



Kent County Veterans Services

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Minutes 03/16/2023

Committee present: Mary Johnson, Melvin Bauman, Reginald Howard, Mike Blundell, Phil Yeater & Jill Hinton-Wolfe (Remote)

Committee absent: Chris Kamps

Staff present: Ryan Grams, Rachel Wustman, Jennifer James

Public: Anthony Torres & Paul Ryan

1) Meeting called to order/ instructions-

- a. The meeting was called to order by Veterans Services Committee chair Mary Johnson.

2) Pledge of Allegiance – Lead by Mike Blundell

3) Approval of the minutes from February Meeting-

- a. Approved by- Mike Blundell, Seconded by- Reginald Howard

4) Success stories

- a. KCVS Ryan- This past week Kenyon, Brad and I were invited out to the Belmont National Guard Armory for the Active Guard Reserve seminar for Retirement. I spoke for about 2 hours and afterwards stayed around to answer questions. It went great and we were able to pass out a quite a few of our cards. We have already started to get a few calls from veterans wanted to start paperwork for their BVD (Before Discharge Claims) claims. That is mostly what I was speaking about, was BVD claims. Overall, it went great and they have already asked us back for their next one. There were no questions about the PACT ACT, but mostly about what they will need to do to get their packets together for retirement.

5) Monthly Impact statement

- a. KCVS Ryan- We are still, very busy. VSO Andrew LaPres was swamped last month doing service-connected claims. Our claims in development is continuing to climb. This last month was the first time in years that we did not do one single burial. Our claims are also up as you can see, along with SSR (Soldier and Sailors Relief). So, it's been a busy month at KCVS, but a good month.

6) Managers' Report

- a. KCVS Ryan- We are still on track for the years, everything is going well in that area. We are still waiting on 2 contracts to come back to be finalized, but all the other ones are up and running with their programs moving along.
 - i. Mary- So what 2 contracts are we waiting on then?
 - ii. Jennifer James- We are waiting on Veterans Treatment Court and Gill Staffing, which we pay KCVS Kenyon Vickery.
 - iii. Mel- We aren't doing the equine therapy up in Traverse City anymore correct. Because of the cost? So, we are going to use the Equine Assisted Development here in town then?
 - iv. KCVS Rachel- Yes, we are going to do a day long retreat, so it will be much easier and more fruitful. We will hopefully get more exposure with it only being a day and not an overnight. So possibly attract more veterans to attend.
- b. KCVS Ryan- I am also working on the contract breakdown that you all asked for. I am going to set this up to be quarterly because a lot of these vendors who don't bill us monthly. So, once we hit the quarter, I will be able to show everyone. It is looking very nice and can't wait to share with everyone.

7) Old Business

- a. None

8) New Business

- a. Mary- Just wanted to know if we need to look at meeting times and dates again for 2023? Is this a convenient day and time? Or do we need to change it to something else?
 - i. KCVSAC- No changes
- b. Mary- We are going to do a closed session today to go over the bylaws and I wanted to make sure you knew you were invited Jennifer. We will also be going over some materials to get clarification.
- c. Mary- I also received an email from MOA's surviving spouses' group. It was about Tricare and how they will be switching to M.H.S Genesis the healthcare records system. It sounds like it is going to be a little chaotic for patrons. The email states that it will take longer to get your prescriptions filled and to make appointments. If you need to make appointments, make them before March 25th. Another important point was to get your records printed off from Tricare before the switch. I know I have personally been through the electronic record systems and changes; it wasn't too bad for the patient. But it was very chaotic for the staff.

9) New Activities

- a. KCVS Rachel – I just spoke with the Commander of the United Veterans Council and Kent County Veterans Services is now a drop-off site for retired flags. We will happily take them, and the council has a way to properly dispose of them. It's a good way to

bring in veterans and civilians into our office to see what we do. All our wellness programs are up and running except for Equine Assisted Therapy, which will hopefully be up and going very soon. A shout of our Heroes Corner for being a reoccurring host for the Saturday Art workshops, we have had great turn outs at their locations. Its been great to have the flexibility and collaborations with them. We have been in touch with the VFW 702 and helping to serve popcorn at the outpatient clinic, we are working to get our faces and business cards out there. Also, at the clinic VSO's Andrew LaPres and VSO Bradley Langerak will be attending their PACT ACT event on March 29th and helping to answer any questions veterans may have. Lastly, we no longer have the **kentcountyveteranservices.com** website. We are shifting all our information and updates over to **AccessKent.com**. We are working on getting a calendar of sorts up and running, so all of our updates can be added there. Ryan and I recently went through all the tabs on Access Kent to make sure that all of the information was up to date and accurate.

