



Pennsylvania
**Department of Military
and Veterans Affairs**
Pennsylvania Soldiers' and Sailors' Home

**Pennsylvania Soldiers' and Sailors' Home
Advisory Council Meeting
Erie, Pennsylvania
September 12, 2024
9:00 a.m.**

ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr. Gary Fry, President, AMVETS
Mr. Raymond Chambers, Marine Corps League
Mrs. Bobbi Cumpston, Washington County Dir. Of Veterans Affairs
Mr. Richard DiGiacomo, Military Order of the Purple Heart
Mr. Robert C. Eiler, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Mr. Richard Supak, Catholic War Veterans
Mr. Joe Benacci, Director, Erie County Veterans Services
The Honorable Patrick J. Harkins, PA House of Representatives
Mr. Keith Eller, PSSH Resident Council President

ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT

Mr. David Price, Military Order of the Purple Heart
Mr. Anthony DiGiacomo, County Director of Veterans Affairs
Mrs. Karen Foust, Disabled American Veterans
The Honorable Daniel Laughlin, PA Senator



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OTHERS PRESENT

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

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

Mrs. Cheri Spacht, RN, NHA, PSSH Commandant

Mrs. Deborah Harris, PSSH Director of Nursing,

Mrs. Elizabeth Seibert, PSSH Deputy Commandant

Mrs. Rasheda Goodwine, PSSH Commandant Assistant

Mrs. Emily Heubel, PSSH Admissions Coordinator

Mr. Ken Vybiral, PSSH Volunteer Outreach Coordinator

Mrs. Danielle Ahlbrandt, PSSH PCU Administrator

Mrs. Alyssa Cooley, Administrative Officer

Mrs. Teresa Brown, PSSH Quality Assurance Risk Management Coordinator

Mr. Anthony Zenobi, PSSH Quality Assurance and Risk Management Specialist

Mrs. Christine Powell, PSSH Procurement Specialist 1

Mr. John Dombrowski, PSSH Storekeeper 2

Mr. Michael Rang, State Commander of the Catholic War Veterans.

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

Mrs. Jessica Kanash, Facility Reimbursement Officer

Mrs. T. Alicia Grassi, Visitor

Mr. Ed Kissell, Visitor



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CALL TO ORDER

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

MOMENT OF SILENCE AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

ROLL CALL

Ms. Rasheda Goodwine took roll call for all present.

SWEARING IN OF COUNCIL MEMBERS

Mrs. Bobbi Cumpston was sworn in by General Weigl.

APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

A motion was made by Mr. Fry and seconded by Mr. Eiler to approve the minutes of the Advisory Council Meeting held on June 13, 2024. Motion carried, and minutes were approved and written.

MEDICAL DIRECTOR UPDATE

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

Mrs. Harris stated "We currently have 0 Covid + residents or employees. We just received our flu vaccines. We are still waiting for our Covid vaccines. A consent form for the residents will be going out soon regardless to what their past covid status was, everyone is able to get the vaccine. At this point we are not sure about employees.

Any Questions?

Mr. Supak asked, "When they distribute those vaccine shots, do you use different arms?"

Mrs. Harris answered, "Yes, they receive them in different arms."

Mr. Supak also asked, "Is there a stronger version for those over 65 like they had last year?"

Mrs. Harris replied, "Yes. There is different version and we do have both here."

Any Other Questions?



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ADMISSIONS AND MARKETING UPDATE

Mrs. Heubel provided update:

Hello. I am Emily the admissions coordinator. Currently our census is at 161. We have 29 residents on our memory care unit, with 10 on the wait list. There are 75 residents in our nursing care unit, with 13 on the wait list. We have 57 residents in our personal care unit, with 7 on the wait list.

Pertaining to marketing and outreach, "I will be attending the Albion Fair this afternoon and will be going down to the Liberty House to speak with a few veterans next week. I will also be attending the Mursky Senior Fair later this month."

Any Questions?

Mr. DiGiacomo asked, "Are the authorized beds available, or is there some that aren't available?"

Mrs. Heubel answered, "They are all available."

Any other questions?

EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION

Mr. Fry states, "At this time we have a new thing that we don't always have on the agenda. We are going to have some recognition of employees at the Pennsylvania Soldiers' and Sailors' Home.

Mrs. Spacht took over and introduced Teresa Brown, our QA Coordinator here at the facility and she has a few things she would like to say regarding one of our employees that is being recognized today.

Mrs. Brown started, "Good morning. I am Teresa Brown the QA Coordinator. Anthony Zenobi is a veteran, himself, with almost 21 years of service here at the home. Anthony is truly an asset, not only to our veterans and residents, but also to his peers. I wanted to take the time to recognize his flexibility and coordination of many recent changes here at the Soldiers' and Sailors' Home. Anthony has always taken great care of our veterans as a personal care home social worker as well as the nursing care residents. Anthony goes above and beyond to meet the specialized needs of each individual, coordinating with staff to provide the best outcome. I am so pleased that he has most recently transferred to the role of our QA Specialist. As we patiently waited for his social service replacement, he not only balanced learning his new role while continuing to excel in his previous role. Anthony remained available for our veterans and assisted in training our new social workers with patience and a willingness to help. I admire his professionalism as a continued valuable resource. Thank you, Anthony, for being such a team player and the example you set for others is truly commendable!"

Crowd erupts with cheer.

Mrs. Spacht introduced Christine Powell, our Procurement Specialist at the facility to speak regarding our next employee that is to be recognized.



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Mrs. Powell began, "Good morning, everyone. We would like to recognize John Dombrowski, our Storekeeper 2. John has worked in our purchasing department as the Storekeeper since he was promoted back in 2013. Prior to that promotion he was a Store Clerk since 2010. John's journey began at PSSH in 2009. Since then, he has remained committed to our community. At PSSH we pride ourselves on providing the idea care and services to our veterans, which is supported by the purchasing of food, equipment, and extensive supplies that are available to meet the needs of the veterans. The inventory controls such items and demonstrates the value that we put on ensuring that the budget allocations are going directly to the veterans that we serve. The inventory needs to be available at the point of service on the nursing unit for the veterans and staff. This is accomplished by John's direction to his team and through collaboration with the various department staff that he interacts with. For compliance's sake, routine audits occur, and over the past there have been 18 audits that were conducted with 0 deficiencies in the department. During those 18 audits, there was only one single variance. This is evidence of a job well done. Thank you, John, for your efforts and ongoing support!"

Crowd erupts with cheers.

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY ADJUTANT GENERAL

General Weigl provided update:

The General began to speak, "Good morning, everyone. It's so nice to be out here. I have probably spent 2 days out here in Erie. I'm sorry I haven't been to the house, but you all have been doing a phenomenal job taking care of our veterans. I had a lot of fun at the Hero Day Event. It was a great event and a great concert. Next year we're going to make sure we get the veterans down there to that concert. Next year we're going to make it bigger, with bigger headliners (that we are not allowed to share with you yet). Yesterday morning I had the opportunity to recognize and remember 9/11. Joe "the magnificent" hosted the event down on the waterfront. It was a very moving ceremony, and he did a really great job. Then we went to see a cemetery that we want to potentially look at making a state cemetery for veterans, here in the Erie area. We have a lot of work to do with the federal VA to make that happen, but I think it's a great location. Then we went up to Mercyhurst College that was bought out to try to see how we can repurpose that facility for some veteran initiatives. So, we have a lot of ideas floating around. We had a great day looking at opportunities to bring more veterans back here to Erie and take care of veterans in this community. You have a great leader over here with Joe leading the way. Big thank you going out to the guard. This month there are a lot of soldiers coming back from Africa who are going to tag team with other folks and another group is going over. So, the Pennsylvania National Guard is supporting that mission. My nephew is in the group coming home and then we have more going out. So, there will be a big ceremony going on down there. November 16th, they are having their guard open house at the Fort Indiantown Gap, letting people know to come on back, the gates are open. October/November is really busy. There's a lot of legislative breakfast's going on in October, must be a campaign season. Then we have Sons and Sons of Veterans Day Event. We are really excited to get out and support all the events. Our team is really busy, our county directors are very busy. I just want to give a shoutout to the team here. Joe and folks came out to Pittsburgh last week. We had our first ever VET conference. In my mind it was magnificent. We hit a grand slam, well not a grand slam but we got to second base on our first try. So, I thought it was a great conference. People from the federal government, state government, six different state secretaries, also the governor came and really kicked it off to talk about veteran issues and what we need to do to take care of veterans. We had veteran trainings going on, and we had senior leadership conference going on. So, it was a really fun event. It was a big heavy lift for my team, but they did it. And of course, we took some veterans out on a cruise while we were there. I want to shoutout the activities



