

Arizona Department of Veterans' Services Advisory Commission
3839 N. 3rd Street, Phoenix, AZ 85012

July 12, 2018

MINUTES

Advisory Commissioners Present

Peter Kloeber
Arlethe Rios
Joseph Brophy (via telephone)
Joan McDermott
Matthew Randle (via telephone)
Rebecca Villalpando

AZ Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS)

John Scott, Deputy Director
Tera Scherer, Executive Assistant
David Mosier, Northern Region Manager
Joe Larson, Cemetery Administrator

Guests

Dr. Juan Gurule

Call to Order – The Arizona Department of Veterans' Services Advisory Commission meeting was held at the Arizona Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Camp Navajo. Chairman Kloeber called the meeting to order at 10:01 a.m.

Chairman Kloeber introduced Joan McDermott, who was recently appointed as the newest Commissioner. Commissioner McDermott spoke briefly of her service in the U.S. Army Nurse Corp, serving two tours in Vietnam. Commissioner McDermott resides in Lake Havasu City, where she is very active in the veteran community, serving in many roles through local veteran service organizations. Commissioner McDermott was inducted into the Arizona Veterans' Hall of Fame in 2016.

Dr. Juan Gurule – Dr. Gurule presented his work in the development and implementation of an interactive site in honor of Father Albert Braun, OFM. Located in Central Phoenix, the objective is to implement a comprehensive, interactive public venue to provide historical relevance of the contributions of all veterans while enhancing further development to the area. Further information can be found [here](#).

Joe Larson, Administrator of the Southern Arizona Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Mr. Larson visits the Commission from Sierra Vista and is assisting with duties at the Arizona Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Camp Navajo (AVMC-C) until a permanent administrator is appointed.

The Arizona Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Camp Navajo held its first interment in May 2016 and was dedicated the following month. The current phase has 716 sites on about 60 acres. The cemetery is expected to require expansion after approximately 10 years. In the current phase, there are 271 pre-placed crypts that can fit two caskets each. Also available at the AVMC-C is a scattering garden, where families can scatter ashes of their loved one.

Mr. Larson let the Commissioners know that when families are planning for their loved one at a veteran cemetery, they tend to become confused about services offered. At a veteran cemetery, only committal services are available, not the larger funeral service that one might expect that takes place at a church or funeral home.

Mr. Larson stated that many veterans do not understand that committal service is available to them at the veteran cemeteries. He stated that he and the other cemetery administrators provide a lot of outreach to funeral homes and community events to educate veterans and family members that a veteran does not need to have earned a big award or be retired from service to be eligible for interment at a veteran cemetery. He added that there are no residency restrictions; veterans can choose which cemetery they

would like to be interred. He added that a veteran and spouse cannot choose their plot, as the cemetery has to fill them as they go.

David Mosier, Veteran Services Division Northern Region Manager – Mr. Mosier updated the Commission on his region that spans Yavapai, Coconino, Mohave, Apache and Navajo Counties and is home to 80-90,000 veterans. Within that region there are a total of seven veteran benefits counselors (VBCs) in Lake Havasu City, Kingman, Bullhead City, Prescott, Show Low and Flagstaff. His staff covers itinerate sites in Page, Parker, White River Apache Reservation, Cottonwood and the Prescott VA.

With the limited number of VBCs needing assistance, the northern region had an idea to use technology that the department was using to conduct meetings and, in March of 2017, rolled out a program now dubbed “Virtual VBC.” This program makes counselors available to veterans in remote sites such as Tuba City, Winslow, Chinle and St. Johns, to name a few.

The Virtual VBC program has also shown value when the Central Region experienced heavy turnover. Until new VBCs were hired and trained, the Northern Region VBCs were able to offer appointments to veterans that would attend virtually at the Phoenix office and meet with a VBC from the Northern Region.

Since the rollout of the Virtual VBC program, 344 appointments have been completed. Commissioner McDermott asked how the older veteran population has responded to the Virtual VBC program; he stated that it is normally the older Native Americans that are a bit resilient, but not soon after their appointment has begun, the veteran warms up and speaks as if they are talking to someone in the same room with them.

