



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Summary Minutes
February 18th, 2014**

I. Call to Order & Introductions

Jerry Godwin, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Jerry asked for all present to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance and to remain standing for a moment of silence for all of those who have given their lives and those who have been wounded for our country in the different conflicts in which our country has been engaged. A POW/MIA Empty Chair is placed at all official meetings of the Commission as a physical symbol of the thousands of American POW/MIAs still unaccounted for from all wars and conflicts involving the United States of America.

II. Approval of Minutes

Mike Subin, Commissioner, made a motion to approve the December, 2013 Meeting Summary Minutes as written. Randy Stone, Commissioner, seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the December, 2013 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. Warrior Canine Connection: Serving the Warrior and Veteran Population in Montgomery County – Rick Yount, Executive Director

Rick Yount was employed as a Licensed Social Worker in foster care when he received a Golden Retriever puppy, Gabe, as a present. One day he took Gabe to work with him and realized the effects the dog had on children who had experienced traumatic events. Gabe became a certified therapy dog and continued to work with children in foster care.

In July 2008, Rick created the first Warrior dog-training program to provide a safe, effective, non-pharmaceutical intervention to help treat the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI). The program, based at the Palo Alto VA's Men's Trauma Recovery Program in Menlo Park, CA evolved into a highly respected intervention. To date, hundreds of Service Members and Veterans suffering from symptoms of combat stress have participated.

Rick was asked in 2009 to establish the Warrior dog-training program at Walter Reed Army Medical Center's Warrior Transition Brigade (WTB) in Washington, D.C. In October of 2010, he and the program were invited to be part of the PTSD and TBI research, treatment, and education mission at the new National Intrepid Center of Excellence (NICoE), in Bethesda, MD – located at what is now the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.

In 2011, Warrior Canine Connection (WCC) was founded to expand the availability of this therapeutic service dog-training program to DoD and VA medical treatment facilities throughout the country, and to conduct research to establish this model as an evidence-based therapy for PTS and TBI.

Training a service dog for a fellow Veteran provides a valuable opportunity for a Warrior suffering from psychological injuries to reintegrate into civilian life. As part of his or her training, Warriors have the responsibility to teach the dogs that the world is a safe place. Through that process, they must convince themselves of the same.

Warrior trainers are taught to praise and provide treats to their dogs when they experience a startling event, such as hearing a car backfire. Rather than turning inward to focus on their past trauma, the trainers must get outside of their own heads to focus on the dogs and their mission to help another Veteran. Additionally, dogs offer opportunities for Warrior trainers – who often isolate themselves from society – to experience positive interactions with members of the community. Their training requires emotionally numb Warriors to demonstrative positive emotion in order to successfully teach their dogs.

Warriors participating in the program have reported that using these positive emotions to praise their dogs has significantly improved their family dynamics, as their children are able to experience and respond to this positive parenting strategy.

Mike Subin, Commissioner, reported that the current location of WCC is subleased on Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) land. A new location needed to be identified as the curator was taking back the land. Mike contacted Jerry Boden, Chief of Staff, Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA), and spoke to him about this issue. Mr. Boden was able to secure a DNR location in Germantown in Seneca Creek State Park. The existing property will need to be renovated or torn down. Rick will contact Chuck Short, Special Assistant to the County Executive, about applying for a Community Collaboration grant. Rick will also be applying for a matching grant from the County Council.

Rick asked the Commission for help advertising the services available from Warrior Canine Connection as well as help to connect them with volunteers.

Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison, noted that there have been some recent complaints from veterans with service animals being denied the right to having their service animal in their apartment. For information on what your rights are and what to do if you experience discrimination, please view the [Equal Rights Center's Assistance Animal Users' Public Accommodations and Fair Housing Toolkit](#). For information on how to file a complaint, please view our listing on [How and Where To File A Fair Housing Complaint](#).

