

**GINO J. MERLI VETERANS' CENTER
ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING
May 18, 2023**

CALL TO ORDER

Lisa Solarczyk, President, called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

ROLL CALL

Secretary Bernie McDonald recorded roll call and attendance was as follows:

MEMBERS

Lisa Solarczyk, President - Marine Corps League
William Smith, Vice President - The American Legion
Bernard "Bernie" McDonald, Secretary - AMVETS
Robert Cudworth - Military Officers Association of America
Robert Smith - Military Order of the Purple Heart (Excused)
Russell Canevari - Veterans of Foreign Wars
Richard Green - Blinded Veterans Association
Joe Sylvester - Disabled American Veterans
Mackenzie Mueller for Rosemary Brown - PA State Senate
Kyle Donahue - PA State Representative
Tim Cleveland - PSACDVA (Excused)
Lisa Kaye - PSACDVA (Excused)
Roger Risner - GJMVC Resident Representative

DMVA

Major General Mark J. Schindler - Adjutant General, Pennsylvania (Excused)
Maureen Weigl, BG - Deputy Adjutant General, VA (via telephone)
Travis Davis - Executive Director, Long-Term Care
Barbara Raymond - Director, Bureau of Veterans' Homes
Vito P. Ruggiero - GJMVC Commandant
Kathleen Ambrose - GJMVC Deputy Commandant

OTHERS PRESENT / INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Lynn O'Day, Recorder
Sarah Butler, Admissions Coordinator
Janice Mcallister, Volunteer Coordinator
Maria Coles, ADON
Erica Comine, Infection Preventionist
Jennifer Spitler, Regional Program Outreach Coordinator
Maria Tagliaferri, Veteran Service Specialist
Beth Warner, Regional Compliance Officer
Thomas Caffrey, HIPPA and Privacy Officer
Sam Estrada, Policy and Planning Specialist
Brian Doughton, District Director for Senator Marty Flynn
Carl Weinschenk

MOMENT OF SILENCE

- A moment of silence was led by Lisa Solarczyk, President.

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS MINUTES

- Previous minutes accepted as written.

REVIEW OF MEMBER STATUS

Jewish War Veterans (Vacant)

Catholic War Veteran (Vacant)

Military Order of the Purple Heart (Vacant)

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY ADJUTANT GENERAL

- General Weigl was excused.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF LONG-TERM CARE

- Travis Davis reported that General Weigl was not able to join us because she is currently at one of the casinos for the announcement of a summer concert series. A portion of their sales will be put toward the veterans' trust fund. The fund enables the Department of Military and Veteran Affairs to distribute funding to the 501 C3s to communities including Lackawanna County.
- General Schindler was confirmed by the Senate on April 26.
- May is Military Care-giver month, anyone who takes on responsibility and provides care and assistance to our veterans.
- After 3 years and 4 plus months, the COVID-19 public health emergency came to an end on May 11. We are no longer wearing masks. A lot of our regulations and policies are changing. We had a senior leadership meeting to provide education on what is changing.
- We have had over 15 inspections and surveys across the homes. We have done very well. We had VA annual surveys, DOH surveys, surprise surveys as well as completing 4 internal audits.
- We have 3 five-star facilities, Gino Merli being one as well as DVVH and Erie. We have 2 two-star which are Hollidaysburg and Pittsburgh, and we have 1 three star at Southeast Veterans' center.
- We have no COVID among any of our residents and only 2 staff members, in 2 different homes.
- Our admissions are the highest they have been in 2 years. We have 1,018 currently in our homes. We started the year around 950.
- Our staffing ratios remain strong however we have a lot of vacancies that we need to fill so that we can fill our beds to capacity. Gino has 87 full-time and 10 part-time vacancies. This is what is preventing us from filling our beds to capacity. We've been averaging just below 70% occupancy.
- One of our initiatives is Walk-In Wednesdays where our teams set up in the lobbies and interviews on-site. We have very good success, and we will continue the initiative.
- On May 2, we broke ground on a new 200 bed facility in Hollidaysburg. We were joined by Governor Shapiro, General Huntley from the federal VA and the acting secretary of the Department of General Services, Reggie McNeil.
- We are recruiting for a Medical Director in Southeast Veteran Center, Director of Nursing at Delaware Valley, and a Commandant at Hollidaysburg.
- We have the 25th anniversary of our Southwest Veterans Center in Pittsburgh on May 24.

