



Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs Meeting Summary Minutes – October 20th, 2015

I. Call to Order & Introductions:

Dan Bullis, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Dan 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 September, 2015 Meeting Summary Minutes. Jim Campbell, Commissioner, seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the September, 2015 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. The Work of Serving Together – Julie Riggs, Veterans and Family Peer Navigator, Serving Together, Mental Health Association of Montgomery County

Serving Together (ST), with help from government, local organizations, and businesses, is striving to provide a sustained, coordinated system in support to those veterans living throughout the region and welcome home the newest generation of Warriors. ST is a project of Mental Health Association of Montgomery County (MHA).

Julie Riggs, Veterans and Family Peer Navigator, ST, gave a brief presentation.

PowