

Pennsylvania Soldiers' and Sailors' Home
Advisory Council Meeting
Erie, Pennsylvania
December 14, 2023
9:00 a.m.

ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT

- Mr. Gary Fry, President, AMVETS
- Mr. Raymond J. Chambers, Vice President, Marine Corps League
- Mr. Richard DiGiacomo, Secretary, Military Officers Assoc. of America
- Mr. Anthony DiGiacomo, County Director of Veterans Affairs
- Mr. Harry E. Stewart, American Legion
- Ms. Karen Foust, Disabled American Veterans
- Mr. William Rose, PSSH Resident Council President
- Mr. Joe Benacci, Director, Erie County Veterans Services

ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT

- Mr. David Price, Military Order of Purple Heart
- Mr. Robert Eiler, Veterans of Foreign Wars
- Mr. Richard Supak, Catholic War Veterans
- The Honorable Daniel Laughlin, PA Senator

OTHERS PRESENT

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

Ms. Cheri Spacht, RN, NHA, PSSH Commandant

Mrs. Deborah Harris, PSSH DON

Mrs. Elizabeth Seibert, PSSH Deputy Commandant

Ms. Rasheda Goodwine, PSSH Commandant Assistant

Mr. Nicholas Wood, PSSH Admission Coordinator

Ms. Ashley Megat on behalf of Congressman Mike Kelly's Office

Ms. Kimberly Knapp, PSSH Personal Care Administrator

Mr. Ken Vybiral, PSSH Volunteer Resources Coordinator

DRAFT

CALL TO ORDER

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

MOMENT OF SILENT AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mr. Gary 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

No Council Members were sworn in.

APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

A motion was made by Mr. Stewart and seconded by Mr. DiGiacomo to approve the minutes of the Advisory Council Meeting held on September 14, 2023. Motion carried, and minutes were approved as written.

MEDICAL DIRECTOR UPDATE

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

We are seeing an increase in the past 2 weeks in the ER. We are having recent flu A and B, RSV, and covid. Right now, we currently have 21 residents in house with covid. Some have no symptoms. The rest have very mild symptoms. We have 9 employees out with covid, that's why everybody is in N95 masks throughout the whole campus. It's mostly on 2 units in nursing. We did have a covid themed clinic for our residents. We have 41 PCU residents that received the vaccine and 69 NCU residents. We have 16 aide trainees that are getting ready to graduate tomorrow from class. That should help with our staffing. Hopefully, we will have another class as soon as the end of January. Which will add 6 more aides from that class when they graduate.

Any Questions?

ADMISSIONS AND MARKETING UPDATE

Mr. Wood provided update:

Currently the census is 158 out of 207 beds. Memory Care has 30 filled out of 32 beds. Skilled nursing has 71 out of 75 beds filled. Personal Care has 57 out of 100 beds. The wait list is consisting of 7 vets and 0 non-vets on our personal care side. Skilled has 9 vets and 3 non-vets. Right now, our marketing department is looking forward to getting our schedule built for next year.

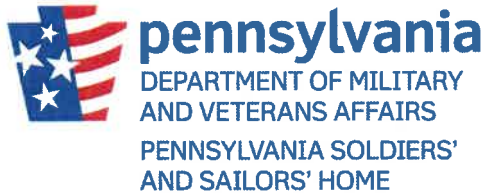
Any Questions?

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF VETERANS' HOMES

Ms. Raymond provided report:

Good morning, everyone. We are in the middle of our TAG visits throughout all 6 homes. We are going everywhere except Southwest, which is today so that's where Travis is. He covered that one while I am covering the Advisory Council meeting here with all you fine folks. Delaware's TAG visit is next week. The residents have thoroughly enjoyed it. Cheri will go into our visit with him from earlier this month. The residents across the homes fully enjoyed seeing the troops and the general in their uniforms. It was really fun for everyone.

