

**COLORADO BOARD OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
(CBVA) 2015 BOARD MINUTES**

## **Board Minutes**

**9 January 2015**

### **American Legion Headquarters**

**7465 E. 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue #D Denver, CO 80230**

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 service members.

### **Roll Call of Members and Introduction of Staff & Guests**

#### **Board Members Present:**

- William "Robby" Robinson, Chairman
- Dana Niemela, Vice-Chairman –Not Present
- Rene Simard, Secretary
- Kathleen Dunemn, Member
- Christopher Holden, Member- Not Present
- Wendy Sue Chiado, Ph.D., Member – Not Present
- Duane Dailey, Member

#### **DMVA Staff Present:**

- Mickey Hunt, DMVA, Deputy Director
- Diane Ricci, CDVA Deputy Director
- Tamara Edmond, CDVA Admin. Asst.
- Gail Hoagland, DMVA VAG Administrator

#### **Guests Present:**

- Richard Sandrock, Governor's Office
- Chuck Broerman, El Paso County Clerk and Recorder's Office  
Mike Dixon, Senior Director, Colorado Department of Revenue
- Tony Anderson, Operation Director, Division of Motor Vehicles, Colorado Department of Revenue
- Jason Strickland, Chief Development Officer, Project

Sanctuary Bill Holen, Arapahoe County Commissioner

- Marvin Meyers, CBVA Emeritus, UVC

### **Approval of Minutes from December**

Unanimously accepted

### **Board Member Comments**

Rene Simard: Happy New Year to everyone! I have just a couple of comments. The Aurora Chamber of Commerce will host along with the Rotary, “The State of the Base” on January 21<sup>st</sup>. Col. John Wagner, 460<sup>th</sup> Space Wing Commander from Buckley Air Force Base will give a review of their activities in 2014 and provide the economic impact of Buckley Air Force Base on the local and state economy. The State of the Base will be held at the Doubletree on Iliff and I-225. If anyone is interested in attending, please contact me. There is a minimum cost for lunch so if you are interested in attending, let me know and I will get you registered. Again, it’s the 21<sup>st</sup> of January, at 11:30am.

Secondly, most of you know George Peck from the Aurora Chamber of Commerce. He is a retired Air Force Public Affairs Officer and is retiring from the Aurora Chamber after 15 years. We will have his retirement party on 30 January and it will also be at the Doubletree on Iliff and I-225. It will be from 5:00PM to 8:00PM. It should be a lot of fun and we are planning to roast him. George has really been the Aerospace and Defense voice in Aurora and he is a great guy! If you are interested in attending, let me know.

Kathleen Dunemn: No comment.

Duane Dailey: Mr. Chair, I wanted to follow-up since our last meeting. Chuck Bruin from the VA came for an outreach at Granby. We had 68 people that signed the roster and probably another 10 to 12 that came in. It was very well received. Mr. Bruin is very knowledgeable and he presented the VA in a very positive light. We also had Lori Hunt from the VAMC skype in and she talked about the Choice Card.

I think it is important for this Board since we are the Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs to do a follow-up with the VA. They gauge everything on a straight line regarding the 40 mile radius for the Choice Card purposes. In my case, the Golden Clinic is 44 miles to Granby. It is 36

miles to Frazer so that eliminates Frazer and Winter Park. They also give on that figure the driving miles because this is a mountainous community, the travel distance needs to be taken into consideration. I think we need some better input.

Robby Robinson: The feedback I got from Dana on the last meeting and the briefing we gave the legislature was the need for focus of direction of the Board's efforts in the coming year. A lot of which is this urban versus rural, and the problems are different and the solutions are different. And certainly, the Choice Card they are trying to implement effects rural areas.

The next meeting will be at the VA Regional Office. I will ask Renaye Murphy to give their perspective on how that Choice Card is going and I will try to get some input from the Board. I think that would be interesting to get their perspective because it depends on where you come from. It is almost like where you stand, if you are a veteran out there it is not very good but if you are in the VA, then it is oh so wonderful. Oh is it really? So, we can dig into that a little bit at that February meeting. I will ask for that as a specific issue for them to address.

Duane Dailey: Mr. Chair, I brought just a couple of copies of an email. I don't know if anyone here on the Eastern Slope is privy to this. Paul Sweeney sent me an email (he is like the equivalent to Dan Warvi at the Grand Junction VA.) This email concerns the death of the veteran over there and the email came from Mark McGuile. I only have a couple of copies but I will give them to Robby and let me know if you want to read the email. It is interesting. That is all I have, Mr. Chair, at this time.

Robby Robinson: Dana alerted me to the fact that we need direction for the Strategic Plan. The one we have now is out of date. We ought to set forth a direction so we have some consensus to look at rural issues. We can talk about that more in terms of what we do; it is reflected in the minutes there. We do have Bill Holen here, Arapahoe County Commissioners. Welcome.

### **Public Comments**

Bill Holen: Thank you very much, Robby, I am honored to be here and I should have called to let you know. I am grateful for letting me have the opportunity to share with you. I have several copies of a report we were asked to put together for a task force to examine in a very forensic way issues related to veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In addition

in a very technical way, examine the current PTSD treatment programs. We looked at the efforts to coordinate between the VA and Denver community services. On the panel, we had many professionals, psychologists, both from the VA and from the private sector, veterans' advocates, and outside research entities that helped us along. We compiled the report in August 2014. We are waiting to present it to Congressman Coffman, who asked me to put this together as did Senator Udall. Due to the election, we have not been able to coordinate our efforts. We will have a press conference or announcement sometime this month to release the report. We have had two or three major public media agencies wanting us to be on television to talk about the findings.

I will leave these copies with Robby and anybody who wants a copy you can take them. If you need more, give me a call.

We found a basis for several conclusions:

- There is a clearly definable lack of coordination between the Department of Defense and the VA concerning the treatment of PTSD relative to the different modalities of treatment available.
- There is a lack of early identification of PTSD and the issues related to PTSD and TBI.
- There are employment issues and how employment impacts veterans with PTSD as a therapeutic intervention.
- There is a lack of family oriented programs. The impact of PTSD on the family has been negated over the years. The importance of family support is crucial to the treatment process for families with a veteran with PTSD.
- The VA and the Department of Defense do not utilize the best practices. In other words, they take a program and use that program and don't move left or right of it. We found there are many examples of best practices for PTSD in many universities, NIH for example proved to be more effective.
- There are problems with the pharmacology for PTSD treatment. Historically, there

have been problems with addiction and psychotropic drugs that aren't really helping the problem.

Our hope is that this report will provide a roadmap for Congressman Coffman who is a member of the VA Committee and help them come up with solutions to these problems. We dedicated a lot of time and resources, on a volunteer basis to help veterans with PTSD and we hope it reached fruition in helping veterans with PTSD. PTSD has reached epidemic proportions with veterans of all eras. We have veterans from WWII, Korea, and Vietnam to modern eras who are still struggling with these issues. I hope some of our recommendations will be utilized in helping these veterans. Does anyone have any questions?

Robby Robinson: I want to make sure we get a copy of the report needs to go to the UVC Chairman, Ralph Bozella.

Bill Holen: I did give a copy to Ralph. Thank you to the Board for all you do to help veterans. I used to be on the Board. The Governor has a copy of this report and we are waiting on feedback from him. We had several Air Force and Army Generals take a look at the report and they were very laudatory about our efforts.

Robby Robinson: I appreciate what you have done for this and for coming today to present to us. I also appreciate all the Arapahoe County Commissioners for their efforts to help veterans.

Bill Holen: We have hired two VSO's and I think we have a good reputation amongst the veterans in our community, in the county, and throughout the state. Thank you very much for your time.

Marvin Meyer: As long as Bill mentioned UVC, I thought I would speak to it. Some of you may not know what UVC is about, United Veterans Committee of Colorado, is a 44 year old coalition of some 53 Veteran Service Organizations and another 24 affiliates. We represent veterans at the Legislative and through Congressional delegations. We focus on issues effecting veterans and their families, active duty, and National Guard personnel. I don't mind saying we have accomplished quite a bit at the Legislature over the years, in terms of major legislative initiatives. We have worked with the Legislature to help frame legislation or to adjust it. At any rate, we are out there and we are serving veterans. The comment I would like

to make this morning is that UVC has incorporated a 501C-3 non-profit, tax exempt foundation. Our target populations that we want to provide services for are the veterans, their families, Guard members, Reserve members, and Active Duty. We are looking for our niche: where is it that we want to provide services. We are looking for unmet needs. We know that there are many needs out there, such as the homeless, where this need is being worked on by many entities.

We want to find something that has not fully addressed or woefully under-served. We want you to think about it because we do not want to do what anybody else is doing. As soon as we identify an area that we believe it is what we want to pursue then we will apply for grants from various foundations and grant giving organizations both locally and nationally to help the veterans. Are there any questions?

Robby Robinson: Thank you, Marvin. Are there any other public comments? The focus of today's meeting as far as the Board in educating everyone is license plates. There are 38 veterans' license plates and some of them are free and some exclude the bearer from having to pay a fee. I invited Mike Dixon from the Department of Revenue and Tony Anderson from the Division of Motor Vehicles to come and talk about the different license plates available for veterans and the process for applying for these license plates. Most of these veteran license plates require that you prove you are a veteran. I thought it would be informative to let you know the process since I just went through this myself. I thought it would be good to know the procedures and what the requirements are. If we talk to veterans who have problems with the procedures, sometimes we can help or sometimes United Veterans Committee can help resolve any issues, or change legislation, or propose legislation that may be needed. That is why I have asked for a briefing.

### **Guest Presentations**

Mike Dixon: Thank you for inviting us today and thank you for what you guys do for veterans. I would like to introduce in the state of Colorado the Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV) works for the Department of Revenue (DOR). In Colorado, there are 54 Clerk and Recorders and they are executive agents for the Department of Revenue for the Division of Motor Vehicles purposes.

We have an initiative in collaboration with the DMV and the DOR to issue these license plates for veterans directly from the counties. There are three counties participating at this time, El Paso County, Arapahoe County, and La Plata County. With our huge population of veterans in El Paso County, this initiative has been a very good service to veterans. I came on board initially with a program called, Vets to Trucks, which helps veterans obtain a CDL at a reduced expenses. We would like to thank UVC for their help with the Legislation with the driver's license identifier. We also help veterans get identifiers as veterans on their driver's license. We send a letter every year to the Board about our progress in helping veterans. Our hope is that this will help veterans in the futures in all counties.

Tony Anderson: First off, thank you for the opportunity to share this information today. I apologize for the miscommunication last month. For the presentation, I would like to go over all the military plates that are available. We have a Power Point printout that is being passed out so you will have a visual. Of all the military plates that are issued, the Disabled Veteran plate is the highest issued of all the 38 plates. There are special unique qualifiers for that Disabled License plate through pre-issuance. El Paso issues approximately 46% of the military license plates statewide. I worked with El Paso to identify ways to make this process better for veterans. Our over-all objectives today are to go over all of the veteran plates, the first time issuance plates, the requirements to be issued, and the current process and challenges with that process. We do know that there are issues and if there are issues that come to your attention, please reach out and let us know. We would like to make it better. I would also like to discuss the service initiative that we are working with El Paso County. If you look at slide number 3 you can see a list of all 38 military plates. There are unique qualifiers for all of these plates with the exception of: USS Colorado, Civil Air Patrol, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry, and NORAD. Those are all available to the public; all other plates there needs to be a unique identifier to qualify.

Mickey Hunt: I have a question. As I look at the plates listed here, I see the Distinguished Flying Cross listed twice. Is that a mistake or are there only 37 plates?

Tony Anderson: It should be 38. It must have been a mistake to have it listed twice. I may have omitted one. I will make note and make that updated. So of the 38 plates, the average monthly issuance is just over 2,500 plates per year. The most common plate is the Disabled



Veterans plate and that is issued about 670 Disabled Veteran plates per month across the state.

Duane Dailey: Excuse me maybe I did not hear you. When you say, first time issue, is that the first year it is issued?

Tony Anderson: The first plate issuance, so if you would have a DV plate it is exempt taxes and fees of course for the life of that plate.

Duane Dailey: Thank you for that.

Tony Anderson: If you look on slide 4, is a list of the first time free issuance plates. There are eleven plates. The free first time issuance plates include the Disabled Veteran plate, the Disabled Veteran Handicapped plate, the Medal of Honor plate, the Distinguished Service Cross plate, the Distinguished Flying Cross plate, the Air Force Cross plate, the Purple Heart plate, the Silver Star plate, the Navy Cross plate, the POW plate and the Pearl Harbor Survivor plate.

Distinguished Flying Cross was added most recently. These free first time issuance military special license plates are exempt from all taxes and fees. Currently there are just over 23,000 DV plates issued and of that just under 10,000 are in El Paso County. So, that is where this partnership is working in hand. This partnership with El Paso County was formed due to the high volume and the area of biggest impact. We have been working with Chuck and his team for about a year now to develop this service initiative to put customer service first. As you will see later on in the presentation, this is a complex process, especially for El Paso County.

Underneath at the bottom of slide 4, there is some statutory reference for everyone's review.

If you look on page 5, the requirements are listed for the free first-time issuance of the Disabled Veteran plate. The veteran must meet one of the following:

- Permanent service-connected disability rated at 50% or more.
- Loss or permanent loss of use of one or both feet
- Loss or permanent loss of use of one or both hands

- Loss of sight in both eyes

On slide 6, we are going to continue with the requirements. The verification of these qualifications, the veteran must have an eligibility letter in writing from the VA or from their branch of service on official service letterhead. This is where it is challenging. The way Colorado statute is written, it needs to explicitly state that the veteran has a 50% service-connected, permanent disability. Many times these letters are missing one or more items. This can be very challenging and this is where many of the letters are sent back.

Robby Robinson: The problem is that the letter does not state that the veteran is 50% or more disabled?

Tony Anderson: The letter is not acceptable if it does not include “service-related or service-connected.” We see some that do omit the 50% disabled and that would cause an issue as well.

Robby Robinson: Diane, question to you. If I am a veteran and I am rated 80% disabled, to get that disability rating it has to be service-connected, right?

Diane Ricci: Well, you can have a rating and have it be non-service connected because it is for pension purposes only. You can also be rated at 80% and it is not permanent and total.

Marvin Meyer: The letter could say or should say 50% or more as rated by the VA. That designation was left out when we would have people come in for the property tax exemption. They would say, I am disabled, but that designation was not rated by the VA.

Tony Anderson: It also has to have the service-connection.

*Discussion of the different letters and ways they come from the VA.*

Chuck Broerman: What we found is when the veteran calls to get a letter from the 800 number they are not getting the appropriate letter. They may be talking to someone at the call center in Maine, and it is a call center where the letter they send does not have service-connected for the disability rating because they are not aware of what the particulars are as far as Colorado statutes. Our staff has worked very hard to make sure they are getting the right letter.

There is a new national letter that seems to be working well. In El Paso County, the Colorado Springs Community Based Outpatient Clinic does have a letter that can be used to get the process kicked off. Having the veterans go straight to the clinic in Colorado Springs to get the appropriate letter has been a great assistance to our veterans in El Paso County.

Tony Anderson: We also need to have a copy of the veteran's DD214 and it must be an Honorable Discharge in order for them to qualify for the plates. They are required to show ownership of the vehicle with either the copy of the title or the registration documentation. This is very similar to the process to when you are renewing your own vehicle.

On slide 8, is the process on how qualified individuals obtain a free first time issuance by meeting the previously listed requirements and they need to complete the form DR 2380,

Disabled Veteran License Plate Application. We require this application be completed as well as all of the documentations in order for this process to be completed.

On slide 9, we are going to talk about currently up until November when we started with El Paso, all transactions were required to be mailed in to the DMV in Lakewood. Researching this has been a challenge because all other counties normally have a \$4.00 transaction fee. So far putting the feelers out with El Paso County, Arapahoe County and La Plata County, that has not been a sticking point with them. The service to the veteran has been more important.

The applications can be submitted in person or by mail to the DMV in Lakewood office. Looking at slide 10, there are some challenges with the current process. Whenever the application is submitted to the Lakewood Office, it should be either in person or by mail. We looked at the gaps in service time, especially with the USPS when the paperwork was not complete and it had to be mailed back. We also examined what was specifically wrong with applications being denied or taking longer for example: there was no DD214, or the letter did not include the required language. This has been a challenge and we are working on it.

For the last slide 11, we are working on the Service Initiative with El Paso County as the pilot for issuing the free first time issuance plates within the County. This allows for individuals to work directly with their county motor vehicle office and it eliminates confusion on what office

completes the transaction. The county issues a temporary plate while the license plates are manufactured at the prison. This model is based on what is done in the hunting industry. We have so much money tied up in inventory that we did not want to lose that. By having the Service Initiative in El Paso County, this first one is done with the Clerk and Records Office and the second one is done at the DMV in Lakewood. We want to integrate that so that it does not matter what vehicle you have, you would be completing that transaction with the Clerk and Records Office. So that completes my portion of the presentation. Chuck do you want to add anything?

Chuck Broerman: There are a higher percentage of transactions in El Paso County because of the various military installations that we have. From the Academy, to NORAD, Peterson AFB, to Fort Carson, we have a large population. This plate is a privilege that you guys have earned and we very much want to say thank you to the veterans. We understand the frustration that you guys go through in making sure you have the right letter and making sure it has the right terminology. We have worked so much with that over the years that when Tony mentioned that this was an opportunity for us to pilot that and reduce the number of steps a veteran has to go through, we jumped at the chance. We realize that there is not necessarily compensation to do that but we want to do this because of our constituency in El Paso County. We are happy to do that. We have been doing it for several months now, about three months or so and we are working out some of the bugs. This new national letter is more bullet proof. When we tell the veterans about the new national letter, it does help in the process when we are sending things on to Lakewood. We are using a POD (point of delivery) process to help get that plate to the veterans. We don't have any inventory in the office. It has been a great help to our veterans in our community. We are happy to do that. We have taken the state's process and kind of made it our own. We have made a few tweaks to it and happy to roll it out to other entities ready to participate.

Tony Anderson: So we are going to continue piloting even though we have had some gaps. There are issues that have popped up as we roll out statewide. Arapahoe and La Plata are test sites to see what challenges and pitfalls are there. Then we will open it up to all county offices to be able to have that opportunity to be a part of the process.

On the last slide, you will find our contact information if there are any questions or if you have a group that would benefit from a presentation. The military plate was earned and we want to be able to assist in any way to make this process more efficient for the veteran. Let me open it up to any questions or comments.

Marvin Meyer: Gentlemen, thank you. I think that is the most comprehensive presentation on the veterans' license plate that I have ever heard. And I have heard a number when I was over at 18<sup>th</sup> and Pierce many years ago. Do you have some idea what the distribution of funds on the sale of plates would go? What happens to the distribution of funds on the sale of plates that have a fee? If there is a \$5 to \$6 dollars for manufacturing, then the balance goes to where?

Tony Anderson: The material fee for manufacturing the plates goes to the Department of Corrections- the metal of the plates, the tags, and the registration. There are several plates that cost \$50.00 for the issuance fee and of that \$50.00; \$25.00 goes to the Licensing Service Cash Fund. That helps support the DMV funding. The other \$25.00 goes to the Highway User Trust Fund. Tax and fees are then distributed within the county. From the \$4.00 transaction fee for all registration documents, .50 cents goes to the insurance database and .50 cents goes to the CSTAR Account. A lot of the taxes and fees, specifically the ownership tax, actually stays within the county so the County Commissioners divvy that out. Of each of the fees, we have the Road and Bridge fee which is \$30.00 and that goes to the Highway User Trust Fund. I can get you more of a breakdown if that would interest you.

Marvin Meyers: That was very helpful. Back in the mid 90's, when I went with a few others to your department over on 18<sup>th</sup> and Pierce, veterans did not have any discretionary funds for veterans services until we were able to get the Veterans Trust Fund in about 2001 so we could provide financial assistance for various veteran priorities. What we were trying to do way back, was to see if we could get .50 cents per plate for any veterans plate that was issued. And that would go into a veterans fund or discretionary fund to take care of specified needs veterans have. We were told that you can't do this. We got that from a number of legislatures. But I think anything is doable. The point being veterans are buying the plate; they would be thrilled to know that .50 cents per plate would go to help veterans. We do have many needs that are unmet. If you would like to reflect on that because it still needs to be pursued because the thing

that turns us on is when somebody says it can't be done.

Mike Dixon: I would like to comment on that. I think you are right when you say anything can be done. It would take a change of the law. We operate under the law and what the statute allows us to do. As I said upfront, there are a few things we are able to do to help veterans but we have an appropriation that tells us to spend so much money and we can only do so much. When they establish laws and tell us where the funds go, we pretty much have to abide by the law. Clearly, anything is possible. You could pursue this in legislation.

Marvin Meyer: Veterans would not be adverse to those .50 cents to help their fellow veterans. Robby, this is something that I will bring up again at UVC. We have left it dormant for many years. Thank you.

Mickey Hunt: Is there any example of a plate, such as the Bronze Star plate, that when I bring in my DD214 that says I have a Bronze Star, then I get a Bronze Star plate. Is there any reason why I would have to prove that again on an annual basis?

Tony Anderson: On an annual basis, you should be just doing a renewal. Why, do you have a situation?

Diane Ricci: I do. I go every year. I have a Bronze Star plate and the DMV makes me show up every year. I cannot renew online and like Mickey just said, my Bronze Star is allocated for the rest of my life. It is a waste of my time and it is a waste of the person's time that I have to go and speak to at the DMV. Especially in my particular case, I am the only person on my vehicle registration. It's my plate, I'm still breathing. I don't understand why I can't do it online.

Tony Anderson: What county are you in?