IV. Veterans Education and Benefits Collaborative Update – Mike Subin, Commissioner

Deferred due to time constraints.

V. Brainstorm for Ideas to Honor Veterans at the 39th National Assembly, July 2nd to 6th, 2014 at the National Harbor – Vicki Baltimore, Commissioner

The Links, Incorporated will be holding their 39th National Assembly from July 2nd to July 6th at the National Harbor in Prince George's County for professional women of color. Wilma Holmes, President of The Links, Incorporated, Long Island Chapter, contacted the Commission seeking ideas and input on how Links, Incorporated can acknowledge female veterans in this region during the National Assembly. Suggestions from the Commission included a scholarship or funds for female veterans attending college or university. Any other suggestions can be e-mailed to Vicki.

VI. Chair and Vice-Chair Report:

On February 10th, Jerry Godwin, Chair, attended a Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) Update Meeting with Mike Subin; Betsy Luecking, Staff; Ann Humphrey, Representative of Congressman Van Hollen; Ken Reichard, Representative of Senator Cardin; and DC VA Medical Center Staff. The group was informed that the CBOC for Montgomery County is now on hold as the VA is reprioritizing their plans for CBOCs. It is now required that all new contracts for CBOC's go through a VISN Strategic Capital Investment Plan (SCIP), even if the facility was previously authorized. Congressman Van Hollen is drafting a letter of concern about this delay to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Eric Shinseki as originally a CBOC was authorized in 2008 and in June 2013 the County was informed that the VA would soon begin identifying potential locations and was aiming to have bids by November. Congressman Van Hollen will ask Congress members John Delaney and John Sarbanes to co-sign the letter. County Executive Isiah Leggett will also be sending a letter of concern. VISN 5 will be holding its quarterly meeting in Linthicum at the end of February. Ann hopes to have the letter sent to Secretary Shinseki prior to this meeting.

County Council President Craig Rice will speak before the Commission at the next meeting on March 18th.

VII. Unfinished Business

None.

VIII. New Business

Jessica Fuchs, Co-Chair, Veterans Collaborative, announced that planning continues for the Veteran Resource and Volunteer Fair scheduled for Saturday, May 10th. It will be held at Glen Echo in the Spanish Ballroom from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. The event will be open to military, veterans, their families, and community members who are interested in learning about volunteer opportunities. The Collaborative is seeking non-profit organizations to attend. There are 70 spaces available with no cost to the vendor. They are also working on an art service project to be completed during the event and donated to Glen Echo afterwards as a thank you to Montgomery County veterans. The American Legion and

Gold Star Mothers have donated money to purchase tickets for the puppet theater. The Collaborative is currently seeking sponsorship for tickets for the carousel and a band that would play a 90-minute set during lunchtime. The Commission is welcome to join the Planning Committee.

Wayne Miller, Commissioner, and a group of veterans from the Silver Spring Vet Center have sent a thank you letter to Michael Ward, CEO, CSX, for making the railroad crossing that was located on the route to the Vet Center more accessible. The repairs made will make it easier and safer for persons who use a wheelchair to cross the tracks in time.

Ann reported that Congressman Van Hollen and Brigadier General Jeffrey Clark, Commander of the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, presented George Carlton Bloodworth the Silver Star Medal. Mr. Bloodworth served in Vietnam and was awarded the Silver Star for his valor, but never received the actual medal. His daughter contacted Congressman Van Hollen's office for assistance in obtaining his award.

Dan Bullis, Vice-Chair, announced that American Legion Post 41 in Silver Spring will be hosting their next Wounded Warrior dinner on Saturday, March 1st. The dinner is open to anyone who wants to attend.

Adjournment: 7:45 p.m.

Next Full Commission Meeting:

Tuesday, March 18th, 2014, from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at HHS – 401 Hungerford Drive, 1st Floor Tan Conference Room, Rockville, Maryland 20850

Respectfully submitted:

Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I

Betsy Luecking, Program Manager II