

LOS ANGELES COUNTY VETERANS ADVISORY COMMISSION

2615 S. GRAND AVE., SUITE 100
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90007



United We Stand



Joseph N. Smith
Director

MINUTES REGULAR MEETING Wednesday, February 8, 2012

Present:

Commissioners

Bob Archuleta, Chair
Carvel Gay, Vice Chair
Dave Culmer
Ramon Rodriguez
Stephanie Stone
Steve Rosmarin

County Department

Military and Veterans Affairs

Colonel Joseph Smith, Director
Tatiana Rosas, Executive Secretary

Call to Order, Pledge of Allegiance and Approval of Minutes

Vice Chair Carvel Gay called the meeting to order at 1:32 p.m., and stated that Chair Archuleta is on his way. He thanked everyone for coming to today's meeting. Chair Archuleta arrived and The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Stephanie Stone. Commissioner Rodriguez motioned to approve the minutes and it was seconded by Commissioner Gay and they were approved unanimously.

Roll Call

As noted above.

Chairman's Report

Chair Archuleta thanked everyone for attending. To those who volunteer thank you and he emphasized the partnerships with AM VETS, VFW, and all the veteran organizations, we all need to get all the veterans to register with the VA. Everyone needs to contact their Congress person so they can advocate for more funds so our veterans can get the help they so deserve.

Comments from Audience (three minutes each)

Commissioner Rosmarin introduced Mitch McMurray, an Army veteran and new Veteran Representative at the West Los Angeles Home. Mr. McMurray stated he has 9 years of service with the State of California and EDD. He will also be going to Sacramento to get his accreditation. He thanked Commissioner Rosmarin and the Commission for the opportunity to introduce himself and stated he's available anytime to help a veteran.

Chair Archuleta informed everyone that Commissioner Fred Flores is recuperating at home and is on medical leave due to an emergency surgery. Wishing him "A get well soon and hope to see him at next month's meeting."

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Jay Morales, retired Marine, Vietnam Veteran and Adjutant, American Legion, 17th District, Los Angeles Post No. 8, introduced the Founder & Artistic Director to The Shakespeare Center of Los Angeles, Mr. Ben Donenberg. Mr. Morales distributed a pamphlet to the Commission on "Veterans in Art" a proposed partnership to enrich veteran care, reintegration and quality of life.

Mr. Morales stated that Judge Harry Pregerson wanted him to meet Mr. Donenberg and work with him on this worthwhile project.

"Veterans in Art" represents an innovation in veterans programming that explores how the arts can contribute in a meaningful way in the efforts to assist veterans to recover and reintegrate into mainstream Los Angeles civilian life. "Veterans in Art" will be a proposed partnership between the Shakespeare Center of Los Angeles (SCLA), Southern Californian and national veterans associations, Rita Wilson and Tom Hanks, and the Los Angeles philanthropic community. The program is aligned with Planetree Alliance of Health Care Organizations' best practices standards. SCLA's intent is to modify and build upon the Shakespeare Center's award winning 18 year-old nationally recognized Will Power to Youth model of arts-based and Shakespeare-inspired job training, which has been replicated across the country. The design will encompass a spectrum of issues related to veterans' past experiences and future hopes, dreams, and aspirations.

This is an arts program that offers all the soft skills and job skills development, community college placement, certification, and job placement that "Veterans in Art" proposes. The Shakespeare Center would be filling a void and would bring the advantage of experience in working with individuals in transition.

In Los Angeles the average wait time for VA benefits is 37 months. Veterans will have time while waiting for determination of benefits to participants in "Veterans in Art" as this time can be used as an advantage. Focus group participants said that vets want to be busy and productive.

There are over 80,000 veterans in the area. With at least a high school diploma or GED now required, many of the vets in the 20–40 year old age group will have the aptitude to get a true benefit from the offerings of "Veterans in Art." The money will be an incentive. Theatre is interesting work; there are a variety of opportunities— lighting, costuming, concession sales. Theatre work is also likely to appeal to women vets.

There were several eager partners around the table, including mental health providers, job placement agencies, and other individuals with in roads to veterans groups, which would offer many safeguards for implementing "Veterans in Art." For example, CWT mentioned that their group is a built-in Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for the employer. The West Los Angeles VA would like to include "Veterans in Art" in their suite of offering for veterans in treatment.

Plantree has a strong presence in LA to tap into for program development. The Brentwood Theatre, the ideal site for "Veterans in Art," will be available. Rita Wilson and Tom Hanks have previously toured the VA campus and both are very enthusiastic about helping with the proposed project.

Commissioner Rodriguez asked what kind of endorsement is he requesting of the Commission and Mr. Donenberg responded that he would like a Support Letter. Commissioner Stone stated that she loved their enthusiasm but as an agency the Commission has come under lots of scrutiny with the Enhanced Lease Use issue. She is requesting that the Commission view the proposal and then make a decision on support.

