

MINUTES
UNITED TENNESSEE VETERANS ASSOCIATION (UTVA)
Legislative Plaza, Room 31 Nashville, Tennessee
Tuesday, December 1, 2015
UTVA information available at

Speakers

Suzanne Jene' Acting Health Systems Director of Tennessee Valley
Healthcare System
Ed Harries Executive Director of Tennessee State Veterans Homes

UTVA Members and Partners Present:

Barry Rice Tennessee State Council Vietnam Veterans of America
Ron Bottomley AM Vets
Mary-Lee Fielder American Ex-Prisoners of War
James Patterson American Legion
Lawrence Morris Disabled American Veterans
Ingrid Morris Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary
John Furgess Veterans of Foreign Wars
Jason Cook Veterans Health Administration, Tennessee Valley Healthcare
System
Suzanne L. Jene' Veterans Health Administration, Tennessee Valley Healthcare
System
Kent Crossley Middle Tennessee Chapter Military Officers Association
And Centerstone Military Services
Leanne Lewis Tennessee State Veterans Home
Ed Harries Tennessee State Veterans Home
Stacey Hopwood TNC SOA/WVA
John Krenson Operation Stand Down
Shelley Mullins Nashville Regional Veterans Affairs Office
Frank Forbes Disabled American Veterans Department of Tennessee

TDVS Executive Members Present

Many-Bears Grinder Commissioner
Yvette Martinez Assistant Commissioner, Outreach & Communications
Travis Murphy Assistant Commissioner, Appeals and Middle Region

I. Call to Order

Commissioner Many-Bears Grinder took roll and called quorum.

I. Invocation

Mary Lee Fielder, American Ex- Prisoners of War, led the invocation.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

Barry Rice, Vietnam Veterans of America, led the pledge.

III. Presentation of Agenda

Commissioner Grinder reviewed the meeting agenda in opening.

IV. Approval of Minutes

There was a motion to accept the minutes from the September 2015 UTVA meeting. Minutes were approved.

V. Briefings:

Commissioner Grinder introduced Suzanne Jene, the Acting Health System Director at the Department of Veterans Affairs Tennessee Valley Health Care System. Director Jene provided an update on what was happening at the Tennessee Valley Health System. She introduced changes in Associate Care Director for Patient Care Services; new acting Associate Director is Cindy Johnson. Ms. Jene went over staffing changes and summarized a successful visit with Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson. Improvements mentioned were electronic wait list and consult list. Town hall meetings are being held across the state. Department heads and executive team members attend town hall meetings to answer questions on site. Access to care addressed. Improve issues with wait list. Four new leases awarded at end of 2015. TVHS is among the most rapidly growing area in the VA system. New leases and opening dates were discussed. Delays in construction in Nashville explained. Changes made to improve quality of care discussed; senior staff members making daily rounds at facilities and meeting with hospital staff and veterans focus groups to discuss concerns. Brand new positions have been hired for previous fiscal year but due to

delay in budgets for this fiscal year no new positions have been created. Director Jene introduced the changes in the Veteran Choice program (**See handout*****). Director Jene ended her remarks and took questions.

John Furgess addressed Director Jene to inquire what the selection process for Director was. No other questions were asked.

The floor was turned over to the Executive Director of the Tennessee State Veterans Homes, Ed Harries who started by presenting the star ratings of State Veterans Homes. State audit was presented and regulatory oversight was addressed. Tennessee Department of Health annual surveys for Murfreesboro, Humboldt, Knoxville and Clarksville Veterans Homes were summarized. Director Harries shared new photos of the construction of the new Home in Clarksville and shared information about the future Homes in Bradley and Shelby Counties. Please see handout for specifics.

Barry Rice commended Director Harries on the new Clarksville home and asked about eligibility requirements. Full eligibility requirements are listed on <http://tsvh.org/eligible.html>.

Commissioner Grinder addressed the group. She commented on a letter received by the National Cemetery Administration in October which stated federal funds were pending for the future Tennessee State Veterans Cemetery at Parkers Crossroads. Design and development are underway and nearly complete. Formal news of the federal award for construction is pending.

Commissioner Grinder excused herself and her facilitator role over to Assistant Commissioner Yvette Martinez. She thanked everyone for their presence at the meeting.

Assistant Commissioner Martinez introduced Assistant Commissioner Travis Murphy.

Assistant Commissioner Murphy explained his background and offered details about the reorganization of the Appeals Division. Reorganization had two purposes which were to increase focus on improving employee

skill set for improved representation for veterans seeking review of their cases at the appellate level and to improve consistency of state and county service officer's claims submissions. AC Murphy has implemented a quality review program to provide feedback to regional directors and to the training division of TDVS. Since July 1, 2015, TDVS has reviewed and submitted 3800 claims between TDVS employees and county service officer partners. Also, TDVS employees have been involved in 86 Board of Veteran Appeal (BVA) hearings representing veterans and their family members. Within those hearing there were 193 issues for contention on appeal.

No questions were asked of Assistant Commissioner Murphy.

AC Martinez introduced DAV UTVA Membership application motion was asked to accept review and consider. Motion was seconded. Voting was held. DAV UTVA Membership Application was approved unanimously.

Mr. Kent Crossley introduced himself and explained his interest in being a member of UTVA. He represents Middle Tennessee Chapter of Military Officers Association (MOAA) and also serves as the Director at Centerstone. Mr. Crossley explained the mental health resources and services Centerstone provides to military veterans and their families. Centerstone specifically looks to provide free resources to service members, veterans and their families. He expressed their passion for helping the community of service members. Centerstone has presence in Florida, Indiana, Illinois, Tennessee and Kentucky but they have access to resources to help service members in all states. He thanked everyone for their attention and sat down. Assistant Commissioner Martinez thanked him for his address and said they would look forward to his membership application in March.

AC Martinez explained where minutes, reports, agenda, videos, presentations and dates for the UTVA meeting will be posted on the department website. She ensured that everyone had signed the sign in page.

AC Martinez opened the floor up for announcements. The DAV announced the date of their Mid-Winter conference, January 15-16. The Legion will hold their Mid-Winter conference the following weekend, January 22-23.

No more announcements were made.

Assistant Commissioner Yvette Martinez thanked everyone for attending and motioned for meeting to be adjourned. Motioned, and seconded.