

**VETERANS COUNCIL OF ST. JOHNS COUNTY
GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING**

26 AUGUST 2021

CALL TO ORDER: Chairman Dudley

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Chairman Dudley

INVOCATION: Vice Chair Quinn

JULY MINUTES APPROVAL: The minutes of July 2021 were reviewed and no additions or deletions were required. Minutes were unanimously approved.

FINANCE REPORT: The finance report was presented by Treasurer John Mountcastle. The Ameris cash balance is \$59,539.00. It is noted that approximately one half of this balance is in restricted funds. It was noted by the chairman as well as the treasurer that assistance was provided to a veteran to install an air conditioner. This was done through donations and use of council funds. A written copy of the treasurer's report was furnished to all veterans present. The report was unanimously approved.

AWARD CEREMONY: Mr. Al Richburg, Director of Jacksonville National Cemetery and St. Augustine National Cemetery was honored by the Council. Mr. Richburg was presented a plaque in appreciation for his support of our county's veterans. It was noted that his tenure was outstanding he will certainly be missed. Mr. Richburg is retiring to South Carolina and all wished him the best.

THE FIRST RESPONDER PROJECT: The First Responder Project was presented by COL (Ret) Ann McCulliss Johnson a founder of the project. She explained the need for understanding and care for our first responders who are required to march to the sound of the guns daily. It was also explained that family members of first responders require assistance as well.

She noted that 20 to 30 per cent of first responders are veterans.

It is the mission and goal of the First Responder Project to provide retreats. The retreats are mostly informal and led by peers. The program will provide outreach both in person and virtual.

Assistance has been provided by Sheriff Hardwick and Chief Alvarez (both veterans).

She stated that donations are needed to eliminate costs to participants and to provide the much needed retreats.

VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE REPORT: CSM (Ret) Joe McDermott provided an office update. He reminded all of the Homeless Veterans Stand Down to be conducted 11 September 2021, 0900 hrs at the Elks Lodge. He reiterated that volunteers are needed to walk the participants through the stations.

He provided an update on the presumptive issues including asthma and more. Unfortunately, conditions at the National Records Center have not changed. Veteran requests for the military records are as much as a year behind. It is estimated that the requests are 500,000 behind.

VETERANS COURT REPORT: John Leslie reported the September session will be conducted via ZOOM as the pandemic is at a surge level at present. He gave a recap mentioning 87 candidates, 42 graduates. Currently 32 in class now. He stated that 13 had been terminated since the birth of the court.

POW-MIA AND MIAP REPORT: Steve Spickelmier reported that the Missing In America Project (MIAP) will conduct an interment on 23 September 2021. The interment will be the 27th in the history of the Florida program. They will lay to rest 19 veterans and 7 spouses.

Steve also announced plans to recognize our POW-MIA's on 18 September. The event will begin at 0900 hrs at Cecil Field, Jacksonville. There will be a recognition ceremony along with organizations present at booths to offer assistance and opportunities to serve.

CHAIRMAN REPORTS: Chairman Dudley began his reports by presenting the need for a traffic light on State Road 207 and Deerfield Preserve. It is at this location our new Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC). He noted the dangers of attempting to leave the clinic considering the amount of traffic in and out of the clinic and the new rehab hospital across 207. He stated we must also consider the state of mind of our veterans having just seen a doctor for any number of critical issues. He has spoken before the county commission and the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT). The FDOT has conducted one

study that did not indicate a need. Now that the CBOC is open they agreed to conduct another study. More details will be provided as they arrive.

Chairman explained to the membership that our plan to conduct a grand opening of the CBOC along with participation of the Veterans Administration has been cancelled. Our committee voted to return to the Anastasia Baptist Church that is the current plan. We have reserved the church and have begun planning the program.

The Chairman announced that the United States Coast Guard Band will return to St. Augustine. Having played here in the past they were so very well received. They have confirmed a concert at the Anastasia Baptist Church, April 4, 2022 at 7:00 p.m.

He also announced that the Air Force Singing Sergeants will perform at St. Augustine Beach on September 15.

ADDITIONAL: Bob Richmond announced that Blacksmith Forge will have an event for veterans and first responders September 25, 2021 from 9:00am to 4:00pm. A lunch will be provided for veterans and first responders. He says come out and try your hand at smithing. He estimates one third of the participants are veterans experiencing PTSD. He is the contact for more information.

ADJOURN: Chairman Dudley having no further business called the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted:

Chairman Bill Dudley

Vice Chair Ray Quinn