

**Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs Minutes
Friday, March 6, 2020
Rocky Mountain Regional VA Hospital
1700 North Wheeling St.
Aurora, CO**

Members and Guests

Members Present:

Pat Hammon, Vice Chair
Norm Steen, Member
Longinos Gonzalez, Member
Hollie Caldwell, Member
Duane Dailey, Member
Sheila Scanlon, Secretary
Jack Rudder, Chair

DMVA Staff Present:

Brey Hopkins, Deputy Executive Director DMVA
Gail Hoagland, Grant Administrator
Joanne Iglesias, Director CDVA West
Rich Tremaine, Director CDVA East
Carissa Snyder, Office Manager CDVA East
Megan Fraser, Administration CDVA East

Guests Present:

Robbie Robinson, VCLC
Tristan Wyatt, Prosthetics Admin at VAMC
Anna Manceas, Prosthetics Program Assistant
Mike Meinen, Chief of Prosthetics
Robert Sheetz, Adams County CVSO
Bob Lowry, VSO
Teresa Rudder, President CO Federation of Women
Mike Kilmer, Director RMVAMC
Weld County VSO's

Opening

Mr. Rudder called the meeting to order at 0905 hours. Proceedings began with a recitation of the pledge of allegiance and a moment of silence for POWs, MIAs, and troops overseas. Mr. Rudder invited introductions from Board members, staff, and guests.

Special Presentation

Mr. Tremaine explained to those assembled his history with the prosthetics staff at the hospital and their history together during deployment. There was a single incident during deployment in 2003 that left three soldiers with amputations, all three were each given new computer chip prosthetic legs and regained their mobility. Accordingly, Mr. Tremaine presented a Purple Heart Stamp Poster to Mr. Meinen, Chief of Prosthetics that he has been waiting to give him for many years.

Approval of Minutes

Mr. Steen requested that under 'Guest Comments' to have "His VFW post" be changed to "Mr. Williams American Legion Post 1980" and under his Board Member comment to add "of El Pomar Foundation" after "the Pikes Peak Council". Ms. Caldwell requested under her Board Member comment to change "UCHealth" to "Centura". It was also verified that the last meeting was adjourned by Duane Dailey motioning for adjournment and Jack Rudder seconding the motion. There was unanimous approval for adjournment at the last meeting.

Mr. Dailey motioned to approve the minutes as amended, Ms. Hammon seconded the motion. The Board approved the minutes unanimously.

Mr. Kilmer, Director of RMVAMC

In regards to Covid-19, the state nursing homes are one of the most vulnerable populations. The VA has offered infectious disease support to the entire state of Colorado. They will be becoming more aggressive in regards to their response to Covid-19 starting tomorrow. He is coordinating with the state office of public health. The RMVAMC currently has one patient with unknown issues; they tested the individual for Covid-19 and it came back negative. The RMVAMC will be closing down entry/exit points so that everyone coming into the facility can be screened.

Ms. Scanlon inquired if they had enough Covid-19 test kits. Mr. Kilmer had no response to the query. He did explain that it takes 48 hours to run a Covid-19 test and if they have a possible case they are allowing minimum staff access to those rooms including no resident access. He reoffered the consultation services of the RMVAMC to the state of Colorado.

Mr. Kilmer shared that nationally the VA is in a fiscal crunch and they have been told that there will not be a pay raise. The RMVAMC is solvent therefore he has been told to cut five million dollars from his program and give it to the rest of the VA. He needs quick assessment and amazing staff to move his program forward in addition to amazing infrastructure. Mr. Kilmer is working to realign the business and clinical sides of his operations. Community Care and the Mission Act are hemorrhaging primary care doctors and teams. He needs eight new primary care teams. Currently he is forty-six out of fifty in regards to overall market penetration. Consequently he is working on an aggressive outreach and

marketing campaign and is about to start targeting both veterans and their loved ones. Colorado needs growth in its VA system.

Mr. Kilmer has negotiated to retain one third of the old VA facility, he will be selling the other two thirds of the old facility. He may make the remaining facility a residential campus. The Aurora clinic should in the next two to three years be expanded to house thirteen primary care teams instead of the current nine teams. He has received approval for a new clinic in Castle Rock that will house eight primary care teams. Colorado Springs should have a new clinic with four primary care teams opening in six months. There are needs for a super CBOC closer to Fort Carson and to expand specialty care and ambulatory surgery operations.

Rocky Mountain Regional VA Medical Center needs to stop acting like a community hospital and work more like Kaiser. It will be a hub site for spinal cord injury, there will also be a Taver program, a heart reconstructive surgery, built here. Travel funds will be revamped and the position of a travel coordinator for the patients added to the staff. There will be a grand opening of the new Fisher House in June or July and he invited the Board to attend. Mr. Kilmer's four main goals are: Health care, Emergency preparedness, Academic training, and Research/Clinical trials. He has approved twice the proposed research grants for the next year as previously approved. He is hoping that a specific grant will be approved for one of the staff to go **overseas** and study a geriatrics program there.

