



## **Kent County Veterans Services**

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DRAFT minutes 11-12-2020

Committee Present: Mary Johnson, Harold Mast, Mel Bauman, Trish Torres, John Baxter, Shane Scherer

Committee Absent:

Staff Present: Martha Burkett, Ryan Grams, Rachel Wustman

Guests: Mary Summers

1. Meeting called to Order/Introductions –
  - a. The meeting was called to order by Veterans Services Advisory Committee Chair Mary Johnson at 8:30am
2. Pledge of Allegiance – Committee Member Trish Torres led those in attendance to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.
3. Approval of Minutes –
  - a. Committee Member Harold Mast made a motion to approve the minutes. Committee Member Mel Bauman seconded, UNANIMOUS
4. Success Stories –
  - a. Administrative Specialist Rachel Wustman shared a recent experience she had at Millbrook Tack in Byron Center, MI. A customer familiar with the cashier expressed to the them that they should ensure that they ask the female customers in line if they were veterans as well as they deserve just as much recognition as male veterans. Rachel Wustman perceived this exchange as evidence of success in the female veteran outreach being conducted in the community.
  - b. Rachel Wustman also related the success of the recent Fall Fest event that Kent County Veterans Services had hosted that was funded through the West Michigan Veterans Coalition. The event was attended by veterans and their families, and featured games and line dancing. Despite cool temperatures, good overall weather contributed to the overall success of the event. Rachel Wustman thanked Committee Chair Mary Johnson for her assistance in planning the event and Committee Member Mel Bauman for his attendance.
  - c. Committee Member Mel Bauman shared his approval of the Fall Fest event and expressed interest in a future summer event. Mel Bauman also shared a recent interaction with the manager of Mission BBQ and believes he may be able to persuade them to cater the future summer event.

- d. Mel Bauman additionally expressed interest in having Mission BBQ cater the event Kent County Veterans Services is planning in June however Veterans Services Manager Martha Burkett assured him that catering arrangements had been made through Grand Valley State University.

## 5. Monthly Impact Reports

- a. Veterans Services Supervisor Ryan Grams provided an update for the monthly numbers. The office has remained closed to the public resulting in many 0 values on the report. Awarded claims are up for the month, however SSR awards are down due to a large number of pending claims.
- b. \$10,000 worth of Meijer Food Vouchers have been issued, the majority of which have gone to first time food assistance applicants.

## 6. Manager's Report

- a. Veterans Services Manager Martha Burkett gave an update on Veterans Services Budget
- b. On the budget worksheet, Project and Program costs were reflected as 59.52% over budget however after speaking with Christopher Wilsens from the financing department it was determined that funds paid to Disability Advocates and Senior Neighbors had been paid out of the wrong line item resulting in the discrepancy which will be amended by taking the funds from the proper line item.
- c. Not reflected on the report is \$1,500 that has been paid to Degage Ministries.
- d. There was no travel or building repairs and maintenance expenses this month.
- e. Building and grant funds have been paid out of the Soldiers and Sailors Relief fund.
- f. Committee Member Harold Mast inquired about the status of the \$300,000 reflected in the General Fund. Martha Burkett assured that since taking her position the department has not needed to use the funds and that the funds will roll over to next year if unspent.
- g. The 2021 Board of Commissioners grant approval meeting will take place on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November.

## 7. Old Business

- a. Veterans Services Manager Martha Burkett stated that when brought before the fiscal committee, the budget faced questions regarding spending however by providing supplemental materials those questions were answered and chances of approval are looking promising.
- b. Planning is well underway for upcoming projects and contracts have already been made for television and billboard advertising.
- c. Free billboard advertising was provided on Veterans Day by GR Outdoor.
- d. In collaboration with The Vets Center and 92 for 22, plans for a "call center" specifically for Kent County veterans are being made with a focus on connecting veterans to their benefits and resources in a timely and efficient manner.
- e. A calendar listing all of the wellness activities organized through Kent County Veterans Services is being created, and talks are currently underway with several individuals that may be chosen to lead those activities.
- f. Martin Rogers was hired to fill the open Clerk II position.

- g. Both clerks will be trained on both administrative duties and the Soldiers and Sailor's Relief Fund to ensure interchangeability. Additionally, both clerks will receive NACVSO accreditation training so in the event that a VSO position opens there can be a smooth transition between positions.
- h. The open Advisory Committee positions have not been filled yet. Pamela Van Buren has provided the resumes of seven applicants and recommendations have been made by Martha Burkett and Mel Bauman.
- i. Committee Officer elections will be held at next month's committee meeting. Committee Chair Mary Johnson expressed interest in remaining Committee Chair and stated that Committee Vice Chair Shane Sherer is also interested in retaining his position.

8. New Business-

- a. Manager Martha Burkett proposed creating a Soldiers and Sailors Relief subcommittee for the purpose of drafting revisions to the current Soldiers and Sailors Relief policy to include, but not limited to, Veterans Services Supervisor Ryan Grams, Committee Chair Mary Johnson, and Mary Sumner. Mel Bauman expressed his desire to be involved as well.
- b. Martha Burkett and Rachel Wustman have been in talks with Equine Assisted Development to organize an equine therapy program as part of the wellness initiative. Martha Burkett has toured their facilities and has instructed them to submit a proposal.
- c. Rachel Wustman is finalizing plans with Woman Veteran Strong to host a wreath/ornament decorating event for female veterans. The event will be headed by Veteran Service Officer Theresa Ergang, who is herself a very talented craftswomen whose experience is expected to greatly benefit the event.
- d. Rachel Wustman is also currently putting together plans for next year's events. Rachel Wustman stated that about six months' worth of events have already been planned and will be presented to the board once the rest of the year's events have been planned. She is currently planning to have at least one event per month for just female veterans with the assistance of Women Veteran Strong and WINC.

9. Around the Table-

- a. The County Administrator has ordered that all county employees work from home where possible, therefore the entire Veterans Services staff will be working from home until notified otherwise. The staff has been outfitted with laptops, cell phones, and VPN access resulting in a fairly smooth transition to remote work.
- b. Committee Chair Mary Johnson stated that the local Women Veteran Strong chapter will be having their first meeting on November 16 at the Vet's Center.

10. Public Comment –

- No public comment

11. Adjournment –Veterans Services Advisory Committee Chair Mary Johnson moved adjourned the meeting

12. The next Veterans Services Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, December 10th, at 8:30am place is TBD.

