



**Pennsylvania Soldiers' and Sailors' Home
Advisory Council Meeting
Erie, Pennsylvania
March 14, 2024
9:00 a.m.**

ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr. Gary Fry, President, AMVETS
Dr. Bobbi Cumpston, County Director of Veterans Affairs
Mr. Raymond J. Chambers, Vice President, Marine Corps League
Mr. David Price, Military Order of the Purple Heart
Mr. Harry Stewart, American Legion
Mrs. Karen Foust, Disabled American Veterans
Mr. Keith Eller, PSSH Resident Council President
Mr. Richard Supak, Catholic War Veterans
Mr. Joe Benacci, Director Erie County Veterans Services

ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT

Mr. Richard DiGiacomo, Secretary, Military Officers Assoc. of America
Mr. Anthony DiGiacomo, County Director of Veterans Affairs
Mr. Robert C. Eiler, Veterans of Foreign Wars
The Honorable Daniel Laughlin, PA Senator



OTHERS PRESENT

Mrs. Maureen Weigl, BG (PA Retired), Deputy Adjutant General-VA

Mr. Travis J Davis, MHA, NHA, HSE, Executive Director, Long-Term Care

Mrs. Barbara Raymond, RN, NHA, Director of Veterans' Home

Mrs. Cheri Spacht, RN, NHA, PSSH Commandant

Mrs. Elizabeth Seibert, PSSH Deputy Commandant

Mrs. Rasheda Goodwine, PSSH Commandant Assistant

Mrs. Alyssa Cooley, Administrative Officer

Mrs. Teresa Brown, Quality Assurance Risk Management Coordinator

Mrs. Ashley Meghat on behalf of Congressman Mike Kelly's office

Mrs. Katie Nagle on behalf of Senator Daniel Laughlin's office

Mrs. Alicia Grassi, Visitor

Mr. William Rose, Visitor

Mr. Ed Kissell, Visitor

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Gary Fry called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

MOMENT OF SILENCE AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mr. Gary Fry led a moment of silence, and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

ROLL CALL

Mrs. Rasheda Goodwine took roll call for all present.

SWEARING IN OF COUNCIL MEMBERS

Dr. Bobbi Cumpston was sworn in by Mr. Gary Fry.

APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

A motion was made by Mr. Fry and seconded by Mr. Benacci to approve the minutes of the Advisory Council Meeting held on December 12, 2023. Motion carried, and minutes were approved and written.

MEDICAL DIRECTOR UPDATE

Mrs. Spacht provided update on behalf of Dr. Millie:

Our position on Covid remains the same. We are fortunate to only have 2 employees out with Covid (asymptomatic). We are going by the newest recommendations for the spring, which is to give another vaccination shot to our residents. We are presently providing and gathering authorizations for the vaccinations.

Currently we have zero RSV or Influenza infections for residents and staff, which was an issue around the holiday season. The RSV vaccine was offered to all our residents also.

Any Questions?

ADMISSIONS AND MARKETING UPDATE

Mrs. Spacht provided update on behalf of the admissions coordinator:

Currently our census is 157. We have 29 residents on our memory care unit. There are 71 residents in our nursing care units. We have 57 residents in our personal care unit. We are working diligently with admissions on a weekly basis to plan outreach for the facility now that we can go place to place and offer our services and distinguish the needs of the community.

Any Questions?

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF LONG-TERM CARE

Director Raymond provided the update on behalf of Executive Director Davis:

Good morning, everyone. General Weigl and Travis have other engagements, they were unable to join us in person. They are on the call today for this meeting in case there are any questions for them. As far as the state veteran's homes, much like Cheri mentioned with Covid, RSV, and Influenza over the colder months, there were some outbreaks throughout the homes. Currently we have 10 residents positive for Covid at our Gino J. Merli facility. That's the only facility with residents that are positive. Our Gino J. Merli as well as Erie have current staff members that are positive with Covid. Across the six homes we do not have any residents with Influenza or RSV. Just like Cheri was mentioning we do have the spring Covid vaccine across all six homes. Currently, with the fall dose of Covid vaccines, we had around 50% of the residents that did accept the Covid vaccine. We are just now starting the spring dose, so I don't have any numbers for you on that information just yet. We also offer the RSV, Pneumonia, Influenza, as well as Shingles vaccine throughout the veteran's homes. It is periodic, depending on when the resident's due for such vaccinations, or their medical provider wants to encourage vaccination or whenever they agree to it.

