

HOLLIDAYSBURG VETERANS' HOME (HVH) ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

THURSDAY, JANUARY 18, 2024

10:00 AM

ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

Ildephonse "Duffy" Hines (Council President), Marine Corps League Department of PA
R. Raymond Lenz (Council Secretary), American Legion Department of PA
Joseph Rodkey, Blinded Veterans Association
John "Goose" Marin, Catholic War Vets
Brian Querry, Centre County, Director of VA
David Wagner, DAV
Michael "Mick" Hoover, MOPH
Tim Susengill, Vietnam Veterans Association
Irene Fulton, Resident Representative

VIP'S PRESENT:

State Representative Louis Schmitt Jr.

DMVA PRESENT:

Brigadier General (Ret.) Maureen Weigl, Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans' Affairs
Barb Raymond, Director, Bureau of Veterans' Homes

HVH PRESENT:

Chrissy Dambeck, Commandant
Kelly Smith, Deputy Commandant
Desiree Kearney, Director of Nursing
Anthony Froncillo, Doctor
Joe Patterson, Admissions and Marketing
Jackie Treon, Accountant 3
Adrienne Bilek, Dietary Director
Deana Haduck, Revenue
Rick Deneen, Payroll
Regina Swinger, CNA
Shelley Ponist, Registered Nurse Instructor

Tom Reed, BVH Revenue

Butch Regala, Housekeeping

Emily McDowell, Volunteer Services

Tia Williams, Assistant to the Commandant and *Recorder*

OTHERS PRESENT:

Jay Buchanan, MOAA (pending appointment)

Anna Marie Rodkey, Spouse of Joseph Rodkey

Constance Stransky, Guest of R. Raymond Lenz

Michele Ivory, Constituent Outreach Specialist, Senator Judy Ward's Office

Lory Liebegott, DAV Service Officer

VACANT POSITIONS:

Military Officers Association of America

Jewish War Veterans

ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT:

Henry Gaunt, AMVETS

Thomas Williams, VFW Department of PA

Moment of Silence and Pledge of Allegiance

Duffy asked everyone to stand, and he led the Pledge of Allegiance. He then asked everyone to take a moment of silence.

Call to Order/Roll Call

Duffy Hines called the meeting to order at 10:03 AM and asked everyone in attendance to introduce themselves and to provide their title and/or Service Organization. Duffy asked Jay Buchanan to come sit at the table.

Review of Minutes from Previous Meeting

Duffy asked every member if they had any questions. Duffy reminded members that there is a process to be followed for resignation and that a resignation letter is needed from the member resigning before the spot can be filled. The Pennsylvania War Council only meets eight (8) times during the year and not at all over the summer months. Any time an application goes in, if sent right before summer, it has potential to sit stagnant for three (3) months causing a delay. Duffy reminded the group that there are many members of Advisory Council over the six State Veterans' Homes, so the volume of applications could also lead to a delay. He explained how the paperwork process works once it makes its way to the Governor's desk. Duffy announced

we have a candidate for the Jewish War Veterans vacancy, but this process will take some time as well. Duffy spoke of how he started working on a manual for Veterans involved in Advisory Council across the state to help solidify the process and as a reference point. With no other questions, comments or concerns, Duffy said the minutes from October 2023 are accepted as posted. R. Raymond Lenz, Council Secretary, then signed the minutes to make them official.

Employee Recognition

Shelley Ponist, RN, was recognized for 30 years of PA state service

Regina Swinger, CNA, was recognized for 20 years of state service

Rick Deneen was recognized for retiring after 20 years of state service

Adrienne Bilek, Deana Haduck and Jackie Treon were nominated and recognized for excellence in the workplace at HVH

Swearing In New Members

N/A

Dr. Anthony Froncillo

Dr. Froncillo attended for Medical Director, Dr. John Reinhardt. He stated being in mid January we are in the middle of respiratory illnesses here at HVH and in the general population. One of the priorities at this time from a medical standpoint is treating and preventing the spread as best we can. We've learned a lot in the last few years and have improved very much. Administration and staff have done a great job at doing the best we can and dealing with this as it presents itself and remembering safety of residents is "number one". Dr. Froncillo stated that Dr. Reinhardt had no messages of his own to pass along.

