



**DELAWARE VALLEY VETERANS HOME
ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES – November 8, 2023, 10:00am**

Advisory Council Members

In person

John O'Donnell, American Legion
Claudette Campbell, Military Officers Assoc. Of America
Benjamin Mastridge, Vietnam Veterans
James Ritchie, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Charles Trainor, Marine Corps League

Conference Call

Samuel Huhn, Blinded Veterans Association
Dontie Brooks, Regional Compliance Officer
Larry Holman, Jewish War Veterans

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and Delaware Valley Veterans Home

Andrew Ruscavage, DVVH Interim Commandant
Yahvae Jones, Admissions Coordinator
Rinisha Thomas, Director of Nursing
Rita Yeung, DVVH Deputy Commandant
Veronica Royster, Administrative Secretary
William McGoldrick, Volunteer Resource Coordinator
Barbara Raymond, Director, Bureau of Veterans Homes
Erin Rakow, SWVC Deputy Commandant
Travis Davis, Executive Director, Bureau of Veterans Homes
Patricia Derry, Deputy for Administration, Fort Indiantown Gap
Kelly Hitz, Chief, Division of Grants

Absent

Richard Fine, AMVETS
Bruce Boice, Disabled American Veterans
Daniel McCollum, American Legion
Charles Petronis, Catholic War Veterans
Maureen Weigl, DAG
Mia Woods, Compliance Officer
Martina White, PA House of Representatives
Violetta Berdichevskaya, Medical Director

Residents

George Kocotis, President Resident Council

Visitors

- Moment of Silence
- Pledge of Allegiance
- Introduction of Attendees
- Approval of Minutes from May 10, 2023

Report for Violetta Berdichevskaya, Medical Director

- Dr. B. is on vacation, Rinisha Thomas Director of Nursing gave an update on her behalf.
- All of the vaccinations have been given out for the residents, we do not have any Covid.

Report from Yahvae Jones, Admissions/Marketing

- Good morning, there has been 12 admissions since our last meeting, we have six planned within the next two weeks, 2 discharges, and ten people unfortunately passed away.
- Our current census is 154 out of 171 beds. Our current waitlist time for a skilled Veteran is 43 and secured is 29 on the wait list. It is kind of hard for me to say what our waitlist time is. I can say, I am currently admitting who applied in July 2023 for skilled nursing which is about four months. For secured the last admission are those who applied in June 2022. It is about a year and a half for a secured bed at our facility at this time.
- Marketing – I have been out a lot and around, I just met with the DVVC Delaware Valley Veterans Consortium to see if they could get the six Veterans Home listed on their website, as a point of contact in the Delaware Valley area.
- I have met with different Council members because they have this book that I just found out about. It is like a resource guide; I am trying to get our name on that guide so we could meet with the Councilman as well.
- I was just asked earlier this morning to go on a radio show next Thursday, I am out doing as much marketing as possible. I still have very good connections with the Philadelphia VA, I am on their social work call once a month, and I am also doing a presentation at the care giver support quarterly meeting, that is open to the public on the 20th of this month.
- Sam Huhn asked a question according to the last minutes, there is not enough staff, has that been corrected or do they plan on having that corrected? Andrew replied, our numbers are up in staffing. They are up because we are utilizing some contract staffing. We will continue to hire as many Certified Nurse Aides as possible. To the question earlier about our nursing training program we are doing everything we can. Our numbers are up, we are doing very well with staffing at this time.

Report from Patricia Derry, Deputy for Administration, Fort Indiantown Gap

- We have a couple subject areas that we are going to talk about with the Commandant and Barbara today. Our time to fill is something that we are really improving on, we do not want it to be 90 days to hire an employee. We are looking at those processes and trying to refine them.
- We also have a host of IT agenda items today; we have our IT leadership here. We want to make sure that Del Valley has all the technology that they need to take care of residents. We have an agenda for after this meeting today to make sure that Del Valley is getting all the assistance from the Fort Indiantown Gap team that they need.
- Barbara added, staffing what Patty is discussing, as far as that time to fill, it actually has decreased significantly since the team at Fort Indiantown Gap was able to bring it back to a different agency. The time to fill for the past several months has dropped from 90 days down to about 72 days, we are really quite excited about that.

Report from Dontie Brooks, Regional Compliance Officer

- I just have one item to report on, in June 2023 a constituent reached out to Representative Hohenstein office to express concern about Del Val residents not receiving their toiletries as needed. In September 2023 we responded to Rep. Hohenstein office reassuring him that the residents are receiving their toiletries on a daily basis, because it is a part of their care. We also reassured the representative that the hygiene products are stocked on each nursing unit and our inventory is replenished on a weekly basis. We also reassured the representative the nursing staff delivers each product to the residents as needed or as upon request, as far as we know the issue is closed. That is all I have, any questions?

