



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs  
Meeting Summary Minutes  
January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

**I. Call to Order & Introductions**

Randy Stone, Vice Chairman, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Randy 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**

The approval of the December 2016 Meeting Summary Minutes was tabled until the next meeting due to lack of a quorum.

**III. Overview of the Mission of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) – Dave Peterson, President, MOAA, Montgomery County Chapter, and NOAA Ret.; and Jim Dittbrenner, Montgomery County MOAA Business and Networking Group (BANG)**

The Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) was originally founded in 1929 as the Retired Officers Association. The name was changed in 2003. It is an independent, nonprofit, politically nonpartisan organization with more than 370,000 members from every branch of service - including active duty, National Guard, Reserve, retired, former officers, and their families. MOAA is the 4<sup>th</sup> largest military service in the organization in the country by membership and their motto is “Never stop serving”. MOAA works to protect compensation and benefit matters for all members of the military community through legislative activity. MOAA has been recognized by The Hill (the largest-circulation newspaper on Capitol Hill) for seven years in a row as the “Top Lobbyist” on behalf of the military and Veterans’ communities. Voices for America’s Troops is a subsidiary of MOAA that is open to members of the public, age 18 or older, who share their interest in maintaining a strong national defense and sustaining essential support systems for our military members, families and survivors. For information on how to join, please visit: [www.voicesfortroops.org](http://www.voicesfortroops.org).

MOAA has councils and chapters in all 50 States. There are 34 State councils and 409 national chapters. Councils focus on state legislation primarily while chapters focus on State legislation as well as address relevant local issues. Maryland has one council and 10 chapters. The Montgomery Chapter has 71 members: 6 are Flag Officers, 40 are Captains or Colonels; 12 are mid-grade Officers; 6 are Junior Officers or Warrant Officers; 7 are surviving spouses of national life members. The Chapter has 1 current service chief, a former service chief, a national board member, two former national board members, a national staff member, a former national staff member, a Commissioner from the Maryland Veterans Commission (MVC), and three Commissioners from the Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs.

The Montgomery County Chapter of MOAA serves members who live and/or work in the County. Members include County residents and people with roots or interests in the County. The Chapter provides a fraternal as well as community-oriented organization where members and friends can meet, participate, and enjoy a range of Chapter programs and activities. Active duty personnel, members of the Reserve Components, retirees, and associates are encouraged to join. They have members from all seven Uniformed Services. The Chapter is sensitive to the needs and interests of both active and retired military of all ranks. These interests include national level issues as well as matters related to the State of Maryland. Chapter members are active in the Maryland Retired Veterans Task force as well as with State legislators. The Chapter is still interested in pursuing a Veterans Treatment Court.

The Montgomery County Chapter takes on the mission of active support of the entire "military family." The Chapter provides a channel for the fraternal interests of the entire membership. It provides support to personnel in need, such as the "wounded warriors" at our local military hospital. It services the interests of active officers and retirees, and their families (including spouses of deceased members). We are active in our financial and service support of worthwhile military community endeavors (e.g., Youth Leadership Programs, ROTC Awards Programs, charitable efforts). The Chapter is a founding member of the MOAA Heritage society and has made a commitment to fund this initiative for five continuous years at the bronze level for \$250 per year.

Every year, MOAA's affiliates compete to receive a four- or five-star Levels of Excellence Award based on a set of objective and subjective goals set by the National organization. The Montgomery County Chapter has been a five-star winner six times and a four-star winner once.

The Chapter holds a monthly luncheon on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of the month at noon held at Manor Country Club in Rockville. The cost is \$25.00 at the door and the luncheon features a guest speaker. In March the Chapter will hold a dinner meeting instead of a luncheon and the guest speaker will be retired Air Force Lt. Gen. Dana Atkins who was recently appointed as the new President and Chief Executive Officer of MOAA. The meeting will discuss 115<sup>th</sup> Congress and issues pertaining to the uniformed services and Veterans.

The Chapter has made a commitment to the MOAA Scholarship Fund that provides educational assistance to children of military families. The Chapter also supports Operation HeroBox that connects deployed servicemembers with specific needs with volunteers that send care packages.

The MOAA Military Family Initiative is a subsidiary foundation of MOAA that funds military family career development programs and services to help currently serving troops and Veterans of all ranks. Programs/services include Career Transition, Financial Education Outreach, Military Spouse Career Development, Warrior Family Reintegration, and VA Disability Claims Information, Assistance and Referral.

Jim Dittbrenner, MOAA Transition Group, gave an overview of MOAA's Business and Networking Group (BANG). BANG works to provide support, additional training, resources and referrals to transitioning military and their families, although the group is open to all and is not restricted to military only. The Montgomery County BANG was started in November 2015 and was held at Montgomery College Rockville Campus for the first six months. It has since moved to WorkSource Montgomery in Wheaton. They currently do not have a website and would like assistance in creating a Facebook page.

Jim would like to reach out to Montgomery County Public Libraries (MCPL) about hosting a two-hour program on job search resources that would also promote the libraries' resources. He would also like to reach out to the Commission on Women for a similar program. He has tried unsuccessfully in the past to connect with the American Legions and Veterans of Foreign Wars locations in the County. Octavia Dixon, Commissioner and member of VFW Post 2562, invited Jim to hold a meeting at their post. Jim has also been unsuccessful with connecting with Barbara Ashe, Executive Vice President, Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce (MCCC). MCCC has a Veteran Institute for Procurement program that trains veteran service-disabled and veteran owned small businesses on how to accelerate their success in the federal contracting market. Henry Bockman, Commissioner, will reach out to Barbara and will also assist Jim in creating a Facebook page for the group.