My report from a covid perspective, we do have outbreaks at our Hollidaysburg facility, Erie facility, Southeast and Southwest facilities which all have current resident outbreaks. For staff outbreaks, we have Southeast, Soldiers and Sailors home, and Hollidaysburg all have current positive covid staff members. We do have 2 staff members positive with the flu at our Hollidaysburg facility. We haven't had any other flu cases across the 6 homes other than Hollidaysburg as Deborah mentioned. We are tracking it across the Commonwealth. The numbers are definitely increasing. So far, we've been ok from a flu perspective. With that being said, we have a total of 1280 flu vaccines given between our residents and our staff. Which is significantly higher than the covid vaccinations for our residents and staff. Covid vaccinations for residents and staff across the 6 homes is 473. The covid vaccine that we have available is the most recent vaccine for covid. It is XBB (Xray Bravo Bravo) which is the most recent variant. That vaccine is 40-60% effective against severe illness. We are encouraging our staff and residents to get the vaccine. However, CDC is recommending about 3 or 4 months wait time before getting the vaccine after you've tested positive. And we've had significant outbreaks recently at 4 of our facilities. That maybe some of what's contributing to the lower numbers as Deborah mentioned the RSV in the hospitals. We also monitor for RSV. Our numbers have been significantly low. We do have protocol to give the RSV vaccine if a physician or medical provider does order it for their residents. It is up to the physician whether the individual would qualify for that vaccine, if it's deemed from the CDC that they would be at high risk.



From a survey perspective: We are awaiting our VA survey at our Delaware Valley facility. My guess is it will be next week at our TAG visit. In the first quarter of 2024, we anticipate the VA to come in for our Southeast facility, Erie facility and our Gino J Merli facility.

From a census perspective: Across the 6 homes we have taken care of 1079 residents. Our waitlist is about 200 across the Commonwealth. The biggest waitlist we have is at Delaware Valley and Southeast Veterans Center. We are pushing to get the residents into our homes as quickly as possible. Some of it is

a bit slower due to staffing. Our biggest concern is staffing challenges, which is primarily nursing across the 6 homes. We do struggle filling Social Services, and Registered Dieticians. This is true especially on the Eastside. We are ok over here. But we are struggling with those Social Services and Registered Dieticians. Actually, our facility here in Erie supported our Hollidaysburg facility most recently for one of their dieticians' vacancies.

Construction wise the main thing is our Hollidaysburg facility. We are building a new facility there. It's going to be a beautiful campus, once that is completed in the next 2 years. Our other main construction is that we are completely renovating our HVAC system at our Delaware Valley facility. Cheri will touch on some of the things going on at our Soldiers and Sailors home. We are still looking at PACT ACT as well as catastrophic illness medications for our veterans and it is moving along very well. Both of those projects headed up by our revenue teams.

The newest thing coming out of Medicare and Medicaid services is a little bit troubling as the proposed rule for staffing. There is now a proposed rule for staffing which is only going to count RN's and CNA's staffing hours. It is currently a proposed rule so we don't know anything yet as far as if it will become regulatory or not. However, it is a bit troubling for us because of the nationwide worldwide crisis of RN's, LPN's, and CNA's. CMS is proposing for an RN mandatory staffing per day is .55 hours. So, what that translates to, if you have 100 resident you need 55 RN hours in 24 hours. Our 6 veterans' homes were ok from that perspective. However, this is going to be an industry wide catastrophe quite honestly because the staffing is simply just not there. From a CNA perspective: the proposed rule is going to be 2.45 hours. So that translates into if we have 100 residents to care for, we need 245 hours to care for those 100 residents. The most troubling concern is the LPN which is completely taken out of the equation. The LPN in the veteran homes is who does most medications and treatments from that perspective. There was a comment period that recently closed so we're anticipating the final thoughts from CMS soon. So, we are watching this situation very closely. Those are the highlights of my report.

Any Questions?

It's in the report here about tearing down the commandants' house. Will that driveway then need historical things because of the age of it? You know your upsetting historians. Ms. Raymond responded, we are upsetting historians, however it's not original to the campus. So, we are looking through all those items. We had proposed to have it torn down pre covid. However, we are following all the proper

channels to make sure that everything is in line. We are working very closely with Senator Laughlin's office as well as the Erie Historical Society. Cheri knows and has quite a bit of information on that.

