

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

JULY 28, 2022

CALL TO ORDER: Chairman Dudley

WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS: Chairman Dudley

PLEDGE: Chairman Dudley

INVOCATION: Vice Chairman Quinn

MINUTES OF LAST MEETING: Minutes of last meeting conducted on JUNE 30, 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 May 26, 2022, there was a balance of **\$108,342.62** and as of July 18, 2022, there is balance of **\$108,808.71**, there has been **\$5,300** in expenditures with receipts. About **\$3,000** more that on events that are all itemized on the submitted Treasurer's Report. Around one-quarter of the funds are restricted specific for specific events. All remaining funds are unrestricted for urgent events that may come up. The Treasurer's Report was approved by voice vote with no changes.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS: Chairman Dudley

There were numerous new attendees to this month's meeting that introduced themselves.

PRESENTATIONS:

Houston Bowles, Chairman, Players PGA Tour

Mr. Bowles is in charge of the 2,000 volunteers that assist with the Players Tournament each year and discussed the "jewel" that the tour is to our community. A media presentation was shown to those in attendance and discussion held of the "Patriot Outpost" that the PGA holds at the tournament for our Veterans. Military Appreciation Day is held on the Tuesday of the PGA Player's Tournament each year. The grant programs were discussed and how each gives back to the community.

Question and answers were held about the Tournament and what it represents for Northeast Florida.

Andrew Stack, Florida Coordinator for Dept. of Defense Programs

Andrew Stack gave a brief introduction of himself, he was in the Air Force for 6 years active duty, an Arabic linguist and spent a lot of time on the ground in Saudi Arabia. Mr. Stack is a published author and presented his book "The Black Hand" as a gift to all in attendance. He talked about exactly what is "Building Healthy Military Communities," a pilot program established in 2017 by the Department of Defense to specifically address some of the challenges that are faced by our geographically dispersed service members around the United States. Helps veterans understand services and programs that are available to them in the communities in which they live. Discussed the percentage of American youth that are qualified (age 17-25) to enlist in the Service, the percentage is low (23%) and needs to be increase for the future of our Armed Services. Standards are being lowered in an attempt to increase qualifications. What can we do to address these problems – get involved. Opened the floor for questions and answers. Mr. Stack was presented with the Veterans Council Coin.

Ron Hasty, US Air Force, Ret. UF Health Veteran Outreach

Mr. Hasty's program, Brain Wellness, was instituted to help minimize the veteran suicide rate. The program is held in Jacksonville and was established by monetary donations to help prevent suicides. There is a 3-day assessment available for veterans in need. After the assessment and the if the veteran qualifies, they are asked to participate in a 3-week, 8 hours a day, program where they are provided help by doctors, psychiatrists, speech pathologists, physical therapists, etc. to help with all their issues. All expenses are paid by the program. There will be a scheduled time in the future for Mr. Hasty to give a more specific presentation to the Veterans Council.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER UPDATE, JOSEPH MCDERMOTT

The Veterans Administration has a new Veterans Crisis Hotline - #988, press one for assistance. Update of the National Personnel Records available and personnel is back on site. Requests are at "high" and being processed as quickly as they can. The backlog should be complete and restored by the end of the year.

Update on HR 3967, a lot of changes and good things are going to come out of this bill. It includes an expansion of health care availability, toxic exposure for presumptive claims due to the burn pits, Atomic Veterans Health Care Act, Fair Care Act for Vietnam Veterans, and research matters. In the process of adding hypertension for presumptive due to exposure to Agent Orange. There are twenty-three more presumptive that they want to add for burn pit exposure. When this passes, there will be a lot more claims filed. Filing claims with the VA is slowing down due to the number of claims they are receiving. More Veteran Service Officers will be hired nationwide in order to assist with these claims.

Homeless Veteran Stand Down will be held on October 8, 2022, at 9:00 am at the Elks Lodge. There are about thirty-one homeless veterans in St. Johns County. Going to visit each homeless site to let homeless veterans know of the Stand Down, and how they can be helped with this event.

The Veterans Service Office is averaging about fifty new clients a month, some never have filed claims. This is moving up to about 60 a month. If you know of a veteran in need, please send them to the Service Office for assistance.

VETERANS TREATMENT COURT, JOHN LESLIE

Explained the Veterans Treatment Court and its function to the new members in the audience. A mentor is assigned to each veteran that goes through this course to assist with navigation of this course. The Treatment Court is in its sixth year and during those years have inducted 107 veterans in the court. Fifty-eight have graduated. There are thirty-six veterans in-flow at this time. Thirteen left the program without graduating (one suicide). Next court session is July 29th at 10:00am with an open invitation to anyone that wishes to attend to observe. On the 12th of August there will be two graduations. Offer was extended to consider becoming a volunteer mentor. The mentor's role is to work outside of the court with the veteran to help navigate the system. Training is provided for the mentors.

NEW BUSINESS:

Vice Chairman Quinn spoke of the Florida National Guard, since September 11th the Florida National Guard has deployed to combat theater over 22,000 men and women from one state in our great nation with not one embarrassing moment. Accomplished the mission and they are still standing ready.

Time to kick off the annual drive for “Wreaths Across America” to place wreaths on the graves of our Veterans in the oldest National Cemetery in America here in St. Augustine. 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.

Chairman Dudley talked of the Veterans Homeless Stand Down that had been previously discussed by Joe McDermott and will be held on October 8th at the Elks Lodge. On Veterans Day, November 11th, at 11:00 am 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. Organizations will have thirty-four tables to present their subjects and information. Theme this year will be the Global War on Terror.

The American Legion Post #194 is having a golf tournament on September 17th at Marsh Creek.

Meeting adjourned at 8:35 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

William Dudley, Chairman

Ray A. Quinn, Vice Chairman