

Board Minutes
6 March 2015
Pikes Peak Community College
5675 S. Academy Blvd., Colorado Springs, CO 80906

Robby Robinson, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 0930 hours. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited and a moment of silence was observed for our POW, MIA, troops in battle or harm's way and all family members.

Roll Call of Members and Introduction of Staff & Guests

Board Members Present:

William "Robby" Robinson, Chairman
Dana Niemela, Vice-Chairman
Rene Simard, Secretary-Not Present
Kathleen Dunemn, Member
Christopher Holden, Member
Duane Dailey, Member
Jack Rudder, Member

DMVA Staff Present:

Mickey Hunt, DMVA, Deputy Director
Reuben Mestas, CDVA Director
Diane Ricci, CDVA Deputy Director
Claire Dean, CDVA Admin. Assistant
Gail Hoagland, DMVA VAG Administrator

Guests Present:

Richard Sandrock, Governor's Office
Leanne Wheeler, Veterans Advocate
Hal Bidlack, Sen. Bennett's Office
Major General Paul LaCamera, Commanding General 4th ID and Fort Carson
Mike Webb, Director Human Resources, Veteran Transition University
Jason Strickland, Project Sanctuary

Guest Presentations

Major General Paul LaCamera, Commanding General of 4th Infantry Division and Fort Carson
Update

Major General LaCamera met with the Colorado Springs Mayor and the Colorado Springs Chief of Police to discuss the economic impact Fort Carson has in the area. Nearly a quarter of the Springs population is military personnel and their families. A community “listening session” was recently held to provide input to the Pentagon in advance of base closing initiatives. Despite the restructuring of various brigades, Fort Carson grew in size. Members of the public voiced their concerns of the environmental impact to Piñon Canyon since combat aviation drills have recently increased in the area. Noise complaints and use of drones were also discussed. Fort Carson allows for high altitude helicopter training in terrain that is very similar to Afghanistan. The Soldier for Life concept was introduced. There is a push to hire veterans within the civilian community. Starbucks has promised to hire 10,000 veterans nationwide over the next several years. The Veterans Opportunity to Work Act, or “VOW Act” helps the veteran transition into civilian life. Pre-separation counseling, financial planning, VA benefits and resume building are all a part of Transition University. Former WWII POW Mr. Corey was brought in to educate the young soldiers about mental strength. Veterans in Piping vocational training program is a success.

Effective May 1, 2015, Fort Carson visitors that do not have a DOD card must register at the control center at Gate 1.

Jason Strickland of Project Sanctuary asked if nonprofits will have easier access to the posts. Major General LaCamera stated that they would have to register at the control center, but added that he would like to have Gold Star families receive a 5-year pass to get onto base.

Dana Niemela asked if there will be any Starbucks Military Family Stores, like the one in San Antonio, that partner with area nonprofits planned for Fort Carson. Major General LaCamera stated that there is already a Starbucks on base.

Chris Holden wondered if the Transition University format will be replicated for other Army posts. Major General LaCamera said that Transition University’s best practices are shared and it is currently used as a model. About 500 soldiers go through the transition program each month. Mr. Holden asked if the Air Force Academy or Navy do any similar transition training. Major General LaCamera followed that while they do have some training in place, they currently don’t have the manpower or facilities that he does.

Robby Robinson asked if there is any tension between the chain of command and the soldier when a soldier is attending Transition University. Major General LaCamera said that while sometimes there is tension, leadership needs to be engaged. A good leader should be interested the soldiers future and their quality of life. Some transition classes are offered overseas in Kuwait. There are a lot of success stories in the business field that are not being told that tie to the adage that the military makes leaders and problem solvers.

Dana Niemela asked if there is a culture of understanding of the importance of the VOW Act. Specifically, does senior leadership understand the importance of the long-term counselling or do they follow it because it’s law? Major General LaCamera stated that some of the leadership understand it and some don’t. It is a constant education for everyone involved to understand the purpose and the benefits to you, the soldier and the community. Dana Niemela added that she hoped they know that the VOW Act came from those who were not afforded this opportunity.