Also Rep. Curt Sonney retired, and he didn't run for reelection, and he is still listed as a member. At some point can you help to get the ball rolling because I hate to see vacancies on the council. We already have 2 existing from veterans. Mrs. Raymond responds We will have Rasheda remove his name. So yes, we will get right on that. Thank You

REPORT OF THE COMMANDANT

Good morning. First, there was an email sent that Alyssa Cooley has taken a different position and Rasheda Goodwine, who did roll call will be stepping into Alyssa's position as my new Commandant's Assistant. So, you will get correspondence from Rasheda. Congratulations Rasheda.

This is Rasheda's first week but again you will be getting correspondence from her for things coming up and an email was sent out for her contact information to all of you but again if you have questions just don't hesitate to let us know.

Starting with staffing: Currently our total authorized staffing here at PSSH is 272. We have 242 positions currently filled with a total of 30 vacancies. We have 3 LPN, 4 RN, 21 NA, 1 food service worker, and 1 Custodial 1 worker vacancies. As Deborah stated we have the CNA class that goes through HVA, we have 6 potential graduates at the end of this week. We have 5 or 6 going into the class starting in January. That will help with our vacancies. Again, if you all hear of anyone looking for work let us know. We still do Walk-In Wednesdays. We can get them set up in a profile even if we do not have open positions for what they're looking for. Any questions on staffing?

Deborah touched on the medical update about our covid current situation. We did see an uptick with our covid positives. Again, A symptomatic or very mild. Deborah also mentioned we did have 1 resident positive for RSV and 1 employee, but they've recovered. Once they had treatment and we monitored that.

For our survey window: our VA survey is due to be completed in February. We are anticipating their visit. Our Dept of Health Survey came in April of last year, so our window is opening for that to come for our annual survey. As well as the Dept of Human Services survey we had last year in February as well. So, we are very close to having those folks come into our facility. We had our TAG visit on December 1st. It was very successful. The residents really enjoyed it. There was a lot of time spent on each unit. The residents got to talk to him and the others that came with him. The residents absolutely enjoyed it. We have Wreaths Across America on Saturday, but I'll let Ken speak on that.

As for construction, our nurse call bell system is completed and is fully functioning now. We continue to do work on the Chapel exterior with 3 pointing masonry, and ongoing waterproofing. The installation of

the chillers and components were completed. There are several projects coming up, there have been SCOPE project meetings for those and those continue to be planned. As for the Commandant's house, we are still working on the plan as to reviewing and discussing what exactly is going to come of the house. There's talks of different things as Barb said with Senator Laughlin's office and we've been in correspondence with the Historical Society and some other firms that have been inquiring about what we are going to do. But we are still in discussions with that and as soon as we know further, we will let everyone know. We have a construction project in our main kitchen on PCU, converting a cooler that needed to be removed and a flooring project that is starting this week.

Any Questions?

It seems like you're working on getting the clearance to get the Commandant's house torn down so that you can build a parking lot and maybe if you have the funds provide a pavilion. Is that the essential part of what you're saying? Cheri responds There is a couple different elements going on with that, I know the

demolition is being discussed. Also, there was the discussion of a pavilion, additional parking, as well as an area of some of the brick being kept from the Commandant's house to create a walkway. But again, all these discussions are coming about by individuals that are interjecting ways to preserve some of what would be left from the house. But there is no concrete plan.

So, the only thing concrete is that the commandant's house is going to be destroyed? Cheri responds It is going to be taken down, yes.

Any Other Questions?

COMPLIANCE REPORT

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

There are no changes to report. There are not any open investigations for PSSH. Across the BVH, the 6 nursing skilled facilities and 3 personal care units did have their mock surveys. Those are completed for 2023. Two of the skilled nursing facilities, and 1 PCU have already gone into the 2024 cycle for the mock surveys. That's it for Beth Werner's report. Thank you.

Any Questions?

REPORT OF DEPUTY COMMANDANT

No report.

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL MEMBERS

Mr. Chambers states he really has nothing to add to what's being discussed. He states that he asked the question about the Commandant's house because years ago when they had the old trussell bridge that went over the railroad tracks, before they put the new bridge in, there was a lot of moaning and groaning about having it torn down. It was unsafe so it's probably a good thing that they did tear it down. That's all I have. Thank You.