As far as surveys go, since our last meeting, our Delaware Valley facility had the VA and the Department of Health in around Christmas time. It was like a little Christmas present for them. They did very well with that survey, no major issues or concerns from that prospective.

At our Southwest facility we did have a survey there where we ended up in what we called an immediate jeopardy situation. We have a scenario where one of our residents did fall. The resident did subsequently pass away. There was one part in the resident plan of care, that the staff members weren't following exactly. The way the intervention was written was that the resident would have 1:1 care, if available. The Department of Health felt that was not clear enough guidance or direction for the staff, so the resident happened to fall. Subsequently went to the hospital, declined in the hospital, and subsequently passed away. The physician did indicate that the fall was a contributing factor to the individual's demise. This a self-report (we must report these types of things). When the Department of Health came in, they felt that the plan of care was unclear to the staff, they put us in what was called immediate jeopardy. We did clear that, and we are back in substantial compliance at that facility. Overall, we stayed at a 5 star at that facility. However, our star rating for health inspections went down to a 3 star. So, it is just something that we continue to work with the homes on, making sure that the plans of care are clear for our staff members that must care for the residents.

We are anxiously awaiting, as Cheri will talk about, for the VA to come to our Erie facility. Two weeks ago, they were at our Southeast and our Gino J. Merli facilities. There were also very minor deficient practices out there (no issues or concerns). What we do with all the surveys is take the information back to all 6 of the veterans' homes. To ensure if there is anything that will affect any of our veterans' homes, we will make sure to correct that across the board. Cheri will talk more about the Department of Health, and Department of Human Services most recent visits.

From a staffing update, since last we met, we do have a new Commandant at our Delaware Valley facility. Our long-term Commandant retired. So, our Commandant there had been our social work coordinator for all 6 of the homes within the bureau. She is a licensed Nursing Home Administrator. She applied for the Commandant position, and we are very happy

to have her. Even though she has been very busy, she had a heat outage within her first week, which is something that we take back to all 6 homes to make sure that our Emergency Preparedness Plans are up to date to help mitigate any concerns from those unfortunate events that do indeed happen.

Also, from a new staffing perspective, our Gino J. Merli and Hollidaysburg facilities both have new Director of Nursing. Our Southeast facility has a new Medical Director. I had the opportunity to meet her this week. Travis and I were both



down there, and I think she will be a nice addition to the Southeast facility. Some of our staffing challenges, in addition to nursing, is Social Services. We did make some changes with classification with Social Services to help mitigate some of the concerns with staffing and filling those vacancies. So now at each of our veterans' homes has a social worker that has that bachelor's level of social education versus us initially requiring the master's level of education. We were struggling to fill that; regulatory wise we can meet the regulation needs if we transition one of our social workers to the bachelor's level. We just started that, so not sure if that will help mitigate the vacancy challenges. Pertaining to our Southwest and Hollidaysburg facilities, both of those facilities had residents that we had to transition to the hospital due to behavioral issues and concerns that we are unable to care for. Both of those individuals, the hospitals, nor their families were very happy. Unfortunately, the behaviors that were continuously exhibited by these 2 individuals were such that just could not meet their needs. So, at this point in time, we are unable to take them back into our facilities. They are being placed elsewhere in the Commonwealth or outside of the Commonwealth. It is certainly a difficult decision to make but we need to protect our existing residents, as well as our staff. The behaviors were quite severe. Just in case you hear anything, that is our Hollidaysburg and Southwest facility (one individual for each facility).

Pertaining to occupancy, we are over 70% at all our facilities, except Southwest and Hollidaysburg. We are just about 60% for both of those facilities. Our waiting list at Hollidaysburg is not very robust. At the Southwest facility, the primary challenge is staffing. RN's, LPN's, CNAs are overall the biggest challenge across the bureau.

