

Maryland Veterans Commission Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, October 19, 2021
100 Community Place, Crownsville, Maryland

Chairman Tyler called the meeting to order at 10:30 am.

Vice Chairman Thornton gave the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairman Tyler Introduce the Guests:

Presenters:

- Dana Burl, MDVA
- Joy Ashcraft, Maryland's Commitment to Veterans
- Charlie Magovern, CHOW, Inc.
- Dawn Leung, Wellspring of Life Farm
 - Brian Silva – veteran participant at Wellspring of Life Farm
 - Cindi Silva – Brian's mother
 - Major Virginia White

Guests:

- James Childs, AMVETS nominee for Commissioner
- Jerome Davis, VFW Nominee for Commissioner
- Bob Hartman, Former Commissioner, Vietnam Veterans of America
- Austin Morris, Senator Van Hollen's office
- Cynthia Cavalieri, Federal Executive Board
- Jason Marshall, Serving Together (Guest of Stan Seidel)
- Anneke Vandebroek, Easterseals (Guest of Stan Seidel)
- Bernadine Blair (Guest of Stuart Blair)
- Janet Burtnick (Guest of Erwin Burtnick)
- Dwight Perry (Guest of Denise Perry)
- Troy Jones, CEO, 108 Organization, LLC
- Dowan Reaves, Serving Together
- Cathy McKinney, Serving Together

Chairman Tyler called on Deputy Secretary Robert Finn for the MDVA update.

Deputy Secretary Finn:

- *It is good to see so many of you here today*
 - *Thank you also to those calling in by phone*

- *I would like to thank the two gentlemen calling in today who have been recommended to fill vacant seats on the Commission by their respective Commanders. The application process for their Appointment has not been completed by Governor's Appointments office:*
 - *James Childs, AMVETS*
 - *Jerome Davis, VFW*

- *The Department has been very busy since we last met in July and I want to give you some updates:*

- *There have been some signs of a return to "normal"*
 - *Secretary Owings and I attended the Annual VSO Conventions this summer and saw many of you at those events*

 - *In-person events are returning, but we are also continuing to attend many virtual events and meetings*

 - *Veterans Day Ceremonies are returning and have been scheduled at the following MDVA locations:*
 - *Garrison Forest Cemetery – 11:00 am on November 11th*
 - *Crownsville Cemetery – 11:00 am on November 11th*
 - *Eastern Shore Cemetery – 1:30 pm on November 11th*
 - *Rocky Gap – 2:00 on November 11th*
 - *World War II Memorial*
 - *War Memorial Building – Commissioner Lane is involved in that ceremony*
 - *Cheltenham – the cemetery committee voted to cancel the ceremony this year due to current construction, but are planning to hold a Memorial Day ceremony next May*

Updates on our Programs:

Maryland Veterans Trust Fund

- *For the 2021 FY the Trust awarded over \$232,000 to Maryland Veterans, averaging almost \$20,000 per month*

- *Since the new Fiscal Year began on July 1st. over \$100,000 has been awarded to Maryland Veterans, so we expect we will exceed last year's record amount*

- *As you would expect, applications to the Trust fund are up, but Mark Hendricks, the Trust Fund Administrator is having the reviews done quickly by the Review Committee. A completed application is usually reviewed within two weeks*
- *However, many of the applications coming in are from veterans with incomes too high to qualify for the program and are rejected*
 - *The income limit to receive a Trust Fund grant was raised to 250% of the federal poverty level to help more veterans qualify for assistance*
 - *An income example of 250% of the poverty level would be \$31,900 for a single veteran or \$65,500 for a family of four*
 - *After Mark presented at the July Commission meeting, applications to the Trust Fund increased – thank you for continuing to spread the word about the Trust Fund*

