

VETERANS COUNCIL OF ST. JOHNS COUNTY

MINUTES OF GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING February 29, 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 January 25, 2023, 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 January 24, 2024, the cash balance was \$168,055.12. As of February 28, 2024, the balance is \$164,691.43. Available cash totals \$176,981.61. Treasurer Mountcastle went over the Treasurer's Report, explaining funds for the Dudley Foundation and Money Market accounts. 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:

ROMONA ROOD, SOLDIERS' ANGELS Ms. Rood introduced herself and military background. Her mission now is Soldiers' Angels. Soldiers' Angels is a national 501(c)3 nonprofit that provides aid, comfort and resources to the Military, Veterans, and their families. Ms. Rood spoke of many of the different efforts that Soldiers' Angels has performed throughout the State of Florida. Soldiers' Angels is among the highest rated nonprofit in the Country as they keep their overhead really low. Their impact is that have had 235 million dollars in aid in the year 2023 to our Military and Veterans. Their funds come from numerous donations throughout the area. Volunteers are their main source of supplying all that is needed throughout the state. They also support deployed Military of all branches of the service. Active soldiers can sign up for the monthly care package that is sent to them from Soldiers' Angels. The floor was opened by Ms. Rood for questions and answers.

RICHARD CLONINGER, VETERANS SERVICE ATTORNEY Mr. Cloninger introduced himself as the Veterans Services Attorney for Jacksonville area Legal Aid. All information of what

the Jacksonville Legal Aid office provides can be obtained through their website. Legal Aid provides a Veterans Services Unit dedicated to helping Veterans with legal issues that expands a broad range of assistance, excluding criminal cases. Legal Aid covers four counties in the area – Nassau, Duval, Clay, and St. Johns Counties. Each county has a local office. There are income requirements that have to be met – mostly low-income clients. Mr. Cloninger offered that he will talk to any Veteran in need and if they do not qualify for Legal Aid assistance, he will direct them to someone else that may be able to help them with their legal problems. He provided his contact information to reach him if in need. Mr. Cloninger opened the floor for questions and answers.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE UPDATE, JOSEPH MCDERMOTT Mr. McDermott read a handout (he distributed to those in attendance) received from the Veterans Administration concerning the expansion of military healthcare available to Veterans in regard to exposure of toxic and other hazardous chemicals, at home or abroad, to be eligible for VA healthcare beginning on March 5, 2024. This will make it easier for applying for VA healthcare without the need to apply for VA benefits. Mr. McDermott expressed what a huge accomplishment this is for those in need of medical care. Mr. McDermott spoke of the research that has been put into place to cover this update and what it will take to apply. The Veterans Service Office is there to help those that need assistance. Mr. McDermott opened the floor to any questions regarding the Veterans Service Office.

VETERANS TREATMENT COURT, JOHN LESLIE John Leslie introduced himself to those in attendance and the operations for the Veterans Treatment Court (VTC). Throughout the nation there are 465 Treatment Courts helping Veterans through their legal problems and the court process. Our VTC covers two counties - St. Johns and Putnam Counties. The Treatment Court is starting its 8th year of operation. In that time VTC processed a total of 154 Veterans. A total of 91 have graduated and moved on, 32 Veterans are currently inflow and 21 have terminated for one reason or another. It has been a successful program but comes with lots of hardship and pain for many involved. There were two mentors in attendance introduced and they gave a recap on their service as mentors. There is a need for more volunteer mentors for the program. A mentor does not work personally with the Court, the mentor works outside that environment to help the Veteran and be their “wingman, battle body” to help through the court system. Everyone was invited to attend the next Treatment Court to observe the operation. Mr. Leslie opened the floor to any questions and answers regarding the VTC.

OLD/NEW BUSINESS: Chairman Dudley informed those in attendance that the Executive Committee of the Veterans Council met and elected two new members on the Board – Ron

Birchall is the new Vice Chairman and Bill Jefferson is the Chaplin for the Veterans Council of St. Johns County. The late Sgt. Major Ray Quinn held both of those positions. Chairman Dudley recognized the new Chief Medical Officer for the CBOC in St. Augustine, Dr. James Keck. Dr. Keck introduced himself to the attendees of the VCSJC and gave his background experience and his family military background that was his influence in attending the Naval Academy and attending medical school. He is happy to be back in NE Florida and helping the Veterans in our area. Chairman Dudley was happy to give the "Big News of the Week," the VCSJC and Home Again St. Johns closed February 28, 2024, on the motel, Old Town Inn, to become the new Veterans Village. Chairman Dudley spoke of the amount of purchase 37 and other monies that will be utilized to bring this facility into compliance for our Veterans in need. There will initially be three paid employees to monitor the facility 24 hours a day. Volunteers will also be used to keep the facility running as needs arise. Community service hours will also be provided by those in the Veterans Treatment Court. There has been lots of communication and inquiries from the St. Augustine community offering any help in volunteering for things that may be needed for the facility. Chairman Dudley and Ellen Walden, Home Again St. Johns, spent time in Jacksonville at their 5-Star Veterans Center and went through their entire process at that center. They helped and provided their policy manual to follow and tailor to our operation at Veterans Village. Chairman Dudley went over other things and updates that will be accomplished to get the facility ready to house our Veterans in need. This task has been years in the making, and we take great satisfaction at the accomplishment of obtaining this facility. Chairman Dudley also discussed the facility that will be built on SR16 and what will be available to Veterans at that complex. He also talked about Patriot Place on Masters Drive, and it is now fully occupied with Veterans in those eight apartments. Chairman Dudley stated that first meeting was held in planning the Memorial Day Service to be held Monday, May 27, 2024, at the St. Augustine National Cemetery. There is a great program being planned and all are invited to attend. 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, March 28th beginning at 7:00pm.

The meeting adjourned at 8:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

William Dudley, Chairman