Questions, Comments, Concerns

Tim Susengill asked if COVID/Flu/RSV vaccines are mandatory or optional? – Dr. Froncillo said that none of these are mandatory for staff or residents, they are optional. For COVID shots, it is more of what is recommended versus what is not. The same applies for the new RSV vaccine. Most residents would be considered at high risk so that is taken into account along with resident and family wishes.

Tim Susengill asked if Dr. Froncillo is strongly encouraging? – Dr. Froncillo said he does encourage it and it is a way to get ahead of the illness. Treatments available are for when you are diagnosed with the illness and symptomatic – treatments aren't that great. They are designed to shorten the duration of symptoms. The way to get ahead of it is being vaccinated. We know that vaccination doesn't prevent disease but It can reduce severity and duration of illness.

Brigadier General (Ret.) Maureen Weigl, Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans' Affairs

General Weigl thanked Dr. Froncillo. She stated all six State Veterans' Homes have gone through COVID, Flu and RSV, but at a better percentage rate than the community. All homes have managed it well and Barb will speak further on this. General Weigl thanked staff for keeping the residents safe. There have been some staff changes, Chrissy will introduce HVH's new Director of Nursing – Desiree Kearney. There is a new Commandant at Delaware Valley Veterans Home – Margo Coleman. Currently trying to replace Greg Lehman and Mark Griffin who were handling capital/construction projects. They will still be in the department but are receiving promotions. Governor's budget should be coming out February 6th. Had Pennsylvania Farm Show last week, thanked Service Organizations for being there as well as the federal VA. There were 150+ per day Veterans who stopped by who, if they wanted to, were able to sit down and sign up for benefits/healthcare benefits.

Reminded the group that “boots on the ground” in Vietnam all qualify for benefits no matter their income and we are pushing the PACT Act. Will have first Veterans Conference which is not a fair, but it is for all stakeholders. All Advisory Council members will be invited. Looking to host in Pittsburgh in September or October of this year. This conference will happen annually on a rotation of locations and there will be a report on deliverables from it. By March 1st, any submissions from organizations or female Veterans needed for female Veterans magazine that will be published. It will highlight different female Veterans and is a free magazine paid for by UPMC and Adagio Health. If you want to take out an ad, though, it must be paid for. The magazine will be published on June 12th. General Weigl will give information to the Commandant so we can get the information out. General Weigl then spoke of how staff here at HVH who have worked here for so long is practically unheard of in the private sector – kudos to everyone for helping us keep staff for that many years at HVH.

