

**HOLLIDAYSBURG VETERANS' HOME (HVH) ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES**

**THURSDAY, JULY 18, 2024**

**10:00 AM**

**ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:**

R. Raymond Lenz (Council Secretary), American Legion Department of PA  
Joseph Rodkey, Blinded Veterans Association  
Brian Querry, Centre County, Director of VA  
David Wagner, DAV  
Jay Buchanan, MOAA  
Michael "Mick" Hoover, MOPH  
Tim Susengill, Vietnam Veterans Association  
Todd Warner, Pennsylvania State Association County Director of Veterans Affairs  
Henry J. Gaunt, American Vets  
Irene Fulton, Resident Representative

**VIP'S PRESENT:**

Amanda Walker, representing Senator Judy Ward

**DMVA PRESENT:**

Travis Davis, Executive Director of Long-Term Care, Bureau of Veterans' Homes  
Barb Raymond, Director, Bureau of Veterans' Homes

**HVH PRESENT:**

Chrissy Dambeck, Commandant  
Kelly Smith, Deputy Commandant  
Desiree Kearney, Director of Nursing  
Donald Ratchford, Doctor  
Richard Hall, CRNP  
Joe Patterson, Admissions and Marketing  
Adrienne Bilek, Dietary Director  
Joseph Megahan, DON Clerk  
Anissa Rosemas, Administrator  
Dylan Nelson, Assistant to the Commandant and *Recorder*

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

Anna Marie Rodkey, Spouse of Joseph Rodkey  
Constance Stransky, Guest of R. Raymond Lenz  
Lory Liebegott, DAV Service Officer

**VACANT POSITIONS:**

Jewish War Veterans

**ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT:**

John "Goose" Marin, Catholic War Vets  
Thomas Williams, Veterans of Foreign Wars  
Ildephonse "Duffy" Hines (Council President), Marine Corps League Department of PA

**Moment of Silence and Pledge of Allegiance**

Tim asked everyone to stand, and he led the Pledge of Allegiance. He then asked everyone to take a moment of silence.

**Call to Order/Roll Call**

Tim Susengill called the meeting to order at 10:03 AM and asked everyone in attendance to introduce themselves and to provide their title and/or Service Organization.

**Swearing In New Members**

General Weigl (via phone) swore in both Jay Buchanan and Todd Warner.

**Review of Minutes from Previous Meeting**

Tim asked everyone to review the minutes, then asked if anyone had any questions or comments. Nobody responded, with Tim then saying the minutes were formally approved.

**Dr. Donald Ratchford**

Dr. Ratchford said that it was nice to meet everyone. He said he was from Ebensburg PA in the Portage and Cresson area for about 20 years now. He has an interest in hospice and palliative care and is the director for Conemaugh's Hospice program. He stated that he was not a veteran, but that he has several veterans in family and has also taken care of veterans in personal practice. Dr. Ratchford said it was his 3<sup>rd</sup> week in the clinical realm here, and that he was excited to be here. Rich Hall, CRNP has been known by Dr. Ratchford for 5 years now, and that he brings experience and positive energy here with him. The second CRNP position is currently posted.

## **Questions, Comments, Concerns**

N/A

## **Employee Recognition**

N/A

## **Matt Smearman**

Construction is 60% complete, they are still working on roof and framing up resident rooms. Still have a lot of work to do, putting in windows and fireproofing. Hopefully in the next few months the exterior will be sealed and they can work only on the inside. So far, there have been no major hiccups. A few small things periodically pop up, but they are able to be handled internally and at no additional cost to the commonwealth. Mac Hall – July 30<sup>th</sup> is the new open date at no additional cost to the commonwealth. Staff is getting trained on new hot water boilers, the equipment will be under warranty for one year.

## **Maureen Weigl, Deputy Adjutant General**

Maureen apologized that she could not be there in person. The budget passed, with nothing changing in a way that was detrimental to the homes. First ever PA Vet conference will be held on Dec 4 to 6. Our first ever women's magazine was published, featuring residents and staff from HVH that are veterans.

## **Travis Davis, Executive Director of Long-Term Care**

The state budget passed, with the budget being decreased slightly but not impacting the operations. State budget did prioritize providers coming out of the COVID pandemic. There was an increase to Medicaid, 7%. Will be a substantial increase for providers to be able to handle rising costs of care. House bill 1853 was approved by senate, intention of bill was to set annual meeting between DOH surveyors and providers to collaborate once a year. Have seen deficiencies and penalties increase with no transparency as to why. Better understanding and collaboration with them would benefit everyone involved. DMVA culture change initiative started last year; they have engaged with various groups and gotten feedback to improve working conditions at the homes. They opened up the floor for comments and ways for staff to engage anonymously if they wished. The next phase is to incorporate trainings covering the issues that were brought up. Travis wanted to congratulate everyone for homes week. The HVH has their annual DOH survey happening right now. All of the homes have been busy with VA and DOH surveys, 2 or 3 more homes to go yet. Surveys are also being done internally in order to ensure consistency of care. At Southeast Medical Center they have also added a new doctor to their staff. For admissions across homes – wait times have been significantly decreased. Getting vets and spouses in homes quicker. We are keeping track of the wait times. Homes are communicating with each other to communicate the options for the veterans. Southeast and Del Val are taking longer than other homes, Southeast is struggling due to staffing shortages. Recruitment and retention – getting new people to apply for jobs is a challenge. There is an

opportunity with federal VA for a grant concerning nursing staff; we are currently applying for the grant. We are currently working with office of administration and negotiations with unions for nursing staff.

### **Questions, Comments, Concerns**

Question – are there certain things that would expedite people for admissions?

