills was the beginning of the Branson phenomena. Enjoy a ride in an open-air Jeep-

drawn tram through the wooded 160-acre farm with our Ozark Native tour guide. You'll see Old Matt's Cabin, Inspiration Point and the Morgan Community Church and newly restored Historic Uncle Ike's Post Office. The Old Mill Theatre was built into this wooded setting over 50 years ago. Step on the stage of the popular Branson show for a behind-the-scenes glimpse of the nightly performance.

**Inspiration Tower** is a 230' tall structure located on Inspiration Point in The Shepherd of the Hills Homestead. Constructed and erected in 1989, the Tower's opening celebrated the 100th anniversary of Harold Bell Wright's first visit to the area. Two glass elevators transport visitors to the spacious, enclosed observation deck. The panoramic views are absolutely phenomenal, in any season. On a clear day, you can see over 90 miles.

**Tour D**

**Thursday, September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

**Bass Pro Wonder of Wildlife Museum and Aquarium** World-class, enchanting fish and wildlife attraction features 35,000 live fish, reptiles, mammals and birds, and one-and-a-half million gallons of water.

**National Archery Hall of Fame** seeks to preserve the sport's history and tradition in the United States; showcasing more than 1,500 artifacts, including a handmade bow created by Native American Apache leader Geronimo.

**National Rifle Association Sporting Arms Museum** is dedicated to chronicling the development and evolution of hunting arms in America from colonial times to present day; featuring legendary items like Teddy Roosevelt's hunting rifle.

**Fantastic Caverns** is America's only ride-through cave. Here, you'll discover one of the world's most beautiful natural wonders; giant columns stretching from floor to ceiling, delicate soda straws glistening with minerals, tiny cave pearls hidden in crystal-clear water. And best of all, you'll see it close-up from the comfort of a jeep-drawn tram.

More detailed tour information is on our website.

**2024 YTD Financial Report**

A brief summary of our finances year to date. The association's finances are looking good.

There is quite a bit more money in the Operating account than is needed to fund the day-to-day expenses of the association. With the consent of our president, Al Gustafson, and the board of directors, as we wind down our association over the next few years, the excess will be used to offset the fixed costs of our annual reunions.

Account	12/31/2023	2024 YTD
Operating Fund	\$15,416.35	\$15,436.02
Reunion Fund	\$4,535.48	\$8,735.48
Ship's Store	\$2,916.61	\$2,585.30
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$22,868.44</b>	<b>\$26,756.80</b>

**2025 Myrtle Beach, SC Reunion**

The September 15 – 19, 2025 reunion is coming together nicely. We will be staying at the oceanfront Beach Cove Resort with many amenities including full kitchens in all of the rooms.

Projected tours include a dolphin and wildlife cruise, a tour of Hobcaw Barony Plantation, Brookgreen Gardens, Barefoot Queen dinner cruise and maybe an all-day tour to historic Charleston.

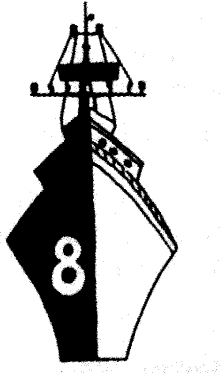


**Beach Cove Resort, Myrtle Beach**

# USS TOPEKA REUNION ASSOCIATION

C/O Gary Baker  
20 Heather Drive  
Billings, MT 59105

TEMP – RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



## NAMES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Chairman, Board of Directors; Al Gustafson, Chairman  
Arnold Hoel, Vice Chairman  
Jerry Craig, Harold Jackson, Dan Moore, Ray Spatz, Jay Davis  
and Dan Moore

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### Ship's Store

The store has USS Topeka ball caps, lapel pins, jacket patches, coffee cups, as well as 6th and 7th Fleet and Vietnam bumper stickers. Order forms and illustrations of items are on the Ship's Store page of the website. The store is managed by Pat Baker. Her contact information is on the ship's store page of the website and the Names and Telephone Numbers section of this newsletter.

### Membership and Dues

As our association winds down our board of directors elected to cease collecting dues after 2028. Members that have already paid dues through 2028 are considered Lifetime Members. When other members pay dues through 2028, they also will become Lifetime Members.