

Meeting Minutes
December 4, 2008
American Legion Post #127
Bothell, WA

PRESENT:

Chairman, Phil Ruhmshottel, Marine Corps League
Vice Chair: Lloyd Burroughs, NABVETS
Rafael Ojeda, American GI Forum
Dennis Primoli, At Large
Gary Pearson, Paralyzed Veterans of American GI Forum
Col. Mary Forbes, At Large
Bill Schrier, American Legion
Roy Compton, AX-POWs
Bill Nickerson, Washington Veterans Home
J.F. Goffinet, Advisor
Frank Cordero, Advisor

EXCUSED:

Michele Colpaert, DAV
George Edmundson, Advisor
Gary Yeager, MOPH
Heinz Hickethier, Advisor
Deryl McCarty, MOAA
Oria Berndt, Advisor

Chair, Phil Ruhmshottel called the meeting to order and led the Pledge of Allegiance.
Lloyd Burroughs offered the invocation.
Phil introduced members of the audience and WDVA staff.

Minutes:

A correction to the minutes was made. The Veterans Wheelchair Games were held in Omaha, Nebraska.

A motion was made by Bill Schrier and seconded by Lloyd Burroughs to accept the minutes of the last meeting as corrected. The motion was passed unanimously.

Missing In America:

Rich Cesler, WDVA Cemetery Director for the Eastern Washington Cemetery introduced key people in Washington State's effort to provide a proper burial to the veterans' remains abandoned at funeral homes across the state. These individuals participated in the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding to work together to ensure all veterans are identified and placed. KING-5 reporter, Chris Ingalls, spoke of his interest in the program that prompted two stories on their television station.

Legislation has been introduced that would limit liability for WDVA when a veterans remains are turned over to the agency for interment

Those who attended the signing and spoke briefly are:

- John Lee, Director of the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs

- COL Mary Forbes, on behalf of General Tim Lowenberg of the Washington National Guard
- Dennis Murphy, Public Relations for the Funeral Directors Association of Washington
- Gregory Smart, President of the Washington Cemetery and Funeral Association
- Bradley Carlson, Washington State Cemetery Board
- Dick Knaus, Chair of the Washington State Funeral Directors
- Chris Dulas, Washington State Coordinator of the Missing In America project
- James Trimbo, Director of Tahoma National Cemetery

Outgoing Chairman:

New chairman, Phil Ruhmshottel, presented a plaque to Dick Whipple, outgoing Chair, for his service to the VAAC and the veterans of Washington State.

Outstanding Veterans Awards:

Phil Ruhmshottel and WDVA Deputy Director, Alfie Alvarado, announced the winners of the Outstanding Veterans Awards, which were presented at the Auburn Veterans Day Parade, on November 8, 2008.

- Outstanding Patriotic Award: Wendy Carolan and Don Shack
- Outstanding Legislator: Senator Margarita Prentice and Representative Tom Campbell
- Outstanding Service Officer: Roger Proctor, VFW
- Outstanding Volunteer Service Officer: Cyndy Reynolds
- Outstanding Female Non-Veteran: Dr. Bridget Cantrell
- Outstanding Male Non-Veteran: Konrad Haskins
- Outstanding Employee: Dennis Clark

Mr. Clark was not available at the parade, but was in attendance at the meeting, so Phil presented him with his award at that time.

Walla Walla Veterans Home:

Alfie Alvarado, WDVA Deputy Director, spoke about the plan for WDVA to open a state veterans home on the campus of the Walla Walla VA medical center. Some areas of the VAMC have been closed, including their nursing home, so the federal VA asked Washington State to consider a location on their campus for the fourth home. The federal VA will offer an enhanced lease of the property.

WDVA hired NBBJ (the architectural firm that also designed the new building at Retsil) to design the facility, and briefed the Walla Walla community. They are looking at what is called the "Green House Concept". These are individual rooms with common kitchen, dining and living room areas that make it more like a regular home. Residents are referred to as "elders" and decisions are made by consensus between the elders and the staff. They would have private baths. Other items such as medications would be located in each resident's room instead of having a med cart pushed through the halls.