Diane Ricci: I have lived in both El Paso and Douglas counties. I have had to go in physically and renew with both counties every single year.

Tony Anderson: I will make a little note to research that and get back with you.

Diane Ricci: Thank you. That would be awesome.

Robby Robinson: You walked through a process that allows you to do this by mail. It allows you to take your documents to Lakewood to get a license plate. We are talking here about getting veterans plates in the mail. I am not sure everybody knows that, so it is an education issue.

Why is that system, doing it by mail, not working? If you are out in Durango, then the mail seems like it would be the best. Here's where I am coming from, if I go out to some tiny little county, where there are 27 veterans, I don't think the Clerk and Recorder would recognize the military documentations that are needed. It sounds to me like the mail thing ought to work, but it sound like you are saying it doesn't always work.

Mike Dixon: You can find room for improvement in any program. The vast majority of folks would probably want to go to their DMV office and get it done in a one-stop process. Or they can mail it in if they want to. It gives them the option.

*General discussion about the mail in applications for special military license and free first issuance licenses.*

Robby Robinson: Purple Heart Plates, for example, is there a form you fill out for the Purple Heart plate?

Tony Anderson: That is correct. There is a specific form you fill out for that one.

Robby Robinson: For each of the fee exempt plates there are unique requirements. You mail these to Lakewood where they have the expertise to look at a DD214 and understand the abbreviations on it and they will know that the SS means Silver Star. That is all still verified at Lakewood. If it goes down to the county level, I hesitate to think that there is anybody qualified to understand the documentation.

Chuck Broerman: I can see your perspective, but I think in El Paso County we are in a unique situation because we see the volume and understand the process.

Rene Simard: So there will be counties where it makes sense to have the Service Initiative and then in other counties it will make sense to use the mail in option?

Tony Anderson: In Aurora, you would see the same thing with the larger military presence. It is would make more sense to have a one-stop shop.

Mike Dixon: It is just an additional service, another way to get it.

Robby Robinson: What we can do is if you need changes to the law, then the Board can always help initiate that process. I am speaking for the Board, you understand? We are a Type II Board and we work for the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. We, as a Board have the authority to do this, and we have the authority to talk to the Governor about it. If the Governor says, I don't want to do that then this Board does nothing. That is essential part of the state government. UVC is totally different. It is a good idea to get support from the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and the Governor's Office. However, not every voice buried in the Department of Revenue or Local Affairs gets heard. Sometimes you have another channel to get to. The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs thinks it is a good idea, and then the Board can do that. We can do that.

United Veterans Committee (UVC) is nonpartisan and they can do what they want. They are largely a lobbying organization. I am not advertising or suggesting, but Mike when you said, "Gee, this is the law and that is the way it is." You are absolutely right! If you need a law changed, then it is our charter to bring it to the attention of the Department, the Legislature, and the Governor.

Marvin Meyers: That is another thing UVC can do and have done over the years.

Mike Dixon: We work for the Governor and we have a neutral position. We get to introduce four Bills per year to help with the programs and we generally don't address specific groups. That does not mean that when groups want to advocate for different programs. It is exciting to hear that you might want to help veterans and we are here in an advisory capacity if you need data or information.

Robby Robinson: Diane and her folks work with veterans every day. They mostly come in for benefits and claims process. The County Veteran Service Officers don't work for them. Duane, here, is a County Veteran Service Officer and they are county employees. Her office serves as a hub and a network. It also provides means of communicating to County Veteran Service



Officers any changes, procedures, or whole new angle that identifies what the problems are. I just want to make sure people know what happens in the veterans' world, happens to you.

Mike Dixon: These are the current procedures and yes we do follow the law. One thing we historically have had issues with is how to communicate. Clearly, our website could have a page with specific information for veterans to improve this communication. A page dedicated to specific veteran issues, the military plates, information on requirements, and renewal.

Mickey Hunt: If you do that, you probably want to contact Diane. You may want to link the veterans' page to our website. I just got my DV plates a month ago and I have to compliment you guys. It was a great process.

*General discussion about how long it has taken to get license plates and the difference in different counties.*

Duane Dailey: Could you tell me which license plates do not require a veteran to get it?

Tony Anderson: 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry, Civil Air Patrol, USS Colorado, and NORAD.

Duane Dailey: Mike, I have a question, you are tied up with Department of Revenue. You stated that there is no charge for veterans for the veteran identifier on their license. It used to be \$14.00. So, what is the charge for a CDL license with the veteran identifier?

Mike Dixon: It should be \$39.00 for the CDL license and no fee for the veteran identifier.

Duane Dailey: I had a veteran who was charged \$39.00 for the CDL license and charged \$7.00 for the veteran identifier.

Mike Dixon: He should not have been charged the additional \$7.00 fee for a veteran identifier after August 2014.

Tony Anderson: Any outreach opportunities that you know of please let us know. We will be glad to partner and collaborate with you to educate the public.

Robby Robinson: The notion of the veterans' page and the link to CDVA is a good idea. You can also use us to communicate this stuff. Marvin's group meets once a month with about 70

different Veterans organizations involved. If you need to get the word out on a change or something, we have access to a lot of veterans' communications modes. If we need to take a recess so you can ask questions or you are welcome to stay for our normal reports? I want to thank you for coming today. It has been very useful information and I am glad to understand the process better.

Diane Ricci: If you have any significant events with the license plates, I run the Department website. If you have anything significant to add to the website, please communicate with me directly so I can add the information. Here is my contact information so we can coordinate this information.

Robby Robinson: Thank you for the informational presentation.

## **Reports**

Governor's Office

Richard Sandrock: This month, the Governor's office will be announcing a partnership with Western Dairy Association and Fort Carson Transition Assistance Program in order to create job opportunities for veterans in rural agricultural jobs across Colorado. This will be done in two stages. Stage one will be all of Colorado's agricultural cooperatives: Western Dairy, Western Corn, Colorado Cattlemen's Association, Egg Producers, and Sugar Beet Growers will be providing more of their job needs across the Western Slope and through the Eastern Plains to Fort Carson. Fort Carson's HR people will collating those jobs and the career counselors will make those career fields known to soldiers transitioning out of the military at the 30, 60, and 90 day marks. Those jobs will be immediate. So if you drive a dairy truck in the military, and there is a job for a dairy truck driver, then you have immediate opportunities.

Stage II, we are working with the same cooperatives and at the same time, working with National Agricultural Organizations to create training programs. So this could be a fellowship or internship where soldiers and airmen could have the opportunity to get funding to have an internship on a family farm. I mentioned a couple of months ago that there are 20,000 family farms in Colorado. The average farm consists of two people and the average age of Colorado farmers is 69.2. So our goal is to get additional funding not from the state but from these coops, to give these young men and women the opportunity to live with families and train in

agricultural environments. If this is not for them, then there will be the opportunity to go to school for agricultural sciences. Sometime in the next week or two, Western Dairy will be announcing this in their newsletter. There will be more to come on that in the future.

At the request of Fort Carson Transition Assistance Program I am working to develop, "Why should a soldier or airmen stay in Colorado?" The story they told me is, "You've got a kid in Detroit who can't find a job and he is running around with the wrong crowd so he joins the Army. He stays in the military for 4 years and then when he is going through TAPS, they are asked what is he are going to do when he gets out of the Army, the soldier says he is going back to Detroit, but there are still no jobs in Detroit. Because they did not take the time to do research, it is comfortable and lazy to go back to where you came from. I have been working with the Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT) to let young service members know about the regions of Colorado, jobs that are available, careers, see what trade is growing, different trade schools available, which trades need people working in them, and the quality of life to see reasons to stay in Colorado. Oh by the way, you can ski and all that other stuff. That is what I have been working on. You have heard me talk about the Veterans in Piping Program. The Veterans in Piping had 16 soldiers graduate and of the 16, only 3 stayed in Colorado, even though there are 1,000's of welding jobs that are needed.

Speaking to OEDIT, I have been working with the aerospace champion, Jay Lindell. He has advised me that advanced manufacturing opportunities that are big in Colorado. So we are working to bring those opportunities to Fort Carson as well. Yesterday, I met with the HR Director at Lockheed Martin and they said they have a lot of manufacturing jobs that are paying anywhere from \$15-\$25 per hour for entry-level positions in their advanced manufacturing plant. They can't find applicants in Colorado, so they are doing nationwide searches for these jobs. With one-to-two months of certification, the service member could get a \$20.00/per hour job to start with, even if that is not what they are going to do with the rest of their life at least they are not going to go waste the GI Bill or get drunk in Mom's basement.

So now that we have connected Fort Carson and Lockheed Martin, Lockheed is exploring how to direct separate soldiers to these jobs. Could be HRC working directly with soldiers at Fort Carson, we are seeing if they will be working directly together for programs such as Veterans

in Piping. We want these soldiers to have the job training so they can walk into a guaranteed job.

Rene Simard: How would that work with the Transition Assistance Program at Buckley?

Richard Sandrock: The gentlemen that work with transition at Fort Carson are not traditional stovepipe they actively work with their counterpart at Buckley to help make transition better for all service members. This is not just an Army thing. I have not personally reached out to the guy at Buckley AFB because the guy at Fort Carson told me he had it covered. His name is Mike Webb. He is in charge of the Fort Carson Transition Assistance Program.

Last month, the dignified transfer in Rifle out on the Western Slope for Captain William Dubois from Colorado. The Western Slope went all out for the support for his family and community. It went very well. Approximately a thousand people came out to provide support for the dignified transfer and a thousand came out for the services. At the funeral, there were people pouring out of the building. I know members of his family were very grateful for Colorado coming out and doing what they do best: honoring the veteran. The family members wanted to let them know they appreciate the show of support and were very moved by the community turnout. For anybody who was even tangentially involved in that, "Thank you from the family." Does anybody have any questions for me right now?

Rene Simard: I would just like to say, Maj. Gen. (retired) Jay Lindell is a great guy. He works very hard to attract and keep jobs in Colorado. He is more than willing to go out and talk to people about the importance of aerospace and defense in Colorado.

Richard Sandrock: If you do know folks from industries who are looking to hire, please get me their contact information. If it is legitimate employment opportunities, then I want to talk to them about veterans' unemployment. When veterans come to me, I tell them to skip the job fairs. I welcome the opportunity to help them get connected so more veterans can get jobs.

Gail Hoagland: Richard, I will get you the name of someone who contacted us for funding. I spent 45 minutes on the phone with her yesterday. Her entire program is focused on agricultural training for veterans. I think there may be I will get you the contact information.

*Discussion about job fairs and legitimate opportunities for veterans.*

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA)

Mickey Hunt: Capt. Dubois's Funeral in Rifle was well attended. Maj. Gen. Edwards and the Governor, Richard and I took the Blackhawk and attended. The Governor presented the Colorado Flag to the family in addition to the U.S. Flag. There was a "Missing Man Formation" from Nellie AFB. Maj. Gen. Edwards and I testified at the Joint Budget Committee. I testified before the Senate Military Affairs Committee along with Gen.

The decision items of note are:

- Requested one FTE for a Strategic Planner
- Approved for additional funding for County Veterans Service Officers, \$550,000 annually. Currently, counties have to do a match.

Dana presented for the Board. She did an excellent job. She raised some interesting questions about veterans' issues. She talked about rural issues and access to mental health care. There was a lot of press there in the room. After our testimony, there was another testimony from a counselor in Grand Junction who complained about treatment for a veteran at the Grand Junction VAMC who passed away during the holidays. Even though the press was not there for us, it still helped raise some awareness of our issues.

30 January 2015 – Military Appreciation Day at the Capitol.

20 January 2015 – Capital Development Committee Meeting (Maj. Gen. Edwards and Mr. Hunt will present)

Duane Dailey: Of that \$550,000, is that money earmarked for County Veteran Service Officers only or is it going to go to snow plowing, etc.?

Mickey Hunt: By statute, it has to go to County Veteran Service Officers only.

Marvin Meyer: Mickey, that is very refreshing to hear that the money will go to the County Veteran Service Officers. May I ask how that money will allocated out to the counties equally?

Mickey Hunt: It is allocated equally. It will be \$8.00 per hour in addition to what they are currently being paid. We know that El Paso County or Arapahoe County, the CVSO are paid better than La Plata. Basically, this is to help out the rural counties where some of the County Veteran Service Officers are volunteers.

*Discussion of County Veterans Service Officer compensation and the progression through the years.*

Colorado Division of Veterans Affairs

Diane Ricci: Good morning, everyone. Provided before you is both a chart and report from Dick Gigliotti from the Grand Junction Cemetery was provided for you from Ben for your perusal. I am just going to highlight a couple of things on there. One is the donations for CY2014 are up at \$10,627.00, which is a 34% increase over CY2013. With the expansion project, they are still getting the silt out of the upper pond and they are working on the four new columbariums. As of Monday, the new columbarium was being used. They just wanted me to remind everyone that we have seven columbariums. We started with 4 and each one has 662 slots in them which equals approximately 18 months for burying our veterans. In approximately six years, we might need more columbariums. This is just something to put on your long-term radar.

I want to remind you that the 2015 County Veteran Service Officer Training is coming up sooner than later. I am working on it all. It will be from Tuesday, April 28<sup>th</sup> through Friday, May 1<sup>st</sup>. It will also be in Colorado Springs at the Marriott down there. Mickey, I have a slot for you, I was anticipating you being there for opening day and opening comments. So be aware that you already have a slot for that with Ben first thing in the morning.

For the Board meeting scheduled February 6<sup>th</sup>, Ben wanted me to ask if you wanted to have the Pre-Audit Meeting either before or after the Board meeting. The Audit Meeting will be on 10 February. Do you have any questions?

Colorado State Veterans Community Living Centers

Kathleen Dunem: The Community Living Centers are doing well. They are all financially

stable. The quality of living for the centers is very high. The annual report was submitted for the Community Living Centers. The Commission is currently looking at the impact of minimum wage, and minimum wage barriers. We are looking at electronic medical records being implemented. Fitzsimmons will be the first to come on board and the rest will come on board the every other month.

As we discussed last meeting, there is a national problem treating individuals with traumatic brain injury (TBI) whether they are veterans or not and with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are combative. It is very difficult to find beds for combative patients. They are running out of beds that are designated combative. The main concern as we move past the Korean War Veterans is that with some of the newer veterans PTSD is more prevalent in from the newer conflicts. This means the need for beds for the combative patients will increase, as will the need for more security and more care needs for those patients, requiring trained staffing. We have really good Community Living Centers. They are way above the national standards. They always receive great awards and are looking to stay on top of this trend.

Vicki Manley is still at the helm and she is doing a really good job.

Robby Robinson: Are there any questions for Kathleen?

Veterans' Trust Fund

Gail Hoagland: One item of note, we needed to make an administrative change to the policy letters there was an incorrect date. The policy letters for both the VTF and the VAG indicated that the first quarterly report was due on September 15, when it should have been October 15. The date has been changed for both of the letters, but I wanted you to know since you voted to approve the final draft of the letter.

Robby Robinson: Since it is an administrative change, it is not necessary for us to vote on it again.

Gail Hoagland: Both grants engaged in an education presentation webinar with the potential applicants. The webinars were well received. There is some grumbling about the change in general but I think that is to be expected.

After the Joint Budget Committee meeting the State Audit Committee had a very brief overview of the VTF Audit and they seemed to be very complimentary in their comments. I think we have achieved what we needed to achieve, so all signs are positive at this point.

*Discussion of the brief overview and the Audit Progress Report submitted in December.*

Robby Robinson: So, they were reflecting on the update on the report submitted in December. We ought to mention the return of funds. That money that is freed up, it won't increase the amount available to the applicants?

Gail Hoagland: The money that was returned if from a VAG applicant, they just did not want to deal with the paperwork. The statute indicates that it gets rolled into next year's money. We can accept donations and we can solicit funding in that fund.

Robby Robinson: The issue for the Department is what to do with the freed up money for the Veterans Assistance Grant.

### **Discussion/Action: Annual Report of the Board**

Robby Robinson: You have a copy of the Annual Report of the Board to the Governor. We should vote on this as a final draft.

Rene Simard: Motion to approve the final draft of the Annual Report to the Governor.

Duane Dailey: Second the motion.

Robby Robinson: All in favor say, aye. That is **unanimous**.

In the last meeting in December, there was some discussion of the need to update the Strategic Plan. The last time we had someone help us with a strategic plan, it cost approximately

\$27,000. It is a plan that is out of date it is 2015 now and that is when it runs out. There has been little time or effort to do a new one with the time spent on the Audit. From reading the minutes, we ought to have a focus for the Board. The rural issues and mental health care seem to be prominent issues. As Duane can confirm, the priorities are different in different communities. Where homelessness may be a big issue here in Denver, in Burlington, the



biggest issue for veterans may be transportation. I think it would be worthwhile to look at unique issues impacting veterans. From conversations with Dana through Colorado Serves, the strategic plan should focus the Board's efforts on rural veterans needs and on outreach. I would like to propose that we utilize the County Veterans Service Officers as the focal point of the needs of veterans in their communities. The CVSO has the pulse of what the veterans in their communities needs are. With the new money for the CVSO's we may see less turnover and more of them being full time employees.

Mickey Hunt: For the future of outreach, this is a generational issue. Where a CVSO may be great at serving veterans of their generation, one specific veteran has college age veterans that they are not connecting with, missing an opportunity to serve the younger veterans. Another issue out in front is how we treat veterans of the current wars. Current veterans are mostly combat veterans with unique issues, unique ways of communicating such as use of social media, i.e., Facebook. Some people may think it is a website, but from my experience with Colorado Serves, it is actually building a network to help get out there and get going. A good example is when I visited Grand Junction, where there is a good network for meetings and collaboration between providers. One of the key ingredients to a network is the non-profit connections. I met a spouse who is wife of a veteran with PTSD. She needed help and she had no resources. I had been up there for the Mental Health Summit and from the networking contacts; I was able to refer the family to Rocky Mountain Human Services. These non-profits are getting money specifically for veterans, military members, and their families. PTSD impacts whole families; the spouse needs treatment as much as the veteran. The spouse, children, all the family members need treatment as much as the veteran. So, that is an issue to take before the Board and I would encourage you to look at.

*Discussion of mental health services and non-profit organizations and the importance of connecting resources with the CVSO's.*

Marvin Meyer: Mickey, as you are traveling around, you are finding out that there is a great need for services for families. What did you uncover as the biggest need?

Mickey Hunt: I would think mental health treatment for the whole family. Project Sanctuary does a great job reaching the whole family. Their success story is in treating the whole

family. We have a lot of non-profits with funds to serve those families.

Marvin Meyer: Have you had feedback for Colorado network of mental health providers?

Mickey Hunt: Each community has its own needs. You need to have both veterans and the providers in the same room to have that conversation.

Marvin Meyer: The fact that a service is available does not mean it is assessable.

Duane Dailey: Mr. Chairman, as you look at venues for future meetings, Granby would love to host the Board for a meeting. I would like to invite Debbie Blanc from the CLC and Jason Strickland with Project Sanctuary. We need to make inroads with relationships inside the VA so we can work together not against each other.

### **Future Meetings**

6 February 2015, 9:30AM, VA Regional Office, 155 Van Gordon, Lakewood, CO 80228 in the Director's Office

6 March 2015, 9:30A, El Paso County, Location TBA, will include Mike Webb from Fort Carson TAP Program.

### **New Business**

Mickey Hunt: I would like to address attendance. I would like the Board Members to know what the expectations are for attendance to Board meetings.

Robby Robinson: The authority for this Board is in statute and the Board Members are appointed by the Governor's Office.

Mickey Hunt: The Board Members appointed had a known expectation for attendance going in.

*Discussion of the importance of attendance to Board meetings.*

Duane Dailey: I would like to invite the Board to come to Grand County to have a meeting.

*Discussion of the Board going to Grand County for a meeting. It will be discussed next meeting.*

Meeting adjourned at 11:24am

**Board Minutes 6 February 2015**  
**VA Regional Office**  
**155 Van Gordon, Lakewood, CO 80228**

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 service members.

**Roll Call of Members and Introduction of Staff & Guests**

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

**DMVA Staff Present:**

- Mickey Hunt, DMVA, Deputy Director
- Reuben Mestas, CDVA Director
- Diane Ricci, CDVA Deputy Director
- Tamara Edmond, CDVA Admin. Asst.
- Gail Hoagland, DMVA VAG Administrator
- Renaye Murphy, Director, VA Regional Office
- Richard Sandrock, Governor's Office
- Rumi Britez, Intern, Governor's Office
- Debbie Blanc, Colorado Veterans Community Living Center
- Steve Rylant, UVC President
- Bernie Rogoff, Greater Aurora Veteran's Commission, City of Aurora
- Marvin Meyers, CBVA Emeritus, UVC
- Lisa McLaws, Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program-Denver

- Rossina Schroeer-Santiago, Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program-Denver  
Constance Tatro, Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program-Denver
- Catherine Dolan, Assistant Veterans Service Center Manager, VA Regional Office
- Mike Kubacki, Veterans Service Center Manager, VA Regional Office
- Elyce Girouard, Assistant Veterans Service Center Manager, VA Regional Office
- Jim Zirulo, Vocational Rehabilitation Officer, VA Regional Office  
Andy Post, Acting Loan Guarantee Officer, VA Regional Office

### **Approval of Minutes from December**

Unanimously accepted.

### **Board Member Comments**

Robby Robinson: The Board was represented last week by me and Dana at Military and Veterans Appreciation Day at the Capitol. I think this was my seventeenth year in attendance. I missed two in the nineteen years I have been going. It was a really nice day and there was a good turnout. The Governor was there and Maj. Gen. Edwards. The Legislators did their usual praise to the Veterans and military. I thought it was a very good event. Department of Military and Veterans Affairs put that on and they did an excellent job, in part due to the Protocol Officer, Janelle Darnell.