Agency Announcements and Updates – John Scott, Deputy Director of the Arizona Department of Veterans’ Services, introduced himself to the commissioners. Mr. Scott stated that currently the Department is in the process of getting the construction of two new veterans’ homes underway and it is looking like the groundbreaking will be happening in April of 2019.

Mr. Scott spoke to the Commissioners about a new computer program that will be implemented later this year that will replace the Department’s use of some VA software. Agency employees will be able to upload files associated with veterans we are working with, but also important is the ability for the veteran to update their information within that system.

The Arizona State Veteran Home – Phoenix (ASVH-P) recently hired a new administrator, Kim Trotta. Not long after she began her tenure, the moving of nursing from 8-hour to 12-hour shifts was implemented, which is the industry standard for nursing positions in similar facilities. ASVH-P saw \$2.4 million paid in overtime costs for registry nursing companies and set out to reduce those costs. The hope is the new shifts will sustain the workforce in the veteran homes by offering shorter work weeks for nursing staff.

The Veterans Services Division (VSD) increased the dollar amount of pensions and disability income received by Arizona veterans from \$18 million per month to \$44 million per month by developing new processes through the Arizona Management System (AMS). When ADVS first adopted AMS, a Veteran Benefit Counselor (VBC) was seeing three to four veterans per day. Mr. Scott set the bar at nine per day, and that is the average number of veterans seen per day by each VBC. Ninety percent of the claims processed by a VBC get approved by the VA, which is well above the national average.

Additional wins achieved by the VSD include an increase of 15 percent in direct services to Arizona veterans and their family members. The VSD achieved well over that goal and continues to sustain the monthly goal. The Virtual VBC program is reflecting a large cost savings in the VSD travel budget, which resulted in a six percent increase in pay to VBCs.

Approval of Meeting Minutes –Chairman Kloeber called for the approval of the April 12, 2018, Veterans Advisory Commission Meeting Minutes. There being no changes to the minutes Commissioner Villalpando moved to approve the minutes as written. The motion carried unanimously.

Open Discussion for the Good of the Order

Further discussion was held on the endorsement of the Father Braun OFM Veterans Memorial District. Commissioner Randle moved for the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services Advisory Commission to write a letter in support of the Father Braun OFM Veterans Memorial District project. The motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Villalpando reported that veterans are having problems with their education benefits through the Vocational Rehabilitation program at the Veterans Administration.

Outreach Activities

Commissioner Rios has been very active with her local Veterans of Foreign Wars and other southern Arizona veteran's organizations.

Commissioner McDermott reports the Jerry Ambrose Veterans Council's construction project of a veteran's resource center in Kingman is progressing. She further reports Veterans in Kingman are being billed erroneously for emergency room visits. Mr. Mosier asked Commissioner McDermott to remind veterans that being approved for medical coverage through the VA is not medical insurance, as many veterans believe that it is.

Commissioner McDermott further stated that DAV reports transporting veterans for services and the need has arisen for the veteran to show proof of their appointment before being transported.

Chairman Kloeber attended a VA Clinic Meeting at a Flagstaff Town Hall. Among the topics was VA veteran transportation. The VA needs more drivers.

Chairman Kloeber was named co-chair of the Northern Military Veterans Community Network. The southern, central and northern networks meet quarterly. Chairman Kloeber asked Tera to send out MVCN meeting notices of where the three networks meet and the dates.

For the Good of the Order

Commissioner Villalpando reported that the Black Canyon City post commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars was nominated and chosen as an "All American Commander," one of only five awarded nation-wide. Commissioner Villalpando would like to look into a congratulatory letter from the governor and from Colonel Wright, the director of the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services.

The next meeting of the Arizona Veterans Services Advisory Commission will be held on October 11, 2018. The commissioners would like the meeting to be held at ADVS headquarters in the newly remodeled conference room.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:01.