



SOUTHEASTERN VETERANS' CENTER ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

October 10, 2024

The Southeastern Veterans' Center Advisory Council met October 10, 2024 at 10:00 AM in the All-Purpose Room of Coates Hall at the Southeastern Veterans' Center.

Advisory Council Members Participating:

Barry Amole, Vietnam Veterans of America, President
Mary Archey, Marine Corps League, Vice President
Kenneth Schweitzer, American Legion, Secretary
Doug Forsythe, Disabled American Veterans
Kenneth Nadwodny, Catholic War Veterans
Thomas Brown, Veterans of Foreign Wars
John Getz, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Robert Richardson, Resident Representative

Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs/Southeastern Veterans' Center:

Maureen Weigl, Deputy Adjutant General of Veterans' Affairs – DMVA
Travis Davis, Executive Director, Long-Term Care – DMVA
Brian Gula, Commandant – SEVC
Mildred Butler-Coleman, Deputy Commandant- SEVC
Dr. Sin Kei Yeung, Medical Director- SEVC
Kimberly Lambert, Director of Nursing- SEVC
Sarah Klufas, Assistant to the Commandant – SEVC
Christina Slaughter, Restorative Aide- SEVC
Jose Garcia, Facility Operations Supervisor- SEVC
Jason Valenti, Facility and Grounds Director- SEVC
Tamara Charles, Facility Reimbursement Technician- SEVC
Beverly Barefield, Facility Reimbursement Officer II- SEVC

Visitors:

Erica Moore, Regional Program Outreach Coordinator- DMVA
Linda Neiman, Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary
Terra Shaner, Geriatrics and Extended Care Services Business Manager, CVAMC- **via Microsoft TEAMS**
Dan Kuper, Personal Care Resident
Nikki Whitlock, Chief of Staff, Senator Katie Muth's Office
Anna Brown- wife of Thomas Brown

Excused Absence:

Richard Doherty, Military Officers Association of America
Thomas Applebach, Lehigh County Office of Veterans' Affairs

Excused Absence (continued):

Jeffrey Elliot, PA AMVETS
Thomas Coreau, Dauphin County Office of Veterans' Affairs
The Honorable Dan Williams, PA House of Representatives
The Honorable Tracy Pennycuick, PA State Senate
BG John R. Pippy, Acting Adjutant General – DMVA
Barbara Raymond, BVH Director – DMVA
Mia Woods, Compliance and Ethics Officer- DMVA

Call to Order:

The Advisory Council Meeting was called to order by Barry Amole at 10:00 AM. There was a moment of silence, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Swearing in of Council Members:

No members needed to be sworn in at the meeting.

Review and Approval of July 11, 2024, Meeting Minutes:

A motion was made by John Getz and seconded by Doug Forsythe to approve the minutes of the Advisory Council Meeting held on July 11, 2024. Motion carried, and minutes were approved as written.

Report of the Medical Director - Dr. Sin Kei Yeung - SEVC:

Dr. Sin Kei Yeung, Medical Director, reported that we currently have 1 full time CRNP, Erin Freeman, that started seeing patients in July and another full time CRNP that will be starting in December. New admission documentation/forms and physician regulatory visits are at 100% compliance.

In the last quarter, we had to reopen our quarantine unit due to having some residents test positive. We had about 25 residents test positive for Covid 19 and 28 employees. We believe this is due to the increase in Covid 19 cases within the community.

Covid 19 vaccination efforts started in September and have been ongoing. Our team continues to work on Covid 19 consents to further protect our residents. As of October 1st 2024, 118 residents received the 2024 influenza vaccine, and 152 residents received the RSV vaccine.

Report of the Admissions and Marketing Coordinator - Jill Alwine - SEVC:

Brian Gula, Commandant, reported on behalf of Jill Alwine, Admissions Coordinator, who could not attend the meeting. Brian reported that our current census is 215; 150 skilled nursing residents, 35 personal care residents, and 30 residents on our memory care unit. We are at a 74 percent occupancy rate. Our capacity for the facility is 292, but we are only looking at a max capacity of 254 because we going to keep our 3 and 4-bed rooms at double occupancy for infection control purposes.

