



Van of Valor Kicks Off National Purple Heart Trail Mission in North Carolina, Overcomes Early Challenges

Dr. Kevin P. Wallace
Van of Valor

DARE COUNTY, N.C. – The [Van of Valor](#), a mission dedicated to connecting the Purple Heart Trail across America's Lower 48 states and documenting the stories of Purple Heart and Gold Star recipients, launched its nationwide journey from its home base in Dare County, North Carolina, on March 17, 2025. Co-founders Lauren and Kevin Wallace, along with their dog Sunny,

embarked on this ambitious endeavor after months of preparation and community engagement in the Outer Banks.

Dare County played a pivotal role in the mission's genesis. In August 2024, Lauren successfully advocated before the Dare County Commissioners, resulting in Roanoke Island being designated [America's first Purple Heart Island](#). This designation, marked by permanent signage in downtown Manteo, served as a springboard for mapping out the national Purple Heart Trail.

Prior to hitting the road, the Van of Valor established a national social media presence through podcast appearances, including [American Warrior Radio](#). They also launched a grassroots awareness campaign, strategically placing non-partisan Van of Valor signs across Dare County alongside 2025 election signage. The team engaged with various [radio shows](#), particularly in the southwest and mountain states, and utilized social media, signage in local establishments, and visits to schools, a retirement home, Veteran Affairs facilities in coastal Virginia and South Carolina, and three trips to Washington, D.C., to promote their mission.

The Van of Valor's initial interviews in North Carolina highlighted the personal stories behind the Purple Heart. They interviewed Tom Higgins, a Vietnam-era Army Purple Heart recipient residing in Manteo and one of four veterans honored on the Manteo Purple Heart monument. Kevin Wallace, a co-founder of the Van of Valor, is also honored on this monument. The local community embraced their efforts, with coverage from The Coastland Times, appearances on [Dare County Current TV](#) and the [Outer Banks Voice](#), and a special article by Marsha Brown, published just before the mission's official launch.

However, the journey's very beginning was met with a significant challenge. On March 17, the day the mission commenced, just outside of Durham, North Carolina, the Van of Valor experienced a major mechanical failure. During rush hour traffic on I-40, the rear driver's side tire and wheel assembly detached from the axle. Despite the dangerous situation, the van was brought to a safe stop on the highway shoulder.

Following a disappointing interaction with their insurance company, the Van of Valor team secured their own tow to Hendrick's Mercedes of Charlotte. The support they received from Hendrick's Mercedes of Charlotte, in collaboration with Mercedes-Benz, USA, was described as a stark contrast to their earlier experience. The dealership fixed the Van of Valor free of charge and produced a video documenting the mission.

Reinvigorated by the generosity of Hendrick's and Mercedes-Benz, USA, the team continued their mission, immediately heading to Stanley, North Carolina, to interview [Ed Nixon](#), a Vietnam Veteran Army Infantryman and Purple Heart recipient. This experience, combined with meeting Mr. Nixon, renewed the team's optimism and determination.

Since March 17, 2025, the Van of Valor has covered 11,245 miles and driven for 186 hours, visiting numerous locations across the East Coast. Their journey next took them to Summerville, South Carolina, marking their entry into the second state of their mission and continuing their important work of gathering interviews and connecting the Purple Heart Trail.

About the Van of Valor:

The Van of Valor is a mission dedicated to connecting the Purple Heart Trail across America's Lower 48 states. The mission involves documenting the

stories of Purple Heart and Gold Star recipients through interviews and sharing their experiences to honor their sacrifice and service.

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Links referenced above (in order they appeared):

<https://www.facebook.com/VanOfValor>

<https://www.darenc.gov/Home/Components/News/News/8949/17>

<https://americanwarriorradio.com/2025/02/van-of-valor-kevin-lauren-wallace/>

<https://wreathsacrossamerica.org/pages/185941/Overview/?relatedId=0>

<https://currenttv.org/show/stories-of-valor-purple-heart-recipient-kevin-wallace/>

<https://www.outerbanksvoice.com/2025/02/02/van-of-valor-to-travel-from-outer-banks-to-collect-and-immortalize-memories-of-the-sacrifice-of-war/>

<https://youtu.be/nP8p6PdIDWM?si=KDtcOAAGyL9frIAc>

