



**DELAWARE VALLEY VETERANS HOME
ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES – February 12, 2025, 10:00am**

Advisory Council Members

In person

James Ritchie, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Benjamin Mastridge, Veterans of Foreign Wars, President Advisory Council
Ashley Conaway, for Senator Frank A. Farry

Conference Call

Samuel Huhn, Blinded Veterans Association
Larry Holman, Jewish War Veterans
James Ritchie, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Douglas Craig, Catholic War Veterans
Leonard M. Johnson, Disabled American Veterans
Claudette Campbell, Military Officers Assoc. Of America
Patricia (Tricia) Udicious for Martina White, PA House of Representatives
Maureen Weigl, Deputy Adjutant General-VA
Travis Davis, Executive Director, Long-Term Care

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and Delaware Valley Veterans Home

Violetta Berdichevskaya, Chief Medical Officer, DMVA
Rita Yeung, Deputy Commandant, DVVH
Yahvae Jones, Admissions and Marketing Coordinator, DVVH
Jada Miles, Admissions Clerk, DVVH
Rodica Pasculescu, Clerical Assistant Clerk, DVVH
Rinisha Thomas, Director of Nursing, DVVH
William McGoldrick, Volunteer Resource Coordinator, DVVH

Absent

Allan Abramson, Jewish War Veterans
Daniel McCollum, American Legion
Richard Fine, AMVETS
Beth Werner, Regional Compliance Officer
David Petro, Resident Representative
Barbara Raymond, Director of Veterans' Homes
Margo Coleman, Commandant, DVVH
Erica Moore, Regional Program Outreach Coordinator
Veronica Royster, Assistant to the Commandant

- Roll Call
- Moment of Silence
- Pledge of Allegiance
- Approval of Minutes from November 13, 2024

Report from Violetta Berdichevskaya, Medical Director

- Delaware Valley had an outbreak of COVID as well as the cold flu. The people are not sick, obviously the vaccination is working. We did not lose anyone from COVID or Flu. We do have some norovirus here and there. This year it is the highest out of the last 15 years nationwide in the United States, outbreaks of the influenza. This week we have only 2 patients with Covid and 1 with influenza. Vaccination rate was very high, especially in this Del Val building, we are aggressive with vaccinations. As you know every single year, they are basically guessing what strain of the virus will be, it seems like they missed this year. That is the end of my report.
- Benjamin Mastridge -The outbreak, do you think that is possibly the present condition that people are denying that these vaccines work? I don't, I take all my shots, a lot of people are denying that the vaccines work. Dr. B.- When it comes to institutions like us, 1 case of COVID we call it an outbreak, it sounds horrible. It is only 1 per patient. Influenza is 2 patients, we call it outbreak. It is only a few.
- Ben- does the residents have a choice of the vaccination? Dr. B. Yes, of course they have a choice, absolutely we are not forcing.
- Larry Holman- My son said funds at the federal level are being weakened, I am wondering if the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is taking offsetting steps to strengthen the surveillance for diseases such as the bird flu, do we have any status of that? Also trying to develop preventive measures such as that vaccine. The States, each one or in combination with each other offset what is being done at the federal level. Dr. B.- I have no answer to your question sir. I definitely can tell you one thing, previously before the COVID era, if you as a medical provider, whether you were a physician, nurse, CNA, or whoever is working in the long-term or hospital level of care, if you are not vaccinated for flu that particular season, you are wearing a mask until March 31st, which is our official ending of our flu season. I am not sure why it is not mandatory to wear the mask, but it is not the case anymore. With the new administration in the White House, maybe something will change, and we will be wearing the mask if you are not vaccinated, we will see.

Report from Yahvae Jones, Admissions/Marketing

- I just want to give you an update from the last quarter, since the last meeting we had 17 admissions and 8 expirations. Our current census is 159 out of 171. I am currently working to send the census back up to 164, which means I am offering 5 beds to those on our skilled waitlist. Our current waitlist is 104 veterans and spouses, I currently am admitting those who applied in May of 2024, which is about an eight month wait time for veterans on our skilled side. We do not have any veterans on our secured side, at this time the beds are on an availability basis, so if I do have an available bed on that secured side, I will be able to fill it as soon as I receive the application and supporting documents. The wait time for spouses is based off female availability and openings, which we currently do not have, it is still about a two to three year wait for those spouses to get in here.
- Marketing- I have done a lot of events in November and December, the main ones would be parks casino, recently had Dietz and Watson come out last week, on Thursday before the Superbowl, they gave out t-shirts and hats to our staff and residents. I am keeping in contact with our community

