



**DELAWARE VALLEY VETERANS HOME
ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES - February 8, 2023**

Advisory Council Members

In person

Allan Abramson, President Advisory Council (JWV)
James Ritchie, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Claudette Campbell, Military Officers Assoc. Of America
Larry Holman, Jewish War Veterans
Charles Trainor, Marine Corps League

Conference Call

John O'Donnell, American Legion
Richard Fine, AMVETS
Samuel Huhn, Blinded Veterans Association

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and Delaware Valley Veterans Home

Maureen Weigl, DAG
Patricia Derry, OA
Travis Davis, Executive Director, Bureau of Veterans Homes
Aurelio Peter Ojeda, Commandant
Mia Woods, Compliance Officer
Dontie Brooks, Regional Compliance Officer
Deborah Olivieri, Director of Nursing
Rita Yeung, Business Manager
Violetta Berdichevskaya, Medical Director
Yahvae Jones, Admissions Coordinator
William McGoldrick, Volunteer Resource Coordinator
Veronica Royster, Administrative Secretary

Absent

Bruce Boice, Disabled American Veterans
Barbara Raymond, Director, Bureau of Veterans Homes
Daniel McCollum, American Legion
Benjamin Mastridge, Vietnam Veterans
Charles Petronis, Catholic War Veterans
Martina White, PA House of Representatives

Residents

William Groomes, President Resident Council

Visitors

Dr. Wally Quinlan; For Council Member Brian O'Neill Office

- Moment of Silence
- Pledge of Allegiance
- Introduction of Attendees
- Approval of Minutes from November 09, 2022

Report from Violetta Berdichevskaya, Medical Director

- No covid, no flu, no pooping or norovirus in the building
- We are open for admissions; we are getting a lot of new patients. Yahvae is loading us with new admissions. All beds are full.
- The admissions are complicated with the wounds, but we are doing our job whatever we can do.
- No shortage in any vaccinations, we have a very high rate of vaccines. The flu vaccinations are all done, it is ending March 31st. as well as the shingles, which is relatively new.
- The rate is high, the Philadelphia County rate is high, we wear N95 mask and eye protection when taking care of patients.

Report from Yahvae Jones, Admissions/Marketing

- We currently have 109 Veterans on our waiting list, 2 of them are out of state and 27 non-Veterans. Our current census in house is 127, I have 3 admissions planned for the 16th, 21st and the 27th, which will put us at 130 out of the 171. We are still waiting for staffing for Bravo unit, which is why I have not filled up that unit. Once we do get adequate staffing, I plan on doing 2-3 admissions a day until the beds are full.
- I am working with different hospitals, they send referrals over to our facility, I check them to make sure they are a Veteran. I have been doing this for quite a while, I decided to track how many Veterans I do have. For the month of January, I got 109 referrals, 28 of them are Veterans, I did contact them and speak to them on the phone. I mailed them out an application, 10 came in for a tour and 4 are on our waiting list now. That is a good referral system I have been using for a couple months and it is working. I did also connect them to the DMVA, so they can get started with the service connection and compensation claims if they are eligible for them. I also let them know about our other 5 Veteran' Homes throughout the State if we cannot be of a resource for them.
- I am doing Standout and Saturday events for the Community with Congressman and Council persons when they have their events I am usually there.

Report from Dontie Brooks, Regional Compliance Officer

- We have four items, the 1st is BVH is non-compliant with a federal law that law says that direct staff must have a background check to ensure they are not excluded for providing direct service to our residents. To fix that we are on the backlog of purchasing those services, as more information is provided to us, we will communicate it to the committee. The 2nd is, we were informed by a CMSPVJ auditor that the Homes were over reporting. I am glad to report we were recently informed that the issue has been fixed, this item will come off the log.
- Benchmark and VistaMed- the compliance department will be doing a contract review, to ensure the services that are provided to us are in compliance with the contract.
Sam Huhn (Advisory Council Member) asked what do you mean by over reporting? Dontie replied, some Homes must report the number of hours they work, and included the lunch hours, which they should not. They were over reporting the hours an employee worked, so we fixed that.

Report from Maureen Weigl, Deputy Adjutant General

- Good morning, everybody nice to see you. I guess the biggest news is obvious, we had a change in Administration the Governor is sworn in. which means General Schindler right now is titled Acting Adjutant General until he until he will be confirmed again by the Senate, that probably will take place in May. So right now, our Legislative Affairs Office is working with the TAG to introduce him to all the Senators that he will have to testify again to get confirmed. Additionally, the Veep committee that we work closely with, the Senate has announced the names. We are waiting to get the final confirmation for the House Veep Committee. They have already moved forward, we have a hearing scheduled in March on Veterans suicide, I will be participating along with the Deputy Adjutant General for the Army Guard Laura McHugh, she and I will testify on Veterans suicide across the Commonwealth.