We have construction going on at our Hollidaysburg facility. The building is coming along very nicely. It is almost unrecognizable. I drove by the campus a couple of weeks ago. It just looks very different already. We are very excited that everything is on track for that building. We certainly expect it to be a premiere facility. From a census perspective, we expect to be able to fill that to capacity very quickly.

Our Delaware Valley and Southeast facilities recently had the kitchen flooring redone, with minor interruptions in service to the residents. There were just a couple days they had more soup and sandwich type meals, but everyone was happy and well fed.

An update at our Delaware Valley facility with our new Commandant, just last week we had a small fire. We are not entirely sure of the root cause of the fire. We do believe it was one of two issues, perhaps somebody that was smoking in the building, or up above the light fixtures that looks like a shelf and sticks out from the wall, sometimes things end up on the shelf such as books, gloves, or linen. Something caught fire. There was minor damage from a smoke perspective (small amount of soot on the wall). There was some water damage, but the staff did a phenomenal job there. Much like all the water issues that Erie has had over the years, the staff really pull together, and they do a really good job. We didn't have to displace any of those residents or veterans outside the community outside of Delaware Valley. We did have to move their rooms around. Almost everyone has transitioned back into their original bedrooms. Just like anything else we pushed that out to the entire bureau, to make sure to include those things in the routine regular rounds (making sure nothing is above the light fixtures).

Last on my list, we continue with the PACT ACT (PACT ACT and Catastrophic Illness). Thanked Joe. We continue to work with our revenue teams to make sure our veterans have whatever they are entitled to. Those are the highlights from my report.

Any Questions?

REPORT OF THE COMMANDANT

Mrs. Spacht provided update:

Good morning, everyone. I just want to welcome Bobbi. This is her first Advisory meeting. Welcome. Cheri introduced Mr. Keith Eller as the new PCU Resident Council President. Welcome Mr. Eller. Welcome visitors.

For staffing, our personnel status report for our compliment, we have a total of 278 positions in our facility. We have 236 filled with 42 vacancies. Our Quality Assurance Specialist position remains open, and interviews are tomorrow for that position. Our PCU Administrator Kim Knapp retired. Beth Seibert is the interim. We are getting ready to interviews for that position. There are 6 LPN positions open, 4 RN positions open, 28 Nurse aide positions open, 1 Food Service Worker, and 1 Activity Aide position open. We have postings of all positions and are currently interviewing. We still have the CNA trainee program that we offer here at the facility, which assists us with the nurse aide positions that are still open, to get those filled. We do currently have agency staff in the facility for the CNA positions until we get those positions filled. That is it from a staffing perspective.

Any Questions?

Mr. Fry asked "How short are we on nurse aides? Mrs. Spacht responded we are meeting our resident to staff ratio. We are above that with the new staffing regulations because those have changed beginning last July. We have tentatively scheduled to make sure that we stay within those guidelines for the new changes coming up as well. Gary responds those are fat numbers. Cheri responds it is, but we are where we need to be for our goals.

As Barb mentioned we are waiting for the VA. It's kind of out of the norm for them not to be here in February but we are always ready for when they want to come in. We are also prepared for and in our Department of Health annual survey window. We had the Department of Human Services come in for their annual survey on the personal care home side. Beth will speak to that regarding the deficiencies that were received.

We have many construction updates at our facility. At our last meeting, the bridge was voted on and named "The Veterans' Memorial Bridge". We are currently in design for the bridge signage. Once we get the signage all squared away then we will have a ceremony for the bridge. We have several projects coming up for all areas of the facility. There will be various door replacements, entire parking lot paving throughout the campus, roof replacement of our PCU entry way, our pa system will be upgraded campuswide, and HVAC systems will be replaced and renovated. Our dish room in the main dining room on PCU will be replaced. We did have an area where there was a cooler at one point that was removed because we had the new coolers installed downstairs. That area is almost done being renovated. The employee breakrooms are going to be upgraded. State veteran's cemetery improvements continue. We do currently have an issue with our cable through Spectrum. Our equipment that we have here at the facility is dated and needs to be replaced with digital. The Commonwealth and Spectrum worked together and as of this week; we did sign off on the agreement for that to get started. We are just waiting on a start date to start replacing what we need replaced. During this situation the cable