Charlotte Hall Veterans Home

- *As I reported at the previous meeting in October, applications and new admissions have resumed at Charlotte Hall. The census is increasing and we had 301 residents last week but we are not back to pre-pandemic numbers yet, so please help spread the word that Charlotte Hall is open and accepting new residents*
 - *While you know there were some cases of COVID in the home early in the pandemic, testing continues weekly for unvaccinated staff and the residents remain safe*
 - *We have not been able to reinstate the Volunteer program at Charlotte Hall, but plan to invite volunteers back, as soon as we can*
- *Charlotte Hall has received many very generous donations recently and I hope you are reading the MDVA newsletter, because that is the best way to stay on top news of donations, and also see other Department news updates. Some recent large donations included:*
 - *The donation of a van from the Almas Shriners*
 - *\$25,000 from Crusin' Southern Maryland*
 - *But we appreciate every donation, large and small and appreciate all your organizations do to support the Home*
- *As the holidays approach, there are personal items you may donate to the residents. There is a list on the Charlotte Hall website, and Denise will also send the list out to you to share with your organizations*

- *Second Veterans Home*
 - *Progress continues on the plan to build a second state Veterans Home in Carroll County*
- *Third Veterans Home*
 - *Secretary Owings and I joined retired Brigadier General Warner Sumpter, who is the Chair of the Home Commission on the eastern shore recently to look at a possible location for a third Home*
 - *While most of our focus and energy is dedicated to the establishment of a second Veterans Home, it doesn't hurt to plan ahead!*

Service and Benefits Program

- *All but one Service office is open to the public now*
 - *Camp Springs – located in the Camp Springs Senior Activity Center is not open because it is located in a building which has not opened to the public*
 - *However, the Benefits Specialists at Camp Springs are working in the office, are returning calls and emails and are continuing to file claims on behalf of veterans*
 - *The staff there will even meet the veteran outside to accept any paperwork*
- *All other Service offices are open for in-person appointments*
- *As I mentioned at the last meeting, five of the MDVA office are now co-located in Motor Vehicle Facilities, improving access and parking for veterans (Glen Burnie, Salisbury, Bel Air, Cumberland and Gaithersburg)*
- *Service Program Numbers for the current Fiscal Year are very strong, and in just 3 months, claims filed by MDVA have resulted in:*
 - *Over \$1.5 million being awarded for new claims*
 - *Over \$8.6 million being awarded in retro payments*
 - *Total claims filed by MDVA for this 3-month period: 838*

Cemetery and Memorials Program

- *Burials are continuing as usual, and never slowed even during the worst of the pandemic*
 - *Cemetery staff work in all weather conditions to ensure the proper burial of our veterans*

- *I am proud of our staff who have continued with no interruption in service to veterans and their eligible family members*
- *Soon, we will be accepting 23 unclaimed veteran's remains from the Maryland Anatomy Board. They will be buried with honor in MDVA cemeteries*

Outreach & Advocacy Program

- *Dana and Denise are continuing to provide briefings and outreach virtually, and have attended some in-person outreach events as they are scheduled*
 - *For FY21 Outreach had 1.3 million contacts overall through online meetings and briefings, the website, Facebook, Twitter and the Newsletter*
 - *With the addition of Roslyn Jones, the Women Veteran Inclusion Program, I expect the number will go even higher this year*
 - *The newsletter in particular, has grown with now over 177,000 on the distribution list*
 - *MDVA now has an Instagram account*
 - *Please "like" and "follow" MDVA Social Media*

In closing, I thank each and every one of you for the work you do on the Commission, in the organizations you represent and in your private efforts to support Maryland Veterans

- Commissioner Rueter asked about building state veteran homes in rural areas which lack transportation. Response: MDVA must select locations where there is available space and no cost – the Carroll County location is a land transfer from another state agency.

Chairman Tyler called on Denise for her report.