partners. Two facilities recently lost their VA contract, so I am working with them to get them to apply their veterans to a state veterans' home, as opposed to sending them out to some place where they won't get good care and not as affordable as a state veterans' home. I am still working with the VA Social workers for their discharge plans with their veterans and working with the veteran's community partnership. I recently got Southeast on board, so now they are a part of the veteran's community partnership, and they are going to get the exposures and referrals that I also get. I am still in contact with the Philadelphia Elder Care Network. I am currently working to become apart of the Bucks County Elder Care Network. Sam Huhn from the blinded veterans- Do you have any blind or visually impaired residents at the home? Yahvae-Yes, we do. Sam- Do they get in-service support for the VA like in Philadelphia, like orientation mobility, do they come out and show them how to get around? Yahvae - Typically with us being a nursing home there is 24-hour staff, so the staff gets them orientated to their rooms and things like they need.

Report from Maureen Weigl, Deputy Adjutant General

- General Pippy was confirmed unanimously, so he is now The Adjutant General, he received his promotion orders, so we are waiting to have his promotion to Major General, he is the Adjutant General. He and I worked together out in Pittsburgh. We visited Southwestern Veterans Center, and he got a whole tour of the facility, and he learned all about the home, that was a lot of fun.
- The legislatures are back in session right now, we have new members on the VEEP Committee, the Appropriations Committee, trying to see what legislations they are working to push. They have a list of different bills that did not get passed in previous years that they are trying to reintroduce.
- VetCon 2025 is going to be in your area, down at the Valley Forge conference center, we are very excited about that. You are welcome to join any of the sessions.
- There has been a lot of executive orders with the new administration, not all of those orders are directly impacting veterans yet. They put a hiring freeze on. The VISN 4 director Tim Liezert is retiring at the end of March. We don't know if they will have a back fill for him right away. There are some other positions we are waiting to see who they hire, more on that, right now it should not have an impact on our veterans.
- We are working on hard-to-place veterans, folks that Yahvae and the admissions team bring into our homes because of behavior issues or previous issues that they had, we are working with them. The AMVETS is going to have their national headquarters in Washington, they applied for a grant for helping incarcerated veterans, working with all of them. I will let Travis do the regular homes update. Thank you to the Del Valley team, they had a lot of fun Sunday morning before the Superbowl. Congratulations to you all. Go Eagles, the team down there got their jerseys, from the Pennsylvania wounded warriors, the team had fun giving out the jerseys. I appreciate what you all do for us. Thank you.

Report from Travis Davis, Executive Director, Long-Term Care

- Thank you all for seeing my email, I am sorry that we had to move this virtually. Due to the state offices on delay, we wanted to make sure everyone was safe this morning. Our Director of Homes Barbara Raymond, along with our Commandants are all down in D.C. this week, at the National Association of State Veterans Home conference. Part of this conference every year is the Capitol Hill visits, where they get to visit their federal Senators and Congressman and women. I spoke to Margo

and Barbara this morning; they were on the Metro headed to the Capitol. We wish them luck as they go and advocate for things we need for our veterans of Pennsylvania.

- I will cover our directors report as well as some of the Commandant report along with Rita, our Deputy Commandant.
- The calendar year 2024 we had a lot of surveys; we get surveys from multiple regulatory agencies. Last year we had over 40 surveys, they all went very well. The end of the year, Delaware Valley had the VA annual survey. We are working on a plan of correction, that will be submitted back for approval, overall, that went well. This first quarter of 2025 we are in the window, so we are expecting annual surveys up in Erie from the Department of health, as well as the Federal VA. We are expecting the Federal VA to come into Southeast Veteran Center and Gino Merli any week now.
- 5-star reports – We have some good news, we still have our three 5-star facilities, Delaware Valley, Gino Merli, and Southeast Veterans Center. We have two 4-star facilities, Erie and Hollidaysburg just jumped to a 4 star, and one 3-star Southwestern Veterans Center. Southeast Veterans Center, Delaware Valley, and Gino Merli all received best nursing home recognition from U.S. News & World Report.
- Respiratory illnesses- Dr. B. gave an update on Delaware Valley. Across all our homes, we have 14 resident's positive for COVID, and 5 staff members. We do have a flu outbreak at 2 of our homes, with that being said flu cases are at a high across the country.
- Vaccines – We currently have 915 residents who got their flu vaccine, and 795 residents have received their COVID vaccine.
- Total census across the state, we have 1128 residents with 280 on the wait list. As Yahvae mentioned, she has 104 out of that 280 at Delaware Valley. So, you can see our Philadelphia home remains very high in terms of wait list. The demand certainly is there for the Philadelphia Veterans Home. Last year we did 501 admissions, thank you to the admissions teams, they are working hard making sure that we get our veterans and spouses placed timely. We are still obviously facing a staffing challenge, we have over 500 vacancies right now.
- One thing that is good on that front, is we were awarded a federal grant from the VA to help us with nurse recruitment and retention. One of two of the unions that it affects has signed off on this. We are starting to advertise that in our homes, starting this week. What this grant will allow us to do is put some money in the pocket of a nurse who currently works for us, who refers a nurse to come into employment with one of our state veterans' homes, that new hire will also receive a sign-on bonus. So hopefully we get some traction, and this brings some new people into our homes to help care for our residents, as well as help us to retain who is doing a great job for us. We spent a little bit of money this year just to market that, each home chipped in, and we are going to run a social media campaign and get that awareness out there. That went out the end of last week, you should start seeing some of that marketing.
- Culture change initiative – We spoke about this in our last meeting, we are continuing to push flexible work schedules, training opportunities, mentorship, anything that we can do to help promote the culture amongst our veterans' homes.
- Legislative front- With the election, at the federal level, we are still waiting to see what they are going to do with that federal staffing minimum, that was proposed through the Biden administration. We don't know quite yet where it is going, but all indications from federal, probably be taken off the table, overall, we support that.

