

**Arizona Department of Veterans' Service Advisory Commission**  
4141 N. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street (North S. Herrera Way), Phoenix, AZ 85012

**November 8, 2012**

**MINUTES**

**Advisory Commissioners**

George Cushing, Chair  
Jeffrey Olson, Vice Chair  
Philip Hanson  
Wayne Krula  
Lionel Sanchez  
David Toliver, Sr.

**Absent**

Ronald Perkins (excused)

**AZ Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS)**

Robert Barnes, Deputy Director  
Homer Rodgers, Assistant Deputy Director  
Dave Hampton, Public Information Officer  
Gabe Forsberg, Strategic Planner/Women Vets  
Coordinator  
Katherine Harding, Exec. Asst. to the Director  
Judy Smith, Admin. Secretary

**Guests**

Jefferson Begay, Commissioner Awaiting Signed  
Loyalty Oath  
Darlene and Daphen Pino  
Pacer Reina, Salt River Pima Indian Community  
(SRPIC)

**Call to Order** – The meeting was called to order at 9:58 a.m. by Chairman George Cushing. The minutes were approved as published.

**Communications** – ADVS received a letter from Linda Stiles of the Governor's office announcing the Governor's re-appointment of George Cushing to a second term and the appointment of new members Jefferson Begay and Brett Rustand to the Advisory Commission.

Chairman Cushing announced a tour of the Arizona Dept. of Veterans' Services office will be held December 13 for the new commissioners.

**Agency Announcements and Updates** – Mr. Barnes introduced new Advisory Commissioner Jefferson Begay, a U.S. Army Veteran who served in Vietnam. Mr. Begay replaces outgoing commissioner Terri Gent.

Mr. Barnes noted that the homeless veteran coordinator in Flagstaff wants to work with ADVS to form a Stand Down in Flagstaff. ADVS Homeless Veteran Coordinator, Sean Price, is working with the Flagstaff homeless veteran coordinator.

Mr. Barnes noted that we are working to fill open Veteran Benefit Counselor (VBC) positions in the Phoenix office and 3 outlying offices. The Show Low office is now staffed and will reach out to the reservations. Laptops have been purchased and deployed to VBC's to enable them to review and file claims. The VA Regional Office is pushing to file claims electronically.

Valerie Williams, the VBC in the Safford office is leaving, which is a great loss for the agency. When the Safford office is staffed, the VBC will go to the San Carlos Reservation to initiate and file claims out of that office.

Mr. Barnes turned the meeting over to Assistant Deputy Director, Homer Rodgers for an update on projects. Mr. Rodgers reported that ADVS will meet with the Flagstaff City Council November 13, for

updates on the Flagstaff Cemetery project and proposed Veteran Home in Chinle. The preliminary plans are to build a 90-bed Veteran home in Chinle by Fiscal Year 2017.

A 4' X 8' billboard stating "Future Veterans' Cemetery for Northern Arizona" area near Flagstaff will be placed at the entrance of the Belmont/Camp Navajo exit on I-40. Groundbreaking for the \$6-7 million project will be in July or August, 2013.

Homer reported that two wings for the Tucson Home are open, with a third to open by February 2013. The fourth, a dementia wing, will be the last to open.

Commissioner Olson reported that the National Cemetery Service had announced a Rural Cemetery Initiative and asked if ADVS wanted to participate.

Mr. Barnes said 5 or 6 pilots are being done in the U.S. and ADVS wants the opportunity to participate in a Rural Cemetery Initiative. This is seen as a good fit for Yuma.

Mr. Barnes noted that the Pascua Yaqui Tribe was awarded a grant for a cemetery near Tucson.

Mr. Rodgers met with officials regarding the proposed cemetery for North Tucson in Marana to be built in FY 2014. The owner will donate the land; 40 acres will be deeded to ADVS. One mile of road needs to be developed and brought to the property. When this is accomplished, ADVS will meet with General Salazar, Department of Emergency Management Service (DEMA) to discuss the National Guard's assistance in building the road.