- Today joining us is Patty Derry, she is from the office of Administration, we work very closely with her when we talk about all the HR, the hiring and all the administrative policies that come down, she is actively involved. Patty, do you want to introduce yourself really quick. Hi everyone, I will follow up with General Weigl statements. I see some positive change coming out of the Governor's Office. We are really hoping to see an uptick in applications due to the 92% of jobs that does not require a bachelor's degree. That mean more applications are being referred back to you, we are watching it very closely. I heard you talking about staff being hired in order to continue to fill your beds, I would like to keep a close eye on that over the next few weeks. I will see if more applications are coming in the door and if we are getting more qualified candidates. We are addressing concerns as they come in the door. Recruitment and Retention is over this issue and the Governor is aware and he has been assisting us. I am glad to hear you are full, as full as you can be, that is wonderful news. It is also great to hear there is no Covid and no flu. I am really looking forward to spring when we can start getting our staff back out here to assist. Thank you for inviting me.
- A fun football game is coming up this weekend, I want to say the Eagles was very generous. They gave us more jerseys, so I believe everybody has an Eagles Jersey. The PA Wounded Warriors put everybody names on the back and about two weeks ago the PA Wounded Warriors came with a backdrop, they took photos, and they had a lot of fun. I do have pictures to give you from that day. Spring is almost here Patty. That is all I have, thank you.
- Dr. Wally Quinlan asked have you been seeing a decrease in Veteran suicide? General Weigl responded, nationally and within the State, we have come down a bit. The national number used to be 22 suicides per day for Veterans and today it is 17, that is still not a drastic decrease. Carbon County PA has the highest suicide rate nationally. We have a lot of Federal funds that was put into that area. The two demographics is still Veterans over 65 your Vietnam era Veterans and 18–35-year-old Veterans. The in between seems to be thriving and doing ok. Homelessness and suicide prevention are big on the Governor and the President agenda right now.

Report from Travis Davis, Executive Director, Bureau of Veterans

- I am going to cover my report, and I am also going to cover our director's report, because she is away at a conference today.
- Our waiting list continues to decline, today 324 across all six Homes, 952 Census, 62% occupancy rate.
- Star ratings we have another Home to join Delaware Valley Veteran's Home in the 5-star club. Delaware Valley, Erie and Gino J. Merli in Scranton are 5-star Medicare/Medicaid services facilities. Southeastern & Southwestern Veterans' Center are currently 4-star and Hollidaysburg is currently a 3-star. Fifty percent of our Homes have 5-star ratings, and we are proud of that.
- This first quarter we are expecting VA annual surveys at Southeastern, Erie and in Scranton, the teams are getting ready for that survey. What changed with the VA surveys is that they are back in person, the last two since the pandemic the VA went remote. Our team would go around with cameras and live stream the VA surveyors, they are now back in our buildings. You are all very familiar with the recognition survey, we talk about that a lot here at Delaware Valley, two of our team members are down at NASVH (National Association of State Veterans Homes) down in Arlington Virginia. They did a topic yesterday about recognition surveys, we were not the only State that felt some pain throughout that process. The Federal VA conducted fifteen nursing home recognition surveys in 2022, sixty percent of those surveys failed. The VA realize that asking a facility to be perfect three to four days is quite a challenge, they are committed to relooking at the stature, per the regulations. That was good to hear that we share some sweating tears with some other States throughout that process.
- The Medical Advisory we continue with that, we will be meeting this month, we always host those here at Delaware Valley, led by our Chief Medical Officer, those are going very well.
- PA bulletin rate, every year we have to post what our true cost of care is for each of our facilities, and it gets published in the PA bulletin, those rates will be coming out next month. We saw a dramatic increase of cost throughout the COVID pandemic. You think about the PPE and the testing, over the last two years we saw our

cost of care really go up. Now this only affect a very small percentage of our residents, those who paid full price of care. For example, within this facility out of 100 plus residents, we have 1 person that this affects. Our numbers across the state are about a dozen. Giving account that we have around a thousand residents, only a dozen is affected.

- Southeastern, Delaware Valley and Erie we saw the cost of care come down, Gino Merli and Southwestern was slightly up, Hollidaysburg was up about 13%. Here at Delaware Valley, they saw the biggest decrease, they were down 26% from last year, it will continue to decrease as Peter and team fill their unit. Great job Delaware Valley on their cost.
- Recruitment -Patty touched a little bit on this, we are still pushing our incentives as we have talked about in the past, like double overtime, our walk in Wednesday campaign that we started in November we are seeing really good success with that, we are seeing more success with the walk-in-Wednesday's then we are seeing with the job fairs. Delaware Valley next Job fair is May 3rd.
- Construction – Nothing to major on the construction updates since the last meeting. We did have our team from Hollidaysburg come out to the State Veterans Commission meeting last week to present our new facility. It is going to be constructed there this year, the plan is to break ground this spring if everything goes through with our VA grant application. The building will be named after a local hero.
- Peter will touch a little bit on the Delaware Valley's 20th Anniversary celebration, I know a lot of you were there. I thought it was a great celebration. This facility here continues to amaze me with the activities and the parties we host here for our residents and our families, they do a tremendous job.
- Sam Huhn asked How many residents at Delaware Valley are 100% or 70% service connected or above? And therefore, their cost as residents is undertaken by the feds rather than the state. Yahvae answered, we are about 20 people that are service connected and we are working actively with the intent to redo everybody else that is currently in our facility. Travis answered out of the six homes statewide, today we are at 11% between 70% and 100% service connected, that number does fluctuate. We are at 60% as our traditional maintenance fee, 28% EVR which is our enhanced Medicaid rate, and 2% of the entire state pays full cost of care.
- Allan Abramson asked do you have to be a veteran to get into the Veterans' Home. Yahvae answered you must be either a Veteran or a spouse of a Veteran to live in a state-run facility.