Dana Niemela: I was part of the Colorado Serves trip that went down to the San Luis Valley. I wanted to give a little feedback that we got from the Veterans Coalition of the San Luis Valley. I am really proud of that community from what they have done to organize themselves. They have some identified key leadership. There are perhaps 4-5 counties involved in the San Luis Valley Veterans Coalition, including County Veteran Service Officers, County Commissioners, and Veterans Service Organizations. They have put together these regular meetings with an agenda and are really trying to help meet the needs of veterans in their community. I think they could probably stand up as an example how a community goes from not being coordinated to getting it together in terms of the best interests of the veterans that they are serving. I think the feedback that I received from them mainly has to do with veterans having access to health care

both mental and primary care, which is not unusual for most of our rural communities. The good thing about San Luis Valley is that there are a lot of private providers. The hospital system down there is willing to step up and fill the gaps in that area and they are really committed to serving veterans- even when they are not being reimbursed for the services they are providing. They are really eager to step up and meet those needs.

Some of the specific challenges that were identified are:

- trying to get in contact with the VA in person or on the phone
- not being able to make the 5 hour trip to the Denver VA Medical Center due to physical challenges in order to get the services that they need
- being able to access care in the San Luis Valley
- the ability to get appointments in a convenient manner.

The relationship with the VA seems to be improving. There was a Patient Care Advocate team from the Denver VA there to present what their program is and explain the process, and that they were there to help. They made mention that they were looking to set up a remote office down there. It would be a specific time and place where the veterans of the San Luis Valley could communicate with a Patient Care Advocate there locally. They were very enthusiastic about it. The local community was very appreciative of that effort and I guess that we will look to see that it happens.

Duane Dailey: I attended the Northern Colorado Veterans Service Officer meeting a couple of weeks ago in Golden. I was very encouraged the way our town hall meeting in Granby in December went. A request has been made to see if we can have an outreach health van from Colorado Springs for medical and that door has been opened. It seems like an attempt is being made to do outreach and get out to rural Colorado. I am really encouraged.

One thing I have a concern about Channel 4 News on the night that Director Roff retired, they had a segment that inferred she was retiring due to the delays in the new VA Hospital. Correct me if I am wrong, but that would not be under her auspices anyway. She certainly did not have anything to do with any delays in the new VA Hospital. To me it gives an organization already with a black eye another black eye. I wonder if this is something the Board wants to address or put in a correction to the story that aired?

Robby Robinson: I wouldn't want to comment on that. They have a public affairs officer and I would rely on Dan Warvi to get that corrected. I imagine Dan is informed of any issues, so they would have to address that broadcast.

Kathleen Dunemn: No comments at this time.

Rene Simard: No comment.

Marvin Meyers: Dana spoke with regard to Colorado Serves. The Legislature at the Military and Veterans Appreciation Day on 30<sup>th</sup> of January held by the Governor, Representative Su Ryden, who is Chairman of the State Veterans and Military Committee in the House gave accolades to Colorado Serves and read a commendation for what Colorado Serves does. I wanted to mention it because Colorado Serves is making a significant impact around the state.

My comments in regards to Mrs. Roff, there was a small article in the Denver Post on the editorial page today if anyone is interested.

Robby Robinson: One question I had about Colorado Serves in the San Luis Valley, does Frankie Muniz play a central role in that?

Dana Niemela: He does. He is actively involved.

Robby Robinson: Is he a kind of a lead down there?

Mickey Hunt: Yes, Richard Nagley is the lead with the veterans with the County Commissioners. That was my fourth trip down to the San Luis Valley. The first time I went they yelled at me for an hour, a very angry crowd. The second meeting was not much more productive. We had media people there. So now, they have actually organized themselves. They had sixty people in the room. They actually had a good decorum. After the two VA spokesmen spoke, they were applauded. I think they are serving the veterans of their community. I met the group from San Luis Valley at the Military and Veterans Appreciation Day at the Capitol. One of my special friends from down there, Dorothy, a WWII veteran, who joined the military when she was sixteen, was able to come up for the day and she was thrilled. She asked me when I was going back to the San Luis Valley. They are meeting monthly. I will go back in the summer.

Robby Robinson: The reason I am calling that out is that I know United Veterans Committee gives awards out every year for outstanding veterans and individuals making a big impact in their community to serve veterans. I throw Frankie's name out because he is the only guy I know down there and he is a County Veteran Service Officer and he is doing a lot to help veterans.

Dana Niemela: I noticed that he was the only County Veteran Service Officer that stood up when they asked for County Veteran Service Officers to stand.

Robby Robinson: Was anybody from Pagosa Springs there?

Dana Niemela: I did not see anybody from there. I did see them at the Capitol. They brought a core team. Representative Crowder and the representative from Durango, Rep. Scheffell, both spoke very highly of Colorado Serves and the effort that is being made to help communities organize. I think that is the takeaway from that visit for us as a Board is helping encourage these communities to work together. I know in rural communities, there is only one way to get it done and that is by working together, making sure everyone is on the same page. From the County Commissioners, County Service Officers to health care working together. I thought it was really great that those two Legislators particularly from our rural communities to see the effort that is being made to work together. At the Alamosa meeting, they collaborated and had veteran representatives from Montrose there to talk about how they do business and best practices, and sharing ideas. It was really pretty remarkable.

### **Guest Presentations**

VA Regional Office Updates: Renaye Murphy, Director, VA Regional Office

Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment

Benefits

Loans

Robby Robinson: I would like to publicly thank Renaye for allowing us to come here. For those of you who have been around for a while, in February of almost every year, we meet here and we have been doing this a long time. It is very helpful for the Board in doing this and for other people to get these annual updates of what is going on with the VA. We probably know

too much about what is going on with the hospital because it is always in the news. But we tend to overlook some of the key elements, Vocational Rehabilitation, VA Loans, Claims Processing and other benefits that come out of the VA Regional Office. So that is why I asked Renaye to allow us to continue to come here, keep up the dialogue and keep us informed. Thank you, Renaye.

Renaye Murphy: I will talk a little bit about what is going on here. I have a few copies of these VA Regional Maps if you will just pass them around. They are public knowledge and if you don't have a copy you can print one from [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) or google, "VA Regional Maps". So these are the new regional maps. The main thing I wanted to talk about today is the VA Regional Office. We do compensation claims for Colorado and for Wyoming. We have a Service Center up in Wyoming. We do vocational rehab claims for Colorado and for Wyoming. We do 8 state regions and we do the Home Loans. VBA also covers business lines such as education, pension, and fiduciaries. That covers what we do out of this regional office, but of course we have other business lines, insurance.

The big thing with VBA is always the claims backlog. We are working very, very hard to address the Claims backlog. The inventory of claims in the VA system nationwide is 502,606 claims that are down from the 883,930 claims in 2012. We have pretty much almost cut that in half. The backlog (defined as any claim that is over 125 days old) is currently 240,854 that is down from 601,173 claims we had in 2013. We have really been attacking that backlog.

We are back in mandatory overtime mode that started in January and all employees are working a minimum 20 hours per month mandatory overtime to process the claims and to serve those veterans. We have not sacrificed accuracy to process all of those claims nationally, or issue based accuracy (that is the accuracy based on?) with the backlog; our average accuracy rate is 96%.

This VA Regional map is related to the "myVA" initiative. The Secretary pushed this initiative to provide kind of a one stop shop, more integrated, more veteran centric services to the veterans. As many of you know, we have a lot of different maps for the VA. If you look at the VA Medical map for example, you will see all the different clinics and the VAMC's. If you look at VBA map you will see all of the different Regional Offices and those different Regional



Offices fall under Area Offices. There are currently four Areas that all Regional Offices fall under. Of course, VCA (Cemetery) has their own map they have their own different regions to represent that. The “myVA” initiative is an initiative related to putting veterans first, and really improving processes and customer service so the veteran is in charge of his/her experiences and in charge of his or her own care. Just to give you an example: If you go to the hospital for an appointment, and you change your address at the hospital, then the VBA does not know that you have done that because our systems don’t talk to each other and because we have all these different maps and all these information silos. We are trying to get rid of that. So, what we are doing is restructuring the whole country to try to put everybody realigned services into these five regions. There are 5 regions on the map and each region will be under a single authority, a single Regional Director, or single Customer Service Coordinator so those kinds of integrated services can happen. It can happen a lot faster and it will be much easier for you to find out what you are entitled to and much easier for you to get the services you need. So, that is the main thing that I had to talk with you about.

*Discussion about designated region and any changes that will impact the defined region for Veterans Affairs.*

Renaye Murphy: It is my understanding that each region will have a Regional Director that coordinates all services, VBA services, VHA services and VCA services.

Robby Robinson: The different VA computer systems - are they going to be able to talk to each other? A lot of that sounds like different technologies.

Renaye Murphy: Yes, that is the thing. That is the main thing that needs to happen. There are very, very smart people working on that. As you know, it is a process. You have to build the IT infrastructure before you can get rid of the legacy infrastructure. Supposedly there are some very, very smart people working on this whole integration thing. Because it is frustrating to change your address and have to tell three different people that you’ve moved. That is just one of the examples. Another example would be if you have a service-connected condition and you go in and get a minor surgery for it. The VBA does not know that the veteran had minor surgery unless you tell us. There should be something that kind of pings us and lets us know that happened.

Rene Simard: Is the DOD Health Integration System (HIS) part of that VA Health System Integration?

Renaye Murphy: The DOD Health Integration System is not part of “myVA” but it is something that we are working on with great strides, the DOD integration into our system. Now the DOD records push into our VBMS system.

Bernie Rogoff: With how the new VA IT program with consolidation and collaboration of different units that will speak to each other, Lynette at one of our meeting mentioned that one of the reasons that the scheduling was so poor, it was like 4<sup>th</sup> in the nation, the bottom from what I understand, is because we were using 1992 scheduling software. I don’t understand having come from the corporate world how something can go 22 years and be so deficient and yet be overlooked? Where are we now with regards to electronic systems?

Renaye Murphy: I can tell you that the VBA Systems, all of the systems we are using for processing claims, and all of the systems that we are doing rules-based processing of pension and burials, those are all fairly new systems. Because I am not a hospital person, I can’t really tell you what is going on with the VHA systems. I just don’t know the answer because I am not a hospital person.

Steve Rylant: Some unofficial information about that, I participate in the Activation Committee Meetings where they are working on activating to the new VA Hospital. One of the big set-ups they are discussing there is the new software they are getting for scheduling. So they are working on it, but it is in there plan.

Duane Dailey: What is the anticipated timeline for the IT integration to take place?

Renaye Murphy: I am sure you will be hearing about that. We do not have the timeline yet.

We know that it is coming as soon as we can possibly make it happen. We have not been given a specific timeline yet. We have been given the map and we have been given the blueprint. We have been given the communication plan to start talking to the employees about it, and to get them thinking along those lines of this integration but we do not know specifically where the Regional Directors are going to go into place and when specifically the integration is going to

start.

Duane Dailey: I applaud whoever is doing that because from a corporate world as this gentleman said, when we serve our client, “the veteran” they have not a clue. And they are lost even though there is so much technology available to them.

Renaye Murphy: This is really just a paradigm shift in the organization and this will be the biggest realignment the VA has seen in many, many years. We know that without integration of services it is very, very frustrating for the veterans. Most people just think they are going to the VA, they don't know that there is VA, VHA, and NCA and we are going to try to fix that.

Bernie Rogoff: I am glad you said that because everybody in the VA was demonized by the polarization that was going on during the campaigns. So that VA already suspect by people who thought the VA was a terrible organization, good people were demonized by what appeared in the papers. That was unwarranted, really. We know that you are all doing wonderful work. We all know that the VBA and the VAMC are different and not everyone is doing that stuff.

Renaye Murphy: Are there any other questions for me?

Jim Zirulo, Vocational Rehabilitation Officer, VA Regional Office, Denver

Jim Zirulo: Good morning, my name is Jim Zirulo, Vocation Rehabilitation and Employment (VRE) Officer. We offer vocational rehabilitation services in accordance with Chapter 31. We have offices in Colorado and Wyoming. Our largest offices are in Denver and Colorado Springs. We have satellite offices in Grand Junction, Cheyenne, Wyoming, Fort Carson, and the Colorado Springs CBOC (Fillmore Clinic). I just put 3 voc rehab people there at the Fillmore Clinic. We have 32 staff and are in the process of hiring four more with a ceiling of 36 FTE. One of the employees that we are hiring is an employment coordinator for the Colorado Springs coordinator. We have 2 employment coordinators. I am going to talk a little bit about applications. We get about 200 applications for vocational rehabilitation per month and it normally takes approximately 5 days to process each application. So they are in the system in about 5 days.

We get them in for an appointment. We usually see each one of the applicants, most of them we see in group orientations for the larger offices and in the smaller offices we may see them individually. It takes us 35 days on average to make entitlement determinations on the veterans who apply for the program. Vocational rehabilitation is a needs based program and not everyone who applies is eligible to receive vocational rehabilitation. They may be eligible to apply but once they get in to see a counselor, then we find out they are suitably employed, or maybe not employable for some reason, not everyone gets into the program. You may hear some people complaining, "Voc Rehab turned me down, blah..blah." If they are denied we have them ask several questions, such as, "Have you asked for an administrative review?", "Have you appealed the decision?" or "Do you have information on why that decision was made?"

What drives the program is each veteran has a vocational rehabilitation plan. I have professional counselors about 26 of them and they write rehabilitation plans with input from the veterans to take ownership of their rehabilitation plan. They come in and say I want to be an accountant. They come in and do some testing. We take a look at their aptitudes and abilities. Then, in most cases we write a rehabilitation plan. Sometimes the veteran will come in and want something that is not compatible with their disabilities. Legally, we can't write a vocational rehabilitation plan if that is the case. So we will take a look at other options if they are willing to do that. So veterans may be found entitled to the program, but we are not going to agree with the plan if it is not within the capabilities of the veteran to perform the vocation. We have 2,500 veterans in training programs in Wyoming and Colorado. So far this year, we have rehabilitated a hundred veterans. That is what this program is all about. We have an employment program. Our success is gauged by how many veterans we rehabilitate each year. We have about a hundred and I have 20 more sitting in my office. When veterans applied for the vocational rehabilitation program, the average salary of the veterans was \$572.00 per month and then once they have been rehabilitated the average monthly salary is \$3,240.00 per month. Sometimes, folks accuse Voc Rehab of spending a lot of money. It is important to realize that there is a return on investment (ROI) with these veterans. These folks generate tax dollars when they are rehabilitated. These tax dollars pay for the next veteran to come along. Our goal through the year is to rehabilitate 350 veterans. Last year, we were fifth in the nation and size wise we are not the fifth largest state. So, we have a really good employment

coordinator, a good job market, and veterans are going to work. So, if you have veterans that come to see you looking for jobs, if they have a service-connected disability of 20% or greater, send them over to Voc Rehab. They can apply online. They can come to the Regional Office and apply, mail it in or fax it in. That is all I have for now. Are there any questions?

Dana Niemela: Jim, I think you touched on each of the points for eligibility for vocational rehabilitation, but can give a synopsis of the points of eligibility for Vocational Rehabilitation?

Jim Zirulo: They can apply at 10% service connected disability, but you have to be found to have a serious employment handicap. The majority of the applicants who are at 10% do not have a serious employment handicap although some are. They have to be within twelve years of their eligibility period or found to have a serious employment handicap. They have to have a disability and they have to apply within twelve years of the notification of their disability.

Dana Niemela: The purpose of vocational rehabilitation is essentially you have a disability that prevents you from being able to do the job you have always done. So you need retraining and new direction. Correct?

Jim Zirulo: Correct, we get service-members and veterans who maybe they were in the infantry, and there is maybe not much call for that in the civilian sector. Or, they have a disability and we will retrain them for a civilian job.

Dana Niemela: You mentioned there are occasions where the counselor may not agree with a disabled veteran's rehabilitation plan, can you give an example of that where a veteran comes in seeking a certain line of employment and it is not compatible with their disability?

Jim Zirulo: An example would be if we have a veteran who wants to pursue a vocation as a truck driver and he has a bad back and a bad shoulder with trouble lifting and he wants to be a truck driver then this would not be a good vocational choice. Then, we would take a look at other occupations that may be a little bit more receptive.

Bernie Rogoff: During the Korean War, I trained as a specialist in the field of radiology and nuclear physics. When I got out I went to the VA in New York and wanted to know if I could utilize some of those fields. I had been taking care of maybe 40-70 patients a day at that

particular Air Force Base hospital. They said you have to go back to school in order to get recertified, get a degree in the field that you have already been working in. What are we doing now to evaluate that veteran, look at his MOS, so that we could determine if perhaps he could quickly transition to a job that he already knows a lot about. He is a valuable asset. Are you taking those things into consideration?

Jim Zirulo: I can think of one example that we have right now. We have an officer who retired as an engineer in the Army and he was never certified as a professional engineer. When he gets out, and has a service connected disability, we find him entitled to the program. What we are we are going to do with him, he already has his degree, he already has his experience working. We are going to provide funding for a refresher course to help him prepare for his certification exam, then he could sit for that exam, and we will pay for the exam so he can get a job in his career field.

*Discussion about vocational rehabilitation program and potential certifications through the vocational rehabilitation program. The Board discussed issue of coordination with Department of Defense and MOS transition considerations.*

Robby Robinson: The State has undertaken the initiative to help transitioning service members to obtain state licenses so they can work in their career field. For example, if a service member operated heavy equipment in the service, then the state would help him get a heavy equipment operators license based on military experience. They went through 140 MOS's or MOSC to see which ones could be translated to civilian licensure. As I understand, that is still ongoing, because they had a big push a few years ago. Which means VA does not even need to get involved, when you get out if you are a heavy equipment operator, come to Colorado, and you can be licensed as a heavy equipment operator. One of the other ones is a commercial truck driver, I know that is an example I heard last month. It is not just the VA, it is a State initiative.

Dana Niemela: Does this program tie in with the Post/911 GI Bill? Are they mutually exclusive? Do they work hand-in-hand? Do you have to be eligible to apply to one to get the other?

Jim Zirulo: Good questions. You can use one or the other. There was a law passed approximately 2 years ago that allowed vocational rehabilitation to pay the Post/911 rates. We

had people that were jumping ship from our program to go to Chapter 33. A lot of these folks were seriously disabled and would have really benefited from having a vocational rehabilitation counselor working with them throughout their program. Once we write the Vocational Rehabilitation plan, we are not done with them. We are working with the veteran throughout their education/training, follow up with them through the job application process and check with them when they get a job to help them be successful. So we can pay the same rate as the Post/911. An example of this is if a veteran goes through vocational rehabilitation in a mechanic program and they get a job in a Harley shop, then we are going to help that veteran buy the tools he needs to be able to do his job. Chapter 33 is not going to do that, it is not the same as Chapter 31. If a veteran is in the program and they need a computer and it can be justified. Everything we purchase has to be justified. If we can justify it, we are going to purchase that veteran a computer through Chapter 31. The benefit to being with Vocational Rehabilitation is that we will work with you and check in on you through the whole process.

The downside is that if you don't want to have to deal with a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor throughout your education, checking in with you then the service member would probably just want to use the Post/911 GI Bill. So people are going to leave the program for that reason. They may say they just want to get their benefits like their buddy and not have to deal with Voc Rehab.

Bernie Rogoff: I have a sort of segue if I may, there is a young man whose father was killed in 2007 in Iraq by an IED. He has rehabilitated himself. He would like to go back to school. He now has a good job at Costco. Would you entertain helping a young man like that getting into a job program?

Jim Zirulo: In order to participate in the VA Vocational Rehabilitation program, you have to meet the eligibility requirements. Are there any other questions? Thank you for your time.

Andy Post, Acting Home Loan Guarantee Officer

Andy Post: Hi, I am Andy Post. I am the Acting VA Home Loan Guarantee Officer. I work in the VA Home Loan Guarantee Center. Our office is made up of three sections. We have VA Loan Production section, which is made up of VA underwriters. We have a Construction and

Valuation Sections, which is basically our VA Appraisers. We also have a VA Loan Administration Section, which is basically our VA Foreclosure Specialists. Currently I have 82 FTE underneath me as Renaye referred earlier; I have a large section to deal with. I have Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado all in my jurisdiction. Two of the sections do have new updated systems that now work out of a national work cue. Our foreclosure specialists have worked in a national work cue since 2008. My underwriters just went into a national work cue back in March. Our target is to move Construction and Valuation into a national work cue as well. Again, I have 82 FTE. Currently we have 6 vacancies; actually the Loan Guarantee Officer position is actually vacant. I am looking to fill three more specialists, or VA Loan Underwriter positions. Our SAH staffing position is open.

As far as out-based, I have eleven out-based agents and four employees, one in Alaska, four in Seattle, one in Idaho, one in Salt Lake City, one in Cheyenne, and just recently in the Fillmore Clinic in Colorado Springs, we got a SAH agent down there.

As far as Home Loan activity for the last two years, in Denver, in FY2014 we had 5,500 loans and so far this year in FY2015 we are up to 23,000. We have increases our output by 28%. So, basically the housing industry boom and then we had the nice interest rates, so everybody either got a home loan or refinanced during that time. Last year was pretty much a down year for us and we are now back to doing more home loans. In Colorado itself, we have already guaranteed over 7,000 loans for this year.