- State budget- There is no increases this year for long-term care, no major impacts to us, we are still looking at the budget right now, making adjustments where needed.
- Construction- Hollidaysburg is moving along very nicely, we had opportunities to tour the building, it looks great. We are running into some delays with transfer switches for our generators. Right now our plan is to do a ribbon cutting in late August or early September, and move residents in around thanksgiving. Gino Merli is under construction right now with some renovations. Delaware Valley has the best main street; you all know that. I do take that model and incorporate it into other facilities, so residents have a place to congregate, that is what Gino Merli is in the process of doing right now, that construction has just begun. Southwestern Veterans Center, they are in the design stage for a major construction project to renovate all their residents' rooms and bathrooms.
- We had multiple 100 birthdays this year, one at Delaware Valley just recently, they have all been great and a lot of fun. As general Weigl mentioned, the Superbowl parties was a success. Thank you to General Weigl for really working with the wounded warrior foundation to get our residents some jerseys and make that extra special.
- This spring we are going to bring all of our commandants, directors of nursing, our leadership at the homes together for our senior leadership, that is going to be hosted up in Scranton March 18th - March 20th. As Maureen mentioned VetCon, that is exciting, we are starting to get it together with our list of speakers and work groups, we are looking forward to having that in the Philadelphia area. That concludes my report, I will be happy to take any questions from the council. Jim Ritchie – Would you please give me an update on the addition that was supposed to be put up here to add more beds, it has been a couple years now and I have not heard any more about it. Travis- I am glad you asked that, those plans that were made to increase the beds at Delaware Valley, those were phased out to start after 2030. We are still a couple years out from there, however with the new building at Hollidaysburg, we are going to be reducing our bed count on the nursing side there by approximately 50 beds. Right now, we are in the process of trying to retain those licensures for those beds and see where we can put them. Whether it be an extension project at Delaware Valley or conversion with personal care beds to nursing beds at Southeast Veterans Center, those are all conversations that General Weigl, leadership and I are having to see where the need is. We do not want to lose the licensure for those beds, we cannot just hold those, the Department of Health will not allow us to do that. We certainly know that the demand is in the Philadelphia area, we are just looking right now to see where we can place those beds, because we are going to have to do that this calendar year. We cannot roll out construction that quick, to look at Delaware Valley as a possible expansion is certainly still on the table. Benjamin- Has the grant money made an effect on drawing new employees here throughout the system? Travis -It has not yet, because we just started, we spent a lot of time trying to get this approved on the state level. These were federal dollars that were awarded to us, we had to jump through a few hoops with our office of administration in Harrisburg, we were successful with that.