Report from Peter Ojeda, Commandant

- Over the past 3 months we had 12 admissions and 1 discharge.
 Monetary Donations for the past 3 months totaled \$17,053.00.
- **Activities**
 For the months of November, December, and January we had many events including music appreciation, bingo, movies, karaoke, painting with a twist and Eagles tailgate and game day parties.
- November 7th – Casino event for the residents.
- November 17th- Thanksgiving Dinner for our residents and families.
- December 19th – Donald Dahlburg 104th birthday celebration.
- December 21st – Christmas Dinner for our residents and families.
 The residents had a nice time and enjoyed their families being here to celebrate with them.
- We had the Delaware Valley Veterans' Home 20th Anniversary Celebration on January 25th.
 It was very very nice, everybody had a good time, the residents, the employees and all who attended.
 Dr. B. put a lot of umbrellas in here on Main Street, it was nice.
- This is probably the last advisory Council meeting Debbie will attend. I had many Directors of Nursing I have worked with, and no one has ever been like Debbie. I want to tell you that in 45 years no one has cared as much, not only for the residents but for the employees and everything. She has been the mother at DVVH. Thank you, Debbie, very much it is going to be a very hard divorce of you and I.

- **Upcoming Events**

Feb. 12th – Superbowl Eagles vs Chiefs Pregame Party.

Feb 14th – Couples Lunch with musical entertainment.

Feb. 20th – Wine and cheese party

COVID

- Presently, Covid is pretty much under control, but things can change daily.
- Construction – General Maintenance continues on the grounds and building.
- Overtime – any staff who works overtime will be paid double time. This is an incentive for staff to volunteer to work when needed.

CONSTRUCTION

- General maintenance continues of the grounds and building.

Report from William McGoldrick, Volunteer Resource Coordinator

- I have some more volunteers in the community, that are looking to come over here and help us out.
- The American Legion Post 810 was a huge supporter for us during our Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners. They 20 plus members here to serve.
- If you look at the newsletter I did last month, it is more less dedicated to the 20th Anniversary for the staff. The people that have taken care of the residents for the last 20 years. Activities did a fabulous job with all the decorations. What they put together is a wall of recognition of all the residents that ever lived in this building, that we have taken care of throughout the past 20 years. If you get a chance, please look at the recognition wall and remember some of your friends from years gone by that used to live here. It was a great event for the 20th Anniversary party. We had a lot of support from the community businesses in the local area. We look forward to another 20 years of five-star service.

Report from Debbie Olivieri, Director of Nursing

- I think as Dr. B. and Peter has attested to; we are returning to some normalcy in the building. We are supporting fun things for our residents and to help staff morale, that is a big thing these days.
- Everybody is healthy and relatively happy, if you get an opportunity to talk to any of our residents you will see that things are becoming a little bit more relaxed. It is a wonderful thing that we have no current infections here, we as well are looking forward to the spring. Thank you for allowing me to participate for the past number of years in the meetings and all your support and well wishes. Thank you.

Allan Abramson, President Advisory Council

- I think some day if we ever get to a point to take these masks off and walking around, we will see there is nothing, but nice things said by the people and the Veterans of this home. They say the staff and the Commandant always keeping us busy, happy with things to do and things to see. Activities and the volunteer group I am very happy with them. I am very happy to see everybody here. Anyone going back to Harrisburg today, have a good trip home.

Mr. Grooms, Resident

- William Grooms asked Peter did they get a menu for the Superbowl? Peter responded, yes, they will have cheesesteaks, pretzels, a Philadelphia spread.
- Question to General Weigl- Do you see any difference in the way Governor Josh Shapiro is going to approach the Veteran Homes or was he ever a Veteran? General Weigl answered I do not know if he is a Veteran, I am not aware of him being a Veteran. I think he is going to be supportive; he is asking the right questions. He is asking about the health and well-being of our homes, residents, and staffing levels. I think we are going to see him lean forward and be proactive in helping solving problems. He is diving into the homeless and suicide immediately.
- I appreciate the Commandant, Peter has breakfast with us in the morning, bring music into the room and have people singing. It is really great.

Old Business: Sam Huhn - Maybe it would be a good idea if the new Governor would rescind the other Governor prayer elimination. That way we could have a prayer before and after the meeting. Allan Abramson responded, I had it all planned out and written down and Jack did not show.

New Business: Two new members Charles Trainor (Marine Corps League) and Claudette Campbell were sworn in by Deputy Adjutant General Maureen Weigl. They would like to have a tour of the building. Yahvae took Claudette Campbell & Charles Trainor on a tour of the building.

Good of the Counsel:

Adjourned: 10:37 AM

Next Meeting: May 10, 2023