

Southwestern Veterans' Center
Advisory Council Meeting
July 19, 2024

Advisory Council Members Present: (meeting held virtual)

Thomas Tallon, Military Officers Assoc. of America
James Lamison, AMVETS
William Aronson, Military Order of the Purple Hearts
William Roland, Vice President, VFW (via phone)
Gary Anspach, Marine Corp League
Edward Hanke, Disabled American Veterans
Ken Vybiral, American Legion
Tim Sager, Secretary, Keystone Paralyzed Veterans
Matthew Zamosky, PASACDV
Kenneth Stubbs, Resident Representative

Advisory Council Members Excused

Michael Chuey, Catholic War Veterans

Advisory Council Members Absent

None

Others Present

Barbara Raymond, Director of State Homes
Maureen Weigl, Adjunct General
Cassie Betzler, Commandant
Erin Rakow, Deputy Commandant
Traci Nuzzo-Land, Director of Nursing
Cheri McAfee, Assistant to the Commandant

Others Excused

Mark J Schindler, Acting Adjutant General
Travis Davis, Executive Director of State Homes
Dr. Blinn, Medical Director
Julia Myers, Admissions Coordinator
Rommel Dacanay, BVA
Paul Kennedy, TAL
Senator Devlin Robinson
Representative La'Tasha Mayes

Visitors

Susan Meighan, DMVA

Denise Wright, DON Secretary

Alley Harmon, RNS

CALL TO ORDER:

Meeting was called to order by Mr. Tallon at 10:00 AM. A Moment of Silence was held and then the Pledge of Allegiance was recited

ROLL CALL:

- *Roll call was taken*

SWEARING IN CEREMONY

- None

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING:

- *Accepted as read*

REMARKS FROM THE MEDICAL DIRECTOR: via DON

- *Medical Director was not present*
- *Traci Nuzzo, DON gave report in his absence*
- *Current have no Covid in the building*
- *Keeping up on vaccinations*
- *Approximately 3 to 4 residents currently have PNA – they are doing well at the current time, one is currently in the hospital*

Employee Recognition:

- *Denise Wright, DON Secretary – Employee of the Quarter*
- *Ally Harmon – Family member nominated for communication skills/her knowledge of her residents*

REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL MEMBER STATUS

- *Done*

ADMISSIONS & MARKETING UPDATE:

- *Not present*

REMARKS FROM THE DEPUTY ADJUTANT GENERAL:

- *The budget has been passed*
- *Currently concerned about the federal VA looking at their budget which they find very concerning, as they may not be able to pay all their benefits in October*
- *There will be a meeting on Monday to clarify information regarding the benefits - the VA medical health care is lacking staff which would impact care – I will pass on the information when I receive, they are a few million in the hole*

- *There have been several leadership changes at the GAP – went over who/what position*
- *Had a womens' magazine which was published, input a few of the residents who were recognized from SWVC*
- *There will be a conference held Sept 4 through 6 in Pittsburgh – it is our first PA veterans conference in conjunction with the PA National Guard Association and the head of the VA healthcare, as well as a few others – will be speaking, there are quite a few exciting speakers coming to speak on programs for vets*
- *Will have different break out groups/lots of vendors*
- *Will be held at the Wyndam downtown*
- *Not open to all veterans/this is for stakeholders/influencers helping the veterans*
- *Adjunct General will send information out*

REMARKS OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF STATE HOMES:

- *Not present*

REMARKS OF THE DIRECTOR OF STATE HOMES:

- *Travis had another meeting he had to attend*
- *Introduced new Commandant, Cassie Betzler – extensive long term care background*
- *Budget perspective – not many issues with the homes' budget*
- *LTC affected by budget – there was an increase for staffing*
- *Our reimbursement – its already extensively high /we actually do well with the Medicaid dollars*
- *Additionally, we are fighting for PACT Act dollars for our veterans, as well as getting more catastrophic medicines covered for our veterans – there will still continue to be out of pocket expenses for vets but we try to limit the amount of those*
- *HVH campus is looking beautiful, the exterior is almost completed to enable working inside for the winter*
- *Survey perspective– we continue with surveys at our homes, we try to help the homes with trending issues from prior surveys*
- *So far for the surveys we have seen minor issues, no harm issues across the board*
- *Education for the homes – the Adjunct General is to support a cultural change across the homes, we started having town hall meetings in all the homes to go over and discuss these issues*
- *Working on training programs with Alzheimer's, Department of Aging etc , in implementing training modules to educate staff – we are currently working on internal training for staff*
- *Staffing perspective – there are new CRNPs and physicians in a couple of the homes, looking for a physician in the Philadelphia area*
- *Pretty stable with key leadership roles across the homes*
- *Staffing -new regs started July 1, hours per patient per day increased from 2.7/pt per day to 2.8/pt per day – July 3.2/pt per day (need 320 hours for staff nursing)*
- *Working on increasing staffing, the government increasing the numbers puts a pinch on the homes – we budget for 3.8 hours of care which we meet quite easily – weekends are still rough*
- *Still have agency across the homes*

