



## VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes  
February 15, 2012

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

The regular meeting of the Veterans Affairs Commission was called to order by Don Beasley, Chairman, at 11:50 a.m., on Wednesday, February 15, 2012. The meeting was held in Leesville, Louisiana, at the Central Louisiana Veterans Cemetery following its grand opening ceremony. Roll call was conducted by the Chairman; all Commissioners were present.

#### **Present:**

Don Beasley, Charles Huggins, Russell Henry, Carroll Knott, Sulanda Lonnette, Rudy Bourg, Richard Garner, Lee Richard, and Precilla Wilkewitz.

**LDVA STAFF:** Lane Carson, Secretary; Tom Burbank, Undersecretary; Mike McNaughton, Veterans Outreach Director; Robin Keller, Press Secretary; Al Leger, Southwest Regional Manager; and Yurie Crockett, Vernon Parish Veterans Assistance Counselor.

### II. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the November 10, 2011, meeting had previously been distributed to the Commissioners for review. It was motioned by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Mr. Knott, to approve the minutes as distributed. The motion passed unanimously.

### III. Division/Program Reports

Mr. Burbank briefly commented on each division/program report per handout(s) that had been distributed for the Commissioners' review prior to the meeting date.

Fiscal/Human Resources. The LDVA Operating Budget as of January 4, 2012, reflected a Table of Organization (TO) of 825; 52.1% of budget expended; and 47.9% free budget. No budgetary issues were noted.

The full-time employee personnel status report (excluding the Veterans Homes), as of February 7, 2012, reflected only one vacancy at the Northwest LA Veterans Cemetery in Keithville.

It was motioned by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Mr. Knott, to approve the Fiscal/Human Resources reports as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

State Veterans Homes. The State Veterans Home System Report noted the following developments as of February 15, 2012:

- All five homes are 94.8% occupied collectively, which is a decrease in census over the last quarter.
- Funding for electronic software for all five homes has been submitted for approval in next year's budget. Installation is anticipated in July 2012.
- As of date, four veterans reside at Liberty Hill Apartments on the grounds of the Jackson facility. Also, Capital Outlay funding has been approved to replace ceiling tiles and lighting throughout the entire facility. This project is expected to begin in August 2012.
- A recent federal VA survey at the Reserve facility cited three areas that needed improvement, which are currently being addressed. Also, an application for a VA grant has been submitted to help fund a recreation room for the veteran residents.

CENSUS STATS PER HOME (as of February 15, 2012)

Facility	Bed Capacity	Current Census	Available Beds
LWVH/Jackson	161	148	13
NELWVH/Monroe	156	140	16
SWLWVH/Jennings	156	146	10
NWLWVH/Bossier City	156	147	9
SELWVH/Reserve	156	148	8

In other comments, Mr. Bourg mentioned the veterans at the Jennings facility have requested funding from AMVETS for a screened smoking area to help keep out insects. Mrs. Wilkewitz said she was pleased with the foster dog program at the Jackson facility and would like to see it implemented at the other homes.

It was motioned by Mrs. Wilkewitz, seconded by Ms. Lonnelle, to approve the State Veterans Homes Report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

State Cemeteries. Handouts of the Facility Access Report for the Northwest LA Veterans Cemetery/Keithville, as of February 14, 2012, were distributed. The report reflected a total of 204 graves used for FY 2011 and a current total of 118 graves used for FY 2012. Secretary Carson and other Commissioners commended Mr. Danny Garris, Cemetery Director, for the increase in burials at the facility.

It was motioned by Mr. Richard, seconded by Mr. Bourg, to approve the report on the Northwest LA Veterans Cemetery as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Troops to Teachers. The Troops to Teachers report showed the program's accomplishments from October 1, 2011, to December 31, 2011. It was noted that 20 teachers had been hired statewide. Secretary Carson commended Mr. Don Howard, program director, for his efforts in achieving successful results with the program. Mr. Bourg also commented he had two referrals for the program.

It was motioned by Mrs. Wilkewitz, seconded by Mr. Bourg, to approve the Troops to Teachers report as submitted. The motion passed unanimously.