Motion: Commissioner Stone and seconded by Commissioner Gay requested a copy of the proposal to be forwarded to the Commission for their review and discussion before the Commission agrees to give a Letter of Support.

Jay Morales stated that hopefully we'll all be returning to Bob Hope Patriotic Hall this year and his office, Post 8, reflects that this is not our home but the Hall is where we all belong.

Bob Hope Patriotic Hall Renovation – Bill Gelpi

Mr. Bill Gelpi was unable to attend meeting.

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VA Long Beach Healthcare System – Alice Martinez

Ms. Alice Martinez was unable to attend meeting.

VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare Center – Ronald Hamm, M.D.

Dr. Hamm was unable to attend meeting.

VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare Center (GLAHC) – Ralph Tillman

Jeff Blake, Associate Chief of Communications at VA, stated they are making Outreach efforts with Twitter and doing some innovative marketing on Facebook. They're increasing their mental health providers especially with the large number of returning veterans they're expecting to return. They had a successful event on Channel Islands and registered 33 returning veterans.

Mr. Blake reported that the construction project at the combined Primary Care in Building 401 and building 402 will provide a One-Stop for homeless veterans. GLAHC in collaboration with various federal agencies, Los Angeles County's Department of Mental Health, local government, and non-profit community agencies is expanding the "Vets to Home Project" (VHP)/Project 60 into VHP/Project 120, a program developed to help the most vulnerable, chronically homeless Veterans off the streets and into permanent housing in Venice, Santa Monica, Hollywood, and Van Nuys. Project 60 reached its enrollment goal a year ahead of its proposed two-year "Housing First" demo project date. Seventy-seven Veterans are now enrolled, 37 of whom are housed. The successful collaboration between the VA and Board of Supervisors Chairman Zev Yaroslavsky's office administering Project 60 led to the early launch of Project 120, as it became officially known on December 12.

VA GLAHC in collaboration with New Directions Inc. (NDI) and A Community of Friends (ACOF) will host a groundbreaking ceremony for the Sepulveda Ambulatory Care Center (SACC) buildings 4 and 5, on Friday, February 3, 2012 starting at 11:00 am. Buildings 4 and 5 will provide supportive and therapeutic housing for 147 formerly homeless veterans and disabled veterans.

The project will begin construction in early calendar year 2012 and it will be completed in approximately 2 years.

Mr. Blake stated that the VA along with Help Hospitalized Veterans (HHV) hosts a free and public concert featuring musical legend The Grass Roots on Feb. 13 at 5 p.m. in the Wadsworth Theatre on the West Los Angeles VA campus. The free and public concert is part of VA's National Salute to Veterans; a tribute to honor our Nation's heroes and local community. This event marks the VA's first time hosting a concert as part of the National Salute to Veterans week held Feb. 13 – 18 at VA Medical Centers nationwide. HHV, a national, non-profit organization that distributes therapeutic arts to Veteran and military patients is sponsoring this event.

Mr. Blake stated that the Los Angeles Marathon will again be going through GLAHC campus on March 18th and there are several veterans and staff members running the marathon this year as part of Team GLA. He encourages everyone to support them on race day.

Commissioner Stone requested a copy of the Red, White and Blue Report if Mr. Blake can send it via e-mail and he stated that report has changed and is now known as the Shep Report. Mr. Jeff Blake stated he would send the report and/or link to staff so it can be disseminated to the Commission. He stated that the VA was rated excellent in the report.

Commissioner Culmer stated he thought Ralph Tillman would be attending the VAC meeting. He is the service director for the WLA Hospital for AM VETS, MOPH and the American Legion and maintain office space at the VA. The County has one person there a week. He does not have computer access to be able to look at a veteran's information. The veterans aren't aware of their percentages on their disabilities (CPDS) which would indicate if they are receiving compensation. Each veteran representative has to call the Federal Building to get this information which prolongs the process.

Chair Archuleta inquired as to how many veterans do the service representatives see on a monthly basis and Commissioner Culmer responded that a couple of thousand veterans. Chair Archuleta asked that Mr. Jeff Blake

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inquire with the VA Administration on what can be done to assist Commissioner Culmer and the other service representative so they could better assist our veterans.

Transportation Foundation of America – Tamiko Hirano

Ms. Tamiko Hirano, Ombudsman, for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve, thanked the Commission for letting her provide a report on her trip to Washington, DC.

Ms. Hirano reported that on January 23rd she met with the Office of the Acting Secretary of Defense, Mr. Dave McGinnis on what issues are going on for the Guard and Reserve; and trying to regain a strategic initiative that has been lost.