Questions, Comments, Concerns

N/A

Barb Raymond, Director

Travis Davis sends regards, had to meet with TAG today. Barb said to the Advisory Council that their support means a lot; when we recognize our [HVH] staff and they see the Advisory Council, that support means a lot to them and the staff take the feedback back to the team to share. Barb said we have COVID in some of the State Veterans’ Homes – 1 case at PSSH, stable and no issues. All homes have COVID positive staff, 13 total. Some outbreaks at almost all facilities over the past few months. Only one death with COVID listed on death certificate this year so far across the homes. This is put on the death certificate if the provider feels COVID contributed to the death. RSV is our bigger issue at this time, we’ve had some significant outbreaks across the homes – we are tracking it a little differently and more closely this year which could be why we are seeing higher numbers than in the past. RSV vaccine is available at all six homes for residents, nearly 500 have received it already. Like the COVID shot, it does not prevent illness but it is 40-60% effective against severe illness. COVID shot mandate for staff went away about a year ago and there’s been a small decrease in staff and residents wishing to receive the most recent vaccine. The recommendation at this time is if you’ve recently had COVID to wait 3-4 months before receiving the vaccine. We might see an increase after this timeframe from some of our outbreaks at the homes. These shots are available in-house at all six homes and are encouraged for staff and residents. Last month, the TAG visited all of the homes and it was very much enjoyed by all staff and residents. From a survey perspective, Department of Health (DOH)/VA/Department of Human Services (DHS) – Delaware Valley had their annual DOH and VA inspections right before Christmas and at the same time. Overall, they had a good survey with only minor deficiencies. Currently waiting for the VA to visit Gino Merli, Southeastern Veterans Center and Soldiers and Sailors in Erie. Generally, surveys are unannounced, the VA does give a narrow window of time. All six homes as a team share information and best practices to improve care at all homes. Census is growing across the State Veterans’ Homes as we are almost to 1,100 residents total. The only reason we are not pushing more is due to staffing. Nursing staffing is the biggest challenge at the 5 other homes, not so much here at HVH. Two other key struggles are Social Services and Registered Dietitians across the Commonwealth. From legislative end (federal), Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) who governs us is looking at a proposed rule for staffing. Currently, there is no federal mandate for staffing, Pennsylvania has a state minimum (that we exceed) which is 2.87 hours per patient per day. For the proposed rule, CMS wants to change staffing to where LPN’s wouldn’t count in staffing hours and it would be a staffing minimum of 0.55 RN hours, 2.45 CNA hours. The current 2.87 hours is with LPN’s included. If the proposal would go through, it is very concerning that LPN’s would not count. Every nursing facility in the country is concerned about this idea. Of course, we want to provide the best care to our residents but these numbers without LPN’s included are unrealistic. General Weigl added that what we need to take from this is that nursing homes are not going to be able to take residents due to staffing and there isn’t enough help in home health care which is very concerning for our senior population across America. Barb again stressed how concerning this is, she will get information to Tia to get out to the Advisory Council. Chrissy will speak about construction. The new building is moving right along, still the biggest project across all six homes. Delaware Valley facility is having some HVAC work done, Southwestern has some changes coming in the next fiscal year. Revenue is working on pensions and working on catastrophic illness coverage for medications for residents. Compliance – we had our Facility Performance Assessment (FPA) at HVH recently and it will be happening at

SEVC on the week of January 29th. Nothing major going on from a Compliance perspective. One of our contracted entities notified us of a data breach and all affected residents have been notified of the potential breach. It included very minor details on the MDS – no birthdates, social security numbers or maiden names were breached so no concerns from financial.

Questions, Comments, Concerns

Tim Susengill stated that recently, state legislation addressed the teacher shortage, any plans to address the nursing shortage? Barb said we don't get to participate in many even though they are state incentives. We could participate in some things like tuition reimbursement. Federal side just issued 2.8 million dollar grant to assist with staffing, we are looking to see if we are eligible for any of those benefits. Tim also stated that after the pandemic, there was an emphasis on air exchange for future construction. With new building, will it have state of the art air exchanges? Barb said yes. Time asked will we install the new air exchanges in the older buildings? Barb stated that we've already upgraded what and where we could in all six homes, including air exchanges, UV light machines and new filters.

Brian Query asked how many Veterans are in all six homes total? Barb does not have a breakdown of number of Veterans with her, but the average at each home for non-veteran spouses, etc. is about 12%. Brian also asked how VA inspections differ in comparison to DOH/DHS surveys or are they the same? Barb stated the regulations are almost identical with just some minor changes. Some states have been able to convince state regulators not to come for annual surveys at state veterans homes – Texas is one for example. This would have to be approved by CMS and the state.