works but there are certain stations that will not work. Then we must reset our boxes that are downstairs at the main area where the cable is at. We did come to an agreement this week, and it was signed by both parties, so we look forward to the equipment getting replaced. Our elevator on the personal care home unit is having issues where it is needing reset. We have our contracted vendor in here quite often, so we can get it repaired, until a replacement can be done. Currently we do not use the elevator to go down to the ground floor, which is where the elevator was getting stuck. Which has no impact on resident use because the ground level is only used for facility staff to take out garbage which we have another means of getting the trash outside now. There are a few things Beth will discuss regarding the Eclipse coming up and our plans for that.

Any Questions?

Mr. Supak asked about the Commandant's Quarter? Mrs. Spacht replied Currently, there are plans for the demolition to occur at the Commandant's house. In addition to plans for that demolition, there is also plans for the memorial walkway that we are going to create with some of the brick from the Commandant's house. It's going to be a walkway with a sitting area. We're going to have a pavilion out in that area once we figure out where everything is going to settle after the house is down. There will also be additional parking around that area.

COMPLIANCE REPORT

Mrs. Seibert provided update on behalf of Mrs. Werner:

Welcome everyone. This report was shared by our regional compliance officer Beth Werner. I act as her liaison at PSSH. PSSH had their first quarterly compliance meeting on March 4th. There are no open investigations for PSSH currently. The regional compliance team did complete their FPA's (Facility Performance Assessments) mock survey at Southeast, Hollidaysburg, and PSSH skilled nursing and personal care units. PSSH FPA is scheduled for August for both the skilled nursing facility and the personal care unit. The compliance team did complete 4 of the 9 FPA assessments. Cheri mentioned that the personal care unit had their annual survey that is conducted by the Department of Human Services. That was in the last week of January. March 20th is our date certain for following up on the 3 tags that we did receive from the Department of Human Services. Two of the tags fell under the sanitation area. One was regarding glucometer use and our plan of correction is to make sure all individuals have their own glucometers. An ongoing issue that we are continuing to work on with the residents is avoiding the convenience of having their urinals in their rooms and encouraging them to take them into the bathroom and dump them out to eliminate any sanitation issues with any urinals in the rooms. Also, the care plans which are called support plans on the personal care unit are updated with each incident that might recall a significant change in the resident's care needs. Those 3 things including education of the staff and residents, some policy reviews, and some ongoing audits to make sure we remain in compliance with education. Yesterday our Quality Assurance Specialist and I went through all the documentation and have everything for our plan of correction. So that should be successful.

Barb mentioned the facility's Emergency Disaster Plan. As part of our Emergency Disaster Plan, we update our facility assessments periodically and annually. The tool is a snapshot of the care needs of the residents served, as well as emergency response information along with the natural disasters as determined by the Erie County Emergency Planning committee. We offer review of the tool to the Advisory Council upon request. The Safety Committee implemented efforts related to the Total Eclipse on April 8th. The event is expected to create traffic burdens throughout the county and as a result the safety committee reviewed and set some mitigation measures with the delivery of care and services. We are also balancing concern with pleasure and are planning activities for the residents to enjoy the event as well.

We had our Personal Care Unit annual survey by the Department of Human Services (DHS) the last week in January, received three tags, two pertaining to sanitation and corrective action implemented immediately. One was regarding using individual glucometers for each resident who needs to use them, encouraging the residents to use the bathroom facilities rather than using urinals and if they must use a urinal to make sure they empty them out appropriately. The other tag was related to updating support plans which required educations to be done and ongoing auditing. The submission of the follow up activities will occur.

Ken Vybiral, our Volunteer Resources Coordinator is off. He wanted me to point out the latest copy of the Beacon, which is included in the packets as well as a flyer related to the Congressional Medal of Honor celebration planned for March 25th at 10 a.m. in our PCU Chapel.
Any Questions?

Mr. Chambers asked if there would be added security along the outer perimeter of the campus? He also stated the campgrounds at the foot of Wayne Street is already overbooked.

