

VETERANS COUNCIL OF ST. JOHNS COUNTY

MINUTES OF GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING April 25, 2024

CALL TO ORDER: Chairman Dudley

WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS: Chairman Dudley

PLEDGE: Chairman Dudley

INVOCATION: Bill Jefferson, Chaplain

INTRODUCTION OF NEW GUESTS: Chairman Dudley

MINUTES OF LAST MEETING: Minutes of last meeting conducted March 28, 2024, were presented by Chairman Dudley. Copies of the Minutes and Agenda are available on the sign-in table and were sent to members electronically by the Secretary. The minutes were approved by voice vote with no changes.

TREASURER'S REPORT: Treasurer Mountcastle presented the Treasurer's Report to the Council. As of March 27, 2024, the cash balance was \$164,267.75. As of April 24, 2024, the balance is \$158,203.94. Available cash totals \$170,446.84. Treasure Mountcastle went over the Treasurer's Report, explaining funds for the Dudley Foundation and Money Market accounts. Treasurer Mountcastle went through details and filing of the current income tax return with the IRS. Expenses that are incurred by the Veterans Council each month of the year were discussed. Details of the month's expenses were also covered. The Treasurer asked if there were any questions regarding the Treasurer's Report. The Report was approved by voice vote.

SPEAKERS:

TRISH DORAN, MILITARY LIASON WEKIVA SPRINGS Wekiva Springs is a mental health and substance abuse facility. They participate in in-patient programs and daytime out-patient programs to help those within the NE Florida area. Wikiva Springs is a VA provider and was the first one the VA ever utilized for the local Veteran community care. Wekiva Springs not only services the Veterans but also others in the community. Ms. Doran went through the services that are provided for our Veterans at their Southside Facility. The floor was open for any questions and answers provided.

DEBBIE JOHNSON, K9s UNITED Debbie Johnson introduced herself and Officer Lavon and K9 Raven. Officer Lavon spoke of the responsibilities of Raven at the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office. She is assigned to the Corrections Division and works at the jail as a narcotics detention canine. Ms. Johnson explained how she started K9s United back in 2015 after being "moved" by the loss of the local K9, Barron, who was killed in the line of

duty. She then went to the Sheriff 's Office to inquire how she could help with the K9 unit. After a ride-a-long with the K9 unit, she discovered how expensive that unit can be. She started K9s United, a 501©3 to raise funds to go directly to the Sheriff 's Office K9 Unit. Ms. Johnson went into detail how they supplement the K9 Unit and how the money is spent. She also discussed other needs for the K9 Unit. She spoke of how she currently pursues legislation for punishment for laws broken against K9 dogs. There have been laws passed for the medical care of dogs injured in the line of duty. Ms. Johnson also spoke of the new Florida license plate that has been approved for K9s United. The floor was open for questions and answers.

COMMITTEE REPORTS: Joseph McDermott and John Leslie were unable to attend this meeting due to other obligations. They will return at the next meeting. Chairman Dudley turned the Committee time over to Derek Collins of The Fire Watch. Mr. Collins explained that The Fire Watch is the State of Florida's veterans suicide prevention program and gave the background of the organization. They currently are performing a workshop for a Crisis Intercept Map with the Sheriff 's Department, Fire Department, Health and Human Services, VA Mental Health, and a few other local organizations, including the Veterans Council, to determine where the resource gaps are in St. Johns County. It is a day and a half exercise, and everyone was invited to attend day two of the workshop (April 26th) to share their experiences. The floor was open to questions and answers.

OLD/NEW BUSINESS: Chairman Dudley discussed the acquisition of the Veterans Village and gave an update on the changes starting to take place. There has been a logo decided upon and the new sign for "Veterans Village – Home of Heros" should be up soon. The American Flag will replace the current fountain, and all will be lit at night. Home Depot is providing all the paint for the facility and most of the rooms are now painted. Volunteers are working hard. Door dams will be placed at all the lower rooms to prevent flooding during the storms. The last few days have been spent interviewing Veterans applying to stay at Veterans Village. Seventeen (17) Veterans have applied for the twenty available rooms. Long term residents of the hotel have been provided 30 days to vacate the facility. Lots of things still to be done and Home Depot is providing the materials and the labor for the installation of the 6-foot fence that will be placed around the property. Veterans Village will be a temporary home for these Veterans and help will be provided to assist them in obtaining other long-term housing they can afford. The floor was open for questions related to Veterans Village. St. Johns County had allotted funds for the Veterans Service Office to use to help Veterans with bills and mortgage payments, but it had strong stipulations. The funds were replaced in the general account and then returned to help with the Veterans Village expenses. The County Commissioner in attendance, Commissioner Alaimo, was recognized and thanked for his assistance in this matter. The SR 16 project is

now underway, and that facility is hoped to be available by the end of this year or early January 2025. Many services will be offered to all the homeless. Chairman Dudley discussed the plans and events for upcoming Memorial Day Ceremony (May 27th) in St. Augustine. General Coffey will be the Keynote Speaker. Volunteers are needed on Saturday (May 25th) to help with “Flags In.” On Tuesday (May 28th) volunteers are also needed for “Flags Out.” The floor was open to questions, answers and all others that had information to share with the Veterans Council. Next Veterans Council meeting will be held on Thursday, May 30th beginning at 7:00pm.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

William Dudley, Chairman