Denise Nooe:

- Thanked Commissioners who have been accepting events for Veterans Day
- Asked Commissioners to contact her if any additional Proclamations were needed

Chairman Tyler called on Charlie Magovern from CHOW, Inc for his presentation

Charlie Magovern discussed the training program Chow offers to teach veterans to run their own food trucks

- Commissioner Lane asked if the program uses food bank donations and is the program eligible for veterans using the GI Bill. Response: Have not partnered with the food bank. The training is totally free, so veterans do not have to use their GI Bill.
- Commissioner Seidel asked if program participants had to have previous culinary training, Response: No
- Commissioner Perry asked how we contact you. Response: Denise will send out the contact information
- Denise asked what would the Commissioners be served for lunch. Response: Chicken tacos, donuts & cinnamon rolls

Chairman Tyler called on Dana Burl and Joy Ashcraft for their presentation

Dana Burl and Joy Ashcraft:

- presented an update on the Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans and Families.
 - All Commissioners were sent an email after the meeting which included the presentation slides, and a link the 2021 report.

Chairman Tyler called on Dawn Leung, Wellspring of Life Farm for her presentation

Dawn Leung, Brian Silva and Major Virginia White

- gave a presentation on the services provided to veterans at Wellspring of Life Farm.
- Commissioner Lane asked how to schedule a visit for a group. Response: Contact Dawn
- Commissioner Holcombe had the opportunity to visit the farm and was very impressed
- Chairman Tyler asked when a fundraising brick is purchased, where does it go? Response: around the observation room area. Bricks are being sold to install a septic system to replace incinerator toilets. All contributions go to the program.
- Chairman Tyler also asked if the location has 78 acres, would they consider donating land for the next veterans' home. Response: the land has natural springs and the plan is to build a lake and possibly in the future there will be swimming with the horses.

Chairman Tyler called for the Sub-Committee Reports:

Commissioner Reuter – no updates for the Homeless Veterans Subcommittee.

Commissioner Seidel – gave the update for Substance Misuse Subcommittee:

- Commissioners Lane, Macri, Collins and Seidel, as well as Cynthia Cavaliere, Anneke Vandebroek and Jason Marshall have been talking to contacts at VA Medical Centers. They have also spoken with representative of the program Headstrong. There are concerned if only 1/3 of veterans go to the VA, what is happening to the other veterans?
- Dr. Macri also gave an update of her work on the subcommittee.
- The sub-committee will provide an updated written report.

Commissioner Collins gave the update for the Incarcerated Veterans Subcommittee:

- The Subcommittee had a conversation with Secretary Green, Maryland Department of Public Safety and Corrections. She also found the Department has an online manual of services offered for substance abuse treatments. One new thing they learned was that incarcerated veterans are eligible to apply for Pell Grants to continue their education. Secretary Owings also joined the meeting with Secretary Green. The Subcommittee is planning on connecting with a Deputy they were referred to by Secretary Green
- Dr. Macri stated the Subcommittee needs to follow-up. She will draft a letter. Commissioner Collins agreed.
- Dr. Macri delivered vaccinations to incarcerated veterans in Cumberland.
- Commissioner Reuter asked how veterans cover the rest of their tuition, since Pell Grants do not cover the full cost. Response: Unknown.

Chairman Tyler called on the Commissioners for the Round Robin portion of the meeting:

- Commissioner Holcombe has two speaking engagements on Veterans Day. He plans to attend the 10/28 and 11/10 MDVA meetings.
- Commissioner Blair attended Marine Corps League events on 9/11 and 10/3. There will be a ceremony on 12/7 aboard the Coast Guard Cutter formerly known as the Taney. Commissioner Blair will be in the Color Guard.
- Commissioner Reuter – PVA held an in-person event for family and caregivers. It was a crab feast and well attended. A Halloween virtual party is coming up.
- Commissioner Lane – he will be attending the 11/11 Veterans Day ceremony at the War Memorial Building in Baltimore. They will be honoring Congressman Sarbanes and BG Janeen Birckhead. Gold Star Mother's will do a wreath laying.