Mrs. Seibert responded that is one of the areas that is vulnerable, along the Bayfront Highway. Our IFSS (Institutional Fire and Safety Supervisor) and maintenance director have walked the perimeter to see where they can try to block off any access points. They have talked to the Erie Police Department liaison. He said from a parking perspective, we may see people that just come up along the Bayfront and just park anywhere. So, we are cognizant of that. Again, we will have all our security guards, regardless of the typical schedules. We will have some vehicles that will be parked along the back, just to make sure that we have eyes on different access points.

Mr. Chambers responds there has been a lot of improvements but over the years you could drive off the Bayfront and come onto the campus and go wherever you wanted to go. That was one of my concerns. Thank you.

Mrs. Seibert answered the police department is going to prohibit any vehicles parking on Holland Street, making sure that emergency vehicles have access. So, if there is a 911 call or fire, they have access to get to UPMC Hamot, if needed.

Mr. Chambers replied from the standpoint of caregivers...many doctor offices are closed that day. They don't want people anywhere near downtown. I also think Sunday would be a problem day because of all these people that will be coming in town.

Mrs. Seibert responded We were told it all starts on Friday.

Mr. Chambers states when you look at the way the different interstates come into Erie, out towards the east where 86 comes into New York State and dumps onto I90, they can get on the Bayfront by Behrend campus and boom. It's going to be a mess.

Mrs. Seibert answered apparently, they are going to have state police at every exit on I90 and I79. If parking gets to 90% capacity, they are going to close those 2 highways. They won't open back up until after the event. So, they'll have sheriffs, police, state police, drones, and helicopters. We are just trying to plan for the worst and enjoy and celebrate this event. Thank you.

Any other questions?

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL MEMBERS

Mrs. Foust thanked everyone who participated in the Holiday Tour. She mentioned how wonderful it was to eat lunch with the residents and enjoyed giving out cards to everyone. Overall, it was just a wonderful day and she wanted to thank everyone for all their hard work. Thank you.

Mr. Stewart states a member of our group did pass away. He said there will be a celebration of life on April 14th at 237 Union City Legion if anyone is interested in attending. Secondly, I would like to step down from the committee. Karen is interested in taking the place of Mr. Stewart and promised that she would find a replacement for the Disabled American Veterans. Mr. Stewart would like to make this official at the next meeting. He thanked everyone and would like to step down before August.

Director Raymond responded to Mr. Stewart to just let his Commander know and then it can all be officially done through the work out list.

Mr. Benacci mentioned the eligibility for the VA healthcare. In the past, there was 2 requirements. You either had to be service connected or fall within the income limits. That has now changed. Any veteran that served in Vietnam, The Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan, and any other AOR's. With that being done it removes those 2 factors. It also includes anyone who has served on state side and served in any type of what they call terror activities or toxic exposure risk activities. X-ray techs, firefighters, or bio-chem workers that work with toxic exposure or toxic materials can also be eligible for healthcare. So that's a huge change that could bring millions of veterans into the VA healthcare. So, if you know anyone that is currently enrolled in the VA, that is a category A or 7, they can re-enroll and they can move their categories forward to a 5 or 6. So please pass that along. If there any questions I have some information I can email out to you, or just give me a call. Any questions?

Mr. Fry asked are they going to how they do the tax exempt, for property taxes through the commission?

Mr. Benacci responds if there is, I haven't seen it. We have pushed that for years and years on the state side level. The can has been kicked down the road for years. Hopefully they are going to do something on that. The other big thing would be the current receipt. Currently if you are 50% or less disabled, if you retire from the military, you will not draw both your military pension and your disability. He states what they do is, they offset it. For example, if you make \$1000.00 in retirement pay and \$500.00 in VA disability, you don't get the \$1500.00. You get \$500.00 taxable and \$500.00 non-taxable. Now if you go 50% or higher on the VA disability rate, now you will get the \$1000.00 and the \$500.00. They are trying to get rid of that. There is really no reason for it other than saving money and it's something that should have been changed a long time ago. It used to be 100%. They did get it down to 50%. Now it doesn't matter what the percentage rate is. Any other questions?