- The governor will be visiting Fort Indiantown Gap on May 31.
- Medical advisory meeting in the 1st week of June.
- TAG fishing derby on June 8, where we bring residents from our homes to the GAP.
- Homes Week is June 11th through June 17th. We encourage you to attend any of the activities we have planned here at the home.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF STATE VETERANS' HOMES

- Barbara Raymond reported that the COVID-19 public health emergency has been lifted. Vaccine mandate has not been lifted for nursing home health care workers. Some of our staff are in masks because they were unable to be vaccinated.
- Medicare will continue to cover the COVID vaccine without cost share, so there will be no copays.
- Our COVID numbers are fantastic. We are still testing for anyone who may have symptoms or exposures.
- We did just finished celebrating Nurse's Week. We had various activities and fun events.
- Department of Health released information on M-Pox which had been called Monkey Pox, but they changed the name. Still is not a concern for our home and area but we are keeping an eye on it.
- We had our quality team at our Southeast facility.
- Each home is currently engaged in active shooter training so that we are prepared for any of those types of events. Hollidaysburg recently had their community involved.
- We are pushing for the replacement of our advisory members. They are with the governor's office.

REPORT OF THE MEDICAL DIRECTOR

- Dr. Kazmierski was excused for today's meeting.
- Maria Coles reported that we currently have no residents or staff positive for COVID.
- We no longer have a red unit. It is now our women's unit.
- We are no longer masking but non vaccinated staff must still wear surgical masks.
- We still have the Bivalent vaccine available
- As of July 1, the PPD (Per Patient Day) requirement will be changing from 2.7 to 2.87. This is the calculation of nursing care hours. We already exceed that number daily.
- Erica Comine reported that we have had 4 positive residents to date this year but have none at this time.
- We have had zero deaths related to COVID.
- We are offering all vaccines to residents and staff while encouraging residents to participate in activities and outings.
- We have an antibiotic stewardship program. We follow all evidence based and recommended practices when treating residents with antibiotics.

REPORT OF THE ADMISSIONS DIRECTOR

- Sarah Butler reported that our census is 153 with 4 admissions scheduled next week.
- We had 31 admissions and 18 deaths or discharges.
- We are up 10% since our last meeting.
- The waiting period/process is 10 to 14 days for a veteran, 6 to 12 months for a spouse.
 - Travis stated that there is a tremendous amount of work for the admissions team, trying to bring our census back to capacity.

REPORT OF THE COMMANDANT

- Vito Ruggiero reported that we are a 5-star facility. It's a cumulative score based on health inspection, quality measure and staffing. In our area, it is very rare to see a building with 5 stars. This was a lot of hard work by our leadership and our team.
- We ask, if you know anyone in the community, we have walk-in Wednesdays. Nursing is our hardest niche here; it is hard to compete with private industry and perks like sign on bonuses.
- We now have a women's unit here. We were on the local news because we chose to make our 1 South unit a women's unit. We have 20 beds on one side of the wing that are all women. Our activities director came up with the name "Sweet and Sassy Society", almost our version of the Red Hats Society. We put flowers there and tablecloths and we are making it homey.
- Flooring has been completed in the conference room and we are moving along on our renovations.
- We have new heating and air conditioning units. Each unit has a unit that can be controlled individually.
- Over the next few weeks, we will be resurfacing the parking lot. DGS will be starting that shortly.
- We will be having our second annual golf tournament on June 5. All the money raised (over \$32, 000.00 last year) goes to our resident welfare fund which is the money used to buy the amenities that our veterans want, need and deserve.
- There will be a motorcycle ride at Harley Davidson that benefits that fund this summer.
- We created a new admissions team room, so the family has a specific room to go to talk about care plans and their loved one.
- In the packets there is a photo of a tiki bar. The students at Johnson College will be recreating that bar for our residents and it will be kept in the MPR courtyard. It will be used year-round in our patio area.
 - Bill Smith asked about the parking lot and what they will be doing for parking.
 - Vito stated that we have purchased 85 parking spaces in the lot across from the home on Mulberry St.

THE GOOD OF THE COUNCIL

- Robert Cudworth shared with the council that his wife spent the last 22 months here at the facility. He stated that the care she received far exceeded the care he has seen in other places.

ADJOURNMENT

The next meeting was announced: August 17, 2023, at 10:00 a.m.

Joseph D. Sylvester
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