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11/15/2023

## VAC COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

### Opening Ceremonies, Salute to the Colors, Opening Prayer, Pledge of Allegiance

- Colors presented by Delegate Gandara
- Opening prayer by Delegate Honeywell

### Roll Call of Members

- Number of members present: 38

### Approval of minutes of previous meeting-September 13, 2023

- Motion made by Delegate DeReu
- Seconded by Delegate Marciciak
- Motion to approve previous minutes passed

### Superintendents Report (presented by John Murray/Assistant Superintendent)

- Governing Unaccredited Representatives Defrauding (GUARD) VA Benefits Act vs. Preserving Lawful Utilization of Services (PLUS)for Veterans Act of 2023
  - GUARD VA Benefits Act is favored by the VACLCL
    - GUARD Act Includes criminal punishment for Claim Shark behaviors
      - Potential disbarment for offending attorneys
    - Hundreds of thousands of dollars per year are taken out of the hands of Veterans and their families by unaccredited entities in return for assembling supplemental documentation and filing claims
      - May not charge up front
      - Contract to receive 20-50% of the payouts for the next 12-18 months
  - Andrew Tangen and several other organizations are lobbying on Capitol Hill to make sure elected officials are not misled or swayed by lobbyists donating millions in return for backing the PLUS Act which is opposing legislation
    - Well supported by those looking to “Help Veterans” but only in return for charging a fee from their earned benefits
  - There are many organizations in addition to National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO) that do not charge fees
  - **We, as an organization, feel it is offensive to charge**
  - Please feel free to refer to the VFW Claim Shark flyer found on all tables
  - **If anything comes up in your Post, please support the GUARD Act**
  - Andrew is in Washington lobbying for the Guard Act today
    - Second trip to Washington this year after NACVSO conference

- Special Use Permit Update (SUP)
  - A tax exemption for us as a government entity
    - Locations currently zoned for commercial use only
  - Andrew, John, and our attorney met with the Gurnee Planning and Zoning Board (PZB)
    - Presented their vision and timeline for the new building
      - Answered 5 questions
    - Approved unanimously by PZB
  - Meeting is scheduled on November 22, 2023 for the Village Board final approval
  - Closing Outback property on November 26, 2023
  - Closing on the Crab Shack property on November 28, 2023
  - County Finance is aware of those dates and our intentions to finalize
    - Funds will be released and we will be the proud owners of both lots
    - No rent fees in new building
      - First time in organizational history
      - Have been paying rent since 1926
- New Hire Update
  - 6 new positions
    - 4 Veteran Service Officer (VSO) positions, 1 Administrative Assistant, 1 Paralegal
    - Posting positions first week of December
    - End of January narrowing of list to 20
    - First interview to get down to 5
    - Second interview to select candidates
    - Post members are encouraged to refer candidates with similar values to apply
      - Veterans first
      - Certified VSOs first so training will be minimized
      - Apply on Lake County website
      - Background check, VAC training, VA training, NACVSO accreditation
      - Will be outside hires – no internal applications
    - Round of applause for current staff efforts
- Outreach
  - Summer and Suzette at the University Center Hiring College event reaching out to potential paralegals
    - 800 Veterans enrolled at the College of Lake County
  - Suzette, Ted and Rachael at Veterans Day event in Highland Park honoring delegate Larry Sassorossi
  - Anthony and Rachael at birthday party for WWII Staff Sargent Robert Lick who turned 101 years old
  - Senator McConchie's Veteran Appreciation Event at Knights of Columbus in Lake Zurich
    - Illinois State treasurer was present to see if Veterans have outstanding funds in State
  - Roll Call Chicagoland meets in Libertyville to help Veteran employment
  - John and Allan taught E-6/E-9's at Great Lakes Naval Base and FHCC about VACLK benefits
- **Please turn in Delegate forms by March 1, 2024**
- Budget was approved unanimously by Lake County government
  - Andrew spearheaded improvements in funding
  - Thank you to everyone who helped
  - 5.4 Million dollars for staff, capital improvements, programs, and services

- Veterans Day Events
  - Andrew was at CLC to give Congressman Schnieder an award for his efforts on behalf of Veterans
  - John and Jonathan participated at Lindenhurst's events
- Offices at Lovell
  - Still finishing up in the offices of Building 135
  - Rooms 106 and 107 have furniture, phones, scanners and computers
    - Had some water damage
    - Finishing decoration
    - Some of the staff have gotten keys
  - Due to staffing constraints, we anticipate opening in early 2024
  - Thank you for those who fought for us to open up at that location
- Motion to pass the Superintendent's Report made by Delegate Marciciak
- Seconded by Delegate Honeywell
- Motion to approve passed

