

ARIZONA VETERANS' SERVICE ADVISORY COMMISSION
Director's Conference Room, 3839 N. 3rd St., Suite 209, Phoenix, AZ 85012
Thursday – October 14, 2010

M I N U T E S

Call to Order - The meeting was called to order at 10:01 a.m. by Chairman Gary Fredricks.

Present

Advisory Commissioners

Gary Fredricks, Chairman
Terrie Gent, Vice Chair
George Cushing
Phil Hanson
Lori Kiefer
Jeffrey Olson
Lionel Sanchez
David Toliver, Sr.
Kenneth Yamanouchi

Arizona Department of Veterans' Services

Joey Strickland, Director
Colleen Rundell, Administrator for the AZ
State Veteran Home – Phoenix
Renee Dudden, Chief Financial Officer
Mike Booker, Fiduciary – Accounting Mgr.
Brad Bridwell, Homeless Veterans Program
Travis Schulte, Homeless Vet Program &
Military Family Relief Fund
Gabe Forsberg, Strategic Planner/ Women
Veterans Coordinator
Dave Hampton, Public Information Officer
Katherine Harding, Exec. Asst. to Director

Guests

Jennifer Allen, Auditor General's Office

After the Pledge of Allegiance, the minutes of the previous meeting were approved as published.

Communications There was no official communication received or sent out by the Commission.

Agency Report

Director Strickland informed the Commission that many managers are at the Veterans Benefits Counselor (VBC) training in Prescott, but he has several other areas of his department available.

- The department is providing the Navajo service officers with week-long training as a result of their request.
- The Gila River Stand Down held in Laveen was very successful and over 400 Native American veterans participated.
- Fiduciary has had a moratorium on accepting new clients for some time, but hopes to have the restriction lifted in January 2011 when the court has scheduled another hearing.
- Cemetery Grants from the VA:
 - The state cemetery in Sierra Vista now has a “priority one” rating to receive \$1.3 million to renovate and expand the cemetery. The VA will inform the agency how much money is needed to get them through construction documents (which was referred to as seed money) and the plans can move forward swiftly.
 - Plans for new cemeteries in the state have all been categorized as “priority two” for Flagstaff, north Tucson, Yuma and Kingman (in that order). The 80 acres of land at Camp Navajo (located in Bellemont, 20 minutes from Flagstaff) was never deeded to the State. After the land has been properly conveyed, the agency will move forward with cemetery construction.
 - The Navajo Nation is also building their own cemetery, which is completely separate from the state. However, ADVS has offered technical assistance to the Navajo Tribe since the agency has a close working relationship with Frank Salvias with the VA State Cemetery Grant Service.

- **Arizona State Veteran Home:** Colleen Rundell is now licensed as a long-term care facility administrator in the state of Arizona. She has added a new position, Quality Assurance Director, to ensure compliance with state and federal regulations. She also informed the Commission they would be receiving invitations to attend a special celebration on Veterans' Day at the Home. The census was 178 today.
- **Fiduciary:** Mike Booker reported there are 275 cases with the Division. The court has extended its moratorium on accepting new clients based on private attorneys who did not meet court deadlines for filings. The statute caps the percentage of monthly income that can be charged to their clients, which is lower than charges by private fiduciaries. **Director Strickland, Dave Hampton and Chairman Fredricks may need to meet to discuss a change to the statute regarding fees.**
- **Financial Services Division:** Renee Dudden reported the upgrades to the Home that have been recently funded. She also reported that the census was up from 150 a year ago and the payment sources have helped stabilize income for the past two months (there are more service-connected disabled veterans living there and the Home is being used extensively as a rehab facility for Medicare patients who are vets). Ms. Dudden said she would ask Homer Rodgers if the VA could help fund purchase of the chillers (estimated at \$700,000). **Chairman Fredricks asked Ms. Dudden to provide a listing of expenditures from the Veterans Donation Fund at the next meeting 11/4/10.**
- **Public Information Officer:** Dave Hampton provided a list of lawmakers he anticipated would be in place after the election. He also reported that the President signed the Veterans Benefit Act of 2010 into law yesterday, which will provide an increased burial allowance and other benefits (see <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c111:H.R.3219>; for details). Mr. Hampton reports the state budget is still in crisis and there is no relief expected for at least a year.
- **Military Family Relief Fund:** Travis Schulte reports the donations received for MFRF so far this year is \$115K, which is in line with previous years. The majority of the donations come into the agency in November and December every year. Mr. Schulte is also now responsible for VetBiz, a way for veterans to find a franchise that will allow them to become entrepreneurs.
- **Homeless Veterans:** Brad Bridwell reports that of the 9 grant applications for Arizona service providers, 3 of them were awarded (33% success rate). ADVS filed an application in collaboration between UMOM and ADVS, which was funded. Also the Madison Street Project was awarded after ADVS provided support to renovate the facility where these homeless vets could move. The VA Grant and Per Diem will make these two programs sustainable over the long-run. The Arizona Coalition to End Homelessness will be meeting next Monday and Tuesday (10/18 and 10/19). The Commissioners were invited to attend an award ceremony at 5 p.m. on Monday 10/18 where Director Strickland was to receive an award for his good work with veterans.