In our Construction and Valuation Department, we have a special section called Special Adaptive Housing (SAH). When a veteran is rated through the VA Service Center and eligible for the program, we have a special program where we can reach out to the veteran and have them fill out an application. We can go in and adapt their house basically to make it safe, sanitary, and more accessible. A couple of primary concerns when we go in to do that is to look for structural and adaptive safety changes to their homes such as access to bedrooms, bathrooms, and emergency egress/ingress to get in and out of the house. So far this year overall, we have approved 48 grants that have been submitted. All of last year, we only did 130. So, we are already at 48 this year with 46 of those grant applications were brand new and two were for subsequent use. The veteran once approved for a SAH grant can us up to the



maximum amount, if that grant goes up or if they don't use it all, then they can come back and use it a total of three times until they reach that maximum amount that is allowed. In October, it just increased again the SAH went from \$67,950 to \$70,465 as the maximum allowable amount.

That is a pretty substantial jump. So we do have a little bit more work.

So far this year, there are 15 pending applications for SAH grants in Colorado. So we have about 15 that we have received and we are starting to reach out and start that process going for them. If you guys have any questions, feel free to interrupt at any point.

As far as VA Home Loans, we are proud to say we have the lowest foreclosure rates out of any loans on the market. VA Home Loans have seen a decrease in foreclosures. Our VA Home Loan rates are at 1.56% and the Prime rate is 1.58%. Prime are the people that show up and throw 20% plus down on a house, they are the perfect credit scores, and they are the premier home loan applicant. Our loans are outperforming theirs. For fun, we always like to compare ourselves with FHA to see where they are at and FHA rate is 2.81%. We are really performing a lot better than those other loans. In Colorado, in just the past four months, we have had 349 foreclosures which are down from the last few years. The primary reason for these foreclosures is due to curtailing of income, i.e., when there was a dual income and the wife decided to stay home, there was a divorce or there was a loss of a job. But that does look like it is improving. That is about it, do you have any questions?

Duane Dailey: I have a question about Special Adaptive Housing contractors; do they have to be certified by the VA? What is the process for certification?

Andy Post: There is no certification required but contractors can go on an approved list. If a veteran comes to us and asks us who is on the approved list, we have a list of people we have worked with in the past to give them. We try not to get too involved in who they pick. We do recommend that they always get three different bids. Now, we do try to ensure they are getting the best bid possible. All of the bids and contracts have to go through the SAH specialist to make sure it meets all of the requirements and that there are no loop-holes in it.

Duane Dailey: So, the contractor once approved, what is the process for competing for that?

Does he have to have a good record?

Andy Post: As far as the contractor? The veteran can act as their own contractor. It does not have to be any approved VA contractor. We have lists of ones we have worked with and ones we have good reports with. After we approve a list of what they are applying for, and when the job is complete, then we ask for the letter from the veteran letting us know if they were satisfied with the contractor. After a contractor gets so many letters of satisfaction, then the contractor goes on the approved list. Again, they can pick whoever they want. I had one in Washington, just recently who had his son be the general contractor and he reaches out to collect bids for all of the electrical and everything else. Again, we don't try to hold the veteran just to this list. We let them pick and choose who they can have work for them. The contract goes through our agent to ensure all of our veterans are not taken advantage of and to make sure the grant is fulfilled. He will give it the rubber stamp before it goes through my office. We have four levels of review before it is signed off on. We review all of the contractors as well.

Once construction starts, our agent is following up on it to make sure everything is going well, to make sure there are not any bumps. You never know if you tear down a wall what you will find behind that wall. We always like to keep in touch and follow up with the veteran.

Dana Niemela: Are the Adaptive Housing grants only for service connected disabilities?

Andy Post: Yes

Dana Niemela: If someone purchases a home on a FHA loan and decides to refinance, can they refinance on a VA loan?

Andy Post: They can refinance to a VA loan, yes. VA loan is just a product so they can go through and get a certificate of eligibility and apply for it.

Dana Niemela: Is it used only for purchase or can it be used for remodeling as well?

Andy Post: It is only for purchase, they have to have the intent of living there full-time.

*Discussion on Veterans Affairs Home Loan*

Duane Dailey: You said they have to be service-connected. Are there certain exceptions for any veterans who are severely disabled or critical but not service connected?

Andy Post: Certainly not. It is written for service-connected veterans who need their homes specially adapted due to their service-connected disability. It is usually due to the loss of legs or whatnot. They have to have a service-connected issue. Are there any more questions? Thank you.

Mike Kubacki, VA Service Center Manager

Mike Kubacki: Good morning, my name is Mike Kubacki. I am the Service Center Manager. I have been asked to come and talk to you today about the overview of claims processing. I have brought my assistants with me, Catherine Dolan, Assistant Service Center Manager and Elyce Girouard, Assistant Veterans Service Center Manager, they are here to talk about the Veterans Service Center, Choice Card, and Digits to Digits, and answer any tough questions. I have a Service Center of 204 employees. Right now, we have 193 onboard. We are in the process of hiring more people, additional Veteran Service Representatives, Claims Representatives, and Legal Administrative Specialist for our Public Contact Unit down here and in Colorado Springs. We are currently going through the biggest transformation process ever in the VA as we transition to a paperless environment. Right now, we are 99.3% paperless at this time. So we are almost 100%.

When a claim comes in to each of the Service Centers around the country, they each have their own separate mailbox. The post office re-routes those claims to a central scanning facility.

Ours is in Wisconsin. After the claims are scanned into a centralized mail portal, they will be reviewed by our intake processing center here at the RO. They are first reviewed by an intake analyst; we have two of them now. There are segmented lanes. We have two core lanes; one works exclusively for Fully Developed Claims (FDC) and the other core lane is for claims with 3 or more issues. We have two Express Lanes; both of the Express Lanes work for claims with one to two issues and also work FDC. There is a Special Operations Lane for tough cases if the veteran is seriously injured, if there was a clear and unmistakable error (CUE), for Special Monthly Compensation, if the veteran was a prisoner of war (POW), for military sexual trauma

cases (MST), if they have ALS or Parkinson's Claim, or veteran dependents with Spina Bifida claims. Denver is the national processing center for Spina Bifida claims. There is also a Non-Rating Lane for claims that are not rated, such as Dependency Issues. There are 115 pending claims that need to go to PMR in Michigan, we have 36 processed. We are sending Dependency claims offsite to a private contractor. Appeals Team if you are not satisfied with the decision on your claim. If you are not happy with the decision, then it goes to the Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA).

Discussion of VA Claims Appeal process.

Steve Rylant: Once it goes to BVA and they determine that the appeal is solid and approved, then what happens?

Mike Kubacki: Appeals Management Center makes the decision on Remands.

Public Contact provides support for both Internal Customers and External Customers. Public Contact takes care of walk-in clients; they do the letters for Colorado State Benefits and other VA correspondence. For the External Customers, we have Outreach Specialists, and we have a Congressional Liaison. We have representatives at Fort Carson and we have 3 employees at the Colorado Springs Fillmore Clinic (Colorado Springs Community Out-Based Patient Clinic at Centennial and W. Fillmore St.). We are in the process of hiring a Legal Administrative Specialist for the Colorado Springs Fillmore Clinic. The demand has been great down there.

They had 800 interviews in Colorado Springs in January and we did 1,200 here.

BVA is transitioning to a national work cue. Colorado claims will come here first unless we can't handle the capacity but that is highly unlikely it will probably be where we take on claims from other states that can't handle their capacity. Are there any questions?

Dana Niemela: Do you have an idea of what the most common claims people are seeking compensation for?

Mike Kubacki: Hearing Loss is a big one. Sleep Apnea is another one, with folks coming out of the military they seem to be geared to file for those sleep apnea claims. Orthopedics and Mental Health are other claims we see a lot of.

*Discussion of different types of claims filed with the VA.*

Dana Niemela: Regarding the claims process for individuals with Military Sexual Trauma (MST), are there specific people who work those claims?

Mike Kubacki: Sure, we do have a MST specialist on the Special Operations Lane. I will let Catherine answer that.

Catherine Dolan: We have a female coordinator and a male coordinator to follow MST claims. It is important that they make personal contact with the veteran and verify if the incident was reported in service. They try to talk to them in person unless the veteran says they don't want to talk to anyone. We have both a female and a male Intake Specialist to work with MST claims.

Steve Rylant: You mentioned that Colorado claims and other state claims being processed in Colorado, are the Colorado claims being given priority by type of issue?

Mike Kubacki: They are processed by date of claim received. We have been part of the national work cue for several years now.

*Discussion about State Benefits and the BVA Process and what happens with Remands.*

Mike Kubacki: Most of the Remands go to Washington, DC; we are required to act on it in 15 days.

Rene Simard: What is required in Washington?

Mike Kubacki: I can't speak to that. Appeals are taking 260 days on average here in Colorado and nationally they are taking 450 days on average.

Catherine Dolan, Assistant Service Center Manager

Catherine Dolan: Good morning, my name is Catherine Dolan. I am the Assistant Veteran Service Team Manager. We are currently downstairs in the Public Contact area and have 7 employees and 6 of them are Legal Administrative Specialist that handles all interviews, all status of claims requests, the 800 number, walk-ins, State of Colorado benefits letters, and

Chapter 18 requests: Spina Bifida Birth Defects Claims. Anytime a client wants to know about Spina Bifida requests, you have to call them back and let them know the eligibility rules for that. They have a lot on their plate, so I know the State Benefits letters are behind. Yesterday alone, they did over 62 interviews between 6 people. We have a centralized mail portal. So what happens is it gets downloaded to a centralized mail process, the State Benefit Letters are routed to the Mail Room and then uploaded to the Scan Site. Then they go through LAS to get processed.

We do 12 different types of State Benefit Letters (Colorado Disabled Veterans License Plates, Monthly VA Compensation Amount, Commissary Privileges ID Card, Widow's Commissary Privileges Letters, Benefit Estimate Letter, Small Game and Fishing License, Columbine State Park Pass, Colorado State Tax Purposes, Civil Service Preference Letters, Civil Service Preference Letters, Tax Verification Letters). The letters just don't stop.

As we become more transparent with e-benefits, we are also getting more IRIS inquiries where the veteran emails their requests. We are supposed to respond within 5 days to IRIS inquiries. We have almost 400 requests. Our job is to serve that veteran who is in the office right now.

Especially before we had the Fillmore Clinic, they would travel all the way up from Colorado Springs. We want you to know we are trying to process those as fast as we can. In Colorado, there are different seasons for different things. I am from Seattle so I know about the fishing license. We are processing those and I want you to know we have 60 that we are actively working on. We are trying to clear them out immediately but wanted you to know why we are having delays.

*Discussion how to make the State Benefit Letters a more efficient process and potentially how the Board could relay this to the Legislature.*

Marvin Meyer: On the VA card there is a picture of the service connected veteran could you use something like that?

Ben Mestas: They have to know what the percentage is of the service connection that is what the issue is.

*Discussion of different service-connection percentages required to receive State Benefits.*

Catherine Dolan: We do have the Fillmore Clinic and business is booming. It is great for the veterans there in Colorado Springs because they don't have to travel an hour or an hour and a half when they would travel here. The Fillmore Clinic is turning out the State Benefit Letters left and right. If you guys have any more issues about the benefit letters, please let me know.

If there is ever anything that needs to be expedited, I will give you my card so you can give me a call so we can make sure to get those expedited.

*More discussion on State Benefits letters process, and what the Board could do to help make this an efficient process.*

Ben Mestas: Just a real quick question about your Wednesday closing early at noon, what is the rationale behind it?

Catherine Dolan: We have IRIS inquiries with emails that we have to answer in an appropriate time frame; we are processing 30 claims per day. We need time to catch up, get them updated and in the system. We have power of attorney (POA)'s that need to be updated or changed. If you don't check a box in VBMS, then the POA can't review that file. We also do the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests and the Privacy Act requests. We currently have 800 of those pending. We have to make copies of all of those files and a veteran could have an 11 volume file that needs to be reviewed. We can't take somebody off of production to make those copies, and somebody has to do the work. When we are doing interviews, by law a person has to take two breaks and a lunch. We have to have legal administrative staff to do the work when we have lunch. We also have to do annual training during that time frame.

*Discussion of requirements of the legal administrative staff and requirements of the Public Contact Office to be on the phone and respond back to veterans.*

Bernie Rogoff: I have a question and maybe it is not in your lane. I have had the occasion to call in on the 800 number and you have a message notice that if you have an emergency then dial 911 and then you also have a number for if you have a mental health issue or mental health emergency, the Veteran Suicide Hotline number, which is another number to call. Someone in

that condition is not going to be able assimilate the number or to dial the other number. Is there a way for them to dial just one number?

Mike Kubacki: It is on the radar, this issue was brought up at a town hall meeting and it is under consideration.

Catherine Dolan: Are there any more questions concerning the State Benefits Letters?

Bernie Rogoff: You are doing a great job!

Catherine Dolan: Thank you. I know the employees are working hard and making sure the veterans get the best customer service. The Veterans Choice Card (VHA program) concerns veteran's access to care when they are more than 40 miles from a VAMC or VACBOC. I am handing out a copy of the Veterans Choice and Accountability Act of 2014 Public Law was passed on August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2014. The Choice Program is a new, temporary program that allows some Veterans to receive health care in their communities rather than waiting for a VA appointment or traveling to a VA facility. This is a temporary three year program to bridge the gap while the VA expands their capacity for access. Approximately, 600,000 veterans were immediately eligible for if you are being told, "I can't see you for 30 days" and you live more than 40 miles away. There are 9,000,000 veterans enrolled in the Veterans Choice Card and the card rolled out on November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014. The eligibility requirements are enrolled in VA health care prior to August 1, 2014 or the veteran is a recently discharged combat veteran. You have to have been told at your local VAMC that you will have to wait more than 30 days to be seen. They have to currently reside more than forty miles from the closest VAMC. So the 30 days start when the veteran is offered an appointment that is 30 days out and the 30 days starts when they are given the clinically indicated date. That is when the clock starts. The veteran is offered the option to keep an appointment or offered the Choice program. The provider must be in the third provider care network. The VA pays the Medicare rate and these rates can be negotiated in highly rural areas. If the veteran has other health care insurance then that insurance become the primary payer. If there is a co-payment that the primary insurance requires, then it has to be paid up front by the veteran. If it is for a service-connected disability, then there is no co- payment. If it is for a non-service connected issue and the veteran has insurance, the VA will notify the provider and they will bill the insurance for it. With prescriptions if they have urgent fill, they can be filled at



a non-VA pharmacy and then submit a claim. With non-urgent prescriptions, the veteran can take or mail the prescription to the VA pharmacy or the provider provides the prescription to the VA pharmacy. If there is travel involved for the veteran that has to go to the Choice preferred provider, the Choice Act does provide for beneficiary payment for travel reimbursement to the Choice preferred provider. This is done through the VHA.

Bernie Rogoff: How does the veteran get travel reimbursement for these appointments? Do they have to apply for it or is it already in the system?

Catherine Dolan: I can't say since that is a VHA program.

Steve Rylant: It says on number 1, 30 or more days, and then it says or 40 miles from the closest VAMC. So it is not an, "and" it is an "or", right?

Catherine Dolan: My PowerPoint slide says 30 days or more and 40 miles from the closest VAMC.

#### *Discussion of Choice Card*

Catherine Dolan: They do have the website at [www.va.gov/opa/choiceact](http://www.va.gov/opa/choiceact) you can go there and read all about for more clarification on it.

Robby Robinson: There are a whole bunch of things that are not covered with the Choice Card. It is also limited to the type of care.

Duane Dailey: Is there any thought on co-providers in my area, 44.44 miles to the nearest VA facility and then there is another one 36 miles, which is a problem. My providers when they call in they are not taking the Choice Card. The providers won't accept the Choice Card.

#### *Discussion of providers not accepting the Choice Card due to payment at Medicare rates.*

Catherine Dolan: I can't speak to that. I would just encourage you to let me know if you have any questions about the State Benefit letter or the Choice Card. Thank you for the opportunity to share with you today.

Elyce Girouard, Assistant Veterans Service Center Manager, VA Regional Office, Denver

Elyce Girouard: Hi I am Elyce Girouard, I am one of the Assistant Veterans Service Center Managers. I am going to give you a brief overview about Digits to Digits. I am also going to talk about some of the updates to the Stakeholder Enterprise Portal (SEP). In terms of Digits to Digits, if you are not aware of what it is, it allows the power of attorney (POA) to submit claims to the VA on behalf of the veteran. The main difference between Digits to Digits and SEP is that in Digits to Digits it allows the Veteran Service Officers (VSO) to use their own proprietary software and it goes into the pipe. However, this is a one-way interface system.Bernie Rogoff: Is this secure?

Elyce Girouard: Yes, it is supposed to be. We do have several users testing the software interface currently. They started that on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2015 and February 7<sup>th</sup>, they have started production at the test sites. So far 18 claims have gone through. They are testing in Tennessee, Georgia, and Ohio. Right now the only claims that can be submitted at the test sites the 526EZ FDC claims. To be perfectly honest, Tracy Wise is our expert at this is out and I am just presenting for her. She headed a meeting earlier this week about Digits to Digits and they are still in the early production phase. We don't have a timeline for it to be used nationwide, but it is coming and they are testing and trying to work through the bugs or any type of security issues. That is kind of Digits to Digits in a nutshell. Are there any questions on it?

Bernie Rogoff: Do you believe it is an improvement over the SEP or what was available three years ago?

Elyce Girouard: I would say it is better than the 3 year ago. However, I am going to be pro-Stakeholder Enterprise Portal (SEP) and I will tell you why when we go through the updates. I think it is a better system and it is already in place. I know you guys like to use your own software but the Stakeholder Enterprise Portal, you go in and fill out the document that is already there then it goes right into VBMS. Now, it will show new updates with the culmination of the data that was received. The Benefits can go in on behalf of the POA and you can submit a claim for them, you can submit documents for them, DBQ's, evidence, etc. so that everything can be viewed electronically. Another good thing about this portal is that if a veteran comes into the portal and they say, "I want DAV to be my representative, then if DAV has access to the system and they would be added as POA. It would put POA as a new update

to the SEP, and then the POA can link to the National Call Center and talk right then about that claim or the specific veteran. Both systems, the documents that are sent into our VBMS, are supposed to be just in time however, there is a slight lag of a few minutes then it should be able to go to VBMS. Another great update to the SEP is that if you submit an informal claim, you know you have a year to submit the formal claim. When the data updates to SEP, if it is an informal claim then at the 90, 60, 30 day out markers, it will send a notification to give the POA and veteran a heads- up that the date to file a formal claim is pending. So, there is an internal tracking that gives the POA and the veteran a heads-up on what is coming. Also, there is a section, Veterans Message Serve; it will also send notification to the Veteran Message Center. We operate in a rules and process based system and when there are changes in the rules or process then these update to the SEP system. So, those are the updates to SEP. If you have any questions about the portal or Digits to Digits, I can take those at this time.

Ben Mestas: Actually, I would like to speak on the Digits to Digits part and why we as Service Officers would prefer the Digits to Digits. You are right in the aspect that you are able to transport an entire claim directly. And there is the capability in the future of webbing these programs together. But if we are working a certain method or technique, where we could bundle the claims, having the ability to bundle the claim and go directly to the VA without having to stop, fill out all those forms again, after we have gotten the veteran to sign them, and we have developed in our own database the ability just to send it would be helpful. It would save us from having to do the same job two times. I mean, that is why Service Organizations like the Digits to Digits concept. Like I say, the SEP program works really great, but it is time consuming for us to redo what we have already done. We like the ability to be able to see the stuff put in VBMS immediately as it is supposed to be when it goes Digits to Digits.

Elyce Girouard: We have only tested 18, so at this point it can't move directly into the system, I don't think. I definitely agree with you. I can see your point of view about having to talk to the veteran just one time. Maybe, it is just something that you can use in tandem, so if the veteran comes in and wants a change of address. You could go into SEP to change the address and then it is updated into our system. With the Digits to Digits interface, you have to give us the form for the address change that comes into our system then you have to let Public Contact know that you have updated the address.

Ben Mestas: When I talked to Tracy, her thoughts were when Digits to Digits and the SEP program were first introduced as concepts that they would be able to mingle as one single system at some point down the line.

Elyce Girouard: That could be true down the road but right now it is just a one-way interface. And it is not updating any of our systems right now.

Bernie Rogoff: So what would that do for you that it is not doing for you now?

Ben Mestas: Under the old system, we physically handed in the claims, they were worked here. It was a lot easier just to get things going on one stage. But with this concept it is going to basically put us all paperless. There will be no paperwork everything will be electronic. So we won't have the loss of paper claims, and we won't have the paperwork shuffling. It is a great system.

Elyce Girouard: As the testing moves forward, we will let you know any updates as they occur.

Ben Mestas: Tracy stays in touch with us; she calls me more than twice a week. She is very good at what she does.

## **Reports**

### Governor's Office

Richard Sandrock: Last week, the Governor, Lt. Governor, Maj. Gen. Edwards, and I were at Fort Carson on Tuesday for a listening session with a General from the Pentagon. 500 people who did not vote for the Governor gave him a standing ovation. This Monday, the Governor will be visiting with patients at the Denver VA Hospital. I will be staffing him for that.

On February 22<sup>nd</sup> is Military and Veterans Appreciation Day at the Pepsi Center for half game, the Lt. Governor will be there to make remarks; a service members, veterans, and Service Family Member Organizations and their families will be singled out for service to those groups. They will be recognized for their efforts for serving those groups.

Today, the communication department signed off on a quote from the Governor that we will be launching our "Veterans in Agriculture" program. We are hoping to collaborate with Western Dairy Association and Fort Carson Transition Assistance Program. Last week, I met with CSU

President, Dr. Frank. He sees the value of “Veterans in Agriculture” especially rural agriculture not just green houses in Denver but in places like Sterling, Montrose, La Junta, Eads, and Lamar. He sees value to immediate jobs but also education for the future, to have more students eventually entering Colorado’s multiple schools to get degrees in agricultural programs, saving their GI Bill for the time being. He will get a phone call in to the Vice President from CSU to see how he can help “Veterans in Agriculture” and get more veterans going into agriculture programs.

