

**WEST VIRGINIA VETERANS COUNCIL  
GOVERNOR'S PRESS CONFERENCE ROOM  
FEBRUARY 11, 2011  
MEETING MINUTES**

Meeting called to order by Chairman Epling, followed immediately by the Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance. Those members present were Mr. Miles Epling, Mr. Patrick Farrell, Mr. Fleming, Mr. William "Bill" Harris, Ms. Debra Tompkins, Mr. Cedric Greene, Mr. Randall Bare, and Mr. Robert Vass. Mr. Ralph Stump was absent.

**OLD BUSINESS**

Motion made and passed to accept the minutes for September 17, 2010.

- **Medal of Honor Plaques at the Veterans Nursing Facility at Clarksburg:**

Kevin Crickard stated that great progress had been made with the help of Mr. Woody Williams, who showed a great willingness to work with our art.

James Crim (Art by Crim) is the sole source vendor for the project. Cost isn't going to be terribly high, but enough to require that we bid out the project. That's what has taken awhile. We now have Mr. Crim appointed as the art coordinator. Mr. Crim, Woody, and myself (Kevin Crickard), have met on several occasions to discuss the art for this project. Mr. Crim will give us an official scope of work and cost for the project. Woody has vision behind artwork and probably can better describe the scope of the project.

Woody comments: Project will include the names of Medal of Honor Recipients from immediately around the Nursing Facility, plaques will be located around the walls on each floor. The diagram is of all three of Medal of Honors and their names and will be designed in such a way that these same drawings can be used in every VA State Institution that we have, Veterans Home and all four VA Hospitals, with names specific to that area. I believe the VA Medical Centers will accept that and Clarksburg already has. It's something that would be honoring those deceased Medal of Honor Recipients from that particular area.

- **Mr. Gwinn presented the new Veterans Affairs Informational Benefit Pamphlets with the new Division of Veterans Affairs logo.** Mr. Williams asked - how many do we have and can we get more? Mr. Williams went on to say that these should be distributed at every VA Medical Center. Donald Young inserted that the pamphlets should be out in the community somewhere because the Veteran may not be at a VA Medical Center if they haven't yet signed up for benefits. Mr. Williams agreed and went on to say "We're already out of date because they say Division and we're going to be a Department." Keith Gwinn noted that will be effective on July 1<sup>st</sup>. He also stated that we (Veterans Affairs) have just recently designed these brochures and do plan to have enough copies printed up after July 1<sup>st</sup> to disburse into communities and VA Centers. (Example of Benefit Pamphlet was included in Board packets)

## OLD BUSINESS (Continued)

- **Division of Veterans Affairs Contact Booklets:** We have recently designed and disbursed informational/contact booklets that we put out to the Regional Offices, other Veterans organizations, VAMCs, Vet Centers, and any other place that requires Veterans Assistance. (Copy included in Board packets)
- **Clarksburg Field Office:** Regarding the issue that we did not have enough personnel manning the Clarksburg field office and that folks were being turned away - This incident was investigated and that was **not** the circumstance. The veteran came in and demanded to be seen immediately instead of waiting his turn. We have seen an increase in demand. We now have two Certified Service Officers, one Assistant, and two Social Workers in Clarksburg Field Office, located in Veterans Nursing Facility.

## DIRECTORS REPORT

- **Keith Gwinn, Director, Veterans Affairs addressed issue of Nursing Salaries.** Discussed with Governor earlier, proposal drawn up and Secretary Thornton submitted to DOP Board and we should hear within next few weeks and should be discussing increasing the Nursing starting salaries.
- Question raised by Donald Young- Will this bring them up to a quality of living that is comparable to others in their profession? Mr. Gwinn responded: This will bring them up to same minimum hiring rate used at other State Facilities (Mildred Mitchell-Bateman and Sharpe Hospital). We were below that because they were considered specialized and they have less of a problem hiring people, so now we will have a more competitive rate for hiring and the Governor has authorized that if this does not work, we will look at this again. This is the first step.

Question: With VA Medical Center right next door, and the wages that their Nurses make, is there any consideration allowed for that? Was that considered in the amount of increase that was requested in the proposal?

Mr. Gwinn's response: That was considered and will be visited by the Board. This will be an ongoing issue that we will take up and if this doesn't work, we will go on to the next step. The Governor is dedicated that we will get the quality of nurses that we need.

- **Keith Gwinn introduced Larissa Wines as the new Cemetery Administrator over the Donel Kinnard Memorial State Veterans Cemetery in Institute.** Applause to welcome Larissa. Keith congratulated her on an outstanding job stating that she has been out there every day in the mud overseeing the construction. The foundation has been laid for the administration building. Road has been cut out across the hill, drainage ditches have been put in and we are on track and still scheduled for November for completion date.

