**PENNSYLVANIA STATE VETERANS’ COMMISSION MEETING**

**KEYSTONE CONFERENCE CENTER**

**FORT INDIANTOWN GAP**

**ANNVILLE, PA 17003-5002**

**FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2013 – 10:00 am**

The State Veterans’ Commission (SVC) meeting was called to order by Chairman Brenner. The meeting was opened with an invocation and the recital of the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Oath of Office:**

Brigadier General (BG) Beck administered the Oath of Office to the following individuals:

* Mr. Neil Appleby – President – Blinded Veterans Association
* Mr. Samuel Blow – Commander Disabled American Veterans
* Mr. William Cleveland – Commander – American Legion
* Mr. Colt Coleman – Commander – AMVETS
* Mr. Chris Fidler – Director / Site Representative - Keystone Paralyzed Veterans of America
* Mr. Joseph Palaia – Designee – Catholic War Veterans
* Mr. Gordon Sheriff – Commandant – Marine Corps League
* Mr. James White – Adjutant – Disabled American Veterans
* Mr. Chuck Jackson – Adjutant / Designee - Military Order of the Purple Heart

**Awards:**

Major General (MG) Wesley E. Craig presented the Pennsylvania Commendation Medal to the following outgoing members for the distinguished service on the State Veterans Commission:

* Mr. Neil Corley
* Ms. Ruth Fairchild
* Mr. John Hahn

**Remarks by The Adjutant General - MG Wesley E. Craig:**

MG Craig provided the Commission members an update on the following:

* Pennsylvania National Guard current unit mobilizations and total deployments
* Future Unit Mobilizations
* Overview report on the PA Veterans’ Trust Fund Monthly Revenue and Expenditures
* Act 66 Claims / Values Report
* Future Outreach Engagements

**VISN 4 Report** - M**r. Robert Callahan, Director of the Lebanon VMAC:**

Mr. Callahan provided the following information:

* PACT Statistics and information
* Statistics and information regarding Compensation and Pension Exams
* FY13 Budget and NRM Construction numbers

Mr. Callahan also reported on Legionella in the Pittsburgh area, stating that VA Pittsburgh has found the problem and has worked aggressively to correct it. The situation is under control and is being closely monitored.

**Review and Approval of June 7, 2013 Meeting Minutes:**

Designee for the Commander, Mr. John Getz, made a motion, seconded by President Tim Cleveland, to approve the June 7, 2013 meeting minutes; the motion carried.

**OLD BUSINESS:**

**Chief Counsel Update by Mr. Dennis Guise:**

Mr. Guise briefed the Commission on the DRAFT Statement of Policy on Maintenance and Use of Veterans Trust Fund. He gave a brief synopsis of the grant structure / distribution. Mr. Guise stated that Grant rounds will begin in November 2013 and should be awarded by April 2014. There will be no grant over $100,000.00. There will be 5 mini grants awarded for $10,000.00. He briefed that the biggest issue will be finding a steady stream of revenue. He informed Commission members that the main sources of revenue for this fund will come from the following:

* Sale of Honoring Our Veterans License Plates
* Voluntary $3.00 Donations from persons applying for or renewing their licenses / registrations
* Grants, gifts, donations from a person, corporation, or other private / government entity
* Money appropriated to the fund by the General Assembly.

**Office of Policy and Legislative Affairs Update by Mr. Dusty Durand:**

Mr. Durand briefed the Commission on the status of the following Current Legislative Priorities:

* Paralyzed Veterans’ Pension
* Military Family Relief Assistance
* Educational Assistance Program
* Military Physician Incentive Program

Mr. Durand also briefed the Commission on the following Proposed Legislative Priorities:

* Motorcycle License Plate
* Global War on Terrorism Bonus Program
* Volunteer Behavioral Health
* Keystone Community Covenant / Joining Community Forces
* Sell / Convey of the Hunt and Pine Grove armories
* Veterans Package

**Homes Update by Mr. Andrew Ruscavage:**

Mr. Ruscavage provided the Commission a Homes’ update. The total State Veterans’ Homes Occupancy is 89%. The rate for Nursing Care / Dementia Occupancy is 93 percent. Occupany Rates for Personal Care/Domiciliary beds is 77 percent. He also advised that the licensure status in each of the homes was current and in compliance with all legal standards.

**REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF REPORTS AND GRANTS:**

Mr. Natali presented the following reports to the Commission:

The report for the **Veterans’ Emergency Assistance Program** was reviewed. Commander Michael Iacavzzi made a motion, seconded by President Tim Cleveland, to accept the report as presented. Motion carried.

The report for the **Blind Pension Program** was presented. President Neil Appleby made a motion, seconded by Designee for the Commander, Joseph Palaia, to accept the report as presented. Motion carried.

The report for the **Paralyzed Pension Program** was reviewed. Director Chris Fidler made a motion, seconded by Commandant Gordon Sheriff to accept the report as presented. Motion carried.

The report for the **Educational Gratuity Program** was reviewed. Member-at-Large Jeanine Botta Guth made a motion, seconded by Commander Samuel Blow, to accept the report as presented. Motion carried.

The report for the **Disabled Veterans’ Real Estate Tax Exemption Program** was reviewed, and the Requests for Waiver to the five acre rule presented. Chairman John Brenner declared the standing motion. Designee for the Commander, John Getz, made a motion, seconded by Commaner Colt Coleman to accept the report as presented.

BG Jerry G. Beck, Jr. brought attention to the amount of paper being used to present the Disabled Veterans Real Estate Tax Exemption report to each committee member at every meeting. He suggested that in order to save paper /resources this report might be able to be made available to the Committee at the meeting, but not as a part of the individual packets / hand-outs. Mr. Dennis Guise, Chief Counsel, suggested that we could eliminate the information on the approved applicants. However, legally, he felt that we should still provide in each packet as a hand-out, a report of those individuals who were either denied and/or seeking a waiver. The suggestion presented by Mr. Guise will reduce the amount of paper utilized but still present all denials / Requests for Waivers to the Committee. This suggestion was found equitable by all.

The report for the **Persian Gulf Veterans’ Benefit Program** was reviewed.

The report for the **Military Family Relief Assistance Program** was reviewed.

The report for **ACT 66 County Offices** **Report** was reviewed.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

**Pennsylvania War Veterans Council Items (PWVC):**

Mr. Paul Hastings provided a report of the PA War Veterans Council meeting. He reported that the Council elected new officers. The council was briefed by the Legislative Committee. They PWVC supports HB 1205 – Veterans Lottery/ Small Games of Chance Legislation.

Designee for the Commander, John Getz stated that they are looking for help to contact Senators. They do not want the Taverns Association to be part of this bill. If that were to happen it will directly impact Veterans Clubs.

Mr. Hastings also reported that the PWVX is in opposition of the Pay Day Lending Legislation.

**Hall of Fame Recommendations:**

Vice Chairman Hawk motioned that the committee approve the Gino J. Merli Veterans Center Hall of Fame packet presented for Jerry Pace. The motion was seconded by Commander Iacavazzi, and the motion carried.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

* BG Beck announced the TAG Annual Fishing Event to be held on Tuesday, September 10, 2013. This event will bring Veterans from 3 of the 6 State Veterans’ homes to Clarks Creek for a day of fishing. While they are on location they will receive box lunches. At the end of the outing they will return to Fort Indiantown Gap for a sit-down dinner, prizes and entertainment.
* President Cleveland announced that September 20, 2013, is National POW / MIA Day. There will be a ceremony held at the State Capitol at 10:00 am.
* BG Beck announced the PA Veterans Forum, November 6 – 7, 2013 at the Crowne Plaza in Harrisburg. This event is a 2 day forum offering educational and practical resources for Veterans, family members and behavioral health care providers to use in their daily lives to address issues veterans experience as they return home.
* BG Beck announced that immediately following the meeting there would be a Press Release and Ribbon Cutting Ceremony to unveil the Pennsylvania Mobile Veterans’ Outreach Van. Everyone was invited to attend the ceremony and tour the van.

**TIME AND LOCATION OF NEXT MEETING:**

Friday, October 4, 2013, at 10:00 am

Arrowheads / Community Club

Building 9-65, Fort Indiantown Gap

Annville, PA 17003

**ADJOURNMENT:** Chairman Brenner adjourned the meeting at 11:26 hours.

**The following members of the Commission were present:**

MG Wesley E. Craig, The Adjutant General

BG Jerry G. Beck, Jr., Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans’ Affairs

John Brenner, Chairman, State Veterans Commission

Dominic DiFrancesco, Member at Large

Gerald Hawk, Vice-Chairman, State Veterans Commission

Jeannine Botta Guth, Member at Large

John B. Getz, Jr., Designee for Commander, Veterans of Foreign War

Neil Appleby, President, Blinded Veterans Association

Gordon Sheriff, Commandant, Marine Corps League

Colt Coleman, Commander, AMVETS

Samuel Blow, Jr. Commander, Disabled American Veterans

Michael J. Mescavage, Commander, Military Order of the Purple Heart

Joseph J. Palaia, Designee for Commander, Catholic War Veterans

William Harris, Military Officers Association of America

Michael Iacavazzi, Commander, Italian American War Veterans

Tim Cleveland, President, State Association of County Directors of Veterans Affairs, Inc.

Harold A. Gennaria, Commissioner, Emeritus

William A. Cleveland, Commander, American Legion

Kit D. Watson, Adjutant, American Legion

Chris Fidler, Director, Keystone Paralyzed Veterans of America

Thomas W. Haberkorn, President, Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc.

**The following members of the Commission were absent:**

Stanley Rolnik, Commander, Jewish War Veterans

Russell R. Canevari, State Commander, Veterans of Foreign War

Donald McMaster, Commander, Catholic War Veterans

**Others present:**

MG Randall Marchi, Deputy Adjutant General-Army

BG Anthony Carrelli, Deputy Adjutant General – Air

Tricia Harris, Governor’s Office

Ray Greene, Senior Vice Commander, Disabled American Veterans

Brenda Zechman, Schuylkill County VSO

Belinda Albright, Northumberland County VSO

William Wright, Catholic War Veterans

Dave Cummiskey, US DOL – Vets

Dave Johnsten, VVA PASC

Constance Snavely, KPVA

Joan Nissley, PAO

Tom Cherry, PAO

Neil B. Corley, Marine Corps League

Hank Fiola, Marine Corps League

Roger L. Snook, Snyder County VA Director

Chuck Jackson, Military Order of the Purple Heart

Jim White, State Adjutant, PA Disabled American Veterans

Rich Hudzinski, VVA, LVMAC

Frank Homme, Disabled American Veterans

Dennis Guise, CC

Dusty Durand, LLO

Brian Natali, VA

Andrew Ruscavage, VA

Sue Kenney, VA

The minutes of this meeting are respectfully submitted by the undersigned.

Jerry G. Beck, Jr.

BG, USA, Retired

Deputy Adjutant General

     for Veterans’ Affairs