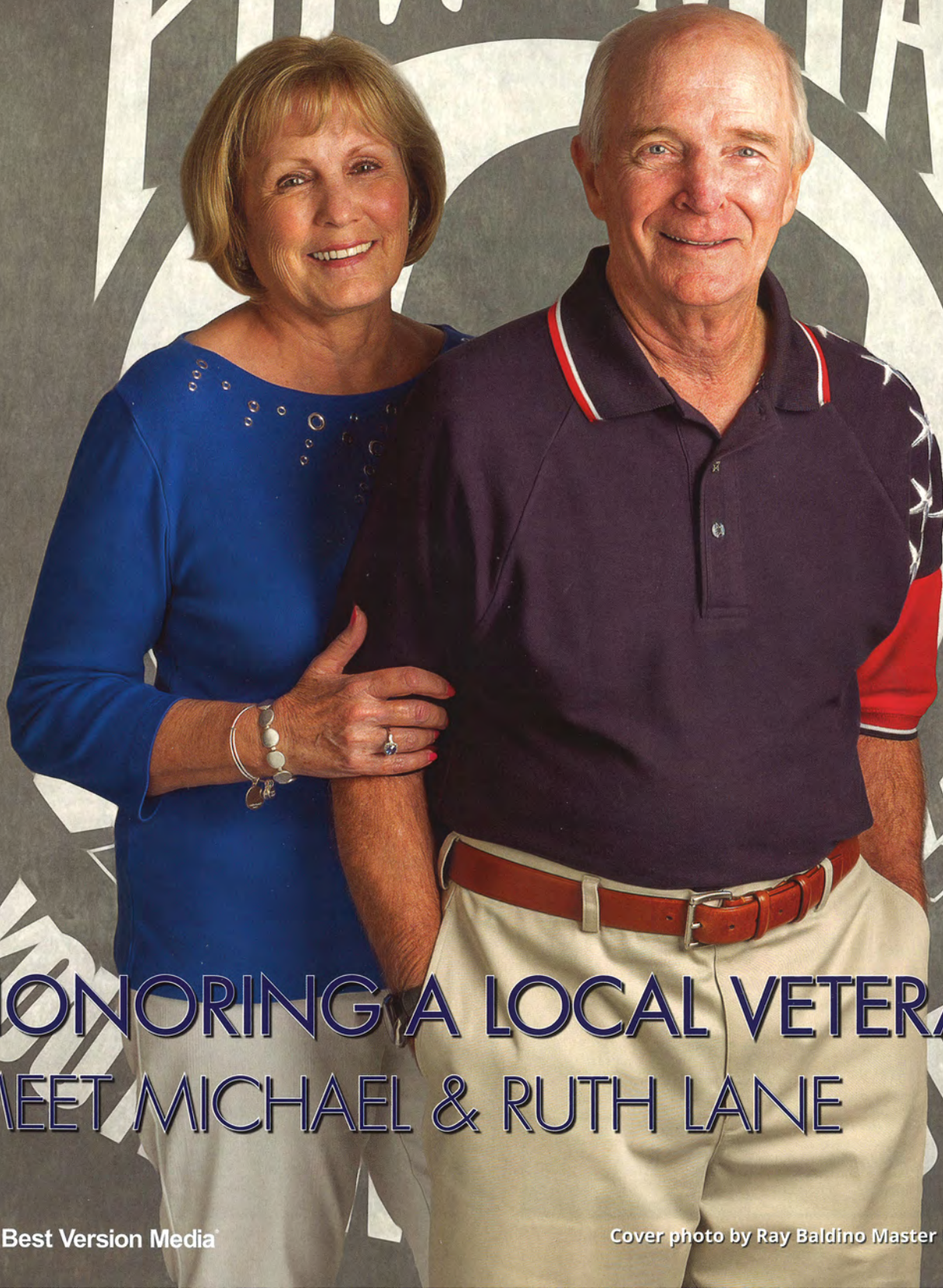


NOVEMBER 2020

# VIERA LIVING

EAST EDITION



HONORING A LOCAL VETERAN:  
MEET MICHAEL & RUTH LANE



# HONORING A LOCAL VETERAN: MEET MICHAEL & RUTH LANE

BY SUE DEWERFF PANZARINO • PHOTOGRAPHS SUBMITTED BY RAY BALDINO MASTER PHOTOGRAPHER, AND MICHAEL & RUTH LANE

It was nearly 54 years ago, in 1966, when retired Air Force pilot, Col. Michael Lane was shot down in North Vietnam.

