



2026 Annual Training Conference

Orange Beach Event Center · 4671 Wharf Parkway W, Orange Beach, AL 36561

*****ALL SESSIONS ARE 45 MINUTES UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED*****

Sunday, October 18th, 2026	
3:00 PM – 6:00 PM	Early Bird Registration Opens! SWAG Pick-Up Party & Welcome Reception (Hors d'oeuvres)
6:00 PM	Registration Closes - Dinner on Your Own
Monday, October 19th, 2026 Alumni Day (Come dress in a shirt from your alma mater!)	
7:30 AM	Registration Opens - AVAA Office Open (Lobby)
8:00 AM	Full Breakfast/Networking
8:30 AM	Opening Ceremony: Presentation of Colors by Gulf Shores High School Navy JROTC
	National Anthem by The Coastal Sound - Coastal Alabama Community College
	President's Welcome / Business Meeting / Open Board of Directors Position
9:00 AM	Brigadier General (Ret.) Jeffrey Newton - Commissioner - Alabama Dept. of Veterans Affairs
10:00 AM	Coffee & Snack Break - 15 minutes
10:15 AM	Keynote Topic - NextOp – Connecting Military to Their Next Career
11:00 AM	Enrollment Manager – Shay Norton-Leonard
12:00 PM	Lunch Provided VA Kahoots!!! (Fun! Shenanigans! PRIZES!!!!!!)
1:00 PM	SCO Training Requirements – Heather Cates
2:00 PM	Snack Break - 15 minutes
2:15 PM	Breakout Discussions – 4 sessions
3:30 PM	Breakout Discussions – 4 sessions
4:30 PM	AVAA Network Meet & Greet
5:00 PM	Dinner on Your Own

Tuesday, October 20th, 2026

Luau Day (Dress for the luau!)

7:00 AM	Morning Meditation – Yoga w/ Rosario Thomas - Veterans Specialist - Southern Union
8:00 AM	Full Breakfast/Networking & AVAA Office Opens – Orange Beach Event Center
8:30 AM	Welcome, Announcements, Nominations for Board of Directors (Main Hall)
9:00 AM	Keynote Speaker – Chris & Genevieve Kruger – Authors of “Walking Away from the Ledge: A Soldier’s Memoir” and public speakers
9:45 AM	Coffee & Snack Break - 15 minutes
10:00 AM	Debt Management – Nicole Hasselberger
11:00 AM	Work Study – Courtney White
12:00 PM	Lunch Provided & VA Kahoots! (Fun! Shenanigans! MORE PRIZES!!!)
	Board of Directors Voting Opens – CVent App
1:00 PM	State Approving Agency – Kimberly Minniefield & Laura Taylor
2:00 PM	Snack Break - 15 minutes
2:15 PM	Breakout Discussions – 4 sessions
3:30 PM	Breakout Discussions – 4 sessions
6:00 PM	2026 AVAA Luau Dinner – Orange Beach Event Center

Get Ready for a Luau in Orange Beach!
2026 AVAA Luau @ The Orange Beach Event Center



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Wednesday, October 21st, 2026 AVAA T-Shirt Day (Wear your AVAA gear with pride!)	
7:00 AM	Morning Meditation – Work Out w/ Rosario Thomas - Veterans Specialist - Southern Union
8:00 AM	Full Breakfast/Networking & AVAA Office – Orange Beach Event Center
8:30 AM	Welcome, Daily Announcements (Main Hall)
9:00 AM	Veteran Q&A Panel – TBD
9:45 AM	Coffee & Snack Break - 15 minutes
10:00 AM	Veterans Readiness & Employment (VR&E) – Jamie Wilder
11:00 AM	85-15 Regulations – Kate Caruso
12:00 PM	Lunch Provided & VA Kahoots!!! (Fun! Shenanigans! MORE PRIZES!!!!!!)
	Auction Ends!!!
1:00 PM	Legislative Updates – Deputy Director Ruhlman
2:30 PM	Snack Break - 15 minutes
2:45 PM	Breakout Sessions – 4 sessions
4:00 PM	Breakout Sessions – 4 sessions
5:00 PM	Dinner on Your Own

Thursday, October 22nd, 2026	
8:00 AM	Farewell Breakfast
9:00 AM	National Training Team - Topic TBD
10:00 AM	Break/Room Checkout
10:30 AM	General Session - TBD
11:15 AM	President's Remarks, Scholarship Presentation & Conference Wrap-Up (Board Results Announced)
12:00 PM	End of Conference – Have a Safe Trip Home!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
12:00 PM – 2:00 PM	Lunch on your own
2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	First Board Meeting of the 2026-2027 AVAA Board

Thank You for Attending the 2026 AVAA Conference. See You Next Year!

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