- *Barb explained to council how the process works on bringing in agency staff*
- *Dollar and sense wise it is slightly cheaper to have agency yet we prefer to have our own staff*
- *Covid perspective – we are actually doing well – a few staff are positive*
- *Hanke – looking at report – almost 150 vacancies as far as staff is concerned – when you figure in the hours – that is tough when you have that many vacancies – Barb agency and internal fill those vacancies*
- *Hanke – what are you doing to answer this problem over and above what you have done in the past – Barb – what we are doing across the bureau – working the with Fed VA to see if there are any grants for retention/referral bonus – other facilities are able to offer those bonuses – we have always been limited with this type of incentive Maureen – industry wide its and issue we are all vying for the handful of graduates –*
- *Barb - the burnout is really high and most are leaving the nursing field – Maureen we are looking at partnering with colleges as well as some new avenues of retention/hiring*
- *Barb when over other avenues – licensing through COMPACT program for transition of licenses*

REPORT OF THE COMMANDANT:

- *Cassie went over the Commandant report*
- *Town meeting held on 7/1 – we are encouraging staff to join committees and participate*
- *Working on our first active shooter program – will be doing a drill in the near future/Pittsburgh Emergency department will also be participating*
- *Had both surveys (DOH/VA) – 6 citations which are low ranking citation – all cleared*
- *VA – 10 citations POC 7/31*
- *HR position opened for recruiting/retention*
- *Andy Shevock returned to be HRA2 – Jamie’s old position*

DEPUTY COMMANDANT

- *New position in HR – Jamie Cuthbert promoted to concentrate on retention/hiring- working with onboarding to direct new employees – will be mentoring in leadership – will be on the floors working with employees and supervisors*
- *Construction – employee breakroom (8/1) possible finish date – excited to get it done which will open on some storage on other units*
- *Capital project – construction is slated to start 2026*
- *Eagle scout project in the works*
- *Mr. Hanke – was at car cruise –was a great day time – wondering what there is to do for the ladies in the same capacity - let the ladies enjoy a day of interest - Erin stated that we do several female directed activities*
- *MR. Tallon inquired about the resident vacancies’ numbers – Cassie/Barb answered all questions regarding the ratio numbers*

REPORT OF COUNCIL MEMBERS

OLD BUSINESS:

- *nothing*

NEW BUSINESS:

- *none*

GOOD OF THE COUNCIL:

- *Mr. Lamison, AMVETS, spoke about the Advisory Council donating funds for specific projects - they go to their organization and seek donations for the specific projects*
- *Mr. Aronson, MOPH – Veterans place sponsoring a cornhole tourney for homeless vets*
- *Mr. Hanke, DAV – Sharing and Caring boat ride is 2 days - Sept 4 and 5 – would love for the General to be there if at all possible –The General can possibly be there to send the boat off before the conference*

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL MEMBERS

- *Mr. Stubbs, Resident representative – nice to have the Commandant here – still waiting to see how much the staff is actually helping the residents here – some saying not getting enough attention – regarding going outside (Gary, MCL – wanted to know if they wanted to go outside is there enough help other than an RN taking them outside) do we have any staff to take some outside – if they ask staff on floor – do they have time to take them outside – if they take that time what do they do about the other residents they have to care for (Commandant – depends on the time of day they wish to be taken out- we can make anything work for a resident – Ken Stubbs stated that some ask to go out during lunch/change of shift) – Erin, DC stated that we shut down when the temperature was not appropriate to be out there*
- *Mr. Zamosky, PSACDVA– nothing really to add*
- *Mr. Anspach, MCL – I have been in this position for a couple of years – things that bothers me – the complaints I am getting that the vets have to fight for everything, our federal government is taking and keeps pushing them aside, what about other areas other than Pittsburgh? someone has to step up and do more for the vets other than just words – use the veterans hotline*
- *Mr. Sager, KPV – there are groups available to help people - gave examples*
- *Mr. Hanke, DAV - spoke about the VA and how they have helped him and stated you should be volunteering to help*
- *Mr. Vybiral, TAL– annual membership kicks off July 1 – American Legion baseball (eastern pa thing) hosting the AML baseball at the end of July, will be staying at LaRoche college – played at NA field – there will be media coverage – maybe bring some vets to watch the game?*
- *Mr. Lamison, AMVETS - nothing*
- *Mr. Aronson, MOPH – chapter donates money to the VA hospital every month – we donate to SWVC also, fundraiser end of August –*
- *Mr. Roland, VFW – nothing*
- *MR. Tallon – MOA – big on legislation – send message you are not alone – people are here to help – crisis line etc*

ADJOURNMENT:

A motion was made Mr. Hanke by and seconded by Mr. Zamosky to adjourn at 1130.

The meeting adjourned at 1:30 AM.

**Next meeting will be held October 18, 2024
at 10:00 AM**