He spent 2,270 days (nearly six and a half years) living in the Hoa Lo Prison camp, better known as the “Hanoi Hilton.”

His first experience was being confined to a 6 x 8 cell. He prayed a lot. It was a time he will never forget.

“Many didn’t make it back home,” Michael said. “I feel like I was blessed to have survived this. I’m extremely grateful for the life I have lived and to have served my country.”

Michael and his wife, Ruth, of nearly 48 years, now make their home in the Indian River Colony Club in East Viera.

More than five decades after his capture and release back to freedom, the story of his journey to and from Vietnam, and his life after, is one he said he is humbled to share.

“I was shot down on December 2, 1966, and got married on December 1, 1973—so December is one month I cannot forget,” he said with a smile. I think we chose the first day of the month to marry because I was a little superstitious,” he laughed.

Michael always wanted to be a pilot. He remembers carrying a toy plane in his pocket from the time he was six years old.

“Flying was something I always found to be fascinating. It was a way to see the world from a different perspective,” he said.

After earning a Bachelor of Science degree at Notre Dame, and obtaining his private pilot’s license, he went on to enter pilot training in the US Air Force in 1964. Learning to fly F4 Phantom military jets was a huge responsibility, one he loved.

“I remember my first flight like it was yesterday. I was jolted forward that first time I took to the sky. When those engines fired up before my very first take-off, I knew it was going to be something I would always remember,” he laughed.

“Traveling twice the speed of sound was something I had previously only dreamed of, so actually experiencing it was nothing short of amazing!”

After spending close to a year in the United Kingdom for his Air Force flight training, he was transferred to South Vietnam on November 12, 1966.



Just twenty days later, Col. Michael Lane became a Prisoner of War.

Though the following six-plus years seemed like a lifetime, his release on February 18, 1973, finally came.

It was on a flight back to Charlotte, N.C. (where his parents lived); he said his life began to take a turn for the better.

Ruth, then a flight attendant for Eastern Airlines, remembered the day she met her husband on that same flight.

"I was wearing a POW bracelet, as many of my colleagues and friends did. When I found out Michael was a former POW I approached him to see if he may have heard of or known the prisoner whose name was on my bracelet," she explained. "Everyone back then had memorized the names on their bracelets. We all were anxious to find out those that were released and were coming home."

After a conversation where they exchanged phone numbers, Ruth said, "The rest of that love story is history!"

December 1, 1973, exactly seven years, (minus a day), after Michael was taken captive, he and Ruth were married.

The ceremony took place at a Naval Base in Orlando, where they set up housekeeping while he returned to college.

Michael went on to get his Master's Degree from UCF in 1975, and their son Kevin was born that same year.

The couple then moved to the panhandle where Michael was stationed at Eglin Air Force Base before his final assignment took them out west to Mesa, Arizona.

Michael retired in 1988 as an Air Force Colonel and returned to civilian life working in the helicopter division of McDonnell Douglas. In 2000, Michael started a private company, with four partners, that manufactured and distributed flight simulators to the Air Force and NASA.

Ruth continued her career as a flight attendant for several years before retiring. Since that time, they have enjoyed traveling throughout the US, Europe, and the Caribbean.

Michael and Ruth returned to the area just three years ago and bought a home in the Indian River Colony Club. They love their home and their community and are both grateful that they can enjoy all that the Space Coast has to offer.

Michael and Ruth have been part of a Former POW's group for the past forty years and they make an effort to travel to as many POW reunions as they can throughout the country.

"We often wonder, if it weren't for the war - if we would have ever even met," said Ruth.

"I am a believer that fate is truly what brought us together and I am glad it has all worked out," said Michael. "I'm thankful for every day. Having been a POW somehow makes you appreciate the freedom we have."

His collection of military awards is both plentiful and prestigious. Along with the POW medal, Michael received a Purple Heart, a Silver Star, two Legion of Merit awards, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Bronze Star with a "V" Device, and an Air Force Meritorious Service medal.

Michael added that his choice to marry Ruth on December 1, instead of the second day of the month, was probably a good one. "I didn't want to get shot down again," he joked.

*We would like to thank Michael & Ruth for sharing their incredible story with us. We are moved beyond words and want to thank you, Michael, for your service and sacrifice. We honor you and are so grateful for you!*