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team, it's a heavy lift to get those veterans to Pittsburgh, and when they're gone other staff is taking on their responsibilities and roles around the house. It's a full support effort just to get us out to all those activities and these guys do a great job! It's a lot of work and I do appreciate all the work you all do here in Erie. You guys have a lot of fun. So, thank you all. That's all I have."

Any Questions?

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF LONG-TERM CARE

Mrs. Barbara Raymond provided update on behalf of Mr. Travis Davis:

Mrs. Raymond began, "Travis does send his regrets, he had another meeting that he had to attend. General Weigl was being modest. VETCON was phenomenal! It was absolutely a grand slam. She did a fantastic job, getting the governor at the last minute was just amazing. We brought down our Commandant's, Deputy Commandant's, and our Revenue team to hear the different things that the federal VA can offer, and the different things that the state governments can offer. Particularly this facility, our Hollidaysburg facility, and even to an extent our Southeastern facility, are the three that have that domiciliary personal care that deal directly with the homeless veteran community. Those are the folks that may come to us over the winter months, but then they want back out. They don't want the structure. And having this type of conference gives the teams at the homes the information to share with that veteran if they do indeed choose to go back into the community. It provides an opportunity to give them additional resources and information."

Any questions?

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF VETERNS' HOMES

Mrs. Raymond provided update:

Mrs. Raymond continued, "From the home's perspective, the homes are very busy with everything. The budget came out since our last meeting. The homes took a very minor hit, nothing that is going to impact us from the current operational standpoint. Staffing remains a challenge across the 6 homes. Hollidaysburg is our largest facility. We're undergoing getting a new building there, which from a construction perspective is right on track with 2025. We are decreasing our number of vet's, which also decreases our number of staff. We still have some departments that have too much staff, so our cost of care is a little bit higher. However, our nursing staff is right where we need to be. So, we are actively recruiting at our Hollidaysburg facility as well. They are now seeing that challenge with the nursing assistants, primarily as our other veterans' homes. RN's, LPNs, and nursing assistants are by far the biggest challenge that we have. In July, the regulations did increase, requiring us to have additional nursing staff. The hours per patient per day that has increased to 3.2hr per patient per day. We're meeting that requirement in the nursing homes without any issues. We are still keeping a very close eye on the upcoming federal mandate to 3.8hr per patient per day. Our biggest challenge is going to be bringing in those nursing assistants. The number of nursing assistants is significantly higher than the current requirement. So, we are looking at different avenues to have nursing assistants schooled and at our state nursing homes at any time that we can. Here, actually Cheri is lucky, she's got some community schools here in this area. The other nursing homes aren't quite as lucky. So, in those areas we are bringing employees in as a training type of candy striper, type of job duties. Then we bus