- He added in response to a previous question from Commissioner Reuter, that incarcerated veterans receive 10% of their VA disability compensation while incarcerated and that income may be used for tuition fees.
- Commissioner Seidel reminded everyone that the MCVET 5K/10K is coming up. He suggested the Commission should think about some sort of recognition for Mission BBQ, which does so much for veterans.
- Commissioner Calvert read in a previous edition of the MDVA newsletter about volunteering at Warrior Canine Connection and she is scheduled for volunteer training. The organization is still looking for more volunteers, if anyone is interested.
- Commissioner Perry – on 11/6 she will be attending the Annual American Legion breakfast at the Alfred B. Hinton Post and a monument is being planned. NABVETS held their annual convention. Humana made a presentation at the convention, NABVETS is also working on an upgrade for a Medal of Honor. She will be representing the Department at the Bridge Dedication.
- Commissioner Wallace – DAV driver's provide transportation for veterans and he is teaching drivers to be active listeners. That includes not commenting on their own experiences, but instead listening to the veteran they are transporting. Volunteer program had over 20,000 hours last year and over 10,000 hours so far this year. They are trying to reach as many veterans as possible. At the DAV State Convention this year, Katrina Barnes was recognized. Two Benefits Clinics were held in at the Dundalk Vet Center and Denise Nooe attended both. They have been holding fundraising events at Golden Corral and have raised over \$5,000.
- Commissioner Collins – Fleet Reserve Association will be holding/hosting the Veterans Day ceremony in Annapolis. Following the ceremony lunch and resource tables will be hosted at the Fleet Reserve Club.
- Commissioner Burtnick – will be attending the Veterans Day Ceremony at Garrison Forest along with other Jewish War Veterans who help with the ceremony. He recommends wearing a military related hat – it sparks conversations with other veterans and is a good way to talk to them about their benefits and also helps recruit for veterans organizations.
- Commissioner Shiffrin – MOAA National Convention was held in Arlington. The priority for the upcoming General Assembly session is Annapolis is full exemption of military retirement pensions from state income tax. The Military Order of the World Wars will be having a commemoration on November 11th at 3:00pm at Pershing's Grave, Arlington National Cemetery.
 - Commissioner Burtnick added that the MOWW Convention in 2023 will be in Maryland.
- Commissioner Smith attended the Equine Therapy trip to Wellspring of Life Farm. Spent time with the horses, as well as Brian and Ginny. Attended the celebration for veteran Al Hintenach, a WWII veteran who turned 106 and lives in

Annapolis. He also attended the 9/11 ceremony at the Maryland Firefighters Memorial in Annapolis.

- Commissioner Thornton – formerly chaired a Committee that developed standard operating procedures for Commissioners. If anyone has copies of the information produced by that committee, please let him know.
- Dana Burl mentioned that MDVA had signed a contract with Maryland Public Television and soon an advertising campaign would begin promoting MDVA.
- Commissioner Killebrew – Senator Patterson will be sponsoring another bill in the upcoming General Assembly session designating the Fourth Thursday in March as Tuskegee Airman Commemoration Day in Annapolis. He is calling on Secretary Owings to again support this legislation. Any Commissioner or anyone attending today who has a relationship with Members of the Maryland House of Delegates – please contact them. This is the fourth time the legislation will be introduced and so far the House of Delegates has not passed the legislation. Please give your support for these members of the Greatest Generation.
- Commissioner Moore, will be participating in the Veterans Day ceremony in Greenbelt at 11:00, then representing the Secretary/Department at the University of Maryland Global Campus. The American Legion's Department of Maryland is holding its Winter 2021 National Security Forum and Dinner at Greenbelt Post 136 on Friday, December 3rd. Featured speakers are: U.S. Space Force LTC Kimberly Myers and The American Legion's National Security Commission Chair Steve Brennan. Deputy Secretary Flynn is an invited guest representing MDVA.
- Commissioner Macri identified herself as the Veterans Commissioner representing the 8th Congressional District. She attended a program at Walter Reed Bethesda. On Veterans Day she will be attending a ceremony sponsored by the Japanese American Veterans Association.
- Commissioner Wallace asked for information about the naturalization of non-citizens who serve in U.S. Uniform. Military.com [article](#)

Vice Chairman Thornton gave the Benediction and led Salute to the Flag.

Chairman Tyler asked for a Motion to Adjourn. Motion Made and Seconded.

Meeting was adjourned at 1:10 pm