Report from Barbara Raymond, Director, Bureau of Veterans Homes

- Good morning, everyone, as always so glad everybody could join us, welcome everyone to Del Val.
- Covid – Across the six homes we currently have 26 residents that are positive with covid. Everyone is stable, minor cold like symptoms. No major concerns from that prospective. Currently those 26 residents are at our Hollidaysburg facility and our Soldiers and Sailors home up in Erie. We have 14 staff members that are currently positive, that is going thru several of our facilities. As we see the staff become positive a lot of times that is when we see our resident's population increase as well. Of course, this time of year cold and flu season we are certainly more susceptible to Covid. However, from the vaccine perspective it has definitely helped and of course that herd immunity generally speaking the country has as well, that is why we are seeing less severity in illness.
- Hospitalizations across the entire country are increased especially in those higher population areas, such as Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. Some of the more rural communities we do not see quite as large of a hospitalization spike, however we do continue to monitor those numbers to pay attention to where our risk is at our Veterans Homes. We had 4 total Covid deaths across the six homes. What happens with Covid deaths when it is listed on their death certificate, we count it, none of those 4 deaths Covid caused the death, the individual just happened to have Covid at the time and the Physician or Nurse Practitioner felt that Covid may have attributed to the death.
- Vaccine prospective we are doing quite well with the vaccine 803 of our residents we currently have around 1100 Veterans and spouses we are caring for across the six homes. 803 has been vaccinated for influenza. The Covid vaccine is not quite as good, that is about 144 across the six homes. That being said, the vaccine we do have available, that is approved through the FDA it does cover the XBB strain that is currently out there, and it is showing a 40% to 60% efficacy rate against severe illness. We may see minor cold symptoms from individuals versus that higher severity. We did recently have major outbreaks at our Del Val facility that Andrew will discuss, at our Gino Merli facility, and our SouthEastern facility, we had upwards about 30, 40, 50-60 individuals of our residents that were positive for Covid. Out of those individuals the main symptoms if any symptoms were cold, cough or sore throats. With the Covid Vaccine the recommendation is three to four months after your most reason bout with Covid to get the vaccine. That is probably another little bit of a reason why our numbers for that Covid vaccine are a little low. Because we had almost 300 individuals that were positive for covid in that timeframe.
- We will of course continue to encourage it to our Veterans, residents, and staff to obtain that vaccine, we do offer it to our staff here. Any Covid and Flu vaccine is paid for through Medicare without cost share, meaning there is no co-pay or no deductible from that perspective.
- The good news that we have going on, one of the other reasons beside for visiting with you lovely folks is we are conducting our new Commandant interviews, we did a preliminary interview with about a half dozen individuals last week. We narrowed that down to three individuals; those interviews are going to be later this afternoon. With any good luck, we will have a good Commandant announced to you in the next couple of weeks. We are excited for that; I certainly thank Andrew for stepping in for us, I have other things for him to do, so he is going to do another job for us when that time comes. We will leave Andrew here to help train whoever the individual is. So, you will see him around very likely probably for your next Advisory Council Meeting. We are really excited from that prospective.
- Admissions – We are holding steady well over a thousand individuals we are caring for, as Yahvae mentioned our waitlist is quite robust at our Del Valley and our Spring City facility out in Southeast. Some of our other Homes, the waitlist is a little bit less and we are actively doing some different marketing events to get them increased.
- Staffing is always the challenge for bringing Veterans and spouses in. Though our numbers are quite good from a staffing perspective, our population tends to lend us to where we like to have a higher percentage of staffing members taking care of our Veterans. We do not want to risk any unnecessary concerns from a staffing

perspective. You may see we have a waitlist here and we have available beds we do not want to completely fill up simply because of our vacancies from a staffing perspective.

- Four of our Six Homes are at a Five-star category, Travis has that information. Travis will cover the construction.
- PACTAct, I am sure you are going to your VA appointments talking about PACTAct. We here at the six homes are looking at where we can help our Veterans to increase their pensions, and revenue coming in. In addition, we are looking at catastrophic illness to help decrease our overall cost of care. Most of our Veterans do have part D, there are sometimes a co-pay and deductibles the Veterans have to pay, the VA is working with us to utilize catastrophic illness coverage for our Veterans instead of utilizing their part D.
- Five of our six State Veterans Homes were listed in Newsweek as Americas best. We are really very excited about it, Andrew here at Del Val facility was one of the five. When Newsweek look at information to determine Americas best, a lot of it is based on staffing, as well as the surveys. We had an incident at one of the homes where a resident was injured by a device that was used, so we had inspections completed on that. We put the processes in place to correct that, generally speaking any deficiencies that we receive from the various survey agencies, it is very minor deficient practices.
- Claudette Campbell asked Barbara how the RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus) Vaccine is. Barbara replied, the RSV vaccine we do offer that as well, it is up to the medical provider to determine if the individual is considered high risk. Sam Huhn asked you mentioned that somebody got hurt, what was the device? Barbara replied, it was an electrical stimulation, unfortunately the individual happened to get a burn from that.