National Cemetery Land Request

The Commission sent a letter to the Arizona State Land Commissioner and Gov. Janice K. Brewer May 14, 2010 in support of transferring 600 acres of state-owned land to the VA to be used as a national veteran cemetery. The Commission appreciated the considerable amount of research conducted in response to their inquiry, and considers this matter closed until the VA asks for assistance in obtaining additional land. **Director Strickland and Chairman Fredricks will schedule a meeting with Wayne Ellis, the Cemetery Administrator for the VA National Memorial Cemetery in Phoenix.**

Region 2 Meeting: Lionel Sanchez has had difficulty connecting with John Dudas, who suggested that he work directly with Tom Gorman, who is also on leave. **Commissioner Sanchez will have a**

report ready by the next meeting. He will go back to the last meeting in Chinle and see if the attendees' issues were all resolved and recap what the Commission accomplished since that time.

Director Strickland mentioned that the tribes in the area are very concerned about:

- Providing medical care on the reservation itself so their veterans need not drive to the Prescott VA Medical Center (by establishing a Community Based Outpatient Clinic or CBOC).
- Building the first cemetery funded through the VA State Cemetery Grant Program ever constructed on reservation. The site is near Many Farms and is awaiting funding by the tribe at this time.
- Obtaining more help filing claims for their veterans. Director Strickland indicated that he is sending out VBCs in force to help Native Americans file claims. He has also sent his VBC trainer to spend a week training their tribal service officers next week.

Education Issues: Terrie Gent met with representatives from the University of Arizona who are responsible for supporting veterans who are attending school there. She has been very concerned that many schools lack veteran resource centers, especially since learning that veteran students are at very high risk for dropping out. Commissioner Gent wanted to collect sufficient information so that the Commission could advocate for programs that will support veteran students. Arizona State University is the largest university in the state and it lacks even basic support for its veteran students. One particular issue that Commissioner Gent knew caused problems for veteran students is their need to be given preference when they choose classes. If a veteran student isn't able to take a particular class that isn't offered every semester, it is likely they will not graduate on time and may not have sufficient GI Bill funding to complete their coursework.

Chairman Fredricks suggested that ArmedZilla is a non-profit organization that may be able to provide a model to those schools interested in establishing a veterans resource center. Director Strickland provided funding to help ArmedZilla locally to help community college establish centers. Lori Kiefer offered to meet with the President of Pima College as part of the Commission's fact-finding mission and will report to the Commission.

Chairman Fredricks recommended that ArmedZilla be invited to provide a briefing to the Commission at a future meeting, possibly at the same time as Lee Sevy, the Administrator for the ADVS Veterans Education & Training Approving Agency.

George Cushing felt that it was advantageous to visit a campus with a well-run veterans resource center in place rather than relying solely on briefings during the monthly meetings. If the Commission would like to visit the U of A campus in Tucson in February, this may be a good time to also tour the state veteran home.

Phil Hanson sits on the governing board of the Glendale Community College and will find out what kinds of support systems are in place for veteran students there.

Open Discussion / For the Good of the Order

A tour is offered at 1 p.m. at the Arizona State Veteran Home.

Adjournment – Chairman Fredricks adjourned the meeting at 12:14 p.m. The next meeting will be at 10:00 p.m. on Thursday, November 4, in the Director's Conference Room - Suite 209, 3839 N. 3rd Street, Phoenix, AZ 85012.