

VETERANS COUNCIL OF ST. JOHNS COUNTY
MINUTES OF GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING
NOVEMBER 17, 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 October 27, 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 was not in attendance and Chairman Dudley provided a detailed report that as of October 26, 2022, there was a balance of **\$122,262.06** and as of date of meeting there is balance of **\$122,873.62**. The deposit of funds this month was **\$5,086.00**, with the most significant intake of **\$5,000.00** from the Jacksonville Jaguars Foundation. 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 had not been in attendance in a while.

SPEAKERS:

KYLE MITCHELL, DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS, PROJECT HELP

Introduced himself a Marine Corp Veteran, community advocate and a father. Project Help started 7 years ago in New Jersey by Mr. Mitchell and his grandmother, Sandy Mitchell. Project Help started off small by collecting clothes, doing drop-off events, fundraising, and aiding struggling and homeless veterans in the area. Project Help later started developing different types of programs for veterans such as Hardship Fund to help with veteran financial crisis, a Mentorship Program to guide them in the right direction, and most recently a Plan for the

Housing Program. Three years ago, Mr. Mitchell started the Chapter in Jacksonville, through many struggles in the initial period, things are starting to come together. On Thanksgiving they are giving out food and clothes to those in need. They are also going to aid those in need during the Christmas season. With the current financial situation as it is nationwide, there are many homeless and struggling veterans in need and Project Help hopes to help. Project Help needs volunteers and financial aid from anyone that can help. Mr. Mitchell answered questions from those in attendance about Project Help. Chairman Dudley expressed his appreciation for what Project Help is hoping to accomplish with assistance to our veterans.

SPECIAL RECOGNITION: Chairman Dudley recognized member John Leslie and his admission into the State of Florida, Veteran's Hall of Fame. It was an honor to see John recognized for all he had done for our country and veterans.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE UPDATE, JOSEPH MCDERMOTT

Mr. McDermott talked about the Veteran's Homeless Standdown that was held in October. Not many in attendance and discussed the need to get the word out there about the Standdown and the military surplus that is given to our veterans. There is a great need to get the information out to the veterans about the Standdown as attendance has dropped off tremendously. Liberty Pines Academy is still wanting to have the event in honor of Veteran's Day, the event had to be cancelled due to weather, and there will be a program on November 22nd at 9:00am. They are going to be serving breakfast to honor veterans. Everyone is invited to attend.

A lot of claims have been submitted regarding burn pits and also for hypertension for veterans with Agent Orange. Burn claims are being held currently and procession of the claims will start after January 2023.

VETERANS TREATMENT COURT, JOHN LESLIE

Mr. Leslie spoke of the honor of being recognized in the Florida Veteran's Hall of Fame and how much he appreciated the recognition. He introduced himself to new attendees and explained the Veterans Treatment Court and its function. The next date for the Veterans Treatment Court will be November 18, 2022, at 10:00 am in the annex of the Courthouse. Then on December 2nd and 16th there will be

sessions held. On December 16th, there will be three graduations, maybe four. Mr. Leslie represents the mentors for St. Johns and Putnam Counties. They've had 114 veteran participants in the program since January 2017. Sixty-two have graduated and there are currently 36 in-flow. Sixteen of the 114 did not complete the program, some are considered successful they just didn't reach all the requirements of the court during their probation and once their probation is complete, the court has no jurisdiction. Some have volunteered to stay. Of the 16 not completed, 5 have passed away. The latest being a 23-year-old that passed due to a drug overdose. Still looking for mentors to help with the program and some of the past graduates are volunteering. Anyone looking to join the mentor program for the Veteran's Treatment Court are urged to talk to Mr. Leslie.

NEW BUSINESS:

Due to the absence of Vice Chairman Ray Quinn, Chairman Dudley gave an update for "Wreaths Across America" program. The program is to place wreaths on the graves of our Veterans in the oldest National Cemetery in America here in St. Augustine. The speaker for this year's program will be City Fire Chief, Carlos Aviles, he is also a 20-year National Guard member. A handout was provided for donations. As of the date of the meeting, we are only about one-third of the way of acquiring the funds to place the wreaths, approximately \$8,000 is still needed to reach the goal. 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. Saturday, December 17th is when the wreaths will be placed. Volunteers will place the wreaths at the event that starts at 12:00. Everyone and their families are invited to attend.

Chairman Dudley spoke of Veterans Day Program, November 11th at the Anastasia Baptist Church that had to be cancelled due to the weather and flooding of the streets. The two walls, the Global War on Terrorism and Vietnam Traveling Wall could not be transported due to the weather. The guest speaker also sent an email stating that he had been called to Tallahassee for the Governor's Hurricane Watch Committee, that he is a member of, and he had to cancel his speech for the ceremony. So, the ceremony had to be cancelled. There will be no makeup day as there is only one "Veteran's Day." The 2022 program on the Global War on Terrorism will now be the program for Veteran's Day program in November 2023. The next major program will be the Memorial Day Program at the St. Augustine National Cemetery.

Chairman Dudley discussed growing veterans' homelessness that we are experiencing in St. Johns County and some of the things that we are doing to help with this dire situation. The most expensive way to house homeless veterans is to put them up in hotels. St. Johns County does not have a shelter for homeless veterans. Chairman Dudley has been working for years trying to get this problem resolved. Homelessness is at a crisis level here in SJC and especially the City of St. Augustine. The City Manager, John Reagan, gave a report to the City Council members on the homeless situation. Sheriff Hardwick also gave a report to the City Council and the cost of housing them in the jail. The recidivism rate is high on those homeless in St. Johns County. Chairman Dudley was encouraged after attending the City Council Meeting and the plans that are being put into place in terms of how to deal with the homeless. The City Council voted to start looking for a facility, home, property, etc. within the City to convert into a homeless shelter. We need to provide a safe place to house these people. After meeting with several people and discussing this problem, Chairman Dudley is feeling encouragement in dealing with this homeless situation within the city and the county in the future.

Michael Goodman spoke of the upcoming Inter-Service Industry Training Simulation and Education Conference held for 11 days at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, FL. It is the cutting-edge technology from many companies that support the war fighter. There are over 600 vendors from all over the world. It is a huge pipeline for training in all branches of the military. Anyone wishing to attend should see Michael and he will help get you in and waive the \$125 admission fee.

Joe Snowberger spoke of ALICE report and how the organization deals with limited income situation for our veterans. He also spoke of a second report, the ENDEVORS report, just for NE Florida and community and wellness center for our veteran population. Also, they are looking of volunteers for the Military Lounge at the Jacksonville International Airport.

Meeting adjourned at 8:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

William Dudley, Chairman

Ray A. Quinn, Vice Chairman