It has taken six or seven months, but I finally have a meeting with a veteran employment specialist with the AFL-CIO at their national headquarters. There are 4-5 million jobs in trades, good paying jobs, you can raise a family with; go on vacation, save money for college that goes unfilled every year. Once we get a little further with “Veterans in Agriculture”, we are hoping to follow the “Veterans in Agriculture” program in the future with a “Veterans in Trade” program. I will be meeting with them in a couple of weeks.

Dana Niemela: Richard, I would like to be in on that meeting with you.

Richard Sandrock: Alright, send me an email and I will let you know the details.

Lockheed Martin in collaboration with Fort Carson is looking to get veterans in to \$20-\$25/hour manufacturing jobs that need to be filled. The jobs don’t require a degree all they require is 4 weeks of free certification. They are now in the process of advertising these jobs to veterans and service members. They are saying if the veteran or service members know what they want to do, why not come to work and then use your GI Bill to get a degree in engineering, CAD, or drafting, etc. So, that is all right now.

Rene Simard: I wanted to add a comment. I was at the listening session and the Governor did a great job advocating for Fort Carson. It lasted over two hours, with folks, one after another, stating their support for Fort Carson. One of the scenarios is that 16,000 soldiers could be lost as part of in sequestration. Think about the economic impact, not only to Colorado Springs, but to the entire state of Colorado. I think it was a great message.

Richard Sandrock: Fort Carson’s economic impact is approximately \$1.7 Million on the state of

Colorado alone. \$8 Million statewide is what the estimated impact would be. DMVA is doing an Economic Assessment to identify the impact to the State. I think that goes out in April.

Mickey Hunt: That report is due on April 15.

Richard Sandrock: It may be higher than \$8 Million, we will see. Fort Carson, alone brings in \$4 Million in tax revenue to Colorado Springs, \$4 Million to the state of Colorado, and \$800,000 to Fountain. So there are large amounts of revenue that has an impact on Fountain-Fort Carson and the state of Colorado.

*Discussion of economic impact the military has on Colorado.*

DMVA

Mickey Hunt: Part of the Partnership Program, Colorado National Guard has been in a long term State Partnership Program with Slovenia and Jordan. So after the Jordanian pilot was killed, Maj. Gen. Edwards reached out to Princess Aisha bint Al Hussein, Maj. General of the Royal Jordanian Army and the military attaché to the Jordanian Embassy in Washington to express our condolences.

F-16's will be deploying to Korea next week as part of the Theater Support PAC. So the war is not truly over, and we will be going back to Afghanistan in September. A part of the Reserve Force is training to take the Chinooks back to Kuwait in June. They are really short-handed over there.

Dana Niemela, Richard Sandrock, and I will be in Fort Collins on Tuesday. The meeting will be at the Library on 4616 S. Shield St. from 3:30pm to 5:30pm. Our role is primarily to listen.

- 17<sup>th</sup> of February, I will be in Grand Junction, and go to the Colorado State Veteran Cemetery that afternoon.
- 18<sup>th</sup> of February at Joint Community Forces Meeting in Grand Junction in the morning
- 18<sup>th</sup> of February I was invited to, "Welcome Home, Montrose" in the afternoon and I have been invited to a tour at the Montrose VA Community Based Out-patient Clinic (CBOC).

- 19<sup>th</sup> of February, I have an office call with the Director of the Grand Junction VAMC
- September 22<sup>nd</sup> is the projected Blackhawk visit to the State Veterans Community Living Centers. It will be a two-day visit and I don't have the exact dates but wanted to get it on the calendar first.

That is all I have. Are there any questions?

DVA

Ben Mestas: I have essentially 4 areas I want to discuss, and then Diane has something.

1. We are going to be hiring next week, 2 new State Veteran Service Officers, for the couple of vacancies we have had since August. We have some very strong applicants with some VA experience.
2. Colorado County Service Officer Training Conference, we are starting to get applications in from all of our counties and it is looking pretty good. If there are any other groups that are associated with it or you think would benefit, let Diane or Tami know so we can get them the contact information. That will be April 28<sup>th</sup> through May 1<sup>st</sup> in Colorado Springs.
3. Cemetery expansion is moving on as scheduled. They are talking about still by September to have the cemetery area completed. We are now in the process of getting the second columbarium ready to go. As Diane discussed in the last Board meeting, the use time for a columbarium is approximately 18 months. The expansion of these next four that are proposed will probably be good for the next six years. Hopefully. Once again, the use of columbariums is now becoming the preferred way of burial so we just need to keep that in the back of our mind.
4. Dick Gigliotti has informed me of his intent to retire at the end of this year. He has given me the tentative date of December 31<sup>st</sup>. I just wanted to let everybody know that the Cemetery Director is contemplating retiring by putting in his letter of intent.

Are there any questions? Diane has one issue she wants to follow up on.

Diane Ricci: I have had an update from the Colorado Department of Revenue. While they primarily brought up the DV plates, Mickey and I brought up my kind of personal issue the fact that I can't renew my Bronze Star plate online. Tony got back to me a couple of days ago and said that not only my Bronze Star but every plate with a permanent award that there was a legitimate glitch statewide of why we can't renew online and it is supposed to be fixed by the end of the month. I will follow through with him at the end of the month.

Duane Dailey: At the meeting, I asked him about the veteran designator on the driver's license for free. When you have a CDL, you have to pay \$7.50 to have the veteran designator put on your driver's license. They said yes, you do have to pay the \$7.50.

#### Veterans Assistance Grant

Gail Hoagland: For the VAG there are no major updates. The sub-grants from the VTF are all tying together. For VAG, other than current expenditures if you remove a grant that was returned, then we are at approximately \$457,000 left to be expended. We are on track, that is about half of the \$970,000. For VTF, we have approximately \$387,581.83 left to be expended. This is approximately half and we are on track.

Robby Robinson: The grant applications are due March 1<sup>st</sup>.

Gail Hoagland: They are starting to come in. The combined updated would be I completed 3 webinars on training for the application process with about 100 organizations in total attending the webinars. There were more individuals because I encouraged people in the same organizations to gather around the computers rather than having several different people from the same organization logging in. Overall, the webinars have been exceptionally well-received. I have received quite a bit of positive feedback. The challenge, I think however is I anticipate more applications this year than we have had in the past. That presents the challenge of really looking at the applications, the recording tool, and rating the applications. It means that it is more likely that there will be more applications that are not funded. So that does present some challenge. People that attended the webinars were very enthusiastic that once selections are made for all new grantees there will be continuing webinar sessions training them on what you need to do to get reimbursement and those types of things. As well as receive a grantee



handbook. That has been like two thumbs up to the training.

Bernie Rogoff: Where can I find the application?

Gail Hoagland: You can look on our website at [www.colorado.gov/vets](http://www.colorado.gov/vets) which is the DVA's website. Unfortunately, you have to look under State Services tab, and use the drop down menu to go to Grants and Trusts. You can also find the VTF application under the Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs Section. I have posted the policy letters for programs, the grant applications. You can also find the PowerPoint from the webinars. There is also a draft form of the potential survey that they are going to be asking the grantees to fill out.

I also presented at the American Legion Half Yearly Conference. I had a mixed response there. Half of the room was very supportive and half of the room was exceptionally angry about the changes.

Richard Sandrock: Was it logical anger or because they aren't getting any more money angry?

Gail Hoagland: Both.

Steve Rylant: What I have heard it is due to the increased amount of documentation that they have to do. They are volunteers and they have to use more of their volunteer time, am I right?

Gail Hoagland: I think in terms of reimbursement being that they think they don't have to submit anything ever to justify the use of the money or a cover spreadsheet asking for it. They are required to provide documentation for expenditures and also they will have to provide the surveys where veterans have to check 5 boxes. It is freaking people out a little bit. As far as the application itself, there was some grumbling about the application process being more complicated than it has been in the past years. This is troubling to some people. And it was very split because half of the room was very supporting and the other half of the room was not.

One other thing to pass on to you, I just got notified through Catholic Charities that St. Joseph's, a transitional housing program is for veterans. The Catholic Church is requesting the property back. I don't know the exact timeline but Catholic Charities has made the determination that they are committed to helping veterans in transitional housing and at the very least; the veterans will be moved to Samaritan's House which is obviously not the best option. I think they are

also looking at some other options.

Bernie Rogoff: Were you notified of what they are going to do with the property?

Gail Hoagland: I was just notified of that yesterday and quite frankly, I think it is Catholic Charities property. I think they are in the initial stages of trying to sort that through. Perhaps there are ways that we might lend support when they are in a position of re-looking at that.

Duane Dailey: How many veterans are in that facility?

Gail Hoagland: I think it is actually somewhere close to twenty but don't quote me.

Dana Niemela: I work very closely with St. Joseph's Veterans Home. They are a partner of ours. I run a Department of Labor funded program to help get homeless veterans jobs. This is one of the better facilities that we have in our community. It is clean. It is quite. It is a beautiful facility. It has a great staff. This is a good program; they volunteer and get out in the community. I hate to see them be relocated to anywhere else.

Gail Hoagland: I absolutely agree but apparently the Church has made other decisions about it. Those are my updates.

Steve Rylant: I have a question. Gail, in the past we were able to use direct deposit for money and the system was broken about 3-4 months ago. I thought it was being fixed. Is it close to being fixed so you can do direct deposit back again?

Gail Hoagland: Not yet. What I am hearing, is that it has been put on a total hold right now until they can get the complete section done. At least that is what I am told. I do not have a timeline.

Robby Robinson: It is a statewide system issue; it has to do with the accounting program, C.O.R.E.

*Discussion of C.O.R.E. the State Finance and Accounting computer system.*

## **Public Comments**

Rossina Schroeer-Santiago, Homeless Veteran's Reintegration Program (HVRP)

Rossina Schroeer-Santiago: We are from the Homeless Veteran's Reintegration Program. I will just pass these out to everybody here. You guys are also our community partnering agency, and leadership in that agency. Our primary purpose of our program is that we are the employment arm of the Department of Labor Grant funded program that works to get veterans reintegrated back into the workforce. My colleague here, Constance, she is our Community Resource Navigator so we have this big collaboration that we do in the office. The primary thing we work on is removing barriers to employment that our homeless veterans or imminently homeless veterans are encountering. So Constance does a lot of the front end work which may include removing barriers to housing, removing barriers to resources, removing barriers to access, clothing, food benefits, and things like that. The nice thing about where we are located because we are located in the Denver Department of Human Services so this helps us to help veterans cut through red tape. We have good relationships with VA eligibility, housing, disability, the old age pension program and things like that. Once they are done with Constance, they kind of shift over to me.

I do the Employment Counseling. What I really work to do with the client is to hone in on focusing on a targeted job application process. This is something that not all agencies are able to do but because we are an intensive case management type program, we are able to sit down with clients, look at their employment history, similar to what the voc rehab program does. I am able to help them reconstruct resumes and help them rebrand, and explain how the job market has changed and trends like that. I help them go through the application process and help them get back out there. This is a really integrated approach and a collaborative approach. We don't do the work for the veteran but we show them how so they will be able to do it again for themselves. We come from a very strength-based approach as far as working with the client's interests. We believe that working from what they are interested in and what their job experience has been in the past and we build that back up. We can get them something that is going to be long-term sustainable employment. Something that is going to give them the income that is not just \$9 or \$10 but looking \$15 plus. So that is the goal of our program. If you have veterans that you know or as you are out there dealing with other agencies in contact with homeless veterans or imminently homeless veterans, please make sure to let them know we are a community partner and that we are there to provide those services.

Robby Robinson: This is a statewide program but you are from the Denver Office, right?

Rossina Schroeer-Santiago: Yes, that is correct.

Robby Robinson: Are there any other comments?

Steve Rylant: United Veterans Committee (UVC) meets on Tuesday, February 10<sup>th</sup> at the VFW Post 9644. It will be held in the usual place. The speaker sections we will have an update on the new VA Hospital construction from Kevin Lindsay (the Executive on the VA Construction site), Robert Michaels (Chief of Construction Division), US Army Corp of Engineers, Celeste Davis, Hewitt Turner, and Brad McCullum (VA Hospital Activation Committee Chairman). So, I figure it is going to be pretty good. This is a good team and they really do seem to be working as a team together.

### **Future Meetings**

March 6<sup>th</sup>, Pikes Peak Community College, Veteran's Center, 5675 S. Academy Blvd, Colorado Springs, CO 80906

April 1<sup>st</sup>, Denver

May 1<sup>st</sup>, Overlaps with CVSO Training Conference, Grant Meeting,

TBA June 5<sup>th</sup>, Grand County, Board Elections

Robby Robinson: We need to have a Grants Subcommittee, let me know if you want to volunteer. (Dana Niemela, Rene Simard, Duane Dailey, and Ben Mestas volunteered.)

Gail Hoagland: You need to read the applications prior to the Grant Subcommittee meeting and score them. I will get you copies in advance.

*Discussion on Grant Subcommittee and scoring the applications. Also, discussed Board visit to CVSO Training Conference*

### **Old**

#### **Business**

#### **New**

#### **Business**

Robby Robinson: The Audit Review meeting has been moved to March 10<sup>th</sup> 2015. The Senate Confirmation Hearings will be on February 11<sup>th</sup> at 1:30pm at the Capitol. Most of the Board

knows that Wendy Chiado elected to resign from the Board.

Meeting adjourned 11:40am

**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 4<sup>th</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> 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 in the soldier's 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 Dunem: 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 3<sup>rd</sup>, 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 1<sup>st</sup>, Overlaps with CVSO Training Conference, Grant Meeting,

TBA June 5<sup>th</sup>, 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

## **Board Minutes**

**3 April 2015**

**Department of Military and Veterans Affairs**

**6848 S. Revere Pkwy, Centennial, CO 80112**

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**

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

DMVA Staff Present:

- Mickey Hunt, DMVA, Deputy Director
- Greg Dorman, DMVA Legislative Liaison Reuben Mestas, CDVA Director
- Claire Dean, CDVA Admin. Assistant
- Gail Hoagland, DMVA VAG Administrator
- Richard Sandrock, Governor's Office

### **Guest Presentations**

None.

### **Approval of Minutes from March**

Accepted.

### **Board Member Comments**

Dana Niemela: Visited Lockheed Martin with Richard Sandrock. Black Fox, located in Longmont, provides electronics manufacturing training and is considered a pipeline to Lockheed Martin. The Workforce Investment Act Fund or the GI Bill will cover training costs. These opportunities are through area Workforce Centers. Veterans who complete the training will have the opportunity for a lucrative career at Lockheed Martin, including on the job training leading to a NASA certification, and will be provided livable wages. We are looking at ways to provide housing and transportation for those who are either homeless or do not live in the Longmont area. Both Dana and Richard will be meeting with Richard Toya and the HR Director of Lockheed to discuss setting up similar training programs in El Paso County.

Robby Robinson: Since there are no guest presentations, Mr. Robinson would like to use the time to discuss the grants. Twenty-eight requests have been submitted.

Richard Sandrock: Next Tuesday Mr. Sandrock will be speaking to the Board of the Western Dairy Association in Phoenix, Arizona. Later that week, he will be at the Space Symposium in Colorado Springs to introduce the idea of hiring veterans. Veteran-owned Red Lake Brewery in Colorado Springs has had great success in uniting veterans from many different eras and walks of life. They will be teaming up with other veteran-owned microbreweries nationwide to increase distribution.

*Mr. Robinson was intrigued by the diversity that Mr. Sandrock mentioned. It is something that many organizations like the American Legion and VFW have been having difficulty in bringing in a diverse group of veterans. Team Red, White and Blue holds many socials there, but most of the customers are word of mouth. Colorado Department of Labor and Employment is working on a pilot program with Marriot Hotels to give veterans extra points through a workforce center, allowing veterans to stay at the hotel for free while attending job interviews. The Governor's office will try to work out a similar program with Southwest Airlines. The annual Pedal the Plains, an agricultural bike tour through the eastern plains and Colorado farming communities, is expecting nearly 1,500 riders this year. A State-wide multi-day Clergy Counsel to address mental health and suicide will be held in Denver this summer.*

*A brief discussion ensued about the VA hospital.*

Mickey Hunt: TAG is currently visiting Jordan and Romania and will be in South Korea next

week. General Edwards, Mickey and Greg Dorman will travel to Washington, D.C. to speak with CODEL. Colorado Serves has been invited to the San Luis Valley Veterans Coalition on May 6.

On May 12, Mickey will be attending a week-long Welcome Home Montrose event, which will host a white water rafting trip with several patients from Walter Reed. Last week Mickey toured the Pikes Peak Workforce Center in Colorado Springs and was impressed with the program. A Veterans Breakfast will be held at the Wings over the Rockies on April 18. May 23 is the 2<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the Freedom Memorial in Aurora. On the second of May, Mickey will be in Walsenburg for the unveiling of a new temporary housing facility for family members of veterans staying at either the hospital or the Walsenburg Nursing Home. The facility was constructed by disadvantaged youth.

*A brief discussion followed with regards to the Board meetings being open to the public and guest presenters lobbying for grant money.*

The F-16s are currently in South Korea and Chinook Helicopters going to Kuwait. This summer the State-owned vacant armory in Grand Junction will be proposed for a future Veteran One- Stop. If approved, a State Service Officer and building maintenance person will need to be hired for the location. The State-owned Las Animas Armory could eventually be turned into a Veteran One-Stop.

Greg Dorman: The Grand Junction Armory was appraised at \$750,000. House Bill 1315 was recently introduced to raise the State reimbursement funds to Counties and meet minimum wage. If passed, Counties will not have to match those funds dollar for dollar. The General Assembly currently sets the rate, but if the bill is passed, the Division will set the rate. Ben Mestas, UVC and CCI testified before the house last week. The long bill has moved from the Senate and will be presented to the House in the coming weeks. Military Family Relief Fund Bill 1052 has been signed by the Governor. House Bill 15-1114, which talks about the indefinite detention of US citizens, did not pass.

*A brief discussion followed about the GI Bill and in-state tuition.*

Ben Mestas: Cemetery construction is ahead of schedule. There are concerns about the upper

pond liner being able to hold up. Two new Service Officers have started work on their caseloads. Ben recommended Duane Daily as the Board Representative and Reviewer for the annual training conference. Mr. Dailey graciously accepted.

Gail Hoagland: Due to staffing issues in the accounting department, many of the grantees have been slow to get paid. Some will not fully expend their award this fiscal year. The money will roll over to next year's trust fund. Veterans Assistance Grant Committee members Ben, Gail, Dana and Duane met to plan for next year's expenditures. Gail visited the Crawford House in Colorado Springs. The nonprofit provides transitional housing and offers rehabilitation. Most importantly, it trains veterans to become peers. We did a budget adjustment to their contract to allow the training program and hope to use them as a model elsewhere.

Robby Robinson, on behalf of Kathleen Dunemn: Everything is running smoothly at the State Veterans Community Living Centers.

Robby Robinson, Dana Niemela, Ben Mestas, Duane Dailey and Gail Hoagland: This year Board members will grade each trust fund applicant with an objective scoring tool prior to discussion and consensus. The applications will be sent electronically to Board members to grade next week. Focus should be on both the narrative and the budget. Any great variances will be discussed at the May Board meeting. Partial funding can and will be awarded. Board members should contact Gail with their grades and recommendations in the next couple of weeks.

*Discussion followed as to veteran population served by county. Gail will include that information along with the applications.*

After conducting a couple of webinars about the grant application process, more realistic requests and budgets have been turned in. Grading consistency was stressed. Understanding geographical areas and hospital migration routes are also important. Dana added that it would be wise to review all the applications and then score them. Gail would be willing to bring hard copies of the applications to the next Board meeting if needed. The process will need to be modified throughout the years.

## **Public Comments**

None.

### **Future Meetings**

May 1<sup>st</sup>, American Legion Headquarters

June 5<sup>th</sup>, Grand County, Board Elections

Duane Dailey: The Board meeting in June will be at Mountain Parks Electric in Granby. A light luncheon will follow with a meet and greet of the newly appointed Hospital Commander and Colorado State Veterans Community Living Center Representative Debby Blanc. For those attending the June Board meeting, the Granby Chamber of Commerce is offering reduced hotel rates.

*The Board was instructed to turn in their travel vouchers to either Ben or Claire.*

No meeting in July

### **Old Business**

Veterans License Plate issues were discussed. No changes have been made as to what the Department of Motor Vehicles requires.

### **New Business**

Rene mentioned that his wife is ill and that he will do his best to make future board meetings but may not be able to attend all of them.

Meeting adjourned 11:03am



**CDVA Board of Directors Meeting**  
**01May2015**  
**American Legion Department of Colorado**  
**7465 E 1st Ave, Denver, CO 80230**

The meeting was called to order at 09:34 with Robby Robinson, Chairman, presiding. The meeting opened with the pledge of allegiance and a moment of silence in acknowledgment of POWs, service members who remain MIA, and in support of our troops and their families. Board members present included Mr. Robinson; Dana Niemela, Vice-chair; Rene Simard, Secretary; Christopher Holden, member; and Duane Dailey, member. Not present were board members Kathleen Dunemn and Jack Rudder.

DMVA staff members present were Mickey Hunt, Deputy Director; Ben Mestas, DVA Director; Gail Hoagland, DVA Grant Administrator; and Carissa Snyder, DVA Administrative Assistant. There was one visiting veteran BG (Ret) Mathias, present.

First item of business was the approval of the minutes from the meeting of 03 April 2015. It was moved by Mr. Dailey and seconded to accept the minutes as written. This motion carried with no opposition.