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them over to school. We pay them to go to school after that we offer them a position at our facilities as a nursing assistant. They can work as a nursing assistant for around 4 months prior to them having to take their certification. It's a tough course for them, so we do various things to help them to be able to pass their certification. The number of applicants is definitely a problem. So, we are doing lots of various things. We are looking to the federal VA for some different incentives that we may be able to do from a monetary perspective. That's a bit challenging to do with state government to do those monetary challenges, however, our team lead by General Weigl is trying really hard to work with downtown office of administration to help support those federal grants that maybe out there for incentives and retention. So that's where we are on the staffing side of things. Survey wise, since the last time we met, we been surveyed by the VA in all our facilities this year. Except for our Delaware Valley facility. They are due in December. We've had surveys from the Department of Health at our Hollidaysburg, Gino Merli, and our Southeastern facilities. All three of those surveys resulted in very minor deficient practices. Mostly paperwork type of things. We may have missed putting an intervention into that residents' plan of care, very minor concerns. These are areas that we can certainly improve upon, but from a care perspective, we are not concerned at all. We did have however at our Delaware Valley facility, as General Weigl mentioned a heavy lift on going out to events and activities. All 6 of our homes are out in the community all the time. They do a range of events from fishing and bowling to plays and theater shows. The residents have a fantastic time. On Sunday, about two weeks ago at our Delaware Valley facility, our staff took our residents out to a play (much like our Erie Playhouse). One of the residents that has some dementia (confusion) wandered away. We did find the resident safe, with no issues or concerns. However, that highlighted to us that we need to do a better job from the back end of things from that policy and procedure process to put steps into play to prevent something like that from happening again. We enacted an action plan. The reason I bring it up, is because it's such an issue, that we've talked in the past about. Hopefully we won't have to talk about this the next time we meet. But I just wanted to reference the possibility that we could end up with a deficient practice out of our Delaware Valley facility for that incident. Again, we have corrected it. The resident is fine. We've moved forward. The staff has been educated. We are in the process of getting the other 5 veteran's homes educated on the same type of protective steps, because we've had other issues, where we talked about those civil monetary penalties. Just in case we have to talk about it next quarter.

From a Covid perspective, we've done quite well here in Erie. Cheri will touch on that if there is anything significant from her end. We did just have outbreaks in our Gino Merli, Delaware Valley, Southeast and Southwest facilities. There was one issue where a resident did pass away. It was an elderly individual who was already quite ill, not an unexpected death. But because the individual had Covid when he passed away, the doctor did put that on the death certificate. Other than that, the outbreaks are very minor. What we are seeing from a symptom perspective is coughs, colds, sniffles, and those types of things. It runs down our elderly folks a little bit more than somebody that is more in a healthy factor. However, we keep a very close eye on it. We're gearing up for flu season. We do have flu vaccines on order across all 6 of the homes. As well as offering Covid and RSV vaccinations. From a current perspective, we're down to 19 total residents at a split between Gino Merli, Southeastern, and our Southwestern facilities and we have 10 staff members split between Gino and our Southwestern facilities. Hollidaysburg has 1 staff member and no residents. From a star rating perspective, we did pretty well there. Our Gino Merli and our Delaware Valley facility are both 5 stars. Our Hollidaysburg is a 3 star. Soldiers' and Sailors' Home and our Southwestern facility are both 4 stars. The 3 stars and the 4 stars are due to health inspections. They are coming back up. Soldiers' and Sailors' just bumped up from a 3 star to a 4 star from their health inspection. Other than that, we are just preparing for holiday visits, as General Weigl just mentioned, we are prepping for the TAG visits across the 6 homes. They really love to see the folks in uniforms. So, we are excited for that. On September 19th, we have the TAG coming to Erie to hand out some awards for the higher-level awards. Some of the officials don't know who's getting the awards. We have 2 individuals that are stationed out of the Erie facility. And I'll



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leave it at that. So, the TAG will come and present those, and we are going to broadcast across the other homes. They will include other awards such as Pittsburgh will be giving awards down there, Hollidaysburg will also be giving awards there. The various awards to be given out include the TAG award, Employee of the year, and Innovator of the year. We are very excited. This will be our second year doing it.”

Any Questions?

Mr. DiGiacomo asked, “What are the amounts of the civil monetary penalties?”

Mrs. Raymond answered, “In the last three years, I’ve started tracking it, when I took this job over. Our ballpark average is about \$200,000. It’s very painful. From the state government end of things, it comes out of our budget. So, with our private sector civil monetary penalties, there have been numerous closures of nursing homes. And I’ll be the first to admit it, we messed up. Nothing was intentional. As soon as I got that phone call, my mind was on how we fix this and what do we need to do to correct this, so this doesn’t happen another time. I’d like to think other nursing homes feel the same way. I don’t like to bad mouth any nursing homes. Do we know there are some that are bad? Yes, absolutely. These different nursing homes that are closing because of these different kinds of issues and concerns, from our end we try to scoop up those employees from the closings. But it is absolutely an issue.”