Report from Travis Davis, Executive Director, Bureau of Veterans

- Sorry I am late; I will be brief because I know Barbara covered a lot. Federal staffing mandate, there was a proposal by the centers of Medicare and Medicaid. This came out in September of this year, they are looking for feedback, we are not in favor of this proposal, one of our biggest issues right now is that it does not includes LPN's. As you all know LPN's play a huge part on our teams. It is not something we are supporting. We did submit our comments, and which were online to varies agencies, and submitted our responses to the Governor's office. What the Governor's office choose to do with them we are not quite sure at this point, because the Departments of Human Services and Department of Health are also developing comments, we do not know if they are going to submit ours as one. Federal Staffing proposal will cost each facility in the nation about 300 to 400 thousand dollars per year, there is no reimbursement at their proposal. There is a lot of work that goes with this proposal.
- We have four of our Homes that are currently a five-star rating which include, Delaware Valley, Gino Merli, Southeastern, and Southwestern Veteran Center. Two of our homes are three-star ratings, Hollidaysburg, and our facility out in Erie (PSSH).
- Job Fairs- Delaware County compared to all our other homes, had a lot more who attended this year. It tripled the number of attendees. It takes a lot of work for the teams when we do those job fairs. Our Nursing and HR, they work hard on these job fairs, so thank you to Delaware Valley for that.
- A quick update on construction, we have a lot of job order projects going on across the homes, it is nice to see that we are on pace, and we keep the projects going as planned. We have seen a lot of private industry homes not being able to do things as planned because of occupancy rates, and some of the financial troubles they had. Hollidaysburg is our big project right now, our new construction of the 200 bed Veterans Home. They just started putting steel up, we walked the grounds a couple of weeks ago. The project is on track, it is exciting to see. That is the major updates from a construction standpoint. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.
- Sam Huhn asked how come PA Soldiers' and Sailors Home is only a three-star facility and they did improvements over the years? Travis replied that facility has been historically a five-star facility for

quite some time. As mentioned before about the one accident we had out there, one incident like that can really jeopardize a facility, which it did in this case. It put them into an immediate jeopardy situation, we were able to clear. That is going to set us back a year or two. We are confident with our staffing members that our quality metrics are improving, the other category within the five star is your health inspections. We are going to carry that deficiency for two years; in the meantime, we are working to getting that facility back. I do not know when we will be back to a four star, we will get there. That is the challenge with this industry, one incident is almost like your credit score, just don't miss a payment, and you are done for years.

- Ben Mastridge added in the past we discussed salary of the people you are hiring, and it being not competitive, because people are leaving to go to other facilities because they pay more. Is that coming forward a little bit more? Travis replied, salary and benefits I think we are very competitive, we struggle with our incentives, the bonus and the sign-on. Those things we just cannot do, but from a salary standpoint where we are bringing our clinical team in, dietary team in, we keep pushing the envelope, we are competitive on that front. I think some of our numbers have shown that in areas that are really lacking. Like right now especially in the Philadelphia area we are struggling with transportation, you see amazon and wawa we are competing against. Those are things we are taking downtown with the help of OA, to bring some awareness to our problem. We are not going to get anyone unless we do something with the rate. A driver in Northeast Philadelphia is going to expect more than a driver in Central PA, that is what we are seeing across the board.

Report from William McGoldrick, Volunteer Resource Coordinator

- I would like to recognize some organizations that has helped us for the past three months. PA State VFW Auxiliary and the Vietnam Vets Memorial Society has been sponsoring lunch and a movie every month. American legion Post 810 has been sponsors all our trips, we take busloads of our residents out into the community to Walmart shopping and stuff like that. American Legion will come to the locations and help take care of our guys; we would not be able to do it without their support. Bingo is popular here, it is sponsored by different auxiliaries, The DAV, American Legion, VFW, and The Knights of Columbus. Just recently this past week we had great support with the trunk or treat, it was supported by multiple organizations, American Legion VFW, and even our Commandant decorated his truck and participated. Lastly, we just had the Veterans Day parade in Philadelphia, we had a motorcycle escort from the Legion riders to the parade from our Home. The Continental Post 263 was our motorcycle escort and they also helped us at the parade, a big shout-out to them as well.
- Ben Mastridge added there is one other thing, last week the deal with the mascots, that was by far one of the best things I have ever attended here. By the way my wife is the President of the Auxiliary for the state of PA, so she is involved in a lot.
- Bill said I would like to give a huge shout-out to the Purple Heart Organization. They donated all the freebies that we were throwing at the General while she was talking, stuffed animals and stuff like that.