Mr. Kilmer wants to institute and increase partnerships between VSOs, the VA, etc. as his goal is to help all of the VA succeed. He is helping Grand Junction to fill their research department so that the same service that is received at the RMVAMC during the day will be available 24/7 in Grand Junction.

Mr. Kilmer invited questions and the Board members made inquiries for clarification.

Public Comments

Mr. Sheetz shared that he is working with two vet centers to provide mental health assistance to the veterans in his area. He has also established both a community wellness and a women's vet to vet program. Adams County is building a veterans memorial, the project is expected to cost five million dollars. The new memorial will be at 120th St. and US 85. Mr. Sheetz is actively trying to work with other counties, he is diversifying what the CVSO role does and not waiting for his phone to ring with a call from a vet. Mr. Hopkins recommended using Adams County as a bottoms-up training example at the annual training conference for CVSOs.

Grant Training

Ms. Hoagland reviewed the major audit recommendations from the last audit with the Board members and the Board members made inquiries for clarification. Much of the application review process is driven by audit compliance as well as 2 CFR 200. Ms. Hoagland clarified that the VTF functions as a high-risk grant program, which also drives many of the procedures and policies. The Board discussed having a future meeting regarding board ability to change the grant process. Mr. Hopkins indicated a department wide review will include the grant program.

For the application review, it will be important to utilize the scoring rubric. This will help to eliminate extreme variances in scoring. The Board reviewed all of the documents to be utilized for the review process.

The Board recessed at 1110 hours.

The Board reconvened at 1128 hours.

The Board members practiced grant evaluations on areas where they have differed greatly on their scores in previous years and then discussed why they scored as they did.

Reports

Mr. Hopkins shared the reports for the DMVA, Governor, and Legislature jointly. The DMVA is continuing to monitor and track bills for their fiscal impact. The DMVA sponsored two bills, both breezed through the confirmation process and are waiting to be signed by the Governor. Neither of these bills affect vets. On 22 April there will be a DMVA day at the Capitol. CONG, CDVA and ANG will all be present. There will be a signing ceremony in the rotunda and a fly by. Mr. Hopkins is in the process of going through a holistic review of the DMVA. There has been a zero net growth at the state government level and the Department has to cut one percent from next years' budget. The Board members made inquiries.

Mr. Tremaine gave the report for DVA East. On 09 March there are two new SVSOs starting, he will bring them to the next Board meeting. He expects the Program Assistant position to be filled in during the next month. A statement of work is being developed for the task force as soon as 01 July additionally a statement of work for the software needs of the CDVA is also being developed. DVA East is gearing up for the annual conference. The first DVA synchronization meeting was two days ago. The Board members made inquiries and it was clarified that Mr. Hopkins has implemented two new meetings for the Division, one of which is a monthly synchronization meeting. Ms. Snyder shared that she will be going to the VA women's summit this October.

Ms. Iglesias shared the report for DVA West. Mesa County has had their County VSO position vacant. Anthony Lee will start on 24 March. Pitkin County is also vacant, the position had been posted and just closed; Brian Oney will be sitting on the selection committee. The OneSource is partnering with the VA hospital in Grand Junction and the vet center to host a Vietnam War Veterans Day on 27 March later at the OneSource. The cemetery is moving along in the capitol construction project and they are hoping to break ground in the September/October time frame. There is a reimbursement issue for the cemetery as the process was changed. There are still issue with tracking who the reimbursements are for.

Ms. Iglesias said that the projects have started at the OneSource with the monies received from the Board. The access door has been installed for the receptionist. Mesa County is also working actively to combat suicide, especially amongst the veteran population. Brian Oney is attending an event regarding suicide prevention this Saturday. Ms. Iglesias went to DC for NASDVA last week. She was invited to speak/ present there in the future. There is now a women vets coffee club, yesterday was the first meeting and it will now convene monthly. There is a 'Come back' yoga class weekly, a veteran coffee weekly, caregiver support meetings and a LGBTQ monthly meeting.

Mr. Hopkins said that in regards to OneSource there are two primary issues. The first is tenant leasing as they want to find appropriate tenants to be around and provide services to the veterans. The second issue is that there is limited parking. In order to resolve the second problem, CONG will assist with

laying asphalt for forty additional parking spaces. This is an example of the department integration he wants to see more of. The Colorado Wing of the Civil Air Patrol will now meet at OneSource once a month.