As Dr. Yeung stated, we did have to reopen our Covid unit. However, we are currently working on plans to reopen that unit to the general population by 2025. We have our maintenance, housekeeping, and nursing departments making sure that the unit is ready for new admits. Once the unit reopens, in the event of any Covid positives, we would then follow infection control procedures to have the residents isolate in their rooms or move them to a private room for those that share a room.

Employee Recognition:

The following employees were recognized in front of the council for their years of service to the Commonwealth. Certificates were presented by Brian Gula, Commandant; Mildred Butler-Coleman, Deputy Commandant; and the employee's Department Head:

- Jose Garcia, Facility Operations Supervisor- 5 years of service with the Commonwealth, 2 of which have been with the DMVA.
- Tamara Charles, Facility Reimbursement Technician- 20 years of service with the Commonwealth, 9 of which have been with the DMVA. Tamara is also a veteran and has a Bronze Star.
- Christina Slaughter, Restorative Aide- 15 years of service with the Commonwealth, all of which have been with the DMVA.

The following are employees that were recognized, but could not attend the meeting:

- Dawn Donhauser, Clerical Assistant 2 (Nurse Scheduler)- 5 years of service with the Commonwealth, all of which have been with the DMVA.
- Ava Anderson, Transportation Aide- 26 years with the Commonwealth, all of which have been with the DMVA.
- Albert Ngao, 3rd shift CNA- 10 years with the Commonwealth, all of which have been with the DMVA.

Thank you for all that you do for our veterans!

Report of the Deputy Adjutant General – General Maureen Weigl – DMVA:

General Weigl started by saying that MG Mark Schindler retired at the end of September after serving for 37 years. We are sad to see him go, but we wish him well. The new Acting Adjutant General is BG John Pippy. General Pippy spent 12 years in the Senate and served in a dual status with the Army Corps of Engineers last year at the Pentagon while he also had a general officer job here in Pennsylvania. He has a very diverse background which we feel will be very beneficial for us.

Another big change is that Joel Mutschler, who ran our programs, integration, and outreach for the Office of Veterans' Affairs took a position with another agency. His replacement is Keith Graham, his title is now the Executive Director of Veteran Outreach. He is a retired Colonel from the Army National Guard, so he has a lot of experience working with the state headquarters, which will benefit the Outreach Office.

We are no longer the 4th largest population of veterans in the Nation. We are now the 5th largest, with just under 700,000 veterans. We are one of the oldest populations of veterans and we are not having many young veterans come back to Pennsylvania. One of our initiatives is to find out how we can get all of those service members leaving active duty to come back to Pennsylvania.

The PA National Guard has a lot of service members deployed across the world such as Africa, Germany, and most recently down in North Carolina to help assist with cleanup efforts.

We had our first ever veterans conference in September. We brought in a lot of the Federal and State leaders that work with the Federal VA. The Governor kicked off the conference. We had about 500 people in attendance and were able to talk about a lot of initiatives for veterans to figure out how we can help solve problems together.

The new digest, Together We Serve, came out in October. It is a new face and format for us to push a lot of detailed information out to everyone. Please take a look at it and if you did not receive it, please let us know.

We have a lot of veteran events coming up. Senator Muth has her Veterans Expo coming up on the 26th, General Pippy will be at the expo if you would like to meet him. We also have Veterans Day parades coming up, including one in Philadelphia that General Weigl will be hosting with Alicia Vitarelli and Robert Irvine. Southeastern and Delaware Valley will be bringing people down to watch the parade. On November 16th, we are having an open house at Fort Indiantown Gap. We encourage anyone in the community to come and visit as there will be fly-bys and a lot of standing equipment for people to look at. We are also preparing for Christmas at all of the homes and getting events planned for the Holiday season.