The MOAA Montgomery County BANG meets the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of each month at the South Building at Montgomery Plaza on the 4<sup>th</sup> Floor in Room 407A/B. All meetings are free and everyone is invited to attend and bring a friend. Each meeting features a Spotlight Speaker who provides job search, business development or personal networking skills information. There are always employers, job positions and networking contacts available at each meeting. The average age of attendees is 27 years old and most have not retired, but have been on multiple deployments. The Northern VA BANG is comprised of 50% retired DoD contractors and 50% job seekers. Although the notices for meetings are sent out to approximately 1,200 Veterans, attendance is low.

It was suggested that a meeting be held at a different venue, such as at a restaurant, with multiple employers as that may draw in more attendees more similar to the program in Alexandria.

It was noted that there may be a disconnect during the transition process and many returning Veterans do not know how to communicate with civilians any more and they are judged or stereotyped once they identify as having been in combat.

#### **IV. Chairman and Vice-Chairman Report:**

Dan Bullis, Chairman, has asked Commander Williams of the Maryland VFW to speak to the Commission at a future meeting.

Dan reported that he, Mike Subin, and Bill Gray attended the funeral on Army Sgt. First Class Allan E. Brown. Mike presented his family with a certificate and a Montgomery County flag on behalf of County Executive Leggett. Dan also coordinated with Stan Siedel, Maryland Veterans Commission, who was able to get a certificate and a Maryland flag that Dan presented to the family this past weekend.

#### **V. New Business:**

Mike Subin, Commissioner, reported that the Department of Transportation continues to develop plans for the new Wheaton redevelopment project. He will ensure that space for the Vietnam Veteran memorial will be included. County Executive Leggett was to receive an above and beyond recognition letter from the Maryland State Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve Committee this evening for his efforts in supporting the Guard and Reserve, including passage of a bill in 1990 that would financially assist County employees who were called to active duty and receiving less pay than their County employment. County Executive Leggett also supported the hiring preference for Veterans and persons with disabilities. County Executive Leggett was unable to attend tonight's meeting and the award presentation will be rescheduled.

Betsy Luecking, Staff, will be meeting with Team River Runner and Montgomery Parks staff at Riley's Lock to discuss installing an accessible pier. There may be funds available from the Department of Natural Resources to for the project.

Betsy reported that Rebuilding Together has been approached by Major League Baseball about participating in a volunteer project with RT that would benefit Veterans and/or active military personnel, including private home repairs or repairs to a facility serving Veterans. Fisher House has contacted RT about renovating six bathrooms for a cost of \$100,000. If a Veteran or military servicemember would like to apply, please call Christina Betancourt Johnson at 301-947-9400 x 100 (V).

#### **VI. Announcements:**

Stan Siedel, Maryland Veterans Commission (MVC), reported that MVC took a tour of MCVET's operation and encouraged Commissioners to do the same. MCVET has lost \$1.2M in funding due to their model of treating substance abuse issues prior to housing, which differs from the VA and HUD's housing first model. Stan reported that a new property is being developed in D.C. called the Conway Residence, which is a 14-story project, comprised of 124 units, with 60 units of permanent supportive housing for formerly homeless veterans, 47 units of affordable housing for tenants at or below 60% area median income, and 17 units of affordable housing for tenants at or below 30% area median income. The former Walter Reed Hospital is developing a 78-unit property for homeless Veterans.

Stan reported that the County receives \$1M in funding for the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), which provides workforce investment activities, through statewide and local workforce investment systems, that increase the employment, retention, and earnings of participants, and increase occupational skill attainment by participants. Veterans receive priority of service. He has received data from the Department of Labor that indicates that only 1 disabled Veteran out of the 125 disabled Veterans in the system was enrolled in Montgomery County's WIA program. It was suggested inviting Ellie Giles, Chief Executive Officer, WorkSource Montgomery, be invited to a Commission meeting to discuss this issue.

Octavia Dixon reported that Maryland VFW members who are in good standing for the past two years can currently sign up for lifetime membership at half price. Octavia also reported that VFW recently completed two essay programs – Voice of Democracy, an audio-essay program provides high school students with the unique opportunity to express themselves in regards to a democratic and patriotic-themed recorded essay, and Patriot Pen,

a youth essay competition gives students an opportunity to write essays expressing their views on an annual patriotic theme. Montgomery County had three students place 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> in the competitions.

Dan reported that American Legion has a similar program through an Oratorical Contest that exists to develop deeper knowledge and appreciation for the U.S. Constitution among high school students. The Legion's Boys State program is a participatory program in which high school students become part of the operation of local, county and state government. American Legion Auxiliary sponsors a separate but similar program for young women called Girls State.

**Adjournment:** 7:35 p.m.

**Next Full Commission Meeting:** Tuesday, February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2016 from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at Executive Office Building, 101 Monroe Street, 9<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room, Rockville, MD 20850

Respectfully submitted:

Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I

Betsy Luecking, Community Outreach Manager