

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

**January 30, 2025**

**CALL TO ORDER:** Chairman Dudley

**WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS:** Chairman Dudley

**PLEDGE:** Chairman Dudley

**INVOCATION:** Chaplain Jefferson

**INTRODUCTION OF NEW GUESTS:** New attendees introduced themselves and who they represent.

**MINUTES OF LAST MEETING:** Minutes of last meeting conducted December 19, 2024, were presented by Chairman Dudley. Copies of the Minutes 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 December 31, 2024, the Council's total liquid cash balance was \$171,258.50. Treasurer Mountcastle went over the Treasurer's Report including all incoming funds and expenses going out. The floor was open for any questions. The Treasurer's Report was approved by voice vote with no changes.

**SPEAKERS:**

**ROBERT SPETA, US NAVY VETERAN, FIRST COAST NEWS TV METEOROLOGIST**

Mr. Speta gave his background history of serving in the US Navy and his current position with First Coast News as a Meteorologist. While serving in the Navy, Mr. Speta worked in Operational Forecasting for over 15 years and gave forecasts in 17 countries throughout the world. Mr. Speta gave his history of working in Meteorology since returning to the United States until accepting his current position in Jacksonville with First Coast News.

The floor was open for questions and answers.

**KATIE ELLER, DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT, HORSEPLAY THERAPY CENTER**

Ms. Eller introduced herself and gave her background as a speech pathologist. She is now the Director of Development for the 501(c)3 Horseplay Therapy Center that is located off SR207 here in St. Augustine. Horseplay Therapy Center does therapy sessions for children dealing with special needs – the Triple Crown Program. In 2021, the Rise Up for Veterans program was launched for Veterans dealing with PTSD, anxiety, TBI, and families that need marriage counseling due to these disorders by utilizing the interaction with horses. The program provides licensed mental health therapy for Veterans in need. The horses are used as a tool to help provide this therapy. In the few years since inception, the Rise Up program has been extremely successful.

The floor was open for questions and answers.

**VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE, MAC MCDERMOTT**

Mr. McDermott spoke that he and Chairman Dudley meet once a month with Dr. Keck and the administrator at the Veterans Clinic here in St. Augustine. Currently the CBOC sees approximately 9,450 and they project that by the end of year the CBOC will see over 10,000. Meetings are held to look ahead and make sure that facilities are available to continue to provide service to our Veterans.

Mr. McDermott spoke of the May 1<sup>st</sup> meeting that will be held with the Citizens Committee of SJC to discuss what the VSO provides for our Veterans such as the nursing home, Patriots Village, and all the things that the Veterans organizations do for the county.

The VSO is trying to hire another person to replace the one that did not meet the criteria needed for the position. Interviews are taking place and if nothing occurs with the interviews, the job position will have to be advertised again. The Service Officer has to be certified by the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs and the process of making sure someone is ready to file the claims for our Veterans is intense. The hope is to get the new Service Officer in and ready and get the VSO back where Mr. McDermott wants it to be able to aid our Veterans. The floor was open for questions and answers.

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

Mr. Leslie introduced himself and gave the history of and what the Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) does for our Veterans in the legal system. The VTC is now in its ninth year. Mr. Leslie gave an update on the VTC and the number of participants the VTC has helped through the legal system process, there are currently 40 Veterans inflow. Mr. Leslie also spoke of the community service requirements needed to complete the VTC. There is always a need for mentors to help with the VTC program. Everyone was invited to attend the new Court Hearing for the VTC on February 1<sup>st</sup>, at 10:00am in the Annex. The floor was open to questions.

### **UNFINISHED/NEW BUSINESS**

Chairman Dudley spoke of the Military Ball that was recently held at the Armory. MOAA presented the Ball for the first time, and it was a remarkable success. Vice Chairman Birchall also spoke of the past and present Military Balls and the need for St. Augustine to have an annual Military Ball. This year the Military Ball honored Judge Howard McGillin, who is a retired 06 Colonel, JAG. Judge McGillin, in his comments, identified the wonderful job the VTC has performed in St. Johns County. The proceeds of the Military Ball will be directed to the JRROTC programs in St. Johns County at St. Augustine, Bartram Trail, and Nease High Schools. This Ball was dedicated to the Future Leaders of our Great Country. This upcoming year's Military Ball will be promoted in the Fall. It is by invitation only but want to include all that are interested in attending.

Chairman Dudley spoke of the SR16 project, and it is nearing completion. The Certificate of Occupancy is expected around the first of March. It will be a tremendous help to all the homeless people and Veterans in need.

Veterans Village has finally come to an agreement with the contractor and all that needs to be done to help Veterans Village assist in the needs of our homeless Veterans. A volunteer organization is going to paint the outside of the building and Home Depot has donated all the paint and supplies needed to complete this task. The hot water heater for the facility had to be replaced at an expense of \$18,000. Chairman Dudley has been impressed by the support and volunteers that help with Veterans Village and the needs there.

The floor was open for questions and new business.

The meeting adjourned at 8:20 pm.

**Respectfully submitted,**

**William Dudley, Chairman**