Ms. Iglesias continued her report by sharing that the Women's Auxiliary American Legion meeting that convenes at OneSource once a month is growing. DEERS will have a temporary replacement as their operator is going to be on maternity leave beginning in May. The property administrator spot just closed and they will begin to screen those candidates. The front administrator or 'triage assistant' position has not yet been approved by the Governor. Mr. Hopkins said that position will not wait to be posted till 01 July – it will be posted and filled as soon as possible. Ms. Iglesias said she discovered that the funeral home in Grand Junction is charging vets and their family members to do the necessary paperwork and she is working to fix that problem.

Mr. Robinson shared that there has not yet been a meeting about the veteran monument. The Board of VCLCs is studying the healthcare needs of vets in the state. The overall number of vets in the state is declining although the number of women veterans is increasing. VCLCs are going out of vogue and they are asking the question of what services are really needed. A problem is posed by funding bouncing back and forth. It was up last year, and down this year. This is sending mixed messages.

Ms. Hoagland shared that she received a total of seventy-five applications for both grant programs. Eleven of the applications were incomplete or had other issues and had to be removed from consideration. There were a large number of new applicants and various current grantees did not reapply due to staffing issues with their organizations.

Old Business –

Ms. Scanlon wrote a letter to Congressmen and Senators. Ms. Hammon motioned to approve, Mr. Steen seconded the motion. The Board approved the letter unanimously. Ms. Scanlon will send it to Mr. Dorman for approval. After Mr. Dorman approves the letter it will be sent to Ms. Fraser with Mr. Rudder's signature for dispersion. Ms. Scanlon will work with Greg Dorman on updating the By-laws based upon legal review.

Ms. Scanlon needs a generic CCI letter, Ms. Fraser will provide that.

The By-laws change proposed by the Board are under review by the Attorney General's office.

New Business

The Board discussed if the annual retreat will be in Burlington in August of this year. No decision was made.

Mr. Rudder is giving Ms. Fraser the list of places for the last five years that the Board has met. She will provide it in a visual form to the Board at the next meeting so they may determine where to meet during the next fiscal year.

Ms. Scanlon inquired as to what the next thing is that the Board should be working on.

Multiple Board members will attend the CCI summer conference at Keystone on 01 – 03 June.

Board Member Comments

Mr. Steen said that Mr. Kilmer gave the same report at a roundtable he attended last week as he did today. Mr. Steen attended the National Association of Counties (NACo) Legislative Conference in Washington D.C. and is expectant that Scott Tipton and Doug Lamborn will both sign onto HR 5516. Additionally bills S3020 and S785 provide funding for vets with mental health issues and are being sponsored jointly by both the VA and Labor Departments.

Mr. Gonzalez reported that he met with leaders in El Paso County regarding making Space Command a permanent fixture there. He is the new ambassador for Mt. Carmel Veteran Service Center. Mr. Gonzalez also attended NACo in D.C. and said that Colin Powell addressed their group when they were there in addition to other leaders. The funeral service reported to the Board last month of a vet with no family in town that Mr. Gonzalez could not attend because it overlapped with last month's board meeting was attended by hundreds despite snow and freezing temperatures. Additionally, Mr. Donald Stratton, one of the last three survivors of Pearl Harbor died recently, his funeral also had a large turnout.

Ms. Hammon reported that she is busy with handling Covid-19 as she is also on the Board of Public Health for the State of Colorado. She is having trouble tracking infected homeless. There are currently many Blue Star families in her area. Ms. Hammon also noted that the Census is coming up and that it doesn't ask about veteran status. The Vail vets program is having a national event right now and is having color guards and the Civil Air Patrol perform for them. Free mental health counseling is taking place one day a week in the county.

Ms. Scanlon reported that the Colorado Women Marine Association just celebrated 100 years of women in the Marine Corps.

Ms. Caldwell reported that 10% of all patients from Penrose, St. Francis, Porter and St. Anthony's hospitals are vets. 2% of the patients at Penrose are active duty military. She said that there is a free healthcare provider certification called 'Psych Armor' that requires the provider to take seven out of fifteen available modules that will train them in how to appropriately work with the special needs of veterans.

Mr. Dailey reported that he recently had Warrior Bonfire #91 in Grand County for a weeklong event. Those who attended were all Purple Heart vets. He attended a Stefan Stiller's Tunnels to Towers event awarding a home in Summit County to an OIF vet and his family. Vet lost both legs. Sadly his wife recently was diagnosed with a brain tumor.

Mr. Rudder reported that he worked with a man in prison. The vet has a Bronze Star and was a sniper. Mr. Rudder wrote a letter to the parole board asking he be released and allowed to join the local honors guard. He's now even been given special permission to use a rifle with blanks at funerals.

Mr. Dailey motioned to adjourn, Ms. Caldwell seconded the motion, it was carried unanimously by the members of the Board.

The Board adjourned at 1325.