Mr. DiGiacomo asked, “When do you have to jump from the 3.2 patients an hour to 3.8?”

Mrs. Raymond responded, “As of now it is going to be a gradual increase. We are all waiting for election season to give us a bit more guidance.”

Mr. DiGiacomo added, “So within the next year.”

Mrs. Raymond answered, “Correct, within the next year. As it stands now, we will have a gradual increase through 2026.”

Any other Questions?

REPORT OF THE COMMANDANT

Mrs. Spacht provided update:

Mrs. Spacht began, “Good morning and thank you for coming. Compliance report is next, but Beth Seibert is going to handle that with her discussion on the Deputy Commandant report. I’ll move right into vacancies and employee numbers. Total authorized employees, we have currently is 279 at Soldiers’ and Sailors’. We have 248 of those positions filled. The total vacancies are currently at 31. We have 7 LPN positions open, 6 RNs, and 13 Nurse assistant, 1 Clerk 2, 1 Dietician, 2 Food Service Worker, and 1 Security staff. We are in process of interviewing for these positions and the interviews have been going rather well. I would like to introduce Danielle Ahlbrandt. She is our new PCU Administrator here at the



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facility. I mentioned her at the last meeting. She started in July. So, welcome Danielle. As Barb mentioned, the current school that we utilize for CNA training is HVA of Erie (Healthcare Venture Alliance). They truly struggle with instructors so when we hire the nurse aide trainees on, we have to go by their schedule. They have been having a difficult time getting instructors to have class for whatever reason. But HVA is very helpful with our employees and student environment that they provide. That CNA trainee course is an open posting, so anyone can apply for that position on the site. If any of you know anyone or has questions about a position, don't hesitate to send them our way. Currently, we have 0 Covid, Flu, or RSV in our facility. As Barb said, we have had a few hiccups in the last 90 days with employees that had Covid. That was a result of different employees going on vacation and coming back feeling ill, or they were exposed by someone in their family. So, we are very fortunate because it is on the rise, again. As I mentioned in the last meeting, pertaining to our regulatory agencies, we are in complete compliance from the Department of Health standpoint for nursing as well as safety. We were waiting for a revisit from the Department of Human Services at our last meeting. We are in compliance with them. We are also in compliance, except for 1 deficiency we had with the VA when they came in for their annual survey. The tentative date of compliance is in October. We also had our headquarters come out and do a survey to check things out as well. We are working our plan of correction for them. They surveyed both nursing and personal care side of the home. They really checked every nook and cranny and it's very helpful, so we know what we need to be focusing on. Our construction report is attached. We have several projects going. We are currently in design for our pavilion structure, near the visiting gazebo on the new concrete pad adjacent to the visitor parking lot. Also, there are several renovations going on in our employee breakrooms to revamp them. Our PCU Unit C nursing station will have some flooring replacement, which is in design as well. Our front entrance to PCU is finally finished, from the roof to the steps. Specific areas of our parking lot were just repaved which was completed last week. Currently, we are working on getting a divider wall similar to this one over in our nursing home dining room, because we've renovated that area and there is a good amount of space in there for meetings and other activities. We have plans to replace various doors. Masonry work continues. There is a PA upgrade system in design. I think we talked about this in our last meeting, but I just want to reiterate our cable system situation that we had has been completely resolved. When we had those outages, it was out for a day or so, but then it came right back online. As the General spoke of Sharing and Caring, it was a great success. Our residents love going. We are getting ready for the winter months activities. I'll let Mr. Eller touch base about the success of State Veterans Home Week and the success of the silent auction, which was great."

Any questions?

Mr. Chambers questioned, "The plaque that was with the original pavilion with the list of donors, that was on a big rock, will it be put someplace?"

Mrs. Raymond interjected, "Yes. It's still there outside in front of Cheri's office. The intention would be to move it back there. We had to rent a piece of equipment to move it."

Mr. Chambers continued, "The reason I asked is because, there are a lot of organizations who were members of this board back when that was done."

Mrs. Raymond answered, "Cheri and I talked about that a couple of weeks back to see where we are with that. I believe we may have equipment for that."