Will Rose states we need to cover the vote on the naming of the bridge and a brief history. All of you have been given a ballot. We had a gentleman from the community that came in this year to a Members Council meeting. He was a member of the S.O.N.S. of Erie. He passed a suggestion that maybe we have a bridge dedication ceremony. That was met with a bit of enthusiasm from the advisory council, and it

was turned over to the residents for some input. So, what we did, and this is borrowing a precedence from our flag naming ceremony. We solicited nominations from all the residents over a 3-month period. All those nominations were collected. Everyone got a chance to caucus for their favorite. Actually, I should say we solicited nominations from residents and staff over a 3-month period. We came up with 11 nominations. Every resident got to choose 3 of their favorite ballots. From that we got our top 3. Then narrowed that to our second round. Added to that list was the president's choice and that was decision that the president of the PCU, the NCU president and I got together, and we held out the option to nominate one more selection to the list as the president's prerogative. To round out the total

of the final vote of 4 items and that's what you see in front of you. All the residents got another 3 months to caucus on that. And we came up with those selections. And we have those numbers. We decided it would be a good idea to have the advisory council weigh in with their ballot. So briefly on the vote. The voting was by paper ballot. The presentation of the various choices that you have as all randomized so there was no order. Briefly about those selections, there was the Anthony Wayne Passover, Blockhouse Bridge, USCT Memorial Bridge, and Veteran's Memorial Bridge. The thinking behind that is it pretty much sums up everything about this. It encompasses who we are and what we do around here and covers all veterans. We were thinking that maybe the most appropriate name. So, if I can ask you to please cast your vote. And I'll put this to you Mr. President in the case of a tie-you'll be the final deciding vote. One other thing, we were very grateful this year to have everybody out of covid. We got to break bread in our dining facilities. That was a nice break from the past few years. So, we all got a nice hot meal this year and that was wonderful. It's kind of a shame that we're going into the Christmas holiday with covid cases. Hopefully, next year we'll get a little bit better on it. But it was nice to enjoy Thanksgiving and have all the residents get together and be able to enjoy all the various activities. Thank You.

Mr. DiGiacomo states Happy Holidays everyone. The Browns look great this year. The building looks great. I'm always impressed by walking through the halls. Every single employee greets you with a warm smile, welcome, and hello. I really appreciate that. We dropped off a bunch of Christmas cards for the residents from the Military Officers Assoc. Thank you.

Good morning, everyone. I don't have a lot. I appreciate everything you guys do. And to wish you all a Happy New Year and a Merry Christmas. Thank you.

Good morning. We had a collegiate Christmas tour last week. We had 50 total in the tour. Everything was fantastic. We appreciate all the hospitality. Secondly a member of our group has gone into remission. He won't answer his phone. He won't go out. He started off taking care of his wife and from there his life has gone downhill. Now there's no way to communicate with him. So please keep him in your prayers. I really love the concept of the Wreaths Across America.

Is there any accountability for how much they collect or who they are?

They are an actual 501C3 nonprofit based out of Columbia folds.

Do they have any reports on what they collect?

I believe if you go to their website-Wreaths Across America.org They may have some breakdowns as far as participation goals.

Ms. Foust states The DAV will be here on Saturday to participate in that. I'm part of the legion so I was also here for our holiday tour which was wonderful. You welcomed us, we walked around and talked to as many residents as possible. And it was just great. Then we went on to the VA and we did the same thing. I'm very happy to see my good friend Carol Reichert as the NCU resident of the month. Her husband Teddy who was a character all in himself was very good friends with my dad. They had a love of baseball. During the tour I got a chance to talk with her for quite a while. And she is very happy with the care she is receiving here. In the upcoming new year if there is anything the DAV can do for PSSH Please make sur you let me know. I hope everyone has a wonderful holiday. Thank you.