**Public Comment**

- None

**Unfinished Business**

- None

**New Business**

- None

**Delegate Reports**

Delegate Peacy (Post 281):

- Post 281 held a Veterans Day Parade and ceremony honoring Veterans

Delegate Duncan (Post 865):

- On September 30, 2023 Zion-Benton American Legion Post 865 and Gurnee American Legion Post 771 supported the Ansel Brainerd Cook Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution to provide a Final Salute for three Army Veterans buried in unmarked graves at Mount Rest Cemetery. Two were World War II Veterans and the third was a Korean War Veteran. Post 771 provided the Color Guard. Post 865 provided the Rifle Squad, Flag Folding Detail, Bugler, and Chaplain. Also, the Post's Food Trailer provided food concessions following the ceremony
- On November 10, 2023, the Post supported Veterans Day events at Zion Benton High School, Lake County Christian Academy, and Prairie Trail School

Delegate Castella (Post 911):

- Post 911 purchased two tables for the Veterans Path to Hope Gala on September 29, 2023
- Post 911 donated \$5000.00 to the Wauconda Path of Honor which will connect the Wauconda Veterans Memorial to the Wauconda 911 Memorial and purchase a bench on the path. Dedication is to be held November 17, 2023
- On November 11, 2023 Wauconda Post 911 hosted a dinner to raise funds for Veterans Path to Hope and American Legion 2<sup>nd</sup> Division Gifts to the Yanks Program
- On Veterans Day:
  - Presentation of the Wauconda Main Street Banners for Veterans to Veterans or their families of the Veterans. About 20 Veterans dating back to the Civil War were honored
  - U.S. Flag Retirement and Disposal ceremony with Cub Scouts & Scouts
  - Fund raiser dinner
  - Sent 5 speakers to Wauconda schools on November 10, 2023
- Breakfast for 50 Great Lakes Naval Training Center Recruits on December 10, 2023 at Wauconda Post 911

Delegate Rigsby (Post 7448):

- Breakfast: First Sunday of the month at the Post 0800–1100
- On December 9, 2023-Army/Navy game party 1400
- On Dec 16, 2023–Sailors' Christmas Party
- On January 1, 2024–Bears/Packers Game & chili cook-off
- Meat raffles will begin in January on the 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday of the month
- VFW 5<sup>th</sup> District Meeting – VFW 4308 Lake Villa on November 18, 2023
- 0900 Breakfast & 1000 hrs. Meeting begins
- Operation Christmas Cheer for ALL Vets Lovell FHCC

Delegate Lopez (Military Order of the World Wars [MOWW] Chicago Chapter 082):

- Veterans Day events with Senator Dan McConchie, Saddlebrook Farms Veterans Group, Mundelein High School Veterans Day Appreciation Day, Diamond Lake High School
- MOWW Meetings:
  - September 24, 2023–Doug Wallace was a guest speaker who gave a Ukraine update
  - November 5, 2023–Had good attendance for joint meeting with Reserve Organization of America (ROA), Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) and Association of the United States Army (ASUA). AUSA is now in partnership with MOWW. The guest speaker was Helen Buss who is working with the Humana Tricare Program
- MOWW Patriotism Program-Installed Nicholas Konz, Senator Dan McConchie, Humana Rep Helen Buss, Alexandria Rios-Taylor, Mark Myers, Hector Gonzalez, Dr. Geraldine Decker
- Veterans Coffee Get Together in Wauconda, IL at Honeyhill Cafe–Every Monday 13:00 – 15:00

Delegate Dutkovic Sr. (ROA Ft. Sheridan Chapter 48):

- Held our last meeting of 2023
- Next Meeting is February 24, 2024 at Dover Straits in Mundelein, IL
- Coalition with AUSA, ROA, MOWW is only path to success these days!! Encourage younger members to continue!!

Delegate Honeywell (Post 2486 and District 5):

Post 2486 Announcements:

- Post Commander Honeywell attended the First Annual Veterans Day Appreciation Event, presented by the Diamond Lake Elementary School, Mundelein, IL. The students (preschool-2<sup>nd</sup> Grade) sang songs for the Veterans and their family in attendance. It was well attended
- Commander Honeywell and other VFW members attended the Veterans Day Reception hosted by Congressman Brad Schneider, at CLC Campus in Grayslake, IL. Many other veteran organizations were in attendance to hear the speakers
- On Saturday, November 11, 2023, 10:30am-11:30am, Commander Honeywell participated in the Waukegan Veterans Day Parade and Ceremony. She marched as a member of the Lake County Composite Squadron IL-042, of the Civil Air Patrol, which meets at Campbell Airport, Grayslake on Tuesday night, 7:00-9:00 pm weekly. The VFW supports the CAP Cadet Program, which provides our Youth with experiences, opportunities, and training that fosters patriotism, service to others, and builds character. They are our future leaders