Mr. Chambers said, "Ok. Thank you"



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Any other questions?

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY COMMANDANT

Mrs. Seibert provided update:

Mrs. Seibert started, "Good morning, everyone. I'm going to present the compliance report on behalf of Beth Werner, our regional compliance officer. She wanted to make sure that we touched upon this information. The compliance department along with other team members have completed all the facilities compliance assessments across the State Veterans' Home which includes all 6 state nursing home and the three personal care facilities for the licensure year of 2024. The Southwestern facility will have it's FPA in December of this year for their licensure year 2025. After that, that will wrap up all the 9 FPA's between the nursing homes and the personal care homes for 2024. The FPA's are done throughout the nursing homes to help prepare all the facilities for surveys from outside licensing agencies. The compliance committee continues to have quarterly meetings at each home. The third quarter meetings are in September. Ours is happening this afternoon. At PSSH, we currently have 0 open investigations.

Mrs. Seibert concluded her report."

Any questions?

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL MEMBERS

Mrs. Meghat commented, "Hello I am Ashley Meghat. I am with Congressman Mike Kelly's office, and I would like to apologize for being late but school drop off did not go accordingly. I have nothing to report but as always, we are here to provide assistance, whether it be on the federal end, especially when it comes to that mandate for the aides and nurses as well. We're here to work with you guys to make that transition a little bit easier. Thank you."

Mr. Harkins added, "Good morning, everyone. My name is Pat Harkins. It's great to be here with you. I have nothing to report but as was said if you need us, please let us know. We are very easy to catch up with. Thank you."

Mr. Benacci spoke, "I have two things, one that may not pertain to some of the residents here, but I wanted to talk about some of the state benefits for veterans that has changed, thanks to our legislators and the governor who made a change in income requirements. It's not just for veterans. State benefits is for any state benefits. I'm going to speak about the real estate tax exemption program for disabled vets. Two of the major eligibility requirements, 1 is you must be 100% permanent total. The second was an income requirement. There was a threshold that you were not allowed to be above. When we calculated that amount, we had to calculate in your disability compensation. Now we do not do that. So, when we do the income calculations, and again it's not just for this program, but any state program. Such as SNAP, WIC, and there is a plethora of other programs, they no longer calculate your disability compensation. That really opened a door, and we are starting to see more vet's come into our office. So, if your 100% permanent total, you own your home (the vet's name or spouse is on the deed) and it's your primary residence and you make under the threshold amount, let us know you can come down to our office and we will help you fill out that application. The second thing I would like to talk about is a volunteer. Her name is Mary Jane Koenig. Everyone from Erie knows Mary Jane and she lives and breathes and loves veterans. She has taken it upon herself to coordinate cleaning the headstones out here at the cemetery. I met with



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her. I was with her Monday alongside of one of the representatives of the national cemetery administration of the VA and we toured the cemetery with her. If you haven't seen the headstones that they've cleaned, you really need to go out there and look at them because it is 180° difference. I believe she had roughly two-thirds of them done. She is done for this year. She'll start back up in next spring. I would like to recognize her to the leadership here for the wonderful work that she does. Thank you."

Mr. DiGiacomo asked, "Joe is there any supplies or anything you need, or is that all taken care of for her?"

Mr. Benacci answered, "No, that's something we talked about. There is a cleaning solution that is very specific to the stone that is called D2. It is a little expensive and out of the kindness of her heart she's been purchasing it on her own. So, I told her when she's ready to go again, please get ahold of us and we'll do some fundraising to purchase some of that cleaning product for her."

Mr. DiGiacomo asked, "Is there anything that we can do to help with that?"

Mr. Benacci answered, "Yes. Last weekend, we worked with the cemetery administration and their starting an outreach program, where they are going out to private cemeteries. Because they take care of the Federal cemeteries, but like here at the Erie Cemetery, there are 7,000 vets buried in that cemetery. It's called The National Day of Remembrance and Service. We had 25-30 people there. We had buckets, brushes, and the D2 (all volunteers). We cleaned roughly about 100-150 headstones. We got 6,950 more to go. I think it went really well."