Mr. Benacci states good morning. As far as our office there's nothing to report. There are 3 major projects going on. One being the ship. The USS Cali. We are working on having that as a permanent status display on the East basin. They have finished the second phase of the 3-phase application. They are waiting on approval for that second phase which they're hoping to have real soon. Then phase 3 kicks in and that's the actual plan on getting the ship here. The ship is sitting in Philadelphia's shipyard so they will need to tow that vessel up the coast. The cost will be anywhere between \$750,000 to 1 million dollars to tow. They are on their way with the fundraising so that would be a great addition to our bay. There are about 300,000 sailors that are still living that served on that ship. So, it's the newest ship to be given that status display in history. I think it would be a great addition to our waterfront. Second thing is I know you must be a resident of PSSH to be buried in your cemetery. I am personally taking on trying to get another state sponsored veteran cemetery in Erie County. The closest cemetery is 125 miles away in the Allegheny's south of Pittsburgh. I'm working with Congressman's Kelly's office, all our state and local reps, and the DMVA to get this into the works. Our biggest hurdle is land. If we can locate and lock in some land than we can start the application process. The third thing is Granite Ridge in Northeast. The old Mercyhurst campus. Mr. Rick Mellon, who is the chairman of the Mellon Heritage Foundation purchased the property. It is final. The closing will be done by the end of the month. We wanted to give some recognition to his father who was WWII air Corp vet. Also, his father-in-law who

was also a WWII vet. A friend of his has a beautiful facility up here in Northeast that's for sale. He bought it sight unseen. Roughly 63,000 sq. ft under roof. There isn't any reason not to make this a Veteran's Wellness and Outreach Center. With that being said Mr. Mellon just wants ideas. I know he has reached out about having some type of training sessions there. So, it does 2 things, helping train local nurses/PT and at the same time if there's a veteran need that needs some medical aide, they can stop in. So, if you have any ideas on how we can use that facility to either support veterans or a supportive service to veterans please let me know. Bill I'd like to commend you on taking lead on the bridge. Thank you.

Joe how do we work on contracts for monuments and stuff like that? There always needs to a funding source for the yearly maintenance and upkeep that often gets forgotten and then it ends up falling apart. Joe responds I'm just a spokesperson. I know there's going to be a welcome center and a small cafeteria. So, I imagine that'll be a cost and money will need to be raised for funding. Plus, we've got DonJoh right there so if they need to tow the ship somewhere they can get the maintenance done.

Ms. Meghat states and with the funding for the ship Joe Flack has been working closely with our office. We have worked with him on different grants and federal grants to get those fundings and help with the upkeep as it goes on. For the CMS we've also been tracking it with our office too. When all the info comes out, please reach out so we can try to figure out how to help on our end. Our office has been watching it as well. We've been having bi-weekly meetings with Mr. Mellon in our office. So, any input that you guys have that would be beneficial, you are more than welcome to reach out. Thank you.

Mr. Vybiral states Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen. Our outreach continued strong through the fall. We recognize our attending Rep Jake Banta expo in Corry, Rep Merksi and Harkins expo in Harbor creek, Mercer stand down events, YMCA senior fair. I'd like to give shout out to Mr. Benacci for his county veterans ceremony on November 10. It was well attended. So, thank you for supporting that. Thanksgiving we hosted a tour for a midshipman from the naval academy. She was a Mercyhurst Prep grad so it's always nice to get that opportunity to contribute to the younger generation. The American Legion Christmas tour was great. Thank you, Karen. Thank you, Gary. Our region district 29 always seems to be one of the strongest as far as turnout. Especially after 3 yr. hiatus that we couldn't do it. To come back with 50 strong was impressive. Last weekend the VFW auxiliary visited and toured. To conclude as we all know Wreaths Across America is this Saturday. If you are attending, I am encouraging everyone to get there by 11:30. We are anticipating a large turnout. We will be back by the blockhouse for the ceremony at noon for the national moment of silence. The ceremony will proceed after that. We will have active service members of each branch, will place a wreath at the ceremony, to give veterans of those branches a servicing opportunity to salute off on their wreath. Immediately after the ceremony we will march down to the cemetery and place wreaths. Thank you.

Mr. Fry states First of all, I heard about the outstanding veteran's day ceremony here. Sorry I didn't make it. I had a speaking engagement. Joe, you got some TV time meaning good promotion to get the news around to everybody and that's always a plus. I have the results of the bridge. The bridge name will be the Veterans' Memorial Bridge. Thank you.

OLD BUSINESS

No old business to discuss.

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 March 14, 2023, at 9:00 am.

Approved:



Gary Fry, President AMVETS

Minutes submitted by: Rasheda Goodwine