Chrissy Dambeck, Commandant

Some staffing updates – we have a new Director of Nursing, Desiree Kearney. She has extensive long term care experience, has worked in the private sector, and transferred to HVH from the Department of Corrections. We currently have two vacant Assistant Director of Nursing positions and interviews have been conducted. We've recently conducted interviews for a Social Worker and for a Quality Assurance Specialist and offers have been made. DOH complaint surveys have all been unsubstantiated. HVH had our FPA last week conducted by Fort Indiantown Gap staff. Some concerns were identified, and we are working on a corrective action plan. We had a resident who was recognized for the Holland Club Award which was in the Altoona Mirror and on the news. We had the Veterans Day Ceremony here in Arnold Hall and participated in the Altoona parade. We had special holiday visits from the legion and other organizations. A topping out ceremony was held at the site of the new building but unfortunately, we were only notified two days prior, so it was a small event; in handouts we've included photos and a brief explanation of what a topping out ceremony is. HVH staff are forming a team for the Special Olympics Polar Plunge, dressing up in Valentine's Day attire. Will include pictures for the next meeting. Lastly, our annual Holiday Fund has exceeded last years'.

Questions, Comments, Concerns

N/A

Joe Patterson, Admissions and Marketing

Admissions – Joe reviewed admission/discharge numbers for the last quarter. Provided resident census breakdown by county. 1 admission today and tomorrow. Next week, husband and wife projected to be admitted. Site visit conducted yesterday in Everett, PA and if it all works out that person will come in next week. 31 new admissions, 3 discharges (1 transfer to SEVC out of those discharges) and 21 residents ceased to breathe.

Marketing – December 7th event attended held by Veterans Community Initiative Outreach. Invited us to go to Johnstown War Memorial to recognize Pearl Harbor Day program. Joe stated it was wonderful and he would love to bring the program back here to share with HVH residents. Joe had the opportunity to speak. Continues to go to Hollidaysburg Rotary meetings. Veterans Community Initiative (VCI) in works of doing program for National Vietnam War Veterans Day, flyer will be out next week per Dave Wagner. VCI asked if they could do

rural outreach here at HVH again, due to construction they had it at the Catholic War Vets in Altoona. Joe is working on getting them set up with the Readiness Center in the spring if needed. During the holidays, Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) stopped in and invited Joe to speak at their events. Contacting VA case managers, putting HVH's name out there. Doing a lot of site visits and bringing many new residents in as a result.

Questions, Comments, Concerns

Brian Querry stated he is concerned about vacancies – are they due to staffing? Joe said not at HVH. If someone is on a waiting list at one of the other 5 homes, they can come to HVH in the meantime and not lose their spot on the other homes' waiting list. Barb elaborated that the numbers are based off current license capacity. We are not going above 200 as that is the new building capacity. Once we adjust numbers, it will be better reflected on the report.

Tia noted the change of verbiage in the “non-vet” category.

Brian Querry asked if we could do a breakdown of reserve/national guard numbers moving forward, Joe said yes.

Joe reiterated that he does not use the term “non-vet” in conversations with potential admissions or in conversation with someone maybe not eligible for benefits.

Tim Susengill asked how someone from Maryland was admitted to HVH? – Joe said if the person joined or separated military as PA resident, they are still eligible to be admitted into a PA state veterans' home.

Tim Susengill noted that the admissions pattern is trending upward, is this seasonal? Supply and demand? Or are we becoming more efficient? – Joe stated it seems seasonal this year which isn't normal for December. Many applications are being processed now since the holidays are over.

Ray Lenz noted that in the minutes from last weekend he questioned Joe about someone who wasn't listed as from Luzerne County and Joe said he would look into it. Ray said he found out said person was in a different county when they applied so Joe was correct initially.

Brian Querry asked how site visits are initiated? – every Wednesday, a packet of all clinical needs for applicants goes before the Admissions Committee, if they see something that clinically raises questions, a site visit will be conducted – has to be an applicant for site visit to happen.

Tim Susengill asked about VA award letter/services – contact Revenue department with any specific questions. Barb said there was just a “Revenue 101” training across all the homes. Part of Joe's job is to contact the VA to get proof of percentage. Tim Susengill stated that some Service Officers have access to which Service Officer represents a person.