Ms. Hirano reported that more than 30,000 veterans return to California each year after leaving the United States Armed Services; and many of these veterans face hardships while transitioning back into civilian life. The unemployment rate for Gulf War II veterans is 42 percent higher than it is for non-veterans; and approximately 25 percent of Gulf War II veterans have a disability that is connected to their military service, compared with approximately 13 percent of all veterans. Recent tests of returning troops show that 20 percent of infantry and 10 percent of other troops suffer from at least mild brain injury; and over 35 percent of veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, who have sought healthcare through the Veterans Administration, have been diagnosed with mental disorders.

California has the largest number of homeless veterans in the nation; and 62% of all homeless veterans have been diagnosed with both substance abuse issues and serious mental health problems; and many federal, state, and local agencies, non-governmental organizations receive and distribute funding targeted to address veteran needs from a variety of sources. California veterans can be better served with a more coordinated statewide effort.

Across America, Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve is able to reach Reserve Component Service members and employers through more than 4,800 dedicated volunteers. During Fiscal Year (FY) 2011, volunteers executed and participated in 7,882 events across the Nation. The range of events executed in FY 11 included: employers signing Statements of Support; awards presentations recognizing outstanding support; educating service members and employers on their rights and responsibilities under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA); and addressing unemployment and underemployment of Reserve Component (RC) Service members through participation in employment-related events. Through these efforts, volunteers made a difference one service member or one employer at a time.

Commissioner Stone stated that her major issue is that employers are always stating their support for veterans and how they are interviewing veterans for jobs and then they don't hire the veterans.

Ms. Tamiko Hirano responded that this is an important issue that needs to be raised and addressed. She also told the Commission that with all their contacts we can get more jobs for veterans.

Veterans Home Support Committee – Steve Rosmarin

Commissioner Steve Rosmarin stated that the paperwork to process the 501©3 form is in process. He also stated that this year's motorcycle ride will be on September 23, 2012 and will be lead by Commissioner Culmer.

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Report – Colonel Joseph Smith

Chair Archuleta suggested foregoing the reading of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Department Report in lieu of Colonel Joseph N. Smith, Director's absence and accept the report as written.

New Business

No new business.

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Item's for Next Month's Agenda

- Veterans Home Support Committee – Steve Rosmarin
- VA Long Beach Healthcare System_– Alice Martinez or a representative
- Bob Hope Patriotic Hall Renovation Update – Bill Gelpi
- Ronald Hamm, M.D or Jeffrey Spina, M.D. – VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare Center
- Commissioner Culmer will invite two Veterans for March's meeting to offer the Invocation and lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

Good of the Order

Commissioner Culmer; stated he had nothing for the good of the order.

Commissioner Rosmarin; Thanked everyone for their presence and he hoped that we put veterans in jobs. He also reiterated the invitation to have another Commission meeting at the West Los Angeles Home.

Commissioner Stone; stated that Boots to Suits Veteran Program, sponsored by Goodwill Southern California, is giving U.S. veterans and active military members \$50 towards clothing and accessories to help prepare for employment. The program is available at all participating Goodwill Southern California retail stores from February 15 through 17, 2012, and requires that veterans or military personnel show their Veteran ID card or DD214 to participate and receive merchandise. Goodwill is proud to respond to the increased need for veteran support as thousands of troops return to Southern California from their military service overseas. They are also encouraging everyone to help support the program by donating gently used or new business attire to their local Goodwill.

Commissioner Stone invited everyone to join in celebrating the 102nd birthday of California's oldest living female World War II Veteran and possibly the oldest in the nation and; participate in the Veterans' Networking Breakfast on February 21, at the LAX Radisson Hotel. In lieu of gift, please bring a pair of new, white socks for Bea Cohen's sock project for homeless Veterans to be donated to the West Los Angeles VA Hospital.

Commissioner Rosmarin; stated that Ms. Bea Cohen will also be honored at the Board of Supervisors meeting where she is scheduled to be a pledge vet.

Commissioner Rodriguez; stated, "Happy Valentines Day! and wish a quick recovery to Colonel Smith."

Commissioner Gay; stated he was in Sacramento involved in jobs for tow operators. He has a towing school with certification through the State of California. They have a total of 14 drivers that will go through the program.

Chair Archuleta; thanked the guests and those representing the VA West Los Angeles. He suggested that any veteran working five or more years should be trained to do something else that would promote him/her. On a personal note, he asked prayers for his son going to Afghanistan the first week of March with the 82nd Airborne. His second son is getting his Masters at George Washington University.

Motion to adjourn meeting by Commissioner Rosmarin and seconded by Commissioner Gay. Chair Archuleta adjourned meeting at 3:26 p.m.

Tatiana Rosas
Executive Secretary
February 8, 2012

Note: The next Commission meeting is scheduled to be held on Wednesday, March 14, 2012 at 1:30 p.m. in Suite 100 at the Department of Public Social Services site at 2615 S. Grand Avenue, Los Angeles, CA.