Report of the Executive Director, Long Term Care – Travis Davis – DMVA:

Travis Davis started by saying that we have had the Department of Health and Department of Human Services come out to multiple facilities since the last meeting, most were complaint surveys. All of the surveys, except for one, no deficient practices were found. The survey that did result in a deficiency was on September 10th at Delaware Valley. We had to adjust a policy and roll out some additional education. When one of our homes receives a deficiency, whether it be major or minor, and it involves a policy used by all 6 homes, we make sure to make the change at all of the homes and ensure that they are all following the same policy. The next annual surveys for the remainder of the year are both at Delaware Valley, the Department of Health Survey and Federal VA survey. All of the other homes have completed those annual surveys for the year.

Covid Update: 4 of our 6 homes currently have Covid positive residents and staff. We have about 18 residents across the state and about 18 staff members that are positive.

We are doing really well with our flu vaccines this year. We have given out about 500 thus far throughout the state. We are lagging a little bit on the latest Covid vaccine but are hopeful that with some education and encouragement, those numbers will increase.

Regarding 5-star ratings, Delaware Valley, Southeastern, and Gino Merli are ranked as 5-star facilities. Pennsylvania Soldiers and Sailors Home is currently ranked as a 4-star facility and Hollidaysburg and Southwestern are currently at 3-stars. When we talk about CMS, the Centers of Medicare and Medicaid, they look at every single nursing facility in the country whether it is a veteran's home or not. Every one of our homes are above the average in terms of a 5-star rating. Some of our homes, including Southeastern, are in the top 10-15 percent of nursing homes in their region. If you look at just state veterans' homes and you average the 5-star ratings of all 6 homes, we rank 11th in the country and we are hopeful that we will be in the top 10 by the end of the year. We are so proud of our team.

Our census over the six homes is at about 1115: around a 73 percent occupancy rate. Our occupancy rate for our skilled nursing beds is about 80 percent which is a big milestone for us coming out of Covid. The highest waitlist times remain at Southeastern and Delaware Valley. Our other homes, we are getting people into beds anywhere from 2-6 weeks. If we have a veteran or spouse who is in immediate need of placement, our admissions teams help to provide options, such as admitting them to a sister facility and transferring them to their desired location once a bed opens up.

Regarding staffing: we put in a grant application through the Federal VA for nurse recruitment and retention. If awarded the grant, this would allow us to give a bonus to a nurse currently employed at Southeastern for referring someone from the outside. The person who is referred would also receive a bonus for signing on. We are hoping to grow and expand upon this with things like mentorship programs and other initiatives.

From a legislative standpoint, Senate bill 668 was passed in the Senate. Now it needs to be signed off by the Governor, which we believe it will. This bill will adjust the Healthcare Facilities Act, to allow CNAs to go through a course to become a Certified Medication Aide, so they can help nursing staff dispense medication. This is something that has been talked about for a very long time and is a very big win for our industry. We believe that, if it does get the Governor's approval, we will start it in our Personal Care homes right off the bat. From there, we can determine how to incorporate it into our nursing facilities.

Construction update: we were ahead of schedule up until last month on the new building at Hollidaysburg. We did run into a delay with some parts for transfer switches. The parts are not due in until September of next year, which was when we were planning on being open. We are not currently sure how this will affect our timeline, but we will update you when we can. We are about 65 percent done with the construction.

Next week we have Advisory Council Meetings at Hollidaysburg and Southwestern.

Doug Forsythe asked why the time process to get the beds filled takes so long if we have about 77 beds that are vacant. Travis Davis replied that the reason we can not fill these beds is due to staffing. Right now, our staffing ratios are strong for the residents that we have in house. If we were to open those beds, we do not have enough staff to keep those ratios. This is a problem across the board at all of our homes.

Compliance Report – Mia Woods – DMVA:

Mildred Butler-Coleman, Deputy Commandant, gave the compliance report on behalf of Mia Woods, Chief Compliance and Ethics Officer. Currently there are no open compliance issues or privacy investigations at Southeastern.

The Commonwealth has a new system for filling out death certificates called E-Vitals. As opposed to prior where a paper form was filled out, the Medical Director or CRNP needs to go online and fill out the form. We have been using it for a few weeks now and we have not had any issues.