The agency is looking at approximately eighty beds. If everything goes as hoped, the new facility would break ground in 2011 with completion in 2015.

81st Heavy Combat Brigade:

The National Guard units left with fanfare in various communities. There have been 7,900 deployments for the 6,200 soldiers. This means some have served more than one deployment. Through a special fund, services will be provided to these soldiers. The WDVA, National Guard Association of Washington and the American Legion will make it possible for donors to receive a Washington State flag, or US Flag, flown over a firearms base in Iraq.

The Brigade will return in October, 2009 and all employers are encouraged to hire these returnees. Please watch for the exact date, locations and times for the returning celebrations so you can show up and thank them for their service.

When they come home, 800 will be immediately unemployed; 200 will not have jobs to go back to; and approximately 200 may not want to return to what they used to do. It is critical to find employers and work on other employment opportunities using all partners in the Memorandum of Understanding signed, and updated with additional partners over the last few years.

Gary Pearson presented his donation to Tom Riggs. Please send donations to American Legion Post #161, PO Box 2695, Redmond WA 98073 and make checks out to: National Guard Association of Washington.

Veteran Housing:

Beacon Development Group, represented by president, Paul Purcell, presented their plan to build affordable permanent housing on the American Lake VA campus. Over five years, they expect to have 300 units for veterans and their families. Currently, there is a similar plan to build 99 units outside McChord AFB by the NABVETS organization. They are in the process of raising \$8 million for this project.

The first hurdle for the Beacon group is to convince the legislature to set aside the land for this purpose. This is similar to the Orting project that is being done in conjunction with the Metropolitan Development Council.

A motion was made by Dennis Primoli, seconded by Gary Pearson and unanimously passed for the VAAC to support this project.

National Association of Black Veterans (NABVETS):

Harvey Brooks and Skip Dreps recognized John Lee for the marvelous job as guest speaker at the NABVETS National Convention held, for the first time, in Washington State. John was presented a saber that stands for honor, respect and a willingness to work to help veterans, regardless of their color.

First Gentleman, Mike Gregoire:

Regarding the budget, First Mike told the participants he knew they were all used to challenges and we will face the new ones together.

Good of the Order:

Dennis Primoli provided invitations to the VAAC members for the Veterans Legislative Coalition reception held every year at the start of the Legislative Session. He said a few of the bills being introduced this session will have fiscal notes, which will make them very difficult to pass but they will pursue their approval, regardless.

Dick Kirk was recently appointed to the national board of the Chosin Few

Dick Whipple said the Sears stores are looking for donations to help them in their efforts to serve veterans.

COL Mary Forbes announced her promotion to bring synergy to services and life skills training in their outreach efforts to returning National Guard members and their families. Under her umbrella of authority will be the Deployment Cycle Support, the Chaplain deployed to Iraq, the Sexual Assault Program, the Psychological Health Program, and the Military Funeral Honors Program.

Public Comment:

Two residents of the Washington Soldiers Home attended to better understand what the VAAC does. They are both applying for the open position on the committee to represent the home.

Dale White thanked the VAAC for their support in the veterans memorial project in Tonasket.

The Bothell American Legion post will be hosting Christmas dinner for the 388th Reserve.

Darrell Wolfe voiced his concern about Veterans Assistance Fund money not being spent and returned to the county general fund. He indicated this was happening in several counties.

The DAV is raising funds to provide six new vans to transport veterans to medical appointments. They need more volunteer drivers, as well.

Gary Clarke said he would like to see more services for the elderly as far as claims of terminally ill veterans.

Doug Adams, representing the US Army Association expressed the association's appreciation for the veterans service organizations.

J. W. Johnson stated VA compensation doesn't count as income for property tax purposes.

Dennis Brown asked everyone to help the homeless.

A motion was made and approved to adjourn.