Report from Rita Yeung, Deputy Commandant

- Our Commandant is away at a conference this week, I am covering for her to give the report.
- The Veterans Administration contracted survey team, Ascellon, was on campus December 17th through the 20th for both the VA annual health and life safety inspections. We had very few citations identified, and efforts have already begun to work toward our plan of correction. All citations were low level deficiencies. We also had a revisit from Department of Health in November clearing up any deficiencies from our annual and life safety surveys, so we are back in full operational compliance.
- We have had quite an exciting quarter since last meeting. We had a visit from Governor Shapiro to wish out residents a happy and safe holiday season and he was accompanied by Brig. General John Pippy, Pennsylvania's Acting Adjutant General and head of the Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs as well as the Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Health, Dr. Debra Bogen.
- Delaware Valley Veterans Home began its employee recognition program "Caught you Caring" in January. There were many wonderful nominees who will be recognized in our upcoming newsletters and the recipients of the award will be invited quarterly to these meetings to be honored for their achievement.
- And last month we were again lucky to honor another resident as he turns 100 years old! Mr. Al Teplitsky celebrated all month long starting with the Bensalem Police Department providing an escort to the casino where the red-carpet treatment was in full swing; a steak luncheon and a beautiful party at DVVH, a letter from Governor Shapiro and a visit from Brigadier General (PA) Maureen Weigl and State Representative Martina White, Al had a birthday to remember!
- Last week at our All-Hands Town Hall meetings we honored 11 employees with Longevity awards which recognized employees for 5, 10, 15, and 20 years of services. Of the 11 employees recognized, five employees we recognized for 20 years of service.
- State Veterans Home Week is coming up in June and planning is already underway. This year our residents selected a Carnival circus theme. We are also planning on unveiling new names for our units during this week. We are running a suggestion box the month of February for anyone who would like to contribute to the renaming; those entries will be narrowed down by a committee so voting for a final choice can be completed by June. Any documents and signs around the building will be updated to reflect the new names. By renaming our units we are embracing a concept for Delaware Valley being a home for human beings and not an institution.
- Delaware Valley residents continue to receive generous financial support from our community and most recently a donor gifted the resident welfare fund 138,000 dollars, the donor was not previously affiliated with the home. We are very grateful for all donations we receive which supports our residents enjoying many events and outings. This conclude my report, any Questions? No

Douglas Craig, Catholic War Veterans

- Happy Abraham Lincoln birthday today.

Patricia (Tricia) Udicious, PA House of Representatives (Representative Martina White office)

- I just want to say Martina had a wonderful time at Al Teplitsky 100th birthday it was a wonderful event. She is very grateful that she has been reappointed by the speaker for next year.

Larry Holman, Jewish War Veterans

- I regret to report that my cancer has come back, we start the battle anew, this time it will involve some radiation. I plan to maintain my involvement here to what ever extent I can.

Claudette Campbell, Military Officers Association of America

- It was good to hear from the medical director that through her staff they are monitoring, controlling and preventing communicable diseases, such as COVID, flu and norovirus. It is good to hear from the Deputy Commandant that you are backing the compliance. Larry, I hope that your process and continuing quest to stay well as you can, will be a comfort to you and a success.
- I like to share with you that Brigadier General Weigl was our keynote speaker at our annual Christmas gala for the Military Officers Association of America Willow Grove branch on December 6th, 2024, at the William Penn inn in Gwynedd, PA, located in Montgomery county. The presentation was outstanding and very comprehensive, about what the department does, and she gave a great overview of her responsibilities and services to veterans in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. We had ample time for questions, answers and comments. Seventy of our retiring officers, family and friends attended the gala. This was the largest attendance in several years and we appreciated having you Brigadier General Weigl.
- On behalf of MOAA we are going to donate \$400.00 to the Delaware Valley Veterans Home welfare fund, I will bring the check when we have our next meeting.

Report from William McGoldrick, Volunteer Resource Coordinator

- Our annual volunteer Calendar year 2024 volunteer hours by the organizations, we achieved over 2,000 hours. The top organization was American Legion Post 754, second was the Vietnam Vets Memorial Society, and third was American Legion Auxiliary Post 148. 610 hours, 444 hours and 248 hours respectively. Our individual volunteer hours that will include all volunteers that are not affiliated with organizations. We achieved over 3,000 hours. With all the battles we had the flu and COVID throughout the year the volunteers really stepped up and came to the home and helped us out here to get through a tough year.
- April is volunteer appreciation month, sometime in the end of April after I meet with the Commandant, we are going to have a volunteer appreciation luncheon here at the home. We do that every year, we are looking for a guest speaker, if anybody is interested in coming up or be a guest speaker to the volunteers. I have to work with the Commandant to pick a date. Benjamin – I been on the council for 15 years, I am wondering is this considered a volunteer, because I am a volunteer here? Should the hours I spend here be credited? William replied from my understanding is you have an appointment. You do a lot of stuff via appointment outside of this building to organizations you communicate with. Because you have an appointment, I do not believe it is considered as volunteer time, that is my understanding. Benjamin- I do not get that, we are not



getting paid, so we are volunteering to be here. I also volunteer here doing other things. I think we need to clarify that, I think we are volunteers, I will let that go.

Patricia (Patty) Leneghan PA House of Representatives (Representative Martina White office)

Ashley Conaway, PA House of Representatives (Senator Frank Farry office)

Dr. Wallace Quinlan, Philadelphia City Council (Councilman Brian O'Neill office)

Douglas Craig, Catholic War Veterans

Benjamin Mastridge, Veterans of Foreign Wars

Good of the Counsel: James Ritchie- Glad to be here today, fortunately in this are the roads were pretty clear and easy to get here. I just finished getting my COVID shot, and flu shot.

Adjourned: 10:45 AM

Next Meeting: May 14, 2025

DRAFT