

## VETERANS COUNCIL OF ST. JOHNS COUNTY

MINUTES OF GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING November 30, 2023

CALL TO ORDER: Chairman Dudley

WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS: Chairman Dudley

PLEDGE: Chairman Dudley

INVOCATION: Danny Garcia

INTRODUCTION OF SPEAKERS/GUESTS: Chairman Dudley Chairman Dudley spoke of the loss of Sgt. Major Ray Quinn and asked for a moment of silence in his memory. New attendees introduced themselves to the group.

MINUTES OF LAST MEETING: Minutes of last meeting conducted October 26, 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 was not in attendance as he was accepting a check for the Council from the Men's Golf Group in Nocatee. Chairman Dudley presented the Treasurer's Report to the Council. As of October 25, 2023, the cash balance was \$165,099.97. Currently the cash balance is \$166,336.07. Chairman asked if there were any questions regarding the Treasurer's Report. The Report was approved by voice vote.

### SPEAKERS:

JENNIFER JENKINS, WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT Chairman Dudley gave an introduction of Ms. Jenkins and her life accomplishments including her new book, "Friends for Life." Ms. Jenkins spoke of her job as caregiver to her younger brother who suffered a TBI during the Iraq War and how the Wounded Warrior Project helped her family through this process. After her brother's injury caused lifelong disabilities, Ms. Jenkins realized his life would be vastly different. After he became medically retired, he was sent home to live with her and she was challenged by helping him with all of his daily requirements. For seven years she was stressed with the responsibility that she was handed. After several times of Wounded Warrior reaching out to her, she finally agreed to participate with their Facebook group. During a challenging time, she posted her concerns with her life and Wounded Warriors provided the much-needed assistance to help assist with her family's needs. Their programs provide many things for her, including an Independent Living Program for her brother, which was successful, and he now lives on his own. Wounded Warrior also offered her employment opportunities and Ms. Jenkins is now a full-time employee of The

Wounded Warrior Project. The Wounded Warrior Project has become a great asset to our Veterans that have been wounded and need help. Everyone was asked to reach out to those who are in need – let them know you are there for them.

SIGRID NEWBURY, HAVEN'S "WE HONOR VETS" PROGRAM Ms. Newbury introduced herself and she is the Volunteer Coordinator with Haven Hospice that covers St. Johns, Volusia, Flagler, and Putnam Counties. She spoke of Haven's program "We Honor Veterans" and their need for volunteers that are Veterans. The patients of Haven Hospice are identified when they are Veterans and there is a need for a Recognition Ceremony. Haven needs volunteer Veterans to come in and conduct the ceremony for their Veterans. Ms. Newbury spoke of what the Recognition Ceremony covers and the protocol for performance. She provided packets for anyone interested in volunteering. The floor was open for questions and comments.

#### COMMITTEE REPORTS:

VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE UPDATE, JOSEPH MCDERMOTT 34 Mr. McDermott spoke of the turnover and update of the Veteran Service Officers that have been hired to continue to help with our Veterans. They will be certified and eased into placing claims. The Veterans Service Office is still in the process of looking for someone to answer the phone and perform administrative duties. Claims that have been filed are still running 5-6 months out, or longer. There has also been a large turnover in the Veterans Administration Office and the workload is heavy. Many have been hired in hopes of getting things turned around in the VA. Floor was opened for questions and comments.

VETERANS TREATMENT COURT, JOHN LESLIE Mr. Leslie introduced himself, Mentor Coordinator for the St. Johns and Putnam County Veterans Treatment Court. The month of December will have two court sessions and at the end of the second session, the Veterans Treatment Court will have completed 7 years of operation. Attending Mentors were given recognition by the Council. The Veterans Treatment Court session for this month will be held on December 1st and there will be 2 or 3 graduates at that session. The second December session will be held on December 22nd and there will be 5 graduates at that session. Everyone was invited to attend those sessions. During the 7 years the VTC has been operating, there have been 140 Veterans who have been inducted into the program. Of that amount, 81 have graduated and the last report on recidivism is 17%. Currently, there are 38 Veterans inflow and 7 or 8 of them will be graduating in December. The floor was open for questions.

OLD/NEW BUSINESS: Chairman Dudley spoke of the passing of Sgt. Major Quinn and the expected service for him in the future. Chairman Dudley has spoken with his wife and will

keep the Council updated on the service once it is planned. 35 Chairman Dudley spoke of the successful groundbreaking on the new facility that will be opened with Home Again St. Johns on SR 16. Hopefully, people will be moving into that facility in the Summer of 2024. There has also been an offer made to a motel on Anastasia Island and the offer was accepted by the owner. Once requirements are met, money will be released to update and renovate the motel to the VA requirements. Questions and answers were discussed on this subject. There was an update on the recent Veterans Day Program and the enormous success that it was – the best yet! A large attendance and an outstanding program. There was great acknowledgement and recognition of Sgt. Major Quinn, who was able to attend. On December 16, 2023, the Wreaths Across America Program will be conducted at the St. Augustine National Cemetery. Volunteers are needed for placing the wreaths on the graves. The ceremony will start at 12:00 (noon) sharp. The floor was opened to all others that had information to share with the Veterans Council. Next Veterans Council meeting will be held on Thursday, December 28th beginning at 7:00pm.

The meeting adjourned at 8:35 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

William Dudley, Chairman