Mr. DiGiacomo commented, "I was talking about acquiring a space for future military cemeteries, anything in that regard."

Mr. Benacci responded, "I have been working on this for about a year. Of course, the first thing to do is find land. An organization called said hey, we have a cemetery, and we want to sell it. I said absolutely. How and where it sits right now is almost like the perfect storm. So, working with the General, the legislators, and NCA I have a feeling this could work. It would give us about 40 acres of a veteran's cemetery to have here locally."

General Weigl interjected, "This area needs one and Northeast PA does not have a national cemetery. The problem is the federal government is doing away with doing national cemeteries. They want the states to fund it. Which means they will give you a grant for a 5yr period, once the grant goes away, you have to consume that cost. So that's where we're at right now negotiating with federal government. We are looking at the grant process to be longer, something more extended."

Mr. DiGiacomo asked, "Is that a done deal?"

General Weigl answered, "Joe, my team, and I are going down to D.C. to talk to them. We are the fourth largest population, and the third oldest population, so we know we're going to need more space."

Mr. Benacci stated, "I think their kind of switching their direction a little bit, instead of making these massive national cemeteries. They want to have these smaller 45-50-acre cemeteries. Smaller but more of them."



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Mrs. Meghat commented, "Let me know when you guys do go down, so I can send you down with a letter from the Congressman, so they know that we support that in our area."

General Weigl stated, "We'll be setting that up within the next 3wks."

Mrs. Meghat stated, "Ok"

Mr. Supak added, "Hello Rich Supak with the Catholic War Veterans. I'm sorry I wasn't here for the last meeting. After listening to what's going on here, I'm very pleased with the Commandant and General and the news that they are telling us. Thank you."

Mr. Eiler started to speak, "Bob Eiler, here. Sorry I missed the last meeting but that was our state convention. I really appreciate the staff, here. Brining down all the residents to our Sharing and Caring Boat Ride. Thirty-five years, we've been doing this. And this is the most important thing I can do in my lifetime. It really is. When Covid hit we had to suspend the boat ride for two years. We're back to two days, but we need to get back to four days. When we call the homes, all you hear is our staff didn't feel like going today. We are not getting the cooperation from the homes. The patients are ready, but the staff is not."

Mrs. Raymond asked, "Is it our homes, Bob?"

Mr. Eiler answered, "No, no, no! It's the private nursing homes."

Mr. Eiler continued, "We really appreciate all you guys do and just want to thank you for an amazing job well done."

Mr. DiGiacomo said, "Rich DiGiacomo with the Military Office of Veterans Affairs, I wanted to touch on something Gary had brought up. Yesterday was 9/11 obviously, and it had me thinking about all the great work that everybody here does. Even down to the residents. Since 9/11 we had 2 generations that basically went in and fought that war. Since then, it's been another 2 generations and what that means is there is a greater need than ever that these homes keep going on. The reason they keep going on and there is no guarantee that it will continue and that's what I talk about every quarter. And the reason they keep going on is because of everybody here. Everybody has a piece and if one piece falls through, the homes might not be here. It's so heartening to see employees that have been here 20+ years, and 15+ years. There are people on this board that have been here maybe almost as long as I've been alive. But that speaks to our commitment, not just to our past veterans, and the future veterans. There will be a tidal wave that hits because of this last quarter century of folks serving. So, thank you for everything that you do and keep up the good work."

Mrs. Cumpston added, "I'm Bobbi Cumpston. One I got to speak to VETCON because I thought it was phenomenal event. Speaking from a county perspective having all 4 non-profits that were there contributing to the discussion about veterans. And having the currently serving members, I saw quite a few of the National Guard come through, some whom I served with before. So, they know we're at the county level too. It's not just state and federal that is available to the veterans that come home. As for AMVETS, they moved their national headquarters from Washington D.C. to Pennsylvania. So, we're pretty excited about the start to work with them. They bought an old elementary school and their going to remodel it to put apartments for veterans and families for temporary housing. Hopefully, that will get kicked off and start up early in the spring around March of next year."



