

Board Minutes
May 6, 2016
National Guard Readiness Center
2820 Riverside Pkwy, Grand Junction, CO 81501

Dana Niemela, Chair, called the meeting to order at 0940 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 service members.

Roll Call of Members and Introduction of Staff & Guests

Board Members Present:

Dana Niemela, Chair
Duane Dailey, Vice-Chair
Rene Simard, Secretary-Not Present
Hollie Caldwell, Member
Christopher Holden, Member
William "Robby" Robinson, Member-Not Present
Jack Rudder, Member-Not Present

DMVA Staff Present:

Mickey Hunt, DMVA Deputy Director
Reuben Mestas, CDVA Director
Gail Hoagland, DMVA, VAG Administrator
Claire Dean, CDVA Administrative Assistant

Guests Present:

Susan Holappa, Sen. Bennet's Office
Joanne Iglesias, Director of Grand Junction Cemetery
Wendy Hoffman, Operation Revamp
Danielle Hindson, National Guard Family Programs
Diane Rino, Western Slope Project Manager for Volunteers of America
Alison Brinkley, First Light Home Care
Pamela Schultz, Women Veterans Project Manager at Grand Junction VA
Paul Sweeney, Grand Junction VA

Approval of Minutes from April

Amended and approved

Ms. Niemela explained the role of the Board and then introduced Danielle Hindson with the National Guard Family Programs. Currently the Joint Community Forces have 49 participating local organizations, some of which help veterans. One area of need is legal advice and representation for veterans. Mr. Dailey asked what makes up the geographic area of the Western Slope Joint Community Forces. It stretches as far east as Silverthorne and west to Moab, Utah.

Ms. Hindson then introduced Diane Rino with Volunteers of America.

With over 42,000 veterans residing in the area, the proposal for a one-stop located in Grand Junction is expected to move forward. The Volunteers of America will begin fundraising as an alternative plan, should the State not grant funds for the one-stop. The State-owned armory has requested and will use funding through DMVA to undergo a \$2.8 million renovation. Mr. Hunt added that the Capital Development Committee will tour the armory on June 7. Local legislature is encouraged to get involved. Ms. Niemela added that a recent study from the Syracuse Institute found that the biggest barrier for veterans is knowing where to go for help. Two full-time State employees are needed for the one-stop. Ms. Hindson will be in charge of coordinating the Joint Community Forces and setting up the office. The focus will be helping younger, often unemployed, families.

Mr. Sweeney stated that veterans of the Western Slope need an alternative to Denver. An advisory board for the one-stop will begin polling the community in efforts to gauge their support. County Veteran Service Officer Dave Montoya sees about 90 veterans a week. The biggest challenge is the Choice Program which has been forced upon the community to use. Paperwork generated through the program has been riddled with errors. Providers are not getting paid in a timely manner and it is very difficult to recruit both Primary Care Providers and Hospitalists. On a positive note, Congressional hotlines have proven to be helpful. The VA Hospital has a new physical therapy building and parking garage. It has been proposed that in order to attract more Specialty Care providers, the VA Hospital will partner with residency programs.

Ms. Schultz added that the Choice Program is having female veterans travel to appointments nearly 300 miles away. Getting OB providers for the female veterans has been a challenge. A separate women's clinic within the VA Hospital accommodates the nearly 1,000 women seeking services. The clinic is integrated with mental healthcare providers to assist those with mental health issues on the same day. Nurse practitioners have been very helpful in rural areas.

Mr. Dailey inquired as to which advocacy group the County Service Officer primarily works with. There are currently 17 identified homeless veterans living between Grand Junction and Montrose. HUD VASH is only for those with zero income and some veterans on the verge of becoming homeless do not qualify. Those veterans are then helped through VOA with emergency funding for housing. VOA is in partnership with landlords to help area veterans. Both Mesa and Montrose Counties have been working together to identify the most vulnerable veterans. The living wage for Grand Junction is \$16.50 per hour and average rent for a one-bedroom apartment is \$600.

Wendy Hoffman, with Operation Revamp, discussed emergency homelessness.

The Board thanked the guests for their work with area veterans. Mr. Dailey asked where the VOA is located for Grand County. The nearest VOA for that county is located in Fort Collins. Mr. Holden stated that he was impressed with the Grand Junction Veterans Cemetery.

Mickey Hunt: Mr. Hunt had nothing further to add to his report.

Reuben Mestas and Joanne Iglesias: Mr. Mestas introduced Joanne Iglesias with the Grand Junction Veterans Cemetery. Ms. Iglesias thanked to Board for touring the facilities and for their support. She traveled last month for training and two grounds crew were able to attend training at Fort Morgan. Ms. Iglesias discussed an addendum to the cemetery grounds. Over 4,000 people have scheduled interments, 60% of which are for columbariums. It takes about 18 months to fill a columbarium. Many employees are temporary and it takes Human Resources over six weeks to fill the positions with permanent employees.

Gail Hoagland: Ms. Hoagland had nothing to add to her previously submitted report.

Duane Dailey: Mr. Dailey congratulated Ms. Iglesias on her promotion to Cemetery Director. Gail was well received at the Annual Training Conference. Ms. Hoagland replied that the County Veteran Service Officers supported each other on Grant programs.

Dana Niemela: Ms. Niemela asked the present Board members if they would be interested in serving as Chair, since she will be stepping down at the end of her term. Should no one be interested, the position will be deferred to the Vice-Chair. Rene Simard has expressed interest in staying on as Board Secretary. One must apply to serve on the Board. Applications are online. Board members are not paid to serve but travel, hotel stays and per diem is reimbursed. We are required to hold 11 meetings, with one held on the Western Slope and one held at a Veterans Community Living Center. Board Officer Elections will need to be held at the June meeting.

Future Meetings

03 June – San Luis Valley, Homelake

Old Business

New Business

Mr. Dailey requested that the Board revisit the restrictions in the VAG application, specifically body preparation costs for cremation. In order the change the VAG restrictions, language would have to be modified in the By-laws and then approved by the Board. The town hall meeting in Grand County honoring Vietnam Veterans was well attended.

Meeting adjourned 11:13am