This was followed by comments from members of the board. Mr. Robinson summarized his 20 April 2015 meeting with Sloan Gibson, United States Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs. They discussed access to health care, the Choice Card program, and mental health services available to veterans. Mr. Gibson acknowledged complications in all areas, all of which are currently being addressed by the VA. Of particular concern has been the emerging VA model of group care and therapy for mental health treatment, which is not suitable for all veterans and in many rural locations not accessible. Mr. Gibson described the intent to expand the existing telehealth model to help with this type of shortfall. Mr.

Robinson mentioned that Representative Mike Coffman has also voiced support of allowing non-VA providers to fill service gaps, including services such as alternative therapies.

Mr. Simard reported that he attended the UVC banquet held on 19 April 2015 and intended to attend the Armed Forces Recognition Luncheon on 08 May 2015. Mr. Dailey reported on the

DVA annual training conference held 28 April 2015-01 May 2015, which he attended as a representative of the Board and also as a county veterans service officer. Mr. Dailey said the conference was successful but conveyed perhaps too much information to be absorbed at once, and voiced support of the Division's plan to send state veterans service officers to do outreach in county offices. He mentioned that the Choice Card program has been problematic for Colorado veterans; the rules are unclear and veterans still have trouble accessing care. Mr. Hunt reported that the Long Bill has been signed by the governor, changing the rate at which county veterans service officers are compensated. Mr. Hunt expressed concern over county commissioners knowing how to properly allocate the new funds. He stated that a companion bill has clarified that these funds are not expected to be matched by counties. He also reported that while the VA is fully committed to finishing the new hospital, cost continues to be a concern. It has also been acknowledged that the anticipated operating costs of the new hospital are likely to overrun the planned budget. A DOD study to be released in June analyzes the economic impact of the DOD on Colorado, and Mr. Hunt has seen a rough draft. In his travels Mr. Hunt visited Project Sanctuary in Granby and was impressed with the program. In the coming weeks he will be in Alamosa to attend a veterans forum with Senator Michael Bennett and in Montrose as the community prepares for their "No Barriers" week. He will also attend the Governor's wildfire press conference. He recently visited the VAMC in Grand Junction and reported that the Veterans' Memorial Cemetery is under budget and filling quickly. He informed the Board that Army Command Sergeant Major Rob Lawrence will retire on 06 June 2015.

Mr. Mestas reported that the annual training conference was concluding today, with the final presenter being the CLCs. He clarified that the new funding allocated to counties for veterans service can't be spent on anything else. The bill specified that the new funds go to county veterans service officers' operating budgets, allowing them to be better compensated or simultaneously freeing up budget allocations for other services. He explained that Colorado currently has 49 part-time and 15 full-time county veterans service officers, and that their compensation from the state is based on the submission of the CVA-26 that tracks the county veterans service officer time. If the form is not submitted the county does not receive the State funds.

Mr. Robinson then mentioned that a Board member is needed to serve as a liaison to the Commission on the Community Living Centers. As no members present volunteered, Mr. Robinson offered to attend the next meeting.

The next agenda item was the Veterans Trust Fund grant. Ms. Hoagland explained that the execution performance for FY2015 has been poor, due to new accounting software and procedures utilized by the State. There have been delays in advances and in reimbursements, some of which has impacted the funded programs. The Board prepared to review the FY 2016 proposals. Ms. Hoagland stated that Letters of Intent should be sent by the end of May, so that all grants could (hopefully) be signed and executed by the first of July.

Mr. Robinson reminded the Board that a code of ethics is attached to the bylaws and all members are obliged to disclose any conflict of interest. Mr. Robinson reported that Ms. Dunemn, while not present, did have comments to make on some of the proposals and he would be contacting her by phone during the meeting. He moved to accept the subcommittee's funding recommendations, noting any exceptions determined during the review of the proposals. The motion was seconded and carried with no opposition. Ms. Niemela was given control of the grant review process. Ms. Dunemn joined the meeting by phone at 10:30.

It was first established that the VTF had \$832,931 to allocate, with \$962,112.36 in requests. Copies of the grant proposals and the subcommittee scoring averages for each individual applicant were provided to board members in advance of the meeting. Subcommittee recommendations were weighed in conjunction with scored criteria. Final decisions are as follows:

**Proposal 1516-01:** American Legion Post 44 in Steamboat Springs requested \$5,600 for transportation and assistance. The Board's average score was 84.8. This organization received the same amount last year for this program and their administration has been satisfactory.

**Decision: fund in full at \$5,600**

**Proposal 1516-02:** DAV Chapter 48 in Durango requested \$80,270 for transportation and assistance. The Board's average score was 86.2. Last year this chapter received a grant of \$36,000 and their administration has been satisfactory.

**Decision: fund in full at \$80,270**

**Proposal 1516-03:** American Legion Post 103 in Littleton requested \$30,000 for veterans' assistance. The Board's average score was 69.83. This post received \$20,000 last year and their administration has been satisfactory. The consensus was to fund this proposal due to the large geographic area served by the veterans' organizations in Arapahoe County, which attracts veterans from at least two neighboring counties.

**Decision: fund in full at \$30,000**

**Proposal 1516-04:** VFW Post 5231 in Mancos requested \$10,000 for transportation and assistance. The Board's average score was 73.7. This post received \$4,810 last year. Spending and accounting are both currently up to date although reporting has been slow. The Board concurred with the subcommittee that there is some overlap of services offered in the area, and that this post could improve in administration performance. The consensus was to fund this proposal at last year's amount.

**Decision: fund in part at \$4,810**

**Proposal 1516-05:** American Legion Post 115 in Rye requested \$5,000 for assistance. The Board's average score was 77.1. Last year this post received a grant of \$5,000. Administration has been satisfactory with the exception of the timeliness of the second quarter report.

**Decision: fund in full at \$5,000**

**Proposal 1516-06:** DAV Chapter 44 in Mancos requested \$68,900 for transportation and assistance. The Board's average score was 69.5. While the subcommittee had recommended funding this proposal only in part, the Board considered the travel distances required to access health care in the area and decided to fund it in full.

**Decision: fund in full at \$68,900**

**Proposal 1516-07:** American Legion Post 18 in Greeley requested \$16,600 for veterans' assistance. The Board's average score was 76.1. This organization is a new applicant. The Board acknowledged the underserved area targeted by this post.

**Decision: fund in full at \$16,600**

**Proposal 1516-08:** American Legion Post 88 in Hot Sulphur Springs requested \$20,000 for

assistance. The Board's average score was 84.3. Mr. Dailey did not score this proposal and recused himself from both the subcommittee and Board discussions since he is involved with this post. Last year this post received \$7,000 as a new grantee and administration has been satisfactory.

**Decision: fund in full at \$20,000**

**Proposal 1516-09:** VFW Post 899 in Alamosa requested \$48,568.35 for transportation, assistance, and a vehicle. The Board's average score was 83.3. Last year this post received \$25,000 and administration has been satisfactory. The Board acknowledged the large geographic area served by this post.

**Decision: fund in full at \$48,568.35**

**Proposal 1516-10:** American Legion Post 127 in Westcliffe requested \$51,750 for transportation and assistance. The Board's average score was 83.2. Last year this post received \$40,000, which has been fully expended with satisfactory administration.

**Decision: fund in full at \$51,750**

**Proposal 1516-11:** VFW Post 8661 in Bailey requested \$8,400 for transportation and assistance. The Board's average score was 82.1. Last year this post received \$7,200 and administration has been satisfactory.

**Decision: fund in full at \$8,400**

**Proposal 1516-12:** American Legion Post 25 in Florence requested \$25,000 for transportation and assistance. The Board's average score was 82. Last year this post received a grant of \$15,000 and administration has been satisfactory.

**Decision: fund in full at \$25,000**

**Proposal 1516-13:** VFW Post 4265 in Craig requested \$36,120 for veterans' assistance and a van. The board's average score was 72.7. This organization received \$10,000 last year and have expended one- fifth of those funds. The Board discussed transportation difficulties in the area and the need for a van; the one currently is use by the post has more than 300,000 miles. The consensus was to fund this proposal in full.

**Decision: fund at \$36,120**

**Proposal 1516-14:** American Legion Post 109 in Windsor requested \$60,000 for transportation and assistance. The Board's average score was 82.4. Last year this post received \$40,000 and administration has been satisfactory.

**Decision: fund in full at \$60,000**

**Proposal 1516-15:** VFW Post 7829 in Monument requested \$20,000 for a stand down. The Board's average score was 84.5. Last year this post received \$20,000 for the same purpose. At the time of the subcommittee review reports were lacking; by the time of the board meeting they have been submitted and are satisfactory. The Board specifically intends to fund only the food and clothing items noted in the application.

**Decision: fund in full at \$20,000**

**Proposal 1516-16:** American Legion Post 32 in Longmont requested \$50,000 for a stand down, transportation, and assistance. The Board's average score was 85. This post received \$20,000 last year and had expended all the funds by December; administration has been satisfactory.

**Decision: fund in full at \$50,000**

**Proposal 1516-17:** The VFW Foundation of Colorado in Denver requested \$85,000 for assistance programs throughout the state. The Board's average score was 81.5. The subcommittee had recommended that the organization modify the proposal to target outreach and services to the underserved areas of the fourth congressional district. That modification had been made by the time of the Board meeting. The Board concluded that while the target outreach is unique, some of the assistance indicated in the proposal is duplicated by local posts. The consensus was to fund this application in part.

**Decision: fund in part at \$53,028**

**Proposal 1516-18:** American Legion Post 2 in Pueblo requested \$35,500 for transportation, stand down, and veteran assistance. The Board's average score was 70.2. This organization received \$18,000 last year for the purchase of a vehicle. They are currently out of compliance with reporting requirements.

Ms. Hoagland explained that the post lost its authorized representative partway through the

funding cycle, but the post now has a new commander who is working to get the program back on track. After discussion the Board determined that the veteran assistance program is out of compliance and does not seem to be moving in the right direction, therefore the decision was to fund only the transportation program and stand down. No funds will be allocated for veteran assistance.

**Decision: fund in part at \$18,000**

**Proposal 1516-19:** VFW Post 4663 in Clifton requested \$6,500 for a program connecting animals with veterans. The Board's average score was 72.6. This organization has not previously submitted a proposal. The board debated the proposal in terms of direct assistance and need. At this time, given limited funds, the board determined that other direct benefit programs would take priority.

**Decision: do not fund**

**Proposal 1516-20:** VVA Chapter 1071 in Denver requested \$25,000 for veterans' assistance. The Board's average score was 78.8. This organization received \$12,500 last year and is in good standing. The Board discussed the issue of duplication of efforts. The Board determined that the applicant should be funded but encouraged to collaborate and to actively refer to other existing resources.

**Decision: fund in full at \$25,000**

**Proposal 1516-21:** VFW Post 1 in Denver requested \$5,625 for program assistance. The Board's average score was 68.2. Ms. Niemela did not score this proposal and recused herself from the discussion since she is involved with this post. Last year this post received a total \$89,000 for three different programs. There have been no expenditures on two of those programs and no reports submitted to date. The Board acknowledged the limited scope of the proposal in light of last year's administration difficulties.

**Decision: fund in full at \$5,625**

**Proposal 1516-22:** VFW Post 41 in Loveland requested \$58,000 for veterans' assistance. The Board's average score was 84.6. This post received \$40,000 last year and administration has been satisfactory.

**Decision: fund in full at \$58,000**

**Proposal 1516-23:** American Legion Post 108 in Pagosa Springs requested \$46,500 for transportation and assistance. The Board's average score was 83.8. Last year this chapter received \$50,000 and is currently not in compliance with reporting requirements. The board however noted the extensive transportation needs in the area.

**Decision: fund in full at \$46,500**

**Proposal 1516-24:** DAV Chapter 25 in Grand Junction requested \$12,000 for veterans' assistance. The Board's average score was 78. Last year this organization received \$12,000 and reporting has been slow but satisfactory.

**Decision: fund in full at \$12,000**

**Proposal 1516-25:** The State Veterans Community Living Center in Walsenburg requested \$29,776.40. The Board's average score was 71.7. Last year this CLC received \$16,828 and administration has been satisfactory. The Board eliminated the training line item from the budget and agreed to fund the remainder of the proposal for phones in each resident's room.

**Decision: fund in part at \$19,576.40**

**Proposal 1516-26:** The State Veterans Community Living Center Homelake in Monte Vista requested \$19,462.61. The board's average score was 70.7. Last year this CLC received \$14,097 and administration has been adequate, although not all of the funds were expended. The Board eliminated costs associated with individual people from the budget and agreed to fund the remainder of the proposal.

**Decision: fund in part at \$9,683.00**

**Proposal 1516-27:** American Legion Post 143 in Bayfield requested \$96,000 for housing. The board's average score was 70. This organization has not previously submitted a proposal. The Board concurred with the subcommittee finding that the identified need is a relatively new one for the area. Due to this and the fact that this organization would be a new grantee, the consensus was to fund this proposal at half of the requested amount.

**Decision: fund in part at \$48,000.**

**Proposal 1516-28:** VFW Post 5843 in Meeker requested \$6,500 for assistance. The Board's average score was 80. Last year this organization received \$6,000 and reporting has been slow



but adequate.

**Decision: fund in full at \$6,500**

With the VTF decisions concluded, the next item of business was upcoming board meetings. Mr. Dailey announced that the next meeting will be held on 05 June 2015 in Granby. Daniel Warvi, Public Affairs Officer for the VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System, will present to the Board. Mr. Robinson reminded the board that elections will be held at the June meeting for Secretary, Vice-Chairman, and Chairman. It was decided that Ms. Niemela will secure a Denver location for the August meeting, and the Board will likely hold the following meeting in Grand Junction. With nothing further, the meeting was adjourned by Mr. Robinson at 12:46 p.m.

## **Board Minutes**

**5 June 2015**

### **Mountain Parks Electric Inc.**

**321 West Agate Ave, Granby, CO 80446**

Robby Robinson, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 0933 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.

“America the Beautiful” performed by Juliet Shams. Board Members Present:

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

DMVA Staff Present:

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

Guests Present:

- Juliet Shams, Grand County Vocalist
- Dan Warvi, Public Relations Director of Denver VA Hospital  
Merrit Linke, Grand County Commissioner
- James Newberry, Grand County Commissioner  
Betty Cranmer, Royal Air Force, Retired
- Lloyd Palmer, WWII Veteran  
Charles Illsley, WWII Veteran

Heather Ehle, Project

Sanctuary

- Marketing Representatives from State Veterans Community Living Centers
- Various members of the community

### **Guest Introduction – Duane Dailey**

Betty Cranmer served in England's Royal Air Force during the Battle of Britain. After losing her husband, she moved to America. Betty had battled cancer and had a book written about her life.

### **Approval of Minutes from May**

Accepted.

### **Board Member Comments**

Duane Daily: From a young age, Juliet Shams has performed at the annual Grand County Veterans Day Breakfast and other local events. She is self-taught and a beautiful resource to the community. Duane explained that following the Board meeting and a short break, the Public Relations Director of the Denver VA Hospital Dan Warvi will talk about the Choice Card. Colorado Department of Human Services Department will discuss Community Living Centers throughout the State of Colorado. Duane thanked the veterans present and briefly discussed some of their service history. Grand County Commissioners Merrit Linke and James Newberry were introduced.

Robby Robinson: A brief explanation was given to the audience about the Board, the Veterans Trust Fund, Veterans Assistance Grant, Veterans Community Living Centers and the State Veteran Cemetery. Twice a year the Board meets in rural areas of Colorado in an effort to encompass all veteran's issues in the state.

### **Roll Call of Members and Introduction of Staff**

Robby Robinson: The Legislative Audit Committee conducted a performance audit of the Veterans Trust Fund. Dana, Duane, Mickey, Ben, Gail and Robby testified before the Committee that all five recommendations that were brought forth last year have been made.

Dana Niemela: As Manager of Veterans Services for the City and County of Denver, Dana runs a homeless veterans reintegration project. During the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans held last week in Washington D.C., it was apparent that Colorado is on the leading edge with communities across the state uniting to benefit homeless veterans.

Rene Simard: The University of Denver has started a Military Psychology program to focus on TBI and PTSD issues. Both on-site and remote clinics will be set up. Handouts were distributed. Rene asked Board members if they would like to be involved with the program.

Jack Rudder: Having attended the San Luis Valley Veterans Coalition meeting recently, VA representatives were able to listen to Care Providers in the rural communities dealing with the Choice Program challenges.

Duane Dailey: Duane thanked the Grand County Chamber of Commerce. During last year's State training, Duane asked Robby if there was rural representation on the Board. This year, two County Service Officers from rural areas sit on the Board. Based on the Geographic Distribution of VA Expenditures, Grand County has 1,035 veterans and excludes the 65% of the population who are second-home veterans in the county. Direct total expenditures that go through Grand County are \$4,450,000. Dan Warvi of the Denver VA Hospital, Golden Clinic Director Dr. Chris Johnson, an author and doctor of psychology who shall remain anonymous, and Duane toured several sites for a medical/psych outreach clinic to serve veterans. The American Legion in Grand County was recently awarded \$20,000 through the Veterans Trust Fund. Duane's office was awarded \$15,000 through the Veterans Assistance Grant.

### **Public Comments**

A member from the audience inquired about Fort Logan Cemetery. Robby explained that Fort Logan is a National Cemetery supported by the Federal Government and any eligible veteran can be buried there. They are looking at building another cemetery in El Paso County. The State has built a cemetery in Grand Junction and is run by the Division of Veterans Affairs. About 60% of veterans are requesting that their cremated remains be placed in a columbarium. Another member of the audience asked for an explanation of the Choice Program and was told that the Federal program will be discussed at length after the Board meeting.

Dana Niemela: Dana thanked all the Navy veterans for their representation at today's meeting.

Mickey Hunt: A proposal will be presented to the Governor to convert the State-owned Grand Junction Armory to a Veteran One-Stop. Mickey, TAG, and senior leadership will tour the Veterans Community Living Centers on September 22 and 23 via Blackhawk helicopter.

Ben Mestas: Ben acknowledged the Grand County Commissioners for having a full-time County Service Officer. Only Alamosa, Grand Junction and Durango have full-time Service Officers in rural communities. Service Officers were hired for both Kit Carson and Adams Counties.

Cemetery construction will wrap up the first week of September. With heavy lobbying from both Mickey Hunt and Greg Dorman, House Bill 1315 was passed which increases money given from the State to the County Service Officers. In two weeks Ben will distribute a Memorandum of Understanding to all County Service Officers to demonstrate how to use that additional money in their budget. A draft of the Board minutes will be distributed to all the Board members within one week of the meeting. Board members will then have one week to submit all comments and corrections.

Robby Robinson, on behalf of Kathleen Dunemn: There is not much to report on the State Veterans Community Living Centers. Betty Mendetti from the Rifle Community Living Center has been honored as the State Employee of the Year.

A comment was made by a member of the public who said that he was very impressed with the Rifle Community Living Center. He shared how the Denver Community Living Center staff made special efforts to unite a couple who had been apart for some time. Fox31 recently covered the 70<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary of a couple in the Fitzsimmons Community Living Center.

Gail Hoagland: Contracts for the next fiscal year Veterans Trust Fund were sent out. We had a great response for the Veterans Assistance Grant. The majority of Colorado is covered in terms

of Grantees. Project Sanctuary has completed the first ever Peer Support Specialist Training with aid from Veterans Assistance Grant money. Fifteen former homeless veterans are now certified and will be able to work for the VA as a Peer Specialist. Mickey reported that the families at Project Sanctuary looked genuinely happy. A handbook will be provided and webinars available to all Grantees detailing the requirements and changes to the Grants.

Robby Robinson, on behalf of Richard Sandrock: The two Board vacancies have been filled. Army veteran Chris Holden has been reappointed by the Governor. Air Force veteran Hollie K. Caldwell has been appointed and will join the Board in July. Robby nominated Rene Simard for Secretary of the Board, Duane Dailey for Vice Chairman and Dana Niemela for Chairman. The Board voted and unanimously approved the recommended slate. Dana will be the first female and youngest to serve as Chairman of the Board.

The entire Board has to review each application for the Veterans Trust Fund Grants. Robby asked if the subcommittee was essential in reviewing all grant applications prior to the Board reviewing them. Ben commented that the Board would not have enough time to screen all the applicants as in-depth as the subcommittee and that entrusting someone to assist the Board is very important. The subcommittee is very valuable in exchanging ideas and understanding both rural and urban issues. A request was made that the applications no longer be emailed but printed out and mailed to each Board member three weeks ahead of time. Of the 28 applications the Board had to review and score, seven applications were not unanimously voted on and had to be revisited. Rene requested that previous awards be included in the information. Grant money should be for solving problems, not simply given away with no accountability. Grantees will be required to provide a satisfaction survey to each veteran they serve. They need to think about the outcome. Dana would like to be involved in the webinars. Robby mentioned that he would like to see more emphasis on question eight, previous administrative performance on prior VTF Grants and questioned the possible 20 points awarded for State-wide and/or regional/local need for the service provided when he may not be sure of programs in the rural areas due to the fact that he lives in the city. Gail said that during the audit process, we must rely upon what the needs are in a given area in order to determine the priority. Dana explained that question number one, with regards to need for the service provided, aids in not duplicating services in an area. If administrative performance is not properly reported, it will weigh

heavily on Dana's scoring and even possibly result in the denial of funds. Duane stated that it is a very subjective item and rural areas, which have fewer staff, get overwhelmed with so many reports to provide various organizations. Gail would like to clearly define each criteria for next year's applicants. During the Board meeting prior to scoring, the criteria will be discussed.