Leanne Wheeler mentioned that when she served in the Air Force, they did on-boarding and wondered if we have the opportunity to create an off-boarding with help from the private

sector. Major General LaCamera pointed out that we would not be able to afford off-boarding which essentially would take manpower away from the military and cost the taxpayers' money.

Mike Webb, Veteran Transition University, Fort Carson

Transition University is introduced to the soldier within 12 months of them getting out of the service. Meetings are held with the Brigade Commanders. Company Battalion have the most trouble with the transition program in terms of having/keeping full staff while sending soldiers through the program. The Military Veterans Appointment Expo at Fort Carson drew a crowd of 5,000 people, 3,000 of which found employment. Only businesses that have 100 or more employment opportunities are allowed in the Expo. There will be one held in May and a large Expo in the fall will be partnered with the Chamber of Commerce. Virtual Job Fairs are offered through Pikes Peak Workforce Center, which allows soldiers stationed anywhere to attend. Currently the VA has 10,000 claim processing jobs that need to be filled. Training for those jobs will take 16 weeks.

With the VOW Act, soldiers can go back at any time to learn employment skills or life skills. In order to stay relevant, more feedback is needed from Transition University alumni. Exit physicals will be completed upon installation. The VFW will help fill out necessary forms for compensation claims. In terms of improvement, the Governor of the State of Colorado said he would like to see more veterans stay in Colorado.

Approval of Minutes from February

Accepted, with changes

Board Member Comments

Robby Robinson: The Legislative Audit Committee will meet on Tuesday at 8:00 A.M. to review the changes implemented in response to the audit of the Veterans Trust Fund.

Mickey Hunt: Visited Montrose VA Hospital and the Colorado State Veteran Cemetery in Grand Junction. The State-owned vacant armory in Grand Junction will be proposed for a future Veteran One-Stop. House Bill 15-1114, if passed, will prohibit the Colorado National Guard from participating in detaining terrorists serving in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Due to the broad language of the bill, our service members would be criminally liable for serving their country. A ribbon cutting ceremony will be held on Sunday at Fort Carson.

Ben Mestas: We have hired two new Service Officers: James Poteet, from the VA Regional Office and Robert Taylor, a former JAG officer. Both will help us to increase our outreach goals and decrease the number of appeals.

The Cemetery expansion continues, with the third columbarium complete. The fourth one will be completed by September. Landscaping has begun. Silt has been removed from the ponds.

Both Broomfield and Park Counties have hired new Service Officers. Vacancies remain in Adams, Custer and Otero Counties.

Diane Ricci: The Colorado County Service Officer Training Conference is coming up. It will be held in Colorado Springs. Board members are welcome to attend. We will be attending a Sky Sox baseball game Tuesday night. Please contact Renee Pace if you are interested in attending. To date, 64 people have registered for the conference which includes a few non-service organizations. Several people from the Warrior Transition unit at Fort Carson will be attending the conference also.

Ben Mestas added that we will need to know which of the Board members will be representing. Duane Dailey asked if there will be computers set up for VetraSpec training at the conference. A discussion about E Benefits followed.

Gail Hoagland: We have fewer trust fund applications. We will need to provide more help to the grantees next year. There is approximately \$443,000 left to expend for VAG. For VTF, we have approximately \$331,000 left to be expended. We are on track with expenditures. The Grant Review Committee will meet March 24, 2015 to review VTF applicants. Prior to the May Board meeting, grantee packets will be given to board members before voting on the grantee selection.

Kathleen Dunemn: With the exception of Rifle, the Community Living Centers financials are very vibrant. Positions have been advertised for the Rifle Community Living Center, including one for Director of Nursing Homes, formerly held by Vickie Gold.

Public Comments

Future Meetings

April 3rd, American Legion, Denver *now changed to the Armory auditorium at the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs in Centennial as of 3/17/15.*

May 1st, Overlaps with CVS0 Training Conference, Grant Meeting, TBA

June 5th, Grand County, Board Elections

No meeting in July

Old Business

Duane Daily asked for the running status of the VSOs bill. Mickey stated that there is enough money in the budget and that the counties do not have to match.

New Business

No Board meeting will be held in July.

Jack Rudder requested a travel spreadsheet.

Meeting adjourned 11:27am