Military Family Assistance Fund (MFAF). A handout showing the fund balance, donations, and expenditures to date as of February 3, 2012, was reviewed. It was noted that there were no changes to the fund since the report given at the November 10, 2011, meeting.

<b>Starting Balance (July 1, 2011)</b>	<b>\$474,272.87</b>
Donations to date	\$11,464.13
Expenditures to date	\$31,253.63
<b>Fund Balance (as of February 13, 2012)</b>	<b>\$454,483.37</b>

A brief discussion was held on how to administer the MFA Fund more effectively and possible legislation to expand the rules for eligibility. Ms. Keller stated the staff will explore these areas and report back to the Commissioners as plans develop.

It was motioned by Mrs. Wilkewitz, seconded by Ms. Lonnelle, to approve the MFAF report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Public Relations/Outreach. Via handout, Ms. Keller briefed on the following topics:

- **FY 2012/2013 Budget.** While State General Funds have reduced, the overall budget for LDVA has increased due to the new Central LA Veterans Cemetery/Leesville. It was also noted that no programs or services have been cut.
- **Cemeteries.** Directional signs are now posted at I-49, Exit 186 and after you exit the interstate for the Northwest LA Veterans Cemetery/Keithville. A possible site for the proposed Southeast LA Veterans Cemetery is at Camp Villere in Slidell.
- **MFAF.** The annual fundraising campaign has begun. Direct mailers were distributed to all Louisiana CPA firms (through the CPA Association of LA), and radio public service announcements will commence statewide after Mardi Gras and will run through May 1.
- **LDVA Tour.** Meetings with Louisiana legislators (particularly new members) will begin February 27 through March 12 and will be held at the Veterans Homes. The meetings will include a tour of the facilities, departmental overview by Secretary Carson, lunch, and a question/answer session. Once finalized, the Commissioners will be provided the tour dates and are encouraged to attend a meeting in/near their local area.
- **Other Matters.** To raise awareness of our Parish Veterans Service Offices (VSO), maps showing locations and hours of operation will be posted in VA clinics statewide. The Orleans Parish VSO is now open five days a week at its new location at 517 N. Rampart Street, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, (downtown) New Orleans. The St. Helena Parish VSO has moved from the Courthouse to the Health Unit Building in Greensburg; notice of this move was advertised in the local newspaper.

It was motioned by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Mr. Richard, to accept the Public Relations/Outreach report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

#### **IV. Date of Next Meeting**

Secretary Carson announced that the Annual Veterans Assistance Counselors (VAC) Training Conference will be held May 16-18, 2012, at the Louisiana National Guard complex in Carville, and invited the Commissioners to attend and hold their next meeting in conjunction with the conference. Thursday, May 17, was set as a tentative meeting date.

#### **V. Other Matters (Around the Table)**

- Mrs. Wilkewitz updated the Commissioners on her activities with various women veteran organizations. She stated that homelessness and military sexual trauma were areas of particular focus and concern.
- By being employed with the Governor's Office of Homeland Security, Ms. Lonnette continues to distribute and display LDVA materials, and update employees on LDVA matters as appropriate.
- Commissioners Beasley, Huggins, and Knott gave brief reports on their attendance at their respective VSO mid-winter conferences held recently.
- Mr. Bourg commented on homeless veterans in Lafayette and his involvement with various organizations that are working to address the needs of these veterans. Funding and support are being sought for a homeless veterans' stand-down event in Lafayette to be held this summer. Mr. Bourg also expressed his concerns that federal VA staff are not fully trained to properly diagnose PTSD for veterans who only show mild symptoms and suggested this topic be added to the agenda for the upcoming training conference.
- Mr. Henry expressed his displeasure with the federal VA process and local management regarding the proposed VA Outpatient Clinic in Lake Charles. He requested the LDVA assist in any way possible with cutting through the red tape so that the clinic plans can proceed more expeditiously.

#### **VI. Adjournment**

There being no further business to be brought before the Veterans Affairs Commission, it was motioned by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Mrs. Wilkewitz, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 1:05 p.m.

/s/ Don A. Beasley, Chairman

/s/ Lane A. Carson, Secretary

May 17, 2012

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Date of Approval

*Minutes submitted by Charmagne Scott, AA6. Copies of all handouts are filed with the Commission minutes.*