### **Future Meetings**

No meeting in July

7 Aug – VOA Veteran Service Center, 1247 Santa Fe, Denver,

CO 11 Sep – Welcome Home Montrose

### **Old Business**

None

### **New Business**

None

Meeting adjourned 11:02am

**Board Minutes**  
**7 August 2015**  
**Volunteers of America**  
**1247 Santa Fe Dr., Denver, CO 80204**

Dana Niemela, Chair, 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 service members.

**Roll Call of Members and Introduction of Staff & Guests**

Board Members Present: Dana Niemela, Chair

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

DMVA Staff Present:

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

Guests Present:

- Brenton Hutson, Division Director, Volunteers of America
- Brandon Young, Director of Development, Team Red White and Blue
- Rossina Schroeer-Santiago, Denver Human Services, Veteran Services Constance
- Tatro, Denver Human Services, Veteran Services

**Approval of Minutes from June**



Unanimously accepted

### **Roll Call of Members**

Chris Holden: Having served in the Army for 25 ½ years, Chris is now employed with defense contractor Akima located in Colorado Springs. Chris has worked on Outreach in the Colorado Springs area, particularly transition activities for Peterson AFB and the Air Force Academy.

Jack Rudder: After retiring from the Air Force, Jack worked as a high school teacher and principal. Since 2012, Jack has served as the Rio Grande County Service Officer and is working with a local Rio Grande County non-profit.

Hollie Caldwell: Soon after high school, Hollie enlisted with the Air Force. She served 10 years as an Air Force nurse and is currently the Dean at The School of Nursing at Platt College. Ten percent of her students are veterans. Hollie is very active with Wounded Warriors.

Dana Niemela: Dana served as a Logistics Officer for the U.S. Navy from 1997-2005. She is currently the Manager for Veterans Services for the City and County of Denver.

Robby Robinson: Having served in the Army for over 30 years, Robby worked as the Deputy Director for the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs up until 2009. He has been on the Board since 2011 and is most proud of the organization's grant programs.

### **Guest Introduction – Dana Niemela**

Rossina Schroeer-Santiago and Constance Tatro, Employment Case Manager and Community Resource Navigator, respectively, explained their roles with Denver Human Services, Veterans Services. They take into account a veteran's interests, needs and strengths and work history to help them reintegrate in a career with long-term sustainability.

Division Director Brenton Hutson with Volunteers of America explained their one-stop for veterans that within the shared space, various non-profits can provide assistance for food, healthcare, shelter, education and employment. It is staffed with volunteers and peer navigators to aid in mentoring veterans. Though the doors have been opened since July 1, 2015, the grand opening ceremony with Governor Hickenlooper will be held next Friday. A

\$1million grant was awarded from the Bill Daniels Fund. Collaboration between non-profits and lack of funding are two of the gaps in service that have been identified. One of the goals is to end chronic homelessness and have the capability to provide a home within 30-days. The lack of affordable rentals in Denver has been a real challenge. Volunteers of America is looking to build partnerships with area landlords to provide affordable housing. The diverse geology of Colorado brings a challenge to finding and helping homeless veterans.

A brief tour of the facilities followed.

Brandon Young, Director of Development for Team Red White and Blue discussed his organization and how it aims to grow authentic relationships within the community. The enrichment equation consists of a strong focus on positive health behaviors, people and purpose. There are currently 80,000 members with 110 new members daily in the U.S. gained mainly through outreach like regional races and gyms. Team Red White and Blue has a turnkey operating model with a budget from the national organization that allows local leadership, under the guidance of the Regional Director to run the chapter, allowing the personality of the community emerge. Colorado currently has two chapters, one in Colorado Springs and the other in Denver. Fort Collins will be starting a chapter soon. Chris Holden added that Team Red White and Blue is successful in utilizing social media, targeting post 9-11 veterans and their family members. Upcoming events include a hike of Mt. Bierstadt and Microsoft will sponsor this year's Old Glory relay that travels across the U.S. over September 11. Dana shared her story of competing in the Marine Corp marathon.

Mickey Hunt: Mickey will be attending a ribbon cutting ceremony in Granby in September. During a visit to Westcliffe, Colorado Serves met with older, retired veterans. The new Custer County Service Officer will hold a monthly veterans meeting to foster community involvement. Mickey will travel to the Grand Junction Mental Health Summit next week. The Colorado National Guard Chinooks deployed to Kuwait to serve that region. There will be no budget increase this year for decision items. Though the Grand Junction Armory/Veterans One-stop will not be approved of this year, it will stay on the Colorado Joint Budget Committees unapproved items list, which will allow for further discussion. Ben Mestas and Mickey met with members of the Department of Local Affairs last month to discuss the unused VASH

Vouchers in Denver and Colorado Springs. Denver did not use the vouchers because it does not have any affordable housing available. Rally.6, a successful non-profit in Texas, will be locating to El Paso County, Colorado. State Veterans Community Living Centers will be visited over October 15, 2015.

Ben Mestas: A record was set with 299 burials at the Veterans Memorial Cemetery of Western Colorado in Grand Junction for Fiscal Year 2014-2015. Construction of new columbarium's and emplacement of additional vaults will be complete with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on November 11. State Service Officers will be travelling to parts of Colorado to conduct semi-annual training. House Bill 1315 passed, giving additional money for County Service Officers. Pitkin County will now be hiring their own Service Officer and Custer County has made their Service Officer full-time. Ben mentioned that there is a small increase in travel budget for the Board due to elections of the two Board members from rural communities. Travel Expense Statements need to be turned in to Claire Dean. Access to DD214's will be done electronically in 2016. Both Claire Dean and Diane Ricci are in the process of getting access to electronic DD214's. Duane Dailey will need to report on the September Staff Outreach and the April Training Conference to the Governor in the Governor's Report due in December.

Robby Robinson: Vicky Manley, Director of State Veterans Community Living Centers, is no longer working for the State of Colorado. Services for Ken Melcher will be next Friday at 10am. He was involved with the United Veterans Committee, and well respected in and around the Denver area.

Gail Hoagland: Over half of the Grantees attended last month's webinars. Meeting new requirements will be a challenge for some. Currently there are two contracts pending. Many have requested advances and the accounting department is working very hard to get them paid in a timely manner. The idea of a Quarterly Recognition Letter given to a Grantee from the Board was discussed. Dana would like to set up a Standard Operating Procedure for next review at the next Board meeting. Robby is concerned that the recognition will be coming solely from one person's interaction with the Grantee. Information gathered from the veterans' surveys could hold a certain weight.

Dana Niemela: The Strategic Planning Committee last met in 2012. Dana would like the

Board's opinion on whether or not to have an annual Strategic Planning meeting. A Strategic Planner is being hired by the Department and will begin full-time in the fall of this year. Jack Rudder mentioned that he appreciates the opportunity to serve on the Board and doesn't mind attending the meetings as long as it is worth his while. Robby believes that having a Strategic Plan like the one that expired would be a waste of time, since it was seldom looked at or used. The Board tends to be reactive rather than proactive. Dana suggested that she would like to change that and perhaps a briefer, more focused plan be considered. The Board is already obligated to meet once a month.

### **Future Meetings**

11 Sep – Welcome Home Montrose

Dana would like to hold future Board meetings in Rio Grande County, CSU at Fort Collins, Grand Junction, Sterling, Conifer, Las Animas and Steamboat, Pueblo and Colorado Springs.

### **Old Business**

#### **New Business**

Dana would like each Board member to ask themselves why they are involved in this Board, what they hope to accomplish over the next year and if they have any causes or interests.

Answers are due from each member at the next meeting.

Meeting adjourned 11:54am

## **Board Minutes 11 September 2015**

### **Welcome Home Montrose**

**11 South Park Ave., Montrose, CO 81401**

Dana Niemela, Chair, called the meeting to order at 1000 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-Not Present
- Christopher Holden, Member-Not Present
- William "Robby" Robinson, Member
- Jack Rudder, Member

DMVA Staff Present:

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

Guests Present:

- Melanie Kline, Founder/CEO, Welcome Home Montrose
- Emily Smith, Executive Director, Welcome Home Montrose
- Erick Goff, Operations Director, the Serenity House, Inc.

### **Approval of Minutes from August**

Unanimously accepted

Robby Robinson: The Denver Veterans Monument will be rededicated on November 10, 2015 at 11am, marking its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Board members are strongly encouraged to attend.

Rene Simard is an elected member of the monument's trust fund. Robby has been selected to

serve as the Board representative for the Colorado Community Living Centers.

Duane Dailey: Everyone is invited to attend the Veterans Day Breakfast on November 11 at Snow Mountain Ranch in Grand County.

Jack Rudder: A rededication is being held at the Homelake cemetery today.

Dana Niemela: One of the duties of the Board is to inform the Governor and the rest of the State on the progress and challenges of organizations who aid Colorado veterans. We would like to know how we can aid your community or celebrate it as necessary. Dana extended her gratitude for allowing the Board to meet at Welcome Home Montrose and looks forward to learning more about the work they do for veterans.

### **Guest Introduction – Dana Niemela**

Founder and CEO Melanie Kline of Welcome Home Montrose discussed her organization and how it interacts with the community. Since opening three years ago, they have helped over 1,000 veterans, including the 100 new veterans from 2014.

Executive Director Emily Smith explained that the “Canteen Room” which is located in the heart of the center, is reconfigured throughout the day to accommodate the veteran’s coffee social, music groups and various meetings. All of the artwork in the room was donated by veterans.

Medical equipment, donated from the community, is given free of charge to veterans in need. Dana asked if the Montrose veteran population were made up of those who grew up in the area or were transplants. Melanie responded that while there are some who grew up in the area and have since moved back after serving their country, some moved to Montrose because of word of mouth.

Erick Goff, Operations Director of the Serenity House spoke of the challenges of funding for the safe transitional home. Vouchers are not distributed for transitional housing and Serenity House does not qualify for grant per diem money. At present, there are no homeless shelters in the area. Serenity House currently houses 10 people. Erick hopes to get the house entrusted.

HUD/VASH vouchers are now available in the area. Many landlords in western part of the

County have decided to lower the rent for veterans.

Duane asked how many of the area veterans live off the grid. Melanie replied that there are 12 veterans that choose to live off the grid and eight who are actually homeless. Because there is a VA clinic established in Montrose, the veterans are unable to use their Choice cards. Mental healthcare is available in the area as well. A discussion about the Choice card ensued. With the economy on the upswing, more permanent jobs are available in Montrose with the average job seeker between the ages of 35-45.

A brief tour of the facilities followed.

Kelly of Colorado Serves spoke briefly about the policy academy for behavioral health. After running out of energy, the group is deciding on what to do next. Mickey Hunt added that the Colorado Serves efforts are the same as the CBVA Boards efforts and would like CDMVA to take over the outreach and possibly create a subcommittee. He would like to have someone like Kelly as the Board's liaison to Colorado Serves. Dana added that getting involved with Colorado Serves would fulfill the advisory capacity of the Board. Jack Rudder stated that the Board should exert influence. Robby Robinson inquired about who would pay for the program and would like the Colorado Serves mission statement in writing. A lengthy discussion followed and it was decided that the topic will need to be revisited at another time. Both Mickey and Dana will put together a written description of Colorado Serves, including its mission and anticipated outcomes, and provide it to the Board.

Mickey Hunt: A ribbon-cutting ceremony will be held at the Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Grand Junction on November 11. Mickey visited the Naval Seabee Project in Grand County yesterday. The Women Veteran's Conference will be held September 12. A new VA Director for the Eastern Medical Center will in place around October 2. The State Veterans Community Living Centers will be visited on October 15 and 16.

Ben Mestas: State Service Officers will be travelling to parts of Colorado to conduct semi-annual training. They will cover such topics as the Federal digit to digit program, CVA26, developing regional partnerships, grant programs, Choice card clarification and fully developed claims. The goal is to increase outreach and thus decrease appeals. Access to DD214's will be

done electronically in 2016. Claire Dean, Hillary Hutson and Diane Ricci are in the process of getting access to electronic DD214's.

Gail Hoagland: Some grantees are struggling with reimbursement documentation. The grant program will be redesigned and need the Boards review next month. Applications have not been filled out properly because Grantees have not completely read the policy letter. A discussion ensued about who can apply for the various grants. There is confusion as to whether Veterans Service Organizations can apply for Veterans Assistance Grants. The Department policy says no – that they cannot apply for Veterans Assistance Grants. They can apply for the VTF Grants. The law says nonprofits serving veterans and government agencies can apply for the Assistance Grants and the Veterans Service organizations are nonprofits per IRS rulings; therefore they should be allowed to apply for Veterans Assistance Grants according to some members of those organizations. The policy needs review.

### **Future Meetings**

02 Oct – Florence/Pueblo

04 Nov – Wings over the Rockies, Aurora Salute to

Veterans 04 Dec – Fort Collins

### **Old Business**

### **New Business**

Meeting adjourned 12:25pm



## **Board Minutes**

**2 October 2015**

### **Bruce McCandless Veterans Community Living Center**

**903 Moore Drive, Florence, CO 81226**

Dana Niemela, Chair, called the meeting to order at 0839 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-Not Present
- Rene Simard, Secretary
- Hollie Caldwell, Member
- Christopher Holden, Member
- William "Robby" Robinson, Member
- Jack Rudder, Member

#### **DMVA Staff Present:**

- Mickey Hunt, DMVA, Deputy Director
- Diane Ricci, CDVA Deputy Director
- Claire Dean, CDVA Administrative Assistant
- Gail Hoagland, DMVA VAG Administrator

#### **Guests Present:**

- Barbara Moore, Administrator,
- Bruce McCandless Community Living Center
- John Griego, Senator Bennet's Office
- John Dickinson, Resident, Bruce McCandless Community Living Center
- Theresa Rudder, Jack's wife
- Robert Kemper, American Legion

### **Approval of Minutes from September**

Unanimously accepted

**Guest Introduction – Dana Niemela**

Barbara Moore, Administrator of the Bruce McCandless Community Living Center explained that the center was the first State Veterans Nursing Home in the nation to be an Eden registered home and will be the fourth nursing home in the country to complete milestone 3. For five consecutive years, the home has been rated five stars. 50 staff members care for nearly 100 residents. The Living Center provides a specialized neighborhood for patients with dementia and three other neighborhoods that offer short-term and long-term care. The facility was built in 1975 and has had over \$8mil in renovations over the last decade. Located in a rural community, it is difficult to find consistent staffing. The facility accepts out-of-state residents. John Dickinson, Resident Council President at Bruce McCandless Community Living Center, thanked everyone for their support. The Resident Council is the governing body of the Center and they meet on the first Friday of every month. A community meeting is held every Monday to encourage communication between residents and staff. Various activities are exhibited on a monthly calendar.

Chris Holden inquired about how the nursing home came to be named. Barbara Moore explained that it was named after Bruce McCandless Sr., a WWII veteran who served in the Navy and received the Congressional Medal of Honor. His son, Bruce McCandless Jr., also served in the Navy and later became an astronaut. The McCandless family has lived in Florence for many generations.

Dana Niemela asked what some of the biggest challenges residents have that are addressed at the Resident Council meeting. John Dickinson replied that the Council continually tries to improve communications in an effort to bring the community together. Staff and residents created several floats for the Florence Pioneer Days parade. Another great success is the annual Halloween party held at the Living Center that establishes youth involvement. On Memorial Day, the local radio station plays military stories provided by resident veterans.

Listeners are encouraged to volunteer at the Living Center.

Robby Robinson wondered if loosening VA regulations requiring nursing homes to have 75% of their residents be veterans' would help, since many spouses and widows are turned away.

Jack Rudder asked if they have anyone at the Living Center that helps veterans with their claims. A certified staff member is available to help those veterans who live in the Center.

Robby Robinson: He attended the El Paso County Veterans summit. The legislators who hosted it are starting a bipartisan Veterans Caucus in the General Assembly. They will be looking for presentations during the next session. He suggested that the Veterans Affairs Annual Report could be presented if approved by the Adjutant General and the Governor's office.

Jack Rudder: The expansion to Homelake cemetery was rededicated on September 11. As part of a civil war reenactment group, Jack and his group were invited to perform at Fort Garland for Lt. Col. Brey Hopkins' change of command.

Chris Holden: At the Veterans Summit, Chris spoke with Mike Webb of Fort Carson/Transition University reestablishing ties and gaining connections.

Hollie Caldwell: Two veterans are interested in serving on the Veterans Memorial Commission. Their names and contact information were forwarded to Greg Dorman.

Rene Simard: The Aurora Defense Council, 350 members consisting of military and community leaders, will focus this year on homeless veterans. James Gillespie with Mile High Behavioral Health will advise the Defense Council on homeless veteran issues.

Dana Niemela: The Veterans Administration is launching a Veterans Economic Community Initiative. It is important that communities have a voice. My VA Communities has been developed in Colorado Springs and will hold a town hall meeting December 3, from 4-6pm. Board members are strongly encouraged to attend.

John Griego, from Senator Bennet's Colorado Springs office, mentioned that the Mt. Carmel Center for Excellence will be a one-stop for veterans in Colorado Springs. Construction is 50% complete. Federal funds have been secured for the VA hospital in Aurora. Several buildings and a parking garage will not be built, to keep the project within budget.

Robert Kemper, from American Legion in Florence, stated that his challenges and successes have been providing rent and utility payments to deserving veterans.

Theresa Rudder is very active in the Homelake community.

Mickey Hunt: OEF/OIF veterans are in need of jobs and homes in Grand Junction. It is hoped that the Grand Junction VA Hospital Director will ask for a Veterans Economic Community Initiative in the area. The Volunteers of America have a renewed interest in running a one-stop in the vacant Grand Junction Armory. The Capital Development Committee will meet at the Alamosa Armory on October 20. State legislation will attempt to define what a veteran is. The proposal is to adopt the federal definitions. \$13,000 was found for board travel expenses.

Board travel funding will not be taken from the Division's budget. Applications are being reviewed for the Strategic Planner position. Mickey attended The Women Veteran's Conference on September 12. San Luis Valley Veterans Coalition met in Alamosa. He felt that the VA did not answer the important questions. The State Veterans Community Living Centers will be visited on October 15 and 16. The Governor's budget will be released on November 1. Both Mickey and General Edwards will meet with the JBC in late November. Mickey is a board member of the Pikes Peak My VA. Gail will provide five to ten grant issue questions to Mickey for the next Pikes Peak My VA meeting. General Edwards has been asked to speak at the next board meeting which will be held at the Wings over the Rockies on November 4. The Chinooks will be back in December.

Diane Ricci: The cemetery expansion is complete. A State Service Officer will be stationed every Wednesday at the Volunteers of America, located on Santa Fe. The Division is down two Service Officers at present. The Regional Training held last week was a huge success. Veteran Homeless Stand-downs will be held October 2 in Pueblo, October 20 in Colorado Springs, October 27 in the four corners area, October 30 in Grand Junction, November 5 in Denver, November 10 in Fort Collins and December 3 in Longmont. Board members are strongly encouraged to attend the four corners stand-down. Denver's Stand-down may have been moved to a different date due to logistics and/or funding.

Gail Hoagland: The first quarter of the grant cycle is ending. Both unduplicated numbers and outcome measures will be captured. In order to comply with audit requirements, statute and by-laws, Gail trained the Board on Conflict of Interest as it relates to the Veterans Trust Fund. Any connections with a grantee in which a Board member would gain monetary benefits or

direct influence would constitute a conflict. Grants for the upcoming year will be accepted December through February. During that time there will be ongoing webinar trainings. Since the Regional Training, many County Service Officers have contacted Gail to request grant funding. Based upon the auditors concerns, as well as recognition that applicants often do not read the policy letter, the application, requirements and guidelines are now in one document. In an effort to remove the grant administrator as the single point of information, the Board will receive a spreadsheet that provides detailed information on current grantees (including the projected number to be served, actual numbers served, timeliness of reports, outcomes notes, etc.) New applicants will need to demonstrate capacity and their projections should be reasonable. Robby noted that the third sentence under Requirements, Terms and limitations should read as follows, “Administrative or capital costs are not allowed, except as noted in statute.” Dana added that private and public sector funding is moving towards a business model. Funders are perceived as investors and are more discriminating on how they deliver their money. They are encouraged to fund innovative ideas which may make it harder for smaller organizations. The grant needs to be announced in November. Any changes and recommendations need to be submitted to Gail by the next Board meeting. The Board will also have to vote on the criteria and the point allocations at the next meeting.

### **Future Meetings**

04 Nov – Wings over the Rockies, Aurora Salute to Veterans

04 Dec – Colorado State University, Fort Collins

### **Old Business**

#### **New Business**

Rene will check on reserving a conference room for the November 4 Board meeting. The meeting will need to start at 8:30am.

Meeting adjourned 10:30am

## **Board Minutes**

**04November2015**

### **Wings Over the Rockies Air and Space Museum**

**7711 E. Academy Blvd., Denver, CO 80230**

Dana Niemela, Chair, called the meeting to order at 0836 hours. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited and a moment of silence was observed for our POW, MIA, troops in battle or in harm's way, and all service members.

#### **Roll Call of Members and Introduction of Staff and Guests**

##### Board Members Present:

- Dana Niemela, Chair
- Duane Dailey, Vice-Chair
- Rene Simard, Secretary
- Hollie Caldwell, Member
- William "Robby" Robinson, Member
- Jack Rudder, Member

##### Board Members Absent:

- Christopher Holden, Member

##### DMVA Staff Present:

- Mickey Hunt, DMVA Deputy Director
- Ben Mestas, CDVA Director
- Greg Dorman, DMVA Legislative Liaison
- Gail Hoagland, DMVA Grant Administrator
- Carissa Snyder, CDVA Administrative Assistant

##### Guests Present:

- Lewis Entz, UVC
- Tony Gerardini, Colorado Department of Human Services
- James Gillespie, Comitis Crisis Center
- Bill Holen, Arapahoe County Commissioner
- Marvin Myers, UVC
- Richard Sandrock, Manager of Community Partnerships, Office of the Governor

- Theresa Rudder, Jack's wife

### **Approval of Minutes from October**

Mr. Robinson inquired where and to whom corrections to the minutes should be sent.