Report of the Commandant – Brian Gula– SEVC:

Brian Gula started by welcoming Kimberly Lambert, our new Director of Nursing, to Southeastern Veterans Center.

Kimberly introduced herself to the board and stated that she has varied experience in nursing. She has been a nurse for 23 years and she has also worked as a nurses aide and in housekeeping. She is excited to be a part of improving our staffing, moving toward high-quality care, and making sure we are doing the best things we can for our veterans.

Brian wanted to provide some statistics for the council and highlight just how far Southeastern Veterans Center and the staff have come since Covid. Our Centers of Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) 5-star rating is a representation of our overall performance and quality of care that we are providing to our residents from a national level and a state level. There are about 15,000 plus nursing homes on a national level that

are ranked via this 5-star rating and about 700 nursing homes in the state of Pennsylvania, just to give an idea of the amount of nursing homes that we are being compared to when referring to 'national average' or 'state average'. As Travis stated, we are currently a 5-star facility. The three main categories that determine our ranking are: quality measures, staffing, and health inspections. For quality measures, we have 5/5 stars. CMS identifies 7 areas that help gauge how well the residents are being cared for: falls with major injuries, urinary tract infections, catheters, residents who receive antipsychotic medication, residents that are high-risk for pressure ulcers, residents who have been identified for increased need in help, and residents with decreases in mobility. Southeastern is above the national and state average in 6 out of the 7 areas.

For staffing, we have 5/5 stars. The national average for direct care for a resident is based on hours per patient per day. They look at direct-care staff, RNs, LPNs, and CNAs and they utilize payroll reports to make the calculations. The national average is 3 hours and 48 minutes of care that a resident is receiving per day from the direct care staff. The Pennsylvania average is 3 hours and 49 minutes of care per resident per day. Southeastern Veterans' Center's average is 4 hours and 52 minutes per resident per day, so we are 1 hour over the national and state averages. This comes out to about 174 hours of additional care that we are providing to our residents per day.

For health inspections, we have 3/5 stars. They run the report yearly, with the most recent being September 2023 to August 2024. The point system for health inspections is a 3-year look-back. The average number of deficiencies nation-wide is 9.6 deficiencies per year. The average for the state of Pennsylvania is 10.1 deficiencies per year. In the last year, Southeastern has only received 2 deficiencies. This again supports the quality of care that the residents are receiving in compliance with regulations, policy, and procedures. With health inspections, they also take it to the next level and break it down for infection control deficiencies. In the 3 last years, Southeastern has had 0 infection control deficiencies. We have truly come a long way and our staff continue to work hard and help improve those numbers. For a short time, we did struggle in the area of providers. We cannot thank our medical providers enough for all that they have done to improve our patient care. Dr. Yeung has been with us for the last 8 months and in that timeframe, she has completed 736 regulatory visits, that is at least 4 regulatory visits per resident. Kimberly has also hit the ground running, bringing lots of expertise to Southeastern and is already looking at making improvements for the nursing staff.

Report of the Deputy Commandant- Mildred Butler-Coleman- SEVC:

Mildred Butler-Coleman stated that we finished our Wi-Fi upgrade, so our internet speed is a lot faster, and staff can get connectivity anywhere in the building. Residents and visitors are able to access the Wi-Fi as well with a username and password. We will also be getting an upgrade so that the wiring into the building will allow for "more traffic", which means we will be able to handle more bandwidth throughout the building. We are working with Comcast and hope to have the project completed within the next 6 months.

Comcast Cable was out last week to upgrade all of the TVs in the resident's rooms to a digital system. Prior to the upgrade, we had an analog system. The residents now have access to Hi-Def channels. The residents will also have the option to buy upgraded cable packages, like sports channels and such.

Fitch Electronics upgraded our overhead paging system and added speakers to the 'dead zones' in the building. They also integrated the two paging systems in each building, so now you can page both buildings at the same time. This makes the system more efficient in the event of an emergency. You can also page a floor individually if need be.