- i. Jill- Is there anyway to forward the old domain to the new one?
 - ii. KCVS Rachel- Great idea Jill, I will investigate that.
 - iii. KC Commissioner Jenny- We will also be redoing the entire access Kent website, along with the updating the Kent County logo.
- b. Jill- I wanted to let everyone know that Pamela Alderman is going to be working on putting together a group to work on a Women's Veteran project for late summer. I will keep everyone updated to what is going on with this project.

10) Public Comment

- b. Paul Ryan- Shout out to KCVS Kenyon, he has been very engaged in with the West Michigan Veterans Coalition lately and I wanted to show our appreciation for that. The Armed Forces Thanksgiving luncheon will be on May 19th, I will resend out the invitations for this event. Any veteran is welcome for free of charge, but you do need to RSVP for this event. If you aren't familiar with this event, it is a mix of Veterans, business leaders and high school sophomores and juniors. The high school kids don't have to pay, they aren't free per say, but they need to commit to doing some veterans related project the next year instead of the monetary cost. Forest Hills Central is currently doing a large veterans interactive wall in their lobby right now. Grandville also did something similar. The high schools are being recognized through the Thanksgiving in Action award, which will be presented on May 19th. 2023. We are interested in inviting the Vietnam veterans, but any veteran is invited. The keynote speaker this year is Rocky Blair, he played college football at Notre Dame. After college, he was drafted by the Steelers and then drafted to the US Army to serve in Vietnam. He was seriously injured in Vietnam and the doctors told him, he would never walk again. But he went back to play for the Steelers and played in their Super Bowl Championship team. He brings a great message and I look forward to hearing him speak. All the money raised from the Armed Forces Thanksgiving is the primary funding sources for the Armed Forces Thanksgiving. They've raised over \$300,000 since the inception and helps to enable us to do what we do with our direct benefit programs that we have. One example of this is our scholarship program that we have with 2, soon to be 3 classes of scholarships. The ones we have currently offer are one with military experience and one for their dependents. The Armed Forces scholarship is for \$1,000 and is for basically any schooling (4-year, 2-year, trade schools). This doesn't have to be used for tuition or books but can used for gas or whatever the student needs. The dependent scholarship is for \$500. You can use

the scholarship repeatedly. We have given out 102 scholarships so far. The signup times is different for each of them. The dependent scholarship is open right now it opened March 1st and closes on September 13th. Another program that is funded by this event is our transportation program. This is a transportation service that is free of charge to any veteran, family member living in their household, or their caregivers to receive rides from their home to any destination in Kent County and the eastern fringes of Ottawa County. Most of the riders are going to medical appointments, but some are for employment also. We are always looking for volunteer drivers.

- i. Mary- It is great seeing transportation being addressed, it has been a topic we have been working on addressing. This is the most stable program that we have seen out there.
 - ii. Jill- So how do people sign up for both volunteering and scheduling a ride?
 - iii. Paul Ryan- There is phone number and website. I can get you all the flyer, if you call the "616" number they can answer any questions that you have. They go through the volunteer requirements and requirements that the vehicles will need. I will make sure that Rachel gets you the flyer for Feonix Mobility Rising, which is the name of the company.
 - iv. Jill- I will put the word out to Grand Valleys Veteran network. I don't always have a ride, so I might try it out myself and report back.
- c. Kent County Treatment Court Anthony Torres- I wanted to pass along that one of our alumni passed away about a week ago. He was a successful graduate in 2019, and passed away alone. He was only 35 years old and received the purple heart as a combat infantryman who was shot twice in Afghanistan. Preliminary finding is there was no noticeable trauma or foul play suspected, but the investigation is ongoing. Judge Cortez will be notified today when he returns and as more information comes out, we will make that available. We believe they will be having his services at Fort Custer, in Augusta. On April 4th, we will be having a graduation for 2 graduates. One Army and one Navy. Unless something goes south before then, they will be having their felonies reduced to misdemeanors. This will be at 3pm on Tuesday, April 4th.
- d. Mary- Reggie, how is AA going?
- i. Reggie- Thank you Rachel for the new flyer, they're beautiful. AA is going a little slow, but its consistent. We do have some motivated guys; we are averaging from 3-6 participates every week. One guy we have is being very influential to our other veterans and helping to make it pick up. He is coming up on his 90 days sober and I love the enthusiasm. We are hoping to get some coins with our \$200 grant. We are also having a celebration for Vietnam day on March 29th at 1pm – 5pm at Heroes Corner. We are going to be presenting some Vietnam challenge coins to Vietnam veterans at the celebration.

11) Meeting adjournment by Committee Chair Mary Johnson

12) Meeting Transcribed by Amanda Lake