VFW District 5 Announcements:

- Voice Of Democracy (VOD), Patriot's Pen (PP), Teacher Of The Year (TOY), Employer Of The Year (EOY) Scholarships-Deadline of entries to the Posts for judging ended October 31, 2023
- VOD, a HS Auditory Contest, PP, a Middle School written Essay, and entries for the TOY, and EOY Programs are being judged on the Post level. The Post winners are now advancing to the district level for judging. The District Winners will advance to VFW Dept. IL judging by the end of December 2023. The VOD National Winner receives a \$35,000. Scholarship to pursue their Higher Education goals. The Patriots Pen National 1<sup>st</sup> Place Winner gets \$5,000. Scholarship. District Winners will be announced at the VOD Awards Dinner on January 6, 2024, Time To Be Determined, at the Sequoia VFW Post 4551, in Antioch, IL
- Operation Christmas Cheer (OCC) is a VFW District 5 Annual Program. Each year the VFW members and community volunteers pack 250 boxes filled with gifts and treats to be distributed to the hospitalized Veterans at Lovell, FHCC in North Chicago. On Saturday, December 9, 2023, we gather to pack the boxes. We will be at the Fox River VFW Post 4600, McHenry, IL from 8am -12 noon. Waukegan JROTC will assist. On Monday, December 11, 2023, the boxes will be delivered to the VA/Lovell FHCC Campus Bldg. 135 at 10 am. VA Staff will distribute the gifts to the Veterans. We will not be having in-person contact with the Veterans this year. Volunteers are needed to shop for items (250), pack boxes, and to drive the truck to Lovell, FHCC for delivery. OCC Donation Letters are available to Donors for Tax purposes. Contact – Commander Mathius Cater, OCC Chair at (847) 404-2668 or Asst. OCC Chair George Gandara at (224) 515-6527

Delegate Voight (Post 8741):

- Provided 6 Firing Squads for military funerals at Fort Sheridan
- Presented 2 Color Guards on Veterans Day on November 10, 2023: Mundelein High School Breakfast and Congressman Schneider's breakfast at CLC
- On Monday, November 13, 2023, St Mary of Vernon Men's Club Veterans Day program, MOH recipient Al Lynch, who was the speaker, presented colors
- Completed our VOD, PP essays, and boxes for collecting winter clothing in Libertyville

### Delegate Schultz (Post 1247):

- Post 1247 supported the Vernon Hills Police Department and Operation Blue Line for the Front Line at the Jim Heier Fishing Derby for Inpatient and residents of Lovell FHCC on June 25, 2023
- Post 1247 held its 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Support the Hero's Golf Outing on August 26, 2023. Proceeds are used to fund philanthropic efforts
- Post 1247 conducted its first Monthly Bingo event of the season in October. These events are held the first Thursday of the month October through May at the Vernon Hills Golf Course beginning at 6:30 PM of the First Thursday of the month
- Post 1247 presented the colors at the Vernon Hills High School Varsity Football for Military Appreciation Day on October 13, 2023
- Post 1247, in partnership with the Village of Vernon Hills, recruited 10 new candidates and counting for the 2024 Service Honors Program. This is the program where banners are created and hung throughout the Village honoring both Active Duty and Veterans for their service
- Post 1247 acquired a used motorized wheelchair, refurbished it and presented it to a fellow Legion member
- Post 1247 participated in 3 Veterans Day weekend events:
  - Rifle Team at Wheeling AMVETS Post 66
  - Breakfast honorees at Vernon Hills Hawthorne Middle School South Breakfast and concert
  - Honoring Veterans at the Victory Center Retirement Community
- Post 1247 is working with Green Oaks Mundelein Libertyville Vernon Hills (GMLV) Chamber of Commerce supporting the Midwest Veterans Closet Annual Winter Clothing Drive as a collection and transportation agent

### Closing Remarks by President Nick Konz and Assistant Superintendent John Murray

- Delegate Fergal Gallagher for the Grayslake Post passed away recently, and the President asked he be included in the closing prayer
- Importance of the Delegate role
  - Please take Elderwerks books and Claim Shark flyer on tables
  - Please direct clients to our office
  - Please push information back out to your members and bring them to us
    - Business cards to take to Post located at exit
  - Please refer people to our website
    - Veteran Business Owners listed

### Motion to Adjourn

- Motion to adjourn made by Delegate Dereu
- Seconded by Delegate Honeywell
- Motion to adjourn passed

**Next meeting will be held on March 20, 2024, at the American Legion Post, Gurnee**