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Mr. Chambers stated, "Good morning, Ray Chambers of the Marine Corps League. I'm just speak to you about the AMVETS. Those of you who are local should go up to the Liberty Plaza and go to that AMVETS. That is very impressive. Gary, I think I've taken 3 truckloads over there. I'm glad to hear all the positive things. Years ago, we used to come in here and this was 2-3hrs of negative. General I could tell you stories that would probably physically upset you. I'm glad to have the involvement of all these other organizations. In the beginning there was only 7 or 8 of us that was appointed by the governor. That was under Governor Thornburg. For those of you who are a little bit younger, yes, he was the governor back in the 80's. That's all I have. Thank you."

Mr. Fry commented, "Thank you and as the National Commander of AMVETS, I'm glad a lot of good things are happening here in the Commonwealth. Regarding moving our headquarters to Pennsylvania, the cause and the lingual problems coming out of Maryland was just unbearable and it was a tough call because you always want to be in the heart of D.C., but business is business, and we hope things will get going. General, very nice of you to make the trip up here. I wouldn't want to have your schedule. As I come in today, I notice the campus is looking pretty sharp. Anthony and John congratulations and there are many, many more that need to be recognized here. And I think we do have an opening here on the board for the American Legion. If not disregard that comment. Thank you."

Mr. Eller started, "Hi, I'm Keith Eller. Just wanted to mention, The State Veterans Home Week. We did a little bit better than last year. Thank you to everyone to helped out with the contributions. Thank you."

Mr. Vybrial added, "Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Ken Vybrial, the volunteer coordinator at the home. Since our last meeting I would like to report on a few things. We concluded the State Veterans Home Week with a first of its kind Erie Philharmonic on Flag Day. That was a nice grand finale to that week. Emily and I attended the Veteran Leadership Standdown Event in Northeast. On August 7th we commemorated Purple Heart Day with the local chapter of the Military War of the Purple Heart here in Erie. Emily and I also attended outreach at the Senior Day at the Erie Zoo. We were at the Crawford County Resource Fair on August 16th, and State Representative Ryan Bizzaro's Resource Fair on August 19th. Residents here attended the Erie VA National Night Out on August 23rd. This past Saturday I hosted a tour for the Navy Chiefs selectees. We will have numerous outreach events to come here this fall. I will report out on at our next meeting in December. Also, I wanted to make mention that we have a resident turning 100yrs old that we will be commemorating with a couple of different events as well. Before I close my report, I would like to introduce a guest with us today, Mrs. Doris Vetek. Welcome Doris. Doris is with the VFW Auxiliary Department of PA and the VFW Auxiliary out of Tidioute. She has been a great advocate for our residents here. Anytime that we need something for our clothing room, I reach out to her, and she always delivers. So, thank you Doris for your support. Mr. President that is it for my report. Thank you."

Mrs. Grassi commented, "Good morning, everyone. My name is Alicia Grassi, and I am Rasheda' Mother."

Mr. Rang added, "Good morning, everybody, my name is Mike Rang. I am the Commander of Catholic War Vets for Pennsylvania."

Mrs. Cooley stated, "Hello, I'm Alyssa Cooley. I'm an Administrative Officer for headquarters."

Mr. Kissel added, "Hello. Ed Kissel here with SONS of Lake Erie fishing club."

Mr. Zenobi said, "Hello, I am Anthony Zenobi, Quality Assurance Specialist."



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Mrs. Brown states, "Hello, I am Teresa Brown, Quality Assurance Coordinator."

Mr. Fry concludes, "Alrighty. Thank you everyone."

Any Questions?

OLD BUSINESS

Mr. Kissel asked, "How is the veteran's bridge signage coming along?"

Mrs. Spacht answered, "The signage is currently in design. As soon as we get the signage delivered. We will have a ceremony dedicated to the bridge. Our intent is to be able to see the signage from the Bayfront Highway."

NEW BUSINESS

No new business to discuss.

GOOD OF THE COUNCIL

Mr. Fry announced that PSSH would be conducting a tour of operations immediately following the meeting if anyone would like to join. He thanked everyone for attending.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 10:15 am.

The next Advisory Council Meeting is scheduled for Thursday December 12, 2024, at 9:00 am.

Approved:
