



## VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes

April 16, 2015

### I. Call to Order – Don Beasley, Chairman

The April 16, 2015, meeting of the Veterans Affairs Commission was called to order by Chairman Don Beasley at 9:08am. The meeting was held at the Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs (LDVA) Administrative Office, 602 N. Fifth Street, Baton Rouge. The pledge of allegiance was recited in unison, followed by prayer by Commissioner Carroll Knott. Roll was called by the Chairman. Commissioner Lee Richard was absent from the meeting due to a prior commitment.

**Commissioners present:** Don Beasley, Rudy Bourg, Sr., Bill Detweiler, Russell Henry, Tom Green, Carroll Knott, Richard Garner, and Wyatt Lobrano

**LDVA Staff:** David LaCerte, Secretary; Dustin Guy, Human Resources Director; Lisa Bruhl, Deputy Assistant Secretary/Homes; Robin Keller, Communications Director; Elizabeth Ellington, Public Information Officer; and Charmagne Scott, Executive Assistant

**Guests:** Mrs. Betty Garner; Mrs. Mary Henry

### II. Introduction of New Commissioners

Mr. Beasley formally introduced and welcomed Mr. Tom Green and Mr. Wyatt Lobrano to the Commission. They were appointed by Governor Jindal on October 24, 2014. Mr. Green is a former member of the U.S. Marine Corps and currently serves as the Marine Corps League (MCL) Commandant of the Acadiana Detachment and Commander of the Acadiana Honor Guard. Mr. Lobrano is a retired U.S. Air Force veteran and currently serves as Chief of Staff of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Department of Louisiana.

### III. Approval of September 11, 2014, Minutes

The September 11, 2014, meeting minutes had been distributed to the Commissioners for review prior to the April 16<sup>th</sup> meeting. A motion was made by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Mr. Detweiler, to approve the minutes as distributed. The motion passed.

### IV. Division Reports

Human Resources (HR)/Fiscal. Mr. Guy reviewed the standard handout showing the vacancies within the Administrative Program and the five State Veterans Homes (SVHs) as

of April 6, 2015. Vacancies in the Administrative Program totaled 14 and the SVHs' vacancies totaled 49.

In the absence of Ms. Stephanie Wade, Chief Fiscal Officer, Mr. Guy reviewed the standard handout of the department's FY 2014-2015 operating budget as of April 2, 2015. Approximately 72.1% (\$43,671,433) had been expended. Mr. Guy stated that all numbers for each budget unit were on target and there were no budgetary issues.

A motion was made by Mr. Detweiler, seconded by Mr. Bourg, to accept the Human Resources and Fiscal reports as presented. The motion passed.

State Veterans Homes (SVHs). Ms. Bruhl briefed on her standard consolidated report that had been provided to the Commissioners for review prior to the meeting. She highlighted activities at each facility since the last meeting.

#### Northeast LA Veterans Home/Monroe

- The facility is currently 93% occupied. A VA survey was conducted in November 2014 and a plan of correction for cited issues has been approved by VA.

#### Northwest LA Veterans Home/Bossier City

- The facility is currently 89% occupied.
- There were 19 admissions last month.
- Department of Health & Hospitals (DHH) conducted its annual survey in January; the facility received a deficiency-free report.

#### Southwest LA Veterans Home/Jennings

- The facility is currently 95% occupied.
- Construction has begun on a 29x40 covered pavilion, funded by the Louisiana Elk's Lodge, to be used for outdoor activities. Once completed, a dedication date will be scheduled.
- Plumbing work began on March 28, 2015, in preparation for the chapel expansion project. Once completed, a re-bid for the expansion project will begin.

#### LA Veterans Home/Jackson

- The facility is currently 84% occupied.
- The annual Family & Friends Picnic was held on March 27 and was very well attended.
- A computer lab has been installed in the Activities annex and facility-wide WI-FI is now accessible to all residents and visitors.

### Southeast LA Veterans Home/Reserve

- The facility is currently 96% occupied.
- A VA survey was conducted last month; the final report is pending. DHH conducted its survey in October 2014; the facility received a deficiency-free report.

A motion was made by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Mr. Henry to accept the SVHs report as presented. The motion passed.

State Cemeteries. Via handouts, Secretary LaCerte reported the NWLA Veterans Cemetery/Keithville had a total of 217 interments (182 veterans, 35 spouses) for FY 2014/2015, as of March 31, 2015. As of March 18, 2015, the SELA Veterans Cemetery/Slidell had a total of 293 interments (259 veterans, 34 spouses) since its official opening in June 2014. He briefly commented on a recent septic tank issue at the Keithville facility that is currently being addressed and increased requests for burials at the Slidell cemetery.

The NELA Veterans Cemetery/Rayville project is proceeding in the construction phase. Structures are currently going up. The projected completion date is early January 2016, weather permitting. There has been no movement on the proposed cemetery for southwest Louisiana (Acadiana area) because current federal VA regulations regarding a 75 mile radius between cemeteries (specifically the Central LA Veterans Cemetery/Leesville) prevent their participation in a construction grant.

A motion was made by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Mr. Knott, to accept the State Cemeteries report as presented. The motion passed.

Contact Assistance/MFA Fund. No report was submitted by Mr. Alfred Leger, Deputy Assistant Secretary/Benefits, for the Contact Assistance division, but a handout was provided on the current balance for the Military Family Assistance Fund, reviewed by Secretary LaCerte. The current balance as of April 13, 2015, was \$654,690.38. Donations to date for this current fiscal year totaled \$52,247.18, and expenditures totaled \$19,037.24. Three need-based claims and one Wounded Warrior claim were paid.

A motion was made by Mr. Detweiler, seconded by Mr. Bourg, to accept the Military Family Assistance Fund report as presented. The motion passed.

Public Relations/Marketing. Ms. Keller reviewed a handout of current and upcoming LDVA events and other public relations information.

The Louisiana Women Veterans Day at the State Capitol has been rescheduled for June 9. Vendors from the federal VA, LDVA, VetCenter, Brother Sister Service Dogs, Louisiana Workforce Commission, Louisiana Women Veterans, and the USS Kidd will participate. State Representative Regina Barrow will also present a House Concurrent Resolution honoring and recognizing the contributions of Louisiana's women veterans.

The social media promotion (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, etc.) of the Veterans Assistance Counselors (VACs) continues to be a tremendous success.

Plans are underway for Secretary LaCerte to tour the state and brief on proposed legislation during the 2015 Regular Session affecting active duty military, veterans, and the LDVA budget. Targeted groups will be veterans' service organizations, parish councils and/or commissions, Chambers of Commerce, etc.

A more detailed status of the Northeast Louisiana Veterans Cemetery in Rayville was provided. All dirt work has been completed; the underground storm drainage is in place; and the foundation has been poured for the Administrative and Maintenance buildings and the committal shelter. The curb, gutter, and asphalt for the roadway will be installed soon. The underground crypts are scheduled for installation no later than June 2015.

Awareness continues to increase via editorial and media interviews in regards to the federal VA healthcare clinics in the Acadiana area and slow payments of healthcare bills.

A motion was made by Mr. Knott, seconded by Mr. Detweiler to accept the Public Relations/Marketing report as presented. The motion passed.

## **V. Other Matters**

Mr. Beasley commented on the emailed correspondence sent to all Commissioners from former Commissioner Precilla Wilkewitz regarding accusations of inappropriate use of funds donated to the Disabled Veterans National Foundation (DVNF) while she served as President and her subsequent resignation from the VA Commission. Within the email, Mrs. Wilkewitz included a copy of a letter from the Copilevitz & Canter Firm that clarified she served as a DVNF volunteer and was only compensated on a per diem basis for attendance at board meetings and other related meetings. Mrs. Wilkewitz also mentioned in her email that she resigned from the VA Commission and the USS Kidd Commission because of the care needed for her husband during his time of serious illness. Secretary LaCerte commented that no one was specifically accusing Mrs. Wilkewitz of any wrongdoing, but during her tenure as DVNF President, there were bad transactions by DVNF in the handling of monies raised through its fundraising efforts.

A brief discussion was held on the lack of minority representation and representatives from other veterans service organizations on the VA Commission. It was noted that Sulanda Lonnelle, an African American female veteran, was not re-appointed to the Commission. Some of the Commissioners stated they have received comments regarding this matter and would like to review the nomination process at a later meeting.

Secretary LaCerte commented that the LDVA should be fine during the upcoming legislative session in spite of the current state's budgetary concerns. He also mentioned that LDVA was the only agency that did not have to implement a layoff plan.

## **VI. Adjournment**

There being no further business to be brought before the Veterans Affairs Commission, a motion was made by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Mr. Henry, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed and the meeting adjourned at 10:10am.

/s/ Don A. Beasley, Chairman

/s/ David LaCerte, Secretary

06/25/2015

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Date of Approval

*Minutes submitted by Charmagne Scott, Executive Assistant. Copies of all handouts are filed with the Commission minutes and are available upon request.*