Bed availability can be challenging, so it is important to get the paperwork started when early warning signs present themselves to ensure a speedy intake process for veterans.

Question – mental health and memory care – are there any new initiatives in that area?

One of the priorities from staff is to increase dementia trainings. This process has been started as the homes are developing training programs to help support staff. The Federal VA is aware of all country state veteran homes issues, we keep pushing for additional assistance with training, recruitment and retention.

Question - Have they reached out to the department of aging?

Yes, we have reached out.

Question for Dr. Ratchford – Have you heard about reducing myeloid deposits?

There is a lot of research into dementia and Alzheimer's. It is a painstaking and slow process, there is an IV treatment approved but unfortunately has very negative side effects and Dr. Ratchford is hesitant to utilize it due to the negative side effects. There continues to be research about it, hopefully moving forward there will be better ways for us to be able to implement it.

Question - Would it benefit us to have staff concentrated there that know how to deal with it?

We do get all our staff members trained for dementia care, with more training being given as needed.

### **Barb Raymond, Director**

We are doing well in a covid perspective, no major outbreaks in any of our homes. One of our residents reached out to a legislative office for quarantining and we are still following the legal guidelines presented to us. We do still isolate individuals due to sickness or exposure, and we are still following DOH guidelines that have been in place for years. We were hopeful that they may have backed off after flu season, but still no changes for hospitals or nursing homes. Still encourage COVID vaccine, CDC did put out recommendations. There will be a flu vaccine coming out in fall, with RSV we have about 70% of our population vaccinated. There is no new recommendations regarding a RSV booster as of yet. Regulatory wise, hours per patient per day increased to 3.2, we budget at 3.8. 380 hours of nursing care needs to be provided for a 100 bed facility, which we are covered for except for weekend coverage. Trying to cover weekends, with strategies including incentive programs concerning working hours and rate of pay boosts. Staff numbers are lowering due to bed numbers being lowered with the new building. We continue to apply our eligible residents for PACT act reviewing in an attempt to diminish all resident costs as much as possible.

### **Questions, Comments, Concerns**

Question – Is the isolation wing in Mac Hall still needed?

The isolation wing was necessary at the height of COVID. It is no longer necessary; however, there was a problem with the roof leaking and repairs were needed. The repairs have been made and the wing is operable. It is recommended to bring up at the next resident council meeting for further discussion.

### **Compliance Report – Beth Warner**

We have completed 9 Facility Performance Assessments (FPA) for 2024, which includes the 6 State Veterans Homes (SVH) and 3 of the personal care homes. The team will begin to prepare FPA scheduling for 2025 survey preparation. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> quarterly compliance meetings done, second week of September will be the next meeting.

### **Chrissy Dambeck, Commandant**

Surveys, DOH here now conducting annual and complaint survey. Chrissy apologized for the lack of available room due to the DOH utilizing the conference room. There were only 3 deficiencies for the VA survey which was a big improvement from last year, but there was an issue with dietary and credentialing process. Commandant report – page 11, items of interest and town hall meeting on June 28<sup>th</sup> with Travis and General Weigl. There are ongoing CLC transition meetings happening every other week due to it being a huge transition. Committees are being formed, with info being shared with us from Centre Crest, was very beneficial and will help us to be proactive moving forward. Softball tournament coming up in August with Van Zandt; last year Van Zandt did not get enough players but this year it will be held in August. A trophy will be going home each year with the winning team. Staffing – we did recently post for 15 nursing positions, primarily 2<sup>nd</sup> shift. An offer was extended to CRNP, but they declined so the position has been reposted. Ray Lenz will be stepping down from his officer position at the American Legion; we wanted to thank him for that and got him a cake in appreciation. Ray said it was his honor and thanked everyone. For CLC, there was discussion in the past about naming the neighborhoods in the building after fallen soldiers, 31 total names submitted for 8 neighborhoods and 1 veterans hall to name. Names were presented to resident councils, now brought here for the final review. All names submitted are heroes who deserve to be recognized. The fallen soldiers are as follows: Gunnery Sgt. Ronald Baum, SSGT Matthew Nevin Ingham, Pfc Larry Parks, Jr., Robert Boyd Jenkins, Ralph Fabbri, Sgt. Brandon Adams, Spc. E-4 Chad A. Edmundson, Spc. Michael A. Hook. We still want to honor those who were not recognized, so will put up a plaque with their names on it in the new building. The names are as follows:

Veterans' Hall – John Francis Gority – former member of our advisory council

Does anyone have anything to add or any objections?

Barb – I like the idea.

Chrissy – the given list did not include women veterans or all branches of the military. We could still always add plaques to the walls to recognize more people.

### **Kelly Smith, Deputy Commandant**

From the VA survey, prevailing rate residents had issues concerning billing. We are currently going back and working with providers to get those issues cleared up and prevented moving forward. There are 31 prevailing rate residents currently, and we are now sending letters out.

### **Questions, Comments, Concerns**

N/A

### **Old Business**

N/A

**New Business**

N/A

**Announcements/Good of the Council**

Ray Lenz said that he talked to Duffy on the phone, and that he needs our prayers and support. Asking all present to send him a card. Ray said that he enjoyed volunteering and working on the Bingos, and he will be sure to come in from time to time to work bingos again. Ray wanted to congratulate the maintenance people for getting the flowers and urns outside to have the place look so beautiful.

**Adjournment**

Ray reminded everyone that the next Advisory Council meeting is set to be held on Thursday, October 17, 2024, at 1000hrs.

Meeting was adjourned at 1127hrs.

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**R. Raymond Lenz, Secretary**