Report from Rita Yeung, Deputy Commandant

- I just want to say we have the holiday season coming up. First, this Saturday is Veterans Day, and we are going to serve steak and salmon, we are going to have a fun time. Following that we will have the Thanksgiving and Christmas Dinners. I just wish everyone a happy holiday.

Erin Rakow, SWVC Deputy Commandant

- I am from Southwestern Center in Pittsburgh; I am here to help with the interviews. Since I drove five hours, I want to see the building, attend the meetings, and learn and take away what I could back to SWVC. Thank you very much.

Report from Andrew Ruscavage, Interim Commandant

- Good morning, I wanted to expand on what Barbara talked about with Covid here at our Facility. In the middle of September into the end of October, we were experiencing a Covid outbreak at Delaware Valley. In all 70 residents and 38 staff contracted Covid. No signs or symptoms were real serious. Everybody was fine in that respect; we have to remain diligent. We still have hand sanitation across the facility, people are encouraged if you want to wear a mask, please feel free to do so. Every resident and staff member were offered the flu vaccine and the covid vaccine. We are getting good results with the residents with the flu vaccine. With the flu season coming up, obviously we will see Covid at the facility at some point and time. We will take the actions we need to take to keep everyone safe as possible.
- Over the past 3 months we had 6,630.00 in donations from your organizations, thank you we could not do this without you all and keep this place going.
- We talked about most of the activities already.
- Our job fair was on October 12th, we had 25 candidates come into the facility that were actually interviewed for positions. Dietary, housekeeping, Nurse aids, LPNs, and RN'S. No drivers came in, Travis mentioned that is something they are looking into. It is down from our last one, this is our second job fair this year, our job fair in the spring we had 60 people show up. We keep track of these individuals every single week, some of them we did not have a position for them. Rinisha and I were doing interviews the other day, when we do not have it available, some people want one particular shift, if we do not have it, we offer them something else. We will not get all twenty-five of them, we try to get as many as we can. We still have the Nurse-Aid training program, our first three that went through the training has successfully completed the class and are scheduled to take their test. They will have a practical and a hands on, and they will be certified Nurse Aids. If they are all doing well, working at the facility, blending with the staff and the residents, we are keeping our fingers crossed, once they get certified they will actually stay here and be long-term at Delaware Valley. Claudette said that it is an excellent program.
- We are having a Thanksgiving dinner, and Bill is still looking for volunteers, it will be next Thursday the 16th at 5:00pm, we are meeting here at 4:30pm. We have over 100 family members that will be here with our residents for that dinner, it is going to be a house full. We are practicing hand hygiene, the hand sanitizer, and the mask will be out. Right around the corner is Christmas dinner December 20th same time at 5pm. The Adjutant General, Deputy Adjutant General, Executive Director, Director, everybody is going to be here, so it is going to be a good time at Christmas.
- There is a lot of construction going on here at DVVH. We are in the middle of a HVAC project, with the heating and air conditioner here at the facility. They are working in the ceiling in here, they are changing all the VAV's Variable Air Volume Control, it controls the heat and cooling in the facility. This project is going to take approximately another two to three more weeks, we are having some temperature fluctuations in the facility in the common areas. The resident rooms are not affected, in the common areas some days it was really hot and some days it was really cold, because they are changing out all these valves in the ceiling. Once that gets completed, we will start working on the

units above. In this conference room the entire ceiling is going to be coming down, they will have to reinforce the whole ceiling because they are putting a new unit on the roof. We are going to have a very large crane sitting out in our parking lot for a little while. This project also has a lot of other things going on with it, and it will be going on until probably the summer. Our entire driveway coming in will be widened on both sides. We will have a guard shack that will be positioned in the middle. We will keep everybody updated with what is going on, we are keeping the residents informed, family members, Department of Health, and Veterans Affairs.

- Does anyone have any questions for me? Ben said thank you very much, and congratulations on being the Commandant, I am sure they have more things for you to do, and I am sure you will do a wonderful job.
- Andrew informed everyone, if anyone would like to stay for lunch you are welcome to stay for lunch in B Unit dining room.