Mr. Supak thanked everybody for being here.

Mrs. Cumpston states she is the Western County Director or just the County Director like Anthony. I traveled all the way up here today because I want to be a part of this. I'm happy to be here and I'm going to learn a lot. I've only been the County Director for 1 year. I'm jumping in and figuring how everything goes.

Mr. Chambers responds he has nothing new to report. He is just glad to hear about all the updates and construction going on. The maintenance is very important.

Mr. Eller states Cheri covered the elevator and the cable. So, I have nothing except it's good to be here.

Ms. Ashley on behalf of Congressman Kelly's office states from the Congressman's office we have nothing new to report. But as always if you all need anything on the federal level please reach out. I have business cards to provide if anybody needs anything. Thank you.

Ms. Katie spoke on behalf of Senator Laughlin's office and states Senator Laughlin is hosting his Veteran's Appreciation Breakfast on April 18th. We already spoke with Ken, and he is bringing a group of residents. They come every year. They seem to really enjoy, and we enjoy having them. Thank you.

Mr. Fry asked the guests of the meeting if they had anything they would like to include.

First guest replied, I don't have anything to say except, my name is Alicia Grassi and Rasheda is my daughter!

The crowd erupts with applause, laughter, and cheers.

Second guest responds, Hi everyone. Most of you know me, Mr. William Rose. Joe, I just want to ask do you have any update on the U.S.S. Cali?

Mr. Benacci answered, there is nothing more to report. They are just waiting for an answer from the navy. They got through step 2. I think they are very confident; they will get it. It's just a matter of the navy dotting the I's and crossing the T's. As we all know nothing moves fast in those channels. I think it will be a very good possibility. Thank you.

Mr. Rose thanked Mr. Benacci.

Third guest states, hi my name is Ed Kissell. I would like to see the Commandant's house used for something. It is a landmark that has been here along with the Anthony Wayne Blockhouse. There is a lot happening with this property. The cemetery updates, I believe they are cleaning the gravesites. The wreath program goes very well. I believe it was 1300 wreaths, they were beautiful. Our area is under surveillance for a sanctuary area from New York State line to the Pennsylvania Ohio line. If that happens there will be a lot of federal activity that takes place in this area to tie in with our artifacts in this area. From the Michigan ship that we built, and we put on the Great Lakes. The material was built in Pittsburgh. It was shipped out. The bow is now on the third floor of our library. There is a lot of things happening around here. Most of you probably don't remember the greenhouses that the vet's took care of. Some of the old buildings are still here. The vets also built model ships. They had a woodshop here. Along the bluff when it was clear, there were pavilions where the people could go and sit and see the waterfront. It's still a beautiful area over across the bridge, so if you haven't been over there, take a ride. Thank you.

Next guest replied, hello my name is Teresa Brown. I'm the QA Coordinator here at PSSH. I have nothing new to add to that but probably in the future. It's so nice to meet you all. Thank you.

Last guest, Alyssa Cooley states good morning, everyone. I have nothing to add. Thank you.

Mr. Fry responded good morning; I have a couple things to say. In your packets you should see the March edition of the Blockhouse Beacon. There is some information in there on different subjects. There is a medal of honor day. Ken is not here, but I see some letters here requesting funding from the different VSO's. I hope for the project's sake it is supported very well. I am the president of a foundation, and I informed my finance officer to find some money and send it up here for the activities. And this is kind of like a commercial but, out in the Liberty Plaza, there is an AMVETS thrift store. As past National Commander, I feel obligated to plug that place. All the money from that goes back to veteran's causes. Some of that may trickle down back to here or the VA facility on 38th Street. That's all I have to offer. Thank you.

OLD BUSINESS

Mr. Kissell asked if there was a timetable for the naming of the bridge?

Director Raymond replied we are working on signage, and we will do a dedication ceremony when it's all done.



NEW BUSINESS

No new business to discuss.

GOOD OF THE COUNCIL

Mr. Fry thanked everyone for attending.

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 9:50 am.

The next Advisory Council Meeting is scheduled for Thursday June 13, 2024, at 9:00 am.

Approved:

DRAFT