

**GINO J. MERLI VETERANS' CENTER
ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING
August 15, 2024**

CALL TO ORDER

Meeting was called to order at 10:00 am and was held both in person and via teleconference. Bernie McDonald, secretary, called the meeting to order at 10:00 am.

ROLL CALL

Bernie McDonald, secretary, recorded roll call and attendance was as follows:

MEMBERS

<i>Lisa Solarczyk, <u>President</u> - Marine Corps League</i>	<i>EXCUSED</i>
<i>William Smith, <u>Vice President</u> - The American Legion</i>	<i>EXCUSED</i>
<i>Bernard "Bernie" McDonald, <u>Secretary</u> - AMVETS</i>	
<i>Robert Cudworth - Military Officers Association of America</i>	<i>EXCUSED</i>
<i>Robert Smith - Military Order of the Purple Heart</i>	<i>EXCUSED</i>
<i>Russell Canevari - Veterans of Foreign Wars</i>	<i>TELEPHONE</i>
<i>Richard Wren – Catholic War Veterans'</i>	
<i>Joe Sylvester - Disabled American Veterans</i>	
<i>Rosemary Brown - PA State Senate</i>	<i>EXCUSED</i>
<i>Sean O'Shea for Kyle Donahue - PA House of Representatives</i>	
<i>Tim Cleveland – PSACDVA</i>	<i>TELEPHONE</i>
<i>Lisa Kaye – PSACDVA</i>	<i>TELEPHONE</i>
<i>Timothy Booth - PSACDVA</i>	
<i>Wilson Miller - GJMVC Resident Representative</i>	

DMVA

<i>Major General Mark J. Schindler - Adjutant General, Pennsylvania</i>	<i>EXCUSED</i>
<i>Maureen Weigl, BG - Deputy Adjutant General, VA</i>	<i>TELEPHONE</i>
<i>Travis Davis – Executive Director, Long-Term Care</i>	
<i>Barbara Raymond – Director, Bureau of Veterans' Homes</i>	<i>EXCUSED</i>
<i>Vito P. Ruggiero - GJMVC Commandant</i>	
<i>Kathleen Ambrose - GJMVC Deputy Commandant</i>	

OTHERS PRESENT / INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Daniel Kazmierski, Medical Director
Michael Mecca, Admissions
Erica Comine, GMVC
Joseph Chiochio, Quality Improvement
Sarah Ruggiero, Quality Improvement
Abigail Lynott, Intern
Jennifer Spitler, Regional Program Outreach Coordinator
Lynn O'Day, Recorder

MOMENT OF SILENCE

REVIEW OF MEMBER STATUS

- There are a few individuals who will be sworn in at the next meeting, November 21, 2024.

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS MINUTES

- Previous minutes accepted as written.
 - Motioned by Joe Sylvester and Bernie McDonald.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF LONG-TERM CARE

- Travis Davis for not only himself but General Weigl and Barbara Raymond. The state budget passed. There was a 2.5 million reduction for military and veterans. This will cause no real impact as we currently have over 300 vacancies.
- There was a 7% increase in the state Medicaid program which the most we have had in several years. This will help a lot of community nursing homes which are struggling.
- Bill 1853 was passed which is new legislation which will require DOH field offices to meet with nursing home providers annually. This has never happened before in our industry. The goal is to increase collaboration and communication between nursing home providers and the state survey teams.
- We are now in year two of the DOH staffing increases. We are compliant at all our facilities across the state.
- DMVA initiated a culture change initiative last year. There is a mission from the Adjutant General to find out from our staff what we are doing well and where we are lacking. We surveyed all our staff, and some things were fixed quickly while some things need to have work. We have different subgroups, and we are being very transparent on posting everything on visual boards and on a share point site.
- We are done with all our VA annuals across all the homes, except for Delaware Valley. We currently have the Department of Health in the building, and we are expecting them at Hollidaysburg and Delaware Valley.
- We have 3 5-stars including Gino Merli, Southeast and Delaware Valley. We have 1 4-star at Soldier and Sailors and 2 3-stars at Hollidaysburg and Southwest.
- We continue to see our quality measures increase across the state.
- We have done well this Summer with COVID, RSV and FLU. We had a small outbreak here in Scranton but was controlled. At this time, we have no other residents with COVID, and we have a bout 9 or 10 staff members across the state who are out with COVID.
- We had several key personnel moves across the homes. WE had transitions with our medical teams in Hollidaysburg and Southeast. Both of those teams are now up and running. We hired a nursing administrator to serve the eastern side of the state and will be working out of Gino Merli.
- Recruitment retention is our biggest obstacle. We are applying for a federal VA grant this year. It will allow us to use federal funding to hire and retain nurses. We are hopeful to get a million dollars so that we can spread across the homes for incentives to help bring new nurses in the door as well as keep the nursing staff that we have. We have been working with the Office of Administration in downtown Harrisburg to get through several loopholes and it is making headway.
- We are doing well with admissions across the homes. Two of our homes are at 90%. Waitlists have stabilized but Delaware Valley and Southeast still have significant waits. Our current census across the state is 1,107 (73%).