Consensus was that any corrections should be sent to the CDVA administrative assistant with a copy sent to Ms. Niemela; it is not necessary to copy all the Board members. The minutes were then approved as written.

### **Board Member Comments**

Ms. Caldwell reported that she has distributed Stand Down information at her campus and so far has 20 veterans signed up to attend. She said that she enjoyed visiting two State Veterans Community Living Centers on the recent tour, and in Rifle met former POWs as well a female veterans, including a nurse. She was impressed by the feeling of community at the facilities. She commented that she had served at the Lowry Air Force Base, the current site of the Wings Over the Rockies Museum.

Mr. Dailey entered his new email address into the record: [gvcvso@grand.co.us](mailto:gvcvso@grand.co.us). He apologized for his uncharacteristically sporadic attendance, explaining that there has been a great deal of veteran activity in Grand County this fall.

Mr. Rudder commented that he too was stationed at the Lowry Air Force Base, in 1966-1967.

Ms. Niemela reported that she had visited the State veterans Community Living Centers in Florence, Homelake, and Walsenburg. She commented on the positive community feeling that she encountered and how she enjoyed the opportunity to converse with the residents and the staff. She expressed her appreciation of the time taken by fellow members of the Board to interact with CLC residents at the Board meeting in Florence. She then informed the Board that on 09November she and Mr. Simard will be sitting on a panel hosted by the Strum Family Foundation and the University of Denver's School of Psychology. The university is considering the implementation of a Military Psychology program that will focus of interdisciplinary approach. The panel is open to the public.

### **Visitor Comments**

Mr. Holen reported that the Veterans Service Office in Arapahoe County has added staff. There

are now two full-time service officers and a part-time administrative assistant. They are established a partnership between the VSO and the Works department to offer training and employment assistance to veterans. Mr. Robinson inquired whether the additional funds provided by the state to county veterans' services influenced their staffing changes. Mr. Holen replied that it did not. He mentioned that he serves on the NAVSCO Board and is always working to liaise between Boards and organizations. He stated a current issue of interest in the need for states to provide more long-term funding for county veterans services.

On 03Nov Mr. Holen was interviewed by the Denver Post, partly in regard to the Choice card. He recounted his own experience in which it took him approximately seven months to schedule an appointment through the Choice program. He reported that statistics indicate that only 1.9% of eligible veterans have utilized the program. Ms. Niemela thanks him for his comments. Mr. Dailey added that Arapahoe County Board of County Commissioners has long been a standard for other Colorado counties.

Mr. Meyers commented the SVCLC at Fitzsimons currently occupies five acres of a 15-acre site, and plans are in development to add a domiciliary section and one for transitional living. Legislation is currently being drafted to create the appropriation of funds. Mr. Robinson expressed his support and encouraged the other Board members to espouse the new legislation if the Adjutant General and Governor decide to support it.

Mr. Sandrock commented that the VOA has been proactive on homeless outreach, trying to spread the word about the new veteran's center in Denver. He reported that the Lieutenant Governor attended an aerospace and stem day for students in northeastern Colorado and that on 10November the Governor will give his Veterans Day remarks at an event near the capitol.

### **Guest Presentation**

Mr. Gillespie addressed the Board on behalf of Comitis Crisis Center. He began with a description of the organization, which provides emergency, long-term, and transitional housing for individuals and families. They have a program specific to veterans in which they can house a veteran and the veteran's family with all expenses paid for two years while they help the veteran and family obtain stable housing and employment. The VA pays a per diem stipend for the veteran only, so the support of veterans' families is borne by the organization. They are



pursuing legislation that would allow the VA to also pay a per diem for dependent children. The current wait list for the veterans' program is 23 families. Ms.

Hoagland recalled that the center received a Veteran Assistance Grant last fiscal year and inquired why they had not submitted an application for the current cycle. Mr. Gillespie explained that the center is receiving funding from the DAV trust. Ms. Niemela and Mr. Holen also recommended that that veterans in need of urgent assistance be referred to other community resources, such as Denver Human Services and the Arapahoe Douglas Mental Health Network. Mr. Simard mentioned that the Aurora Defense Council has made Homeless Veteran's support a special interest item for the year. Mr. Gillespie attends and presents to the council at their monthly meetings. The goal is to build awareness and support within the community for funding assistance and to reinforce the need for legislation with the congressional staffers that attend the meetings.

### **Board Member Reports**

Ms. Niemela reminded the Board that reports were submitted in writing prior to the meeting for the Board members to review. A copy of the reports will be attached to the minutes. She then invited report addenda.

Mr. Mestas reported that America Serves is working with MyVA Communities in the Colorado Springs area. America Serves coordinates networks of veterans services and already has an active presence in New York City, Philadelphia, and Charlotte. There will be a community meeting held in Colorado Springs on or about 18 January. Ms. Niemela stated that she plans to attend the January meeting with AmericaServes, as well as a town hall meeting on this topic.

Ms. Hoagland reminded the Board that the items in her report would be addressed later on the agenda. She also mentioned that VTF grantee VFW Post 1 received coverage in the 17 Oct edition of the New York Times. She encouraged the Board to consider the Post for a guest speaker or a site visit. It was noted by Mr. Robinson and approved by several Board members that the Board would have to proceed with caution in the selection of guest speakers between December and March, to not inadvertently offer an advantage to any organization that is also a grant applicant.

## **Annual Report**

Ms. Niemela stated that all items for the annual report have been submitted except for the information from the cemetery. The Board's bylaws require that the report be complete by 31 December. She also called for discussion on an item in both statute and the bylaws that requires that the Board report on all veterans organizations; taken literally, it may not be practicable. Mr. Dorman opined that the statute was not meant to preclude the Board from acting in what it feels to be in the best interest of Colorado veterans. He also stated that forthcoming legislation may abolish such reports. Mr. Robinson added that historically, the Board has reported on state programs only.

## **Veterans Trust Fund Grant Review**

Ms. Niemela stated that Ms. Hoagland has distributed a draft of the 2016-2017 RFP, and Ms. Hoagland added that she had received feedback from almost all of Board members. Ms. Niemela reminded the Board that modifications to the process are designed to make the decision process accountable and transparent.

Ms. Hoagland reported that the grant program is receiving increased attention across the state. The next cycle has received more than 35 inquiries to date from organizations that are not previous recipients of the VTF grant. This indicates that the number of applications will increase and requests will be very competitive. It will be of particular importance to have articulated reasons why applications are or are not funded.

Ms. Hoagland distributed a copy of the recommendations from the state auditors, much of which focused on the application process. Ms. Caldwell expressed concern that a noticeable number of past grantees did not comply with the reporting requirements, and Mr. Simard concurred. Ms. Hoagland agreed that some current grantees continue to struggle with this and stated that she will be holding a series of region-based webinars to coach and advise grantees of the requirements and how to meet them. Grantees will be reminded that compliance will be greatly considered in the 2016-2017 application evaluation. Ms. Niemela stated that the Board will rely on Ms. Hoagland to provide information of grantees' performance and improvement efforts.

Ms. Hoagland informed the Board that the application instructions and forms will be available on

the DMVA web site prior to 01 December as part of the open application process. Webinars with application instructions and information will also be scheduled from December through February, and that schedule will also be available on the web site.

Board members had submitted suggestions specific to the evaluation criteria and narrative summary guidelines. Several expressed concern that the listed criteria and guidelines did not align in regard to the number of categories, and the Board discussed the possibility of removing some items from the listed criteria. Ms. Hoagland explained that the difference in the number of categories occurs because some evaluation criteria cannot be addressed by the application, such as the geographic distribution and availability of funds. These items cannot be removed from the criteria list as the Board must consider them.

The Board discussed scoring methods for the applications, considering a Likert scale or similar rubric. Ms. Hoagland agreed to provide training on scoring methods, but emphasized that the application materials would have to be finalized at the meeting in order to publish them before 01Dec.

The Board then began to align the criteria and narrative summary instructions by folding criteria into subcategories. The consensus was to use this method to make the materials easier for applicants to understand.

The Board also discussed the requirement for applicants to identify their target audience, questioning whether applicants have access to reliable data sources. Ms. Hoagland agreed to also provide links on the web site to help applicants to access census information and also the veteran population data available at va.gov. Mr. Dailey expressed concern regarding the accuracy of those figures. The Board acknowledged that the resources are imperfect but are probably the best available.

Mr. Simard moved that the Board accept the VTF application packet as revised. It was seconded by Ms. Caldwell and carried. A copy of the final application packet is attached to these minutes.

### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held on 04 Dec at 0900 hours in Fort Collins, possibly at CSU but with the location still pending. The January meeting will be discussed at that time.

## **Adjournment**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:09 a.m.

## **Board Minutes**

**04December2015**

**Colorado State University Lory Student Center**

**1101 Central Ave Mail, Fort Collins, CO 80521**

Dana Niemela, Chair, called the meeting to order at 0906 hours. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited and a moment of silence was observed for our POW, MIA, troops in battle or in harm's way, and all service members.

### **Roll Call of Members and Introduction of Staff and Guests**

Board Members Present:

- Dana Niemela, Chair Duane Dailey,
- Vice-Chair Rene Simard,
- Secretary Hollie Caldwell, Member
- William "Robby" Robinson,
- Member Jack Rudder, Member
- Board Members Absent:
- Christopher Holden, Member

DMVA Staff Present:

- Mickey Hunt, DMVA Deputy Director
- Ben Mestas, CDVA Director
- Gail Hoagland, DMVA Grant Administrator
- Carissa Snyder, CDVA Administrative Assistant

Guests Present:

- Josh Hayes, President, CSU Student Veterans Organization
- Sharon Lindell, CDLE Veterans Employment Representative, CSU Adult Learner and Veterans Services Jennifer Pickett, Director,
- CSU Adult Learner and Veterans Services
- Theresa Rudder, Jack's wife

### **Approval of Minutes from November**

Mr. Robinson corrected a misspelling of the last name of board member Christopher Holden. Ms. Niemela corrected Richard Sandrock's title to Manager of Community

Partnerships, Office of the Governor. Mr. Dailey clarified that his comment to Arapahoe County Commissioner Bill Holen recorded in the fifth paragraph of page 2 was directed to the Arapahoe County Board of County Commissioners. The minutes were then approved as corrected.

### **Board Member Comments**

Mr. Dailey commented on the attendance and success of the Veterans Day event held at Wings over the Rockies, which honored World War II veterans and had 102 of them present. He reported that Grand County's Veterans Day event the next week had 380 in attendance.

Mr. Simard reported the death of George "Joe" Sakato on 02 December 2015 at the age of 94. Mr. Sakato was a member of the U.S. Army's 442nd Regimental Combat Team in World War II and a Medal of Honor recipient.

Ms. Caldwell added to Mr. Dailey's comments regarding the veteran Day event at Wings over the Rockies, remarking on the unusually high number World War II veterans at the event.

Ms. Niemela reported that on 09 November she and Mr. Simard participated in a Veterans Community Panel hosted by the Sturm Family Foundation and the University of Denver's Graduate School of Professional Psychology. The University is considering the implementation of a cross-disciplinary Military Psychology program. The panel was open to the public and was attended by the University chancellor, dean of students, members of the Student Veterans Organization, and various clinicians. Mr. Simard added that this endeavor is part of a greater effort by DU to become more aware and responsive to the needs of veteran students and their families.

Ms. Niemela proceeded to report on the Denver Stand Down held on 19 November. Participant feedback indicates that the veterans served are interested in more intensive, ongoing services. Homelessness is a continuing problem and can be difficult to accurately measure and track. The number of homeless veterans in Denver seems to have decreased, which indicates that street outreach and transitional programs are helping. Permanent housing is harder to achieve, and Ms. Niemela stated that both the VA and local community providers are considering sustainability plans through case management.

Mr. Rudder spoke in reference to the veterans he represents in the southern Colorado and San Luis Valley. He stated that veterans are having logistical difficulties with C&P exams, particularly those scheduled through Veterans Evaluations Service, or “VES.” Mr. Rudder personally called the VES contracting agency in Houston but made little progress. Mr. Dailey concurred with Mr. Rudder’s concern, and added that use of the CHOICE card has created additional problems for veterans seeking health care. He said veterans in his county no longer use it.

### **Visitor Comments**

Ms. Lindell runs the Northern Colorado Stand Downs and reported that the Fort Collins Stand Down was held on 10 November. The event is in its ninth year and this year’s event was the best attended to date. Homeward 2020 helped to spread the word.

Mr. Hayes explained the mission of the CSU Student Veterans Organization is to aid veterans in their transition to education and to employment. While this is a nationwide organization, the CSU chapter was the first in Colorado. This chapter works closely with school administration and the VA to help meet the needs of student veterans. Their most recent meeting was attended by 23 student veterans, three members of the school administration, and focused mainly on issues faced by CSU student veterans, including problems with the Vocation Rehabilitation tutoring program and difficulties with handicap parking. In regard to the latter, Ms. Pickett stated that all lot parking at CSU is paid and is \$442.00 for a year. Students can elect to park on the street for free and walk to the classroom buildings, but for some disabled veterans this is not possible. After some conversation it was decided that while this is negotiated with the school, disabled veterans in need of assistance could probably be helped through the school’s Veterans Assistance Grant.

Ms. Niemela inquired about the number of student veterans enrolled at CSU. Mr. Hayes replied that there are currently 1500 students using GI Bill benefits, with 900 of those students living on campus. Mr. Hayes said the veterans representatives at CSU who help students with the GI Bill are knowledgeable and effective. Ms. Lindell added that the school has received an Anschutz donation for programmatic changes to become more veteran-friendly. Mr. Hayes said the school’s welcoming atmosphere for veterans was one of his deciding factors in his enrollment.

Ms. Lindell then described her role as the Veterans Employment Representative partnering with CSU's Adult Learner and Veterans Services. The Department facilitates veteran employment by both helping student veterans and graduates find sustainable employment and keeping services available to ensure they are able to stay employed, with the end goal being a meaningful career. Services are offered on an as needed basis, and Ms. Lindell has the flexibility to try to assist any student, including those enrolled in the global campus. Ms. Pickett stated that one difficulty has been finding housing for new graduates who are still seeking or have just started employment, and GI Bill benefits stop paying once the veteran graduates. Ms. Lindell stated that VAG funds provide some help managing this gap.

Ms. Niemela inquired about the availability of mental and behavioral health counseling for student veterans. Mr. Hayes confirmed that is available on campus but accessibility can be a problem due to long waiting lists. Ms. Lindell added that her office can assist by connecting student veterans to other resources available in the community. Mr. Dailey remarked that a hurdle for veterans who leave the service with training is to acquire certification in fields in which they have experience. Ms. Lindell said that student veterans who need six months or less or education to acquire certification can receive it for free through the workforce center. Mr. Simard pointed out that this is helpful but not available in all fields. Ms. Caldwell agreed, also saying that not all schools can read military transcripts.

### **Board Member Reports**

Ms. Niemela thanked the Board members and DMVA staff for providing written reports and invited them to share summaries with the board.

Mr. Hunt said that in reference to earlier discussion, he agrees that there is not much transition assistance offered by the VA to graduating student veterans and said that support has been up to schools to provide. He said that the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs and Regis University also both have good veterans support programs. He participated in MyVA Community panel in Colorado Springs on 03 December that included both Bill Holen, Arapahoe County Commissioner and Danny Pummill, VA Acting Undersecretary. The panel differed in character from what was expected; rather than a community meeting it was a VA informational meeting. Ms. Niemela said that some communities already collaborate well and



don't need a VA-centered model, with which Mr. Mestas agreed. In regard to concerns about VES, Mr. Hunt said in his experience difficulties with scheduling can be resolved by supervisors, which may be a short-term option for veterans coping with this problem. The current VES contract is under review.

Mr. Mestas reported that a report on all Colorado Stand Downs is available with the exception of Alamosa. This data has been tracked since 2008 and is a good opportunity to compare figures over time. Mr. Dailey inquired about the date of the Denver Stand Down. Mr. Mestas confirmed that the date did change from 07 November to 19 Novembers due to a delay in an item shipment. Mr. Rudder offered to try to follow up on results from the Stand Down in Alamosa.

Mr. Rudder commented that the SVCLC at Homelake can't fill all its cottages, and is often prevented from accepting otherwise eligible persons since 75% of residents have to be veterans. Mr. Hunt said he has met with HHS deputy director Sara Orrick and suggested inviting her to a future meeting.

Ms. Niemela stated that there was nothing Greg Dorman wanted to add to his submitted report.

Ms. Hoagland reported that four of eight regional webinars have been held with current grantees and were well attended and generally successful. The webinars are designed to answer questions and to reinforce the necessity of compliance with grant contract terms. It was emphasized that past compliance will impact the consideration of applications in the next cycle. Issues of lingering confusion among grantees seemed to be what is meant by "unduplicated" veterans, why supporting documentation is specific and extensive, and why the new applications are longer. Mr. Dailey attended webinar training and said that recurrent grantees resist change. He stated that the current system offers fair and consistent treatment for all.

*Let the record show that here the Board recessed at 10:48 a.m., and resumed to labor at 10:55 a.m.*

### **Annual Report**

Ms. Niemela stated that a draft of the annual report is ready and draft cover letter will be available by the week of 07 December. An item noted in last year's report was that the waiting

time on veteran's claims placed larger burdens on local resources. Mr. Mestas asked if that included the timeline for claims on appeal. It did not. Mr. Mestas stated that the current timeframe for an appeal is two to four years. Ms. Niemela suggested that a recent push to process claims may have resulted in more denials, thus more appeals. Mr. Mestas told the Board that Denver has been selected as a site for pilot appeals project in which a veteran will get a preliminary hearing within 45 days of an appeal. A meeting on this topic will be held on 08 December. Ms. Niemela said that this year's report will feature access to care, particularly mental health care, VES, and the additional funding the state now provides to county veterans services. She asked the Board for suggestions of items to highlight in the cover letter. Mr.

Dailey said that the Golden clinic has very proactive in screening and referral, and Ms. Niemela said she will include information about the SVCLCs, increasing census in rural areas, and access to housing. Mr. Simard suggested including information on community partnerships. Both Mr. Robinson and Mr.

Mestas suggested including data on VA claims and appeals processing times.

### **Strategic Planning**

Ms. Niemela told the Board that the Department strategic planner will not be on board until June 2016, so the board will proceed without for the time being. She said the intent of the meeting was not to make a strategic plan, but to discuss the intent and purpose of the Board, beginning with why sitting Board members agreed to serve and what they hope to accomplish in that service.

Ms. Niemela said that she joined hoping to effect policy change, and that interaction has increased between the VA and local communities. Mr. Rudder said he hoped to provide a voice for rural veterans. He said VA policies are not always a good fit for veterans who don't live in urban areas.

Mr. Dailey agrees with Mr. Rudder, observing that while the State office does a good job of outreach into local communities, the Federal VA does not, and the concern is that the interests of rural veterans are not considered when policies are made or changed. He said he would like to see more cooperation with the Federal VA. Mr. Simard said that he too wanted to effect

change. He too expressed similar frustration with Federal VA communication.

Ms. Caldwell said this meeting was her fifth as a Board member. She said that the Board needs areas of courses where it can make tangible progress. Mr. Robinson observed a lack of interface between the States and the VA. Mr. Mestas suggested that Board members be active advocates in their congressional districts to develop the Board's stated purpose "to advise and consult" the Governor on matters pertaining to Colorado veterans. Mr. Robinson pointed out that some of the founding missions of the Board have been accomplished, such as establishing the State cemetery and reforming the SVCLCs. He said the Board needs to find a new focus. Ms. Niemela suggested making use of a traveling Board to bring community members to the table. Mr. Dailey said that extensive travel might be difficult for Board members who also work full time jobs.

Ms. Niemela suggested combining Board meetings with community roundtables to keep the events down to a one-day commitment which will make the stated meetings longer. In reference to the meeting format, she asked the Board if the current agenda structure was adequate or if anyone would like to recommend changes. There was a consensus to dispose of the time limit for public contact, since it is rarely needed or enforced.

The Board agreed to continue with guest presentations from the area in which each Board meeting is held. Ms. Hoagland recommended inviting multiple representatives from the community. Ms. Caldwell suggested that Board members consider visiting veterans organizations while in the area. Ms. Niemela said that Board members should coordinate site visits so that local organizations aren't overwhelmed.

Mr. Simard recommended adding action items to the minutes and agenda and there was discussion regarding appointing a subcommittee to liaise with Colorado Serves, or to invite representatives from that body to serve on Board subcommittees. Ms. Hoagland said either would require a bylaw change, but Colorado Serves representatives could assist the Board as expert consultants. Mr. Robinson reminded the Board that approval would be needed from the Adjutant General regarding new action items or partnerships; the Board will not be able to back any efforts that are not supported by the Governor.

The Board then discussed the locations of upcoming meetings. Ms. Hoagland said that the March and April meetings at least need to be held in the Denver area, since high-volume work will be required on the Veterans Trust Fund Grant. The meeting location schedule was set as follows:

- January – Pueblo
- February – Sterling
- March – Denver area
- April – Denver area
- May – West Jefferson or Park County/Bailey/Conifer/Evergreen
- June – San Luis Valley/Homelake

#### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held on 08 January in Pueblo at 08:00 a.m.

#### **Adjournment**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:09 a.m.