Our Coates Hall elevator elopement prevention project is now complete. Residents that are elopement risks can no longer access the elevator to go between floors when unaccompanied. Mildred followed up that staff can override the Wanderguard elevator system with their badge if they are accompanying a resident with a Wanderguard bracelet. The only current challenge is educating volunteers that may be transporting residents to an event or activity so that they know to ask a staff member to swipe their badge if the elevator does not move.

Volunteer Office Update: We have 6 new Eucharistic ministers that come in on Sunday mornings and give Communion to residents who can not come down to service. We also have 7 new volunteers that will be going through orientation in November. We have some student volunteers that have volunteered over 100 hours of service and have earned the Presidential Award. The Boy Scouts will be here the evening of Veterans Day to do the Pinewood Derby with the personal care residents. We would also like to recognize the Kulp family for naming us as a beneficiary for the Car Show that they organized and raised \$8,000 for our Welfare Fund. Finally, our Volunteer Coordinator has been doing community outreach at various organizations and churches in our area to help recruit volunteers. So far, she has attended a Daughters of the American Revolution meeting, an American Legion meeting, a Perkasio Women's Club meeting, and has some churches that have asked her to speak to their congregation. We are gearing up for Christmas and our Friend of a Veteran wish lists will be going out shortly to those who wish to sponsor a veteran this Christmas.

Barry Amole asked, with the upgraded internet, if he needs to continue paying for the internet service that they had been providing for residents. Mildred clarified that for the time being, that they still need the service and that she will let him know when it can be cancelled.

John Getz asked how soon the Friend of a Veteran wish lists will be coming out. Mildred stated that we will be sending them out by the end of the month.

Comments from the Council:

Mary Archey stated that when they would go out shopping, that they would go to Boscov's because veterans would get a 15 percent discount. Mildred commented that we do still shop there when needed.

Thomas Brown asked Barry Amole if he mailed a letter to our legislative representatives about attending the meeting. Barry responded that he had called. Thomas Brown asked for the number of the bill that Travis mentioned earlier so he could write and get a copy of it. Travis replied that it was bill 668 and that the Senate had passed it this week and we were just waiting on the Governor to sign off on it, which we believe will happen. Thomas Brown stated that he was State Commander in 2016 and 2017 with John Getz and that he feels like our legislative branch does not service the veterans the way that they should. Thomas Brown asked for Barry Amole's permission so he could reach out and ask for more of their support and Barry gave his permission. Doug Forsythe noted that Katie Muth's representative was at the meeting and is at every meeting. Travis Davis also mentioned that Southeastern does an excellent job representing the Advisory Council and that some homes do not even hit a quorum. He further stated that we appreciate the support from our service organizations when we need bills passed or to 'make noise'.

Nikki Whitlock, Chief of Staff for Katie Muth, introduced herself to everyone and stated that she is at every Advisory Council meeting and that their office works with Travis and General Weigl constantly to represent the veterans in Harrisburg. Senator Muth is also the minority chair of the Veterans' Affairs and Emergency

Preparedness Committee and takes her responsibility of representing Southeastern Veterans' Center very seriously. She also stated that they have a VSO officer that comes to their office once a month to make appointments with veterans that need to address what benefits they are eligible for. Senator Muth also has Whitehall Inn in her district, which is an apartment complex that is dedicated to veterans. She is very engaged with the resident's there as well, helping them establish programming and getting their units filled. Lastly, Senator Muth is having a Veterans' Expo on October 26th at the Oaks Expo Center, this will be the 5th year that she has held this expo.

Mary Archey asked if you have to be a veteran congressman to sit on the board. Nikki Whitlock stated that the chairs on the board are appointed out of each chamber.

Erica Moore introduced herself to the council. Erica is a Regional Program Outreach Coordinator that covers 13 counties in the southeast of Pennsylvania, along with 2 other staff members.

Old Business:

Nothing to Report.

New Business:

Nothing to Report.

Good of the Council:

Nothing to Report.

Time and Date for the next Meeting:

With no further business to discuss, a motion was made to end the meeting. Motion carried. The next regular meeting of the Advisory Council will be held on January 9, 2025, at 10:00 a.m.

Approved:

Kenneth Schweitzer, Secretary

Minutes submitted by: Sarah Klufas