

VETERANS COUNCIL OF ST. JOHNS COUNTY

MINUTES OF 24 SEPTEMBER 2020

OFFICERS PRESENT: Chairman Dudley, Vice Chair Ray Quinn, Treasurer John Mountcastle, Advisor Joseph McDermott

OPENING OF MEETING: Chairman Dudley led the Pledge of Allegiance and Vice Chair Quinn offered the invocation

Chairman Dudley introduced the guests present

Guest speakers were recognized: Vicky Oakes Supervisor of Elections and Gayle Ballard of the St. Augustine Light House

The Treasurer's Report was rendered by Treasurer John Mountcastle. His report indicated a balance of \$33,144.10. Chairman Dudley called for a vote to approve the report with a unanimous result for approval.

Chairman Dudley introduced the first speaker of the evening Vicky Oakes the Supervisor of Elections for St. Johns County.

Mrs. Oakes opening comment was to report her office had on this day mailed a total of 60,000 mail in ballots. She stated even though that was a large number we should realize there are over 200,000 registered voters in our county.

She was particularly proud of the fact that voter participation in our general elections ranks among the top six counties in the state of Florida.

She noted that a lot of publicity of late about voting has pertained to voting by mail. Much to everyone surprise that five states vote only by mail and that has been the case for several years. She stated she had every confidence in voting by mail in our county. She also emphasized that in order to vote by mail you must request a mail ballot. Her office begins tabulating mail in votes 30 days out from the election date.

St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections (Cont.)

There will be 10 early voting sites with voting beginning 19 October 2020. She encouraged voters to visit the website to see their personal voting history.

She cautioned voters to beware of 2nd or 3rd party organization sending out misleading information and look alike ballots.

Chairman Dudley introduced Gayle Ballard St. Augustine Lighthouse Director of Interpretative Division.

Ms Ballard began by announcing the addition of a new World War II exhibit.

She stated the mission of the lighthouse as: Discover, Preserve, Present and Keep Alive the stories of the nation's oldest lighthouse.

After being under the direction of the Lighthouse Service and the Coast Guard the lighthouse came under command and control of the Navy in 1941. Within three months of the attack on Pearl Harbor the Navy had constructed a barracks to house six sailors.

Of great importance and urgency to First Coast was the sinking of the Gulf America off our shore. This began the black outs of home and automobiles. Our downtown was filled with Coast Guard recruits as the city became a training site for enlisted and officers of the Coast Guard.

She offered some little known facts about the war period such as; M&M's were invented and distributed to the troops because they did not melt as did other forms of chocolate; Monopoly boards distributed to our POWs contained clues, maps and other information to result in escape; Al Capone's confiscated car was utilized by President Roosevelt because of its' bullet proof properties.

She encouraged volunteerism to support December 8th next food distribution. We should contact her to volunteer. Twenty seven percent of the food recipients were veterans.

Reports followed:

CSM McDermott announced the Clay County CBOC has officially opened. He noted that our CBOC has more than 5,000 local veterans as patients. He provided an update on claim progress. He stated that the process is much approved and moving faster than recent years. The board of appeals much approved of the 100,000 appeals this year alone 95,000 have received a decision.

John Leslie provided an update on Veterans Court. A real success story is the report of only one repeat offender out of 34 graduates of the court's process. He stated meetings have been hampered due to the COVID-19.

John announced the Marine Corps League will host a golf tournament at the St. Johns Golf and Country Club (CR-210) on 02 October 2020.

Ray Quinn announced major changes to the Wreath Across America event for 2020. We will not be able to invite the community to lay wreaths however we are authorized up to 50 volunteers to unload and lay the wreaths on Friday before the ceremony. Those volunteers are needed on Friday 18 December 2020. On Saturday only 10 people may be at the cemetery to place the Service Wreaths. A drive to collect funds for the 1400 plus wreaths is underway and donor forms distributed.

John McGinty indicated that the Toys for Tot's program would be changed this year and he was not sure how it was to be conducted. Collections are taking place and he encouraged all to assist.

Joe Snowberger announced the publication of a new military news and community relations publication. More to follow. It will stress military involvement and impact on our local First Coast communities.

Chairman Dudley provided an update on the construction of St. Augustine's new CBOC. He stated that a mid-summer 2021 opening is expected. Construction has been slowed due to weather and the COVID-19. The virus limits the number of workers that can be on site.

Of great importance is the announcement that now both the House and the Senate have approved the naming of our CBOC in honor of Leo Chase Jr.

The chairman announced our Veterans Day Program this year would not be held at the Anastasia Baptist Church. He explained we will honor our Korean War Veterans on that day by releasing a new video of 5 of our Korean War veterans. They will appear in the video telling their experiences in the forgotten war.

A brief memorial was conducted to honor the Civil War veterans of St. Johns County prior to the monument being removed from the city. Chairman Dudley on behalf of the council conducted the ceremony at the city dock prior to the barge leaving the city.

A caution was provided to our veterans warning them of billing of medication and services might arrive in December. The VA has not billed veterans for several months due to the health crisis. All should be prepared.