Duffy Hines – Report of Status

Two members with terms expiring this year – Tom Williams and Mick Hoover. Duffy asked to please get paperwork together to be submitted. Hopefully will have completion date in May. As a reminder, the PA War Council is off summer and December – they only met eight months per year. Some positions change yearly and others perhaps every two years. One reason Mick Hoover's information got stuck was the Commandant for MOPH was replaced that year. When we think about an organization getting us ready for appointment, keep in mind that timing is essential to get information to them so they have the opportunity to react to it while they are in session. Something else that has been brought up are requests to include various service members' names in new building. Also, someone said a person had to be on the Hall of Fame in order to have something named after them in the new building, is this true? Barb stated no, that is not true. For example, Penn Dot built a bridge on-site at PSSH and one of their Advisory Council members wanted to be sure it was named as something meaningful to the home. They took a vote amongst the residents and the Council approved it. As far as a wing to be named, the person does not have to be in the Hall of Fame. We are not naming the actual home, it is already “HVH”. Where it gets complicated would be when we are renaming the home and we aren't doing that. Duffy asked for names and suggestions to be submitted to the Commandant, Chrissy. Goose mentioned John Gority's name, was a former member of Advisory Council and was a Vietnam veteran. Barb

said we can get some specifics – are we looking at dedicating a lounge? A room? A wing? A hallway? We can get more information with available spaces. Duffy asked is there a cut off for when it should be done? Barb said it depends, if we want it done as a full dedication then yes but if we are going to look at this routinely and bring up at every Advisory Council meeting then not particularly. Duffy noted that the Hall of Fame is something we should be looking at on a regular basis. We should also have a committee chairman – one thing we’ve found out recently was we had guidelines on how to pick a person to go on the wall, but they were not approved. Those were pulled back and now we are in the process of getting an approved set of guidelines for selecting. It doesn’t mean anything will necessarily change for sure, but there will more than likely be some differences moving forward. General Weigl added that a person must be a veteran to be on the Hall of Fame.

Old Business

N/A

New Business

N/A

Announcements/Good of the Council

Dave Wagner said the VA is about to launch an aggressive outreach initiative to veterans throughout the surrounding counties. It is their drive to generate more veterans as members of the VA. They currently have 800,000 veterans but they should have more. Altoona is serving as a pilot program. General Weigl noted that many veterans don’t know they qualify for VA benefits/healthcare. Duffy said there was an announcement from DMVA that in the past year, over 1 billion dollars was raised for benefits for residents. Brian Querry noted this is a big achievement; it tells people that if you don’t know who to call, call the county office. Brian Querry said a lot of times people don’t realize how much money they can be eligible for. In Centre County alone, there is 1.4 million dollars a month sent to the county. General Weigl said there are still so many who won’t accept benefits. There is a lot of misinformation, a lot of people could be benefiting and are not. Things are always changing. Tim Susengill thanked DMVA for their support for Directors and Veterans’ Service Officers (VSO) over the years, providing training, advice, etc. and are always willing to help and the results are showing. Duffy will include a listing of Service Officers across PA in proposed manual, it will need to be a “living document” as people change. Tim Susengill asked if Duffy is familiar with PA Vet Connect, something DMVA created, which has a database for organizations that you can reach out to. General Weigl said it is being updated in order to self-navigate in case someone doesn’t want to call a VSO. Duffy noted that it is interesting that we don’t know all the surrounding county directors; General Weigl added that all counties have one right now except Philadelphia.

Ray Lenz welcomed new members, Irene Fulton and Jay Buchanan. He said what a difference a year makes. Last January, we were asking when the new building construction would start. Now, look at the building. This is one of the greatest places we have here – when we look at employees we’ve honored today, one person was here for 30 years! The various activities here at HVH are so wonderful and the staff are outstanding. There are so many activities and staff are all a great family and treat the veterans super. We owe the HVH staff a round of applause for all they do.

Adjournment

Duffy reminded everyone that the next Advisory Council meeting is set to be held on Thursday, April 18, 2024, at 1000hrs.

Meeting was adjourned at 1142hrs.

R. Raymond Lenz, Secretary

DRAFT