Benjamin Mastridge, Vietnam Veterans

- Ben asked Barbara if she would like to read the letter, the email she sent out about Peter retirement. Barbara replied sure I will read it, back in September when Peter signed his retirement papers, if you do not know I did send this letter out to all of you, Ben asked if I would read the letter. Barbara read the letter and said soon we should be sending you a different letter announcing our new Commandant within the next couple of weeks. Ben asked are there any reports of the Council members. Ben congratulated George Kocotis for being the new Advisory Council Resident Representative President.
- I want to thank everyone for putting up with me this meeting, I moved it right along. Let's keep Allan in our prayers, I do not know exactly why he is not here, I think it was some sought of medical procedure. Please, let's keep him on our minds.

James Ritchie, Veterans of Foreign Wars

- I have a personal issue; I will pass out papers. The flags outside were put up wrong. The apex of the triangle should be facing away from the building not toward the building. I was told they got it angled now to face Southampton Road. That means that for twenty years it was wrong. The flag is something that means a lot to me and should be taken care of. I know that it is not going to be done fast or cheap. I saw that the first day and I almost ran into it with my car, that is how mad I was. Ben Mastridge said Jim, I have a question for you, I have discussed this with you before and I am looking at that. What exactly is it, the configurations of the flag or the concrete that you are opposing? Jim replied, the arrangement of the triangle of the flag. When you come in the driveway the American Flag is in the center of this arrangement ok, when you are coming up the driveway for Southampton Road, the American Flag as you are looking at it then is in front of the other two flags, which is the proper way. But the way it was set here when they built the brand-new building the American flag was in the front, and the two flags behind it closer to the building. This alignment is not in agreement with the original setup. Andrew said so you are saying it was put in, so you are looking at it coming in this way, that is what you see when you are driving up the driveway. Once you take the corner and looking at the building now it is not in right alignment. What you are saying is it should be in right alignment when you are looking at the building where the original poles were. Jim said right. Bill added what we also discussed about it was if you put the honor guard behind the flag, the honor guard is not protecting the building the honor guard is protecting the park. Jim said this is really important to me.

Claudette Campbell, Military Officers Association of America

- I will continue to try and see if I can get volunteers. I am interested in the donations to the Delaware Valley Veterans Home. How do you get your organization to provide donations?
- Bill replied, hi my name is Bill we spoken many of times. What happens is a lot of the organizations will call me and ask what we need. I develop a wish list; I send out the wish list, as well as a request asking do they want to sponsor an event. For example, the VFW sponsors bingo every month, and they sponsor a special horse racing event, which today you will actually see if you hang out here until 2:00pm today. Organizations call me or call the home; we also have a website. Our website has a link for all donations. If you click on the website, it will give you the instructions on how to send money electronically or via check to donate to the Home. There are multiple resources that are available for the donating public. We don't really do any fundraising or anything like that, it is just literally here we are, this is what we have and when they call us, I tell them this is what we need. So far it has been working out really well, the church around the corner just sent a list. They are buying 100 of our residents Christmas gifts. The Knights of Columbus just called me they are doing 5, The American Legion is doing 20, The VFW Auxiliary is doing 20, everyone of our residents will get a Christmas gift from the Community without me even asking, they come to us. Claudette asked what is the website? Bill replied it is on the top of the agenda. All the homes have the same process for donating.

Samuel Hunh, Blinded Veterans Association

- I have a question about the last meeting, The Deputy Adjutant commented about the proposal to increase the monthly stipend to the blinded Veterans and the paralyzed Veterans increased from \$150.00 to whatever the heck it was. It was approved by the government, somehow it never happened. I was wondering if anybody knows if it did not get budgeted or lost track? No increase for the blind or paralyzed Veterans. Travis replied he doesn't know, but he can follow up with General Weigl, I will shoot her an email this week and let you know. Sam said ok, I appreciate that very much, I told people at our meeting that we are going to get an increase. They did not get the increase, and now I am getting all these phone calls. I do not like being the bearer of bad news.
- The meeting today was very good. I have problems right now transportation wise, like everyone else does. I am still recuperating from a heart surgery last Thursday. Monday, they released me from the hospital. I am recuperating and trying to do the best I can. I had it done at Doylestown Hospital, which is unfortunate that it is too far away from my house. It is a good hospital. I live in Elkins Park, its over an hour drive. They had to shock the heart rhythm back in order.

Old Business: None

New Business: None

Good of the Counsel: None

Adjourned: 10:50 AM

Next Meeting: February 14, 2024