

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

**AUGUST 25, 2022**

**CALL TO ORDER:** Chairman Dudley

**WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS:** Chairman Dudley

**PLEDGE:** Chairman Dudley

**INVOCATION:** Chairman Dudley

**MINUTES OF LAST MEETING:** Minutes of last meeting conducted on July 28, 2022, were presented by Chairman Dudley. Copies of 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 John Mountcastle provided a detailed report that as of July 28, 2022, there was a balance of **\$108,808.71** and as of August 24, 2022, there is balance of **\$103,781.74**. There is a \$500 gift card donated, giving the balance amount of **\$104,281.74**. There is an outstanding credit card balance of **\$1,120.50**. The credit card gets a lot of use helping our Veterans that may need lodging. The Treasure went over the majority of the expenses and what they covered. The Treasurer's Report was approved by voice vote with no changes.

**INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS:** Chairman Dudley

There were numerous new attendees at this month's meeting that introduced themselves, including members that not been in attendance in a while.

**PRESENTATIONS:**

**SPECIAL GUEST, Mr. Ed Trester,** recipient of the Gold Medal in May 2022. Presentation was given in June locally here in St. Johns County. Mr. Trester, age of 96, spoke of the recognition and his time in the Merchant Marines during WWII. Mr. Trester left a flyer he made about information of the Merchant Marines and their duties during WWII.

## **SPEAKERS:**

### **CARMALITA GAINES, JACKSONVILLE VET CENTER**

Ms. Gaines gave her military background and talked of her service in the US Air Force. She then spoke of the programs and assistance the Vet Center Program offers to our Veterans. The Vet Center Program is a special program within the VA that offers a lot of counseling for Veterans and has nationally been in service since 1979; the local area of Jacksonville, opened in 1980. The Vet Center was opened as a place for Veterans, especially Vietnam Veterans, to have a “safe place” to talk and receive counseling for what they had experienced both in war and returning home to a society that was less than accepting. It gave them a place, other than medical, to express their feelings and talk with other Veterans that were experiencing the same thing. The Vet Center Program’s main purpose is to help Veterans deal with and get help with the trauma they have experienced. The therapists and counselors are licensed, and all discussions are confidential. Ms. Gaines provided a flyer with information about the Vet Center Program.

### **KATHY CHURCH, FL COORDINATOR, MISSING IN AMERICA PROJECT**

The Missing In America Project is a non-profit, nationwide, 501(3)c organization whose goal is to locate, identify and interment of the unclaimed cremated remains of Veterans, spouses and dependents that have sat in many areas and not placed in cemeteries, memorials, etc., where they should have been. The Missing In America Project is the only organization that has permission from the VA to go to funeral homes and other places to locate these unclaimed cremated remains. They then identify that the cremains are eligible for placement in a National Cemetery. Once about 25 cremains are located and eligible for burial here in Florida, they prepare a full military service with honors at one of the 9 Florida National Cemeteries. The Program is operated by volunteers and there is a need for more volunteers to help with this program and its accomplishments.

## **COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

### **VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER UPDATE, JOSEPH MCDERMOTT**

Mr. McDermott mentioned the upcoming Veterans Homeless Standdown that will be held on October 8, 2022, at 9:00 am at the Elks Lodge. Set up will be on Friday, October 7, 2022, at 8:00 am for volunteers that would like to help.

The Veterans Service Office has made a flyer that details the PACT ACT. Please pick one up if you need help to simplify the need for assistance in dealing with the 20+ presumptive for burn pit and toxins exposure have been added for Gulf War and Post 9/11 Veterans. The flyer tries to make it as simple as possible to assist those Veterans in need to file claims. It also breaks down the Agent Orange presumptive. Hypertension has been added as a presumptive and a blood disease MGUS (bone marrow, blood protein). Also, the locations that are recognized for the presumptive. Some of the past denied claims can be looked at to see if the Veteran, or deceased Veteran, now qualifies.

### **VETERANS TREATMENT COURT, JOHN LESLIE**

Mr. Leslie introduced himself to new attendees and explained the Veterans Treatment Court and its function. A mentor is assigned to each veteran that goes through this course to assist with navigation of this course. The Treatment Court is looking for new, younger mentors to help assist. The Treatment Court is in its sixth year and during those years have inducted 109 veterans into the court. Sixty-one have graduated. There are thirty-five veterans in-flow at this time. Thirteen left the program without graduating (one suicide). There was a graduation of three at the last session. Next court session is August 26th at 10:00am with an open invitation to anyone that wishes to attend and observe.

### **NEW BUSINESS:**

Jerry Hanchett represented Ray Quinn for “Wreaths Across America” to place wreaths on the graves of our Veterans in the oldest National Cemetery in America here in St. Augustine. A handout was provided for donations. The price of the wreaths has not changed, \$15 per wreath, if you purchase two, the sponsor gets an additional wreath – so that is three wreaths for \$30. We need to raise \$12,000 to get a wreath on every headstone. Saturday, December 17<sup>th</sup> is when the wreaths will be placed. Volunteers will place the wreaths at the event. Everyone and their families are invited to attend.

Chairman Dudley spoke of Veterans Day, November 11<sup>th</sup>, at 11:00 am and there will be a ceremony honoring our Veterans at the Anastasia Baptist Church. The Global War on Terror Wall and the Vietnam Veteran Wall will be there. The speaker will be Major General John Haas. Theme this year will be the Global War on Terror – which covers a 20-year period. Every Veteran that served during that time will be recognized. Each of the attending Veterans recognized that day will

be presented with a lapel pin on the Global War on Terror as part of honoring them.

Chairman Dudley discussed the Continuum of Care Program that the Veterans Council and the Veterans Service Office is part of and teaming with Flagler Health. The main goal of Continuum of Care currently is to find housing for our homeless veterans. The Program is attempting to house 9 Veterans before the end of the year. Looking for ten volunteers to help gather the needed information to assist the Case Managers in placing the Veterans.

Chairman Dudley reported that he spoke with Dr. McKinsey at the CBOC about having a “dedication” for the Clinic that had to be postponed due to the pandemic. Currently looking at a date in November for the dedication to be held. A time and date will be given at the next meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 8:30 pm.

**Respectfully submitted,**

**William Dudley, Chairman**

**Ray A. Quinn, Vice Chairman**