## DIRECTORS REPORT (Continued)

- **Cemetery Highway Sign: Mr. Gwinn- I passed out information and need recommendation for passage of sign** which will be put on interstate side next to State Police Barracks. Will not be next to their sign as indicated in last meeting, but will be in an open area. Will be a V shaped sign, lit up with flags, approx. 6 ft high on one side, with 10" letters, lit from both sides and very visible from highway. Need passage approval. Funding for this will come from the 1.8 Million Dollars that we had refunded by the Federal VA as part of the 14.0 Million Dollar Grant. 22.8 ft. long. **Motion made, seconded, voted on, and approved.** (Note of reference on this per Keith Gwinn: Sign is located on State Police property and they have agreed to it.)
- **GWOT Memorial: Global War on Terrorism Memorial** will be located on the memorial walk. We will be one of the first cemeteries to have a Memorial Walk installed. This walk will be a concrete walkway going over streams and around by trees and comes to the end at the POW MIA which is being replaced by GWOT Memorial which will also include POW MIA Flags. Question was raised: Why are we replacing the POW MIA? Mr. Gwinn responds: This is the only area that we could put this memorial. We are incorporating the POW MIA along with the GWOT Memorial as this was the only space

## VETERANS HOME

Stacy Brown, Administrator over WV Veteran's Home in Barboursville, introduced herself and presented the following report.

- Currently we have a total of 100 residents remaining at the end of month.
- Thanks to change in Legislation, we have gotten an increase in applications for the Veterans Home.
- Seems that as we get more people in, people leave – We were up to 107 as of end of January, we were pushing to 110, then several people exited and so now we're back down to 100. Seems to be seasonal.
- Planning to have Vietnam Memorial Traveling Wall, with assistance of local community businesses and individuals, April 21-25. Working on details. We have people wanting to give money toward this but we want to make sure we are following State Guidelines. This will be free to Public and we are looking for volunteers.
- Chairman Epling thanked and congratulated Stacy on their fine job at the Nursing Home and expressed appreciation. Applause.

## VETERANS NURSING FACILITY

- Kevin Crickard, Administrator over WV Veteran's Nursing Facility in Clarksburg, introduced himself and presented the following report.
- Kevin introduced Kathy Hess as the most senior employee of the Nursing Facility, she is the Director of Administrative Services.
- We're making a lot of progress, most occurring operationally. A lot of exciting things happening.
- We are up to 90 Veterans, give or take one. We have approximately 75 applications, roughly 35 for Alzheimer's special unit. In addition to that, about 100 Veterans have expressed interest but have not done the formal admissions process. So we have quite a few veterans waiting to get in.
- We measure our success by the satisfaction of our veterans and their families, its nothing more complicated than that. Complimentary letters and testimonials are shared over the radio, etc. We're actively involved in the Veterans Councils. We're excited about National Nursing Home Week coming up in the 1<sup>st</sup> full week of May. We're going to have a 5K Walk and Run. A lot of culturally enriching things are happening in our Veterans Home right now. Many of you have stopped by, made visits, had lunch with us, etc.
- We have a wonderful Director who has visited a number of area Nursing Homes and ones that already have an Alzheimer's Unit and she is developing a vision for our Specialty Unit. We're going to take some ideas from other units and put them on ours and 75% of employees earmarked for that unit will be on that unit the 1<sup>st</sup> of March and will be ready to go. We are really excited to go on to the last and final stage of this process.
- Question is sometimes asked - Why are we at 90 and not 100? – Some Veterans, due to physical conditions, are not appropriate to have a roommate- so we are waiting on private rooms to come open. Each time that happens that opens up two more beds.
- Question: Have you talked to the Nursing School at Morgantown at all to make some type of arrangement with them? Kevin responded that as he understands from the Director and the Governor, this is in the works- an actual formal arrangement with them. Kevin has personally visited a number of graduating RN and LPN classes at Vo-Tech Centers as part of Director's vision for me to visit graduating classes and let them know we have Government jobs available in our area.
- Nurses' salaries are being addressed at the Governor's level at this time.