- We have our first ever Vet-Con, which is a veteran's conference in Pittsburgh. It will be held September 4th through September 6. We have almost every secretary of the state's departments attending. There will be several individuals from the federal VA. There will be discussion groups about veteran employment, benefits, housing etc. and it is open to anyone who would like to join. All veterans' service organizations have received information about the conference but, if you would like more information contact Travis.
- The new building in Hollidaysburg is coming along. Pretty much the entire exterior has been enclosed and they are starting to lay tile and drywall. We are over 60% complete and are hopeful the new facility will be open this time next year.
- Gino Merli has had a lot of work completed, sidewalks are being replaced and we will be having a major construction project on the first floor. We will be converting our chapel space into a resident lounge and turning the canteen into a chapel/quiet reflection area. One of the challenges we have had in our current chapel is that it cannot accommodate all the residents when we have mass. Mass is a very popular weekly activity and is now held in the multipurpose room.
- The spousal benefit for our homes is one of the greatest assets we offer. Many nursing home patients in the community are Medicaid residents, which means that the state picks up their room and board. This leaves them with a personal needs allowance of \$65 to \$80 dollars per month. Our EVR residents, residents and spouses, allows them to keep \$450 per month on top of the wonderful care, high staffing ratios and robust activities calendar.
 - Richard Wren asked if the veteran's preference for hiring is extended to the spouse or children. Travis stated that there is nothing extended to the spouse or family for hiring.
 - Richard Wren asked for clarification of masses in the facility. Kathleen stated that we have 2 services. We have a Catholic service and a non-denominational service. Erica stated that we are looking into possibly have a rosary reading.

REPORT OF THE COMMANDANT

- Vito reported on June 27, we celebrated the 30th Anniversary of Gino Merli. We celebrated with food and activities, the mayor and generals attended. We also had a ceremony for several staff members who have been here since the inception 30 years ago. It says a lot about the facility to be able to keep a dozen or so employees for over 30 years.
- We had our annual golf tournament and this year it surpassed expectations. Preliminary numbers have us up around \$40,000 for this year. In 3 years, we have raised over \$100,000.00 for our resident welfare fund. We will continue to do the tournaments.
- General Weigl introduced me to the Twilight Wish Organization which is basically a Make-A-Wish for seniors. John Lubek turned 100 years old. He was a lifelong Yankee fan since, as he stated, "Babe Ruth got traded to the Yankees". He never got to go to Yankee Stadium. The Twilight Wish was for Mr. Lubek and his family to go to a Yankee game. They gave him the VIP treatment. He met the announcers; they were on the field, and they spent the whole day at Yankee stadium. They put his name on the board wishing him a happy birthday. We got him a Babe Ruth jersey that he always wanted, and it all happened on his actual 100th birthday.
- In October we have another veteran who will be 104 years old, Mr. Charles Tansits. We are looking to do something special for him as well.
- Yesterday the Scranton Police Department presented us with a donation. They had a car wash with the children and raised \$630.

- We are currently in survey. The Department of Health came in on Tuesday and they will be here until Friday. They have asked for copious amounts of documentation and have questions. All in all, it looks like it is going well.
- This Saturday will be our annual motorcycle ride. It starts at Harley Davidson in Dickson City and ends here. The weather doesn't look to promising but we will continue. If you are free this weekend, please join us. There will be food, vendors, and entertainment.