Dave Hampton, ADVS Public Information Officer and Legislative Liaison, said the Arizona House and Senate met to announce new leaders. There are 17 Republicans and 13 Democrats in the Senate and 36 Republicans and 24 Democrats in the House. There are 70,000 votes still to be counted from the General Election on November 6<sup>th</sup>. Dave presented a list of members of the Senate and House, noting their position and the districts they serve. There are 10 Veterans serving in the 51<sup>st</sup> Legislature.

**Commission Guidelines and Strategic Plan Review Committee Report** – Commissioner Olson reviewed the Management Policy changes. A motion to approve guidelines was made by Vice Chairman Olson. Motion seconded by Lionel Sanchez. Motion carried. It was further moved that ADVS staff may make technical changes to the policy. Changes will be incorporated and the document readied for Chairman Cushing's signature by November 20th.

**Outreach Activities for Commission** - Commissioners Toliver and Krula visited the Yuma VSD office on October 24<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Toliver provided a Trip Report and gave an overview of their visit.

When asked what the commission could do to make the job easier, Tom Jones said he would like to be present and brief troops during the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Briefing. Tom believes he can add reality to veterans' expectations as they transition from military to civilian life. Commissioner Toliver questioned whether this could involve serious attention and problem solving action on the part of the Commission in cooperation with the ADVS Director's Office.

Commissioner Krula stated that the recap of their visit by Commissioner Toliver was excellent. Mr. Krula was impressed by Tom Jones' first class operation of the Yuma VSD office and their visit to the Veterans Park was impressive.

Mr. Barnes is impressed by the Commissioners' knowledge of the VBC's role in working with Veterans and the difficulties they face at the Federal level.

Commissioner Cushing noted that outlying town hall meetings got to be expensive and there was not great attendance by area Veterans. The Commission is trying a different approach with the

commissioners attending Veteran events throughout the state in the regions they are assigned to and using the table top display. A larger number of Veterans are encountered at these events. This is a first attempt to serve Veterans in all parts of the state and they may need regional meetings after a reevaluation.

Chairman Cushing agreed that we need to get the medical center directors, regional office members and Veterans Integrated Service Network 18 (VISN-18) involved and get a commitment from them to be in attendance to field questions if another regional meeting is scheduled.

Commissioner Olson announced that he attended a Northern Arizona University (NAU) meeting and people were pleased to see commissioners out of their formal setting. It increases their comfort level and allows Veterans to comfortably connect with other Veterans.

**Open Discussion For the Good of the Order** - Chairman Cushing announced that he will attend the American Legion Fall Conference in Tucson November 16-18 as past department commander of the American Legion. He asked for a couple of commissioners to attend on Saturday using the table display to let people know we are there to serve the Veteran community. Any concerns the commissioners are not able to answer would be noted on cards with the Veteran's name address, and phone so we can research the matter and get back to the Veteran with answers.

Commissioners Sanchez and Krula will advise the Chairman if they are able to attend. Chairman Cushing will issue an e-mail in the interim to all commissioners regarding the American Legion Fall Conference. The table top display can be borrowed from the VSD office; Cathi Starr would need to be notified in advance that it is needed.

The Advisory Commission has been invited to the Pearl Harbor event on December 7<sup>th</sup> at Wesley Bolin Plaza. Katherine will need to know how many commissioners will be attending so their seats can be reserved. Commissioners will advise her before the event.

Chairman Cushing introduced visitors Darlene and Daphen Pino and Pacer Reina at the meeting.

Mr. Reina of the Salt River Pima Maricopa Indian Community (SRPMIC) said 6 Veteran events are being held with good response from the Salt River community and encouraged commissioners to continue reaching out to the Native American Veteran community. People are curious about the state level commission.

Commissioner Hanson moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Toliver seconded the motion.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:40 a.m. The next meeting will be held December 13, 2012.