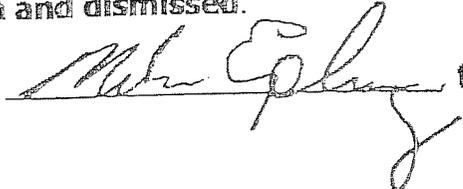
## NEW BUSINESS

- **Keith requests that members of committee review the Congressional notification letter that was handed out.** – This indicates by Secretary of Veterans Affairs for the 14.1 Million Dollar Grant for the Cemetery that construction plan includes 1,674 standard burial plots and 2,000 pre-placed double crypts. Original was for 1,200 pre-placed crypts, but VA approved money to buy additional 800 crypts. In consultation with the Grafton Cemetery, there is a trend leaning toward more burials in the crypts. Looking at this situation and currently having money at hand, I propose to committee that we can add 400 double burial crypts. This would be at a cost \$240,000 – however if we had to look at later for these crypts, it would be another \$120,000 plus disturb cemetery greatly to get these placed. If we do now, it would be a minimal cost and they could be placed with other crypts being installed. This would be a great savings and we would be prepared in the future for the cemetery. – **Motion made, seconded, voted on and passed for the additional 400 more crypts at a cost of \$240,000.**
- **Annual Report for Veterans Affairs** – Copies passed out to Council by Mr. Gwinn. Report indicated that Veterans Affairs filed over 4,000 claims in Fiscal Year 2009-2010. We have brought in over \$141 Million Dollars to the State. We've almost passed that already and are projected to bring in over \$200 Million Dollars into the State in disability claims filed on behalf of Veterans. We are paced to go past 7,500 claims filed on behalf of veterans in the State. Question – How is the revenue from the Veterans scratch off tickets? Response by Keith: Stayed about the same, still receiving about a Million a year and \$740,000 goes toward the bond payment of the Nursing Home. The additional \$240,000 goes into the operation of the Cemetery, but with the change in the cemetery going from \$300 to \$750 allowance for each burial, we look at a future of bringing in almost \$400,000 per year versus \$200,000 – We're looking at self-supporting the Cemetery.
- **Question came up about different designs for the MIA Memorial.** Per Keith, we can incorporate a dual area for POW MIA & GWOT Memorial but it would be at an additional cost. Requested that this be tabled for further review. Keith expressed concern of waiting until next meeting, since the sidewalk and conduit are currently being installed, this will add additional cost.
- **Cost of burial at cemetery is free to Veteran,** \$300 for wife or one dependent per VA regulation, but the allowance which VA will reimburse the State for is \$750.
- **Mr. Williams expressed concern that the 100 residents at Veterans Home** continues in bothering him, when the bed capacity is 150. Anytime you have an institution with 50 empty beds and you're paying for 50 empty beds, you have a problem-financially. Years ago, I made correspondence with all Veterans Organizations, Posts, Chapters, anybody I could write to, to let them know that there is a Veterans Home.

There's a lot of people in northern WV and probably southern too, who do not even know we have a Veterans Home existing in Barboursville. Is there any restrictions on the home that would forbid them from doing PSAs and letters to all the posts, chapters, and people to let them know that there are vacancies in that home for homeless people. We think of homeless people as living under the bridge, but the guy living by himself who cannot take care of himself any more, is for all practical purposes, homeless. So my question is: How can we let people know in the State that there is a wonderful place that you can stay down there and they will know it's available to them? Keith responded: I've addressed that issue by submitting to the Governor an improvement package, along with the Social Workers, to do Public Service Announcements and Information broadcasts to get this information out statewide and the Governor has approved that and included in our budget. Don Young commented that the Director also has two large newspapers, one from American Legion and one from VFW that goes out to quite a few people around the whole state and I'm not sure why they are not utilizing these rags but in my opinion, they should be. Mr. Williams said he has sent things to the papers but they didn't get printed, maybe I was just too late. But that is a good source and we should use this more and there should be something in the paper **every** month. Stacy Brown added that we do a lot of education in the community and around the State but sadly a lot of people think we are a nursing home and we need to redirect potential applicants to Clarksburg or that we are assisted living and that we have CNAs around the clock that can help the residents and that's not the case. A lot of our outgoing residents enjoy their transient lifestyle and they come for a little while and then leave. A lot of our residents have alcohol or substance abuse issues and when they become unable to care for themselves or if they continue to break the rules, they cannot remain at the home, so sadly that's what happens a lot of times.

- **Question: I think Woody is trying to expand the definition of a homeless veteran** and I don't think anyone is attacking that anywhere here. How do we define a homeless veteran in the state and how does the Veteran Community perceive us? Stacy responds that the local community does not see us as a homeless veterans home – it was a mental health facility prior to being a WV Veterans Home and a lot of people still refer to it as a mental health facility, so it is constant continuing educating public and working with the local VA.
- **Chester – Old business: Access over at Dept. of Transportation – Motor Vehicles** – State was to cut a work order to fix those doors to get in and out of there with chairs, but nothing has been done. Work order has never been executed. Miles questioned: Can you check on that Cedric? Cedric responded with a yes.

- Miles – Any further business to come before this meeting? If not, we'll entertain a motion to adjourn- moved, voted on and dismissed.

Minutes approved by Veterans Council Chairman,  the

25 day of May, 2010.