REPORT OF THE MEDICAL DIRECTOR

- Dr. Kazmierski reported that we had a bit of an outbreak of COVID over the last month or two. It was nothing dramatic and luckily no severe illnesses resulted. We had a total of 12 residents. Currently we have 2 positives recovering and 17 staff members total with 3 currently out.
- There are a few variants around and our community has been a bit sensitive to. The symptoms are more respiratory than the previous 2 years. The symptoms are nothing like we saw at the beginning of the pandemic but still causing a little more respiratory severity and we are being very cautious.
- The CDC recommends another booster to be times around the same time of the FLU and RSV vaccines. We will try to get as many, or all of our residents vaccinated as possible.
- We are receiving releases for our immunizations.
- We have had many new admissions. We are trying to lessen their medication lists as they come in. We are also working on our current residents as well.
- We continue to provide medical screening to eligible residents to remain proactive.
- We continue to try and decrease our antibiotic use.
 - Tim Booth asked what the immunization rates are among the residents.
 - Dr. Kazmierski stated that our previous vaccine rates have been high. The initial COVID vaccine was high but has been lessening a bit due to family members and society hearing things and misinformation. Erica stated that all our residents are offered the immunizations upon admissions and as things come up. Travis stated that we have approximately 1100 residents statewide, and of those we have had 640 residents receive their 2nd COVID dose and 848 receive the RSV. The first few years COVID vaccines were really high.

REPORT OF THE ADMISSIONS DIRECTOR

- Michael Our current census is 151 or 92%. We had 30 admissions and 12 discharges.
- The current wait times for veteran admissions is 6-8 weeks for skilled nursing and 6-8 months for secured nursing. The wait times for spouse/non vets it 10-12 months for skilled nursing and secured nursing is when there is availability. Secured care is memory care.

THE GOOD OF THE COUNCIL

- Erica stated that we are currently at 370 employees and our staffing ratios are well over the minimum with an average of about 4.
- Walk-In Wednesdays are still being held from 11:00 to 3:00 in the lobby for all departments. As always, we ask the council to assist us with referrals. We will be posting for an Infection Preventionist position. We just filled an RNAC position. We had 32 CNAs go through the onboard programming as employees as we train them and are now permanent CNAs here.

- Our residents are going to various off-site activities. They went to the Moscow Sports Club for their annual skeet shoot. It is one of the veterans' favorites. They continue to go to various VFWs and Legions for cookouts and other activities. They have gone on several fishing trips, which is a favorite. We had a few trips to the St. Ann's Novena and a cookout and fishing trip to the state park. We also have cookouts arranged for all the residents where our dietary team brings everyone outside or downstairs and does a nice barbeque type cookout for them.
- Kathleen reported that we recently had the family of Jim Megoc present a yearly grant to a CNA, Mihwa Tilberry. For the past 2 years, the family has presented a \$2,500 award to a nurse's aide in the memory of their brother. Jim was a CNA here at Gino for a long time. After receiving her award, Mihwa gave \$200 to hold a BINGO for the residents. The Tiki Bar is completed outside. We are waiting for the sign to be finished and added. The sign will be "Bardonski's Bar" after Ed Bardonski, a resident who had passed away but gave the money to have the bar built.
We have canteen and chapel improvements coming. It will make the most of our space and allow the residents more room to gather and socialize.
Our sidewalk project is finishing up and we will be starting on landscaping. We also received authorization to start our 5-year plan purchases for this fiscal year.
- Resident representative, Wilson Miller asked if we are going to be getting more WIFI in the building.
 - Travis stated that we have had improvements, but it is still not to where we would like it. Rewiring the building is a big project. We are working on it but it is available.
- Timothy Booth commended the facility and its employees. He stated that it is remarkable the work that is done to keep the numbers high and staffing here in a field that is difficult to fill at this time.
- Joe Chiochio reported that we are currently in the survey and he explained that we are in the second part of our corrections for the survey which we had in February with the VA.

ADJOURNMENT

The next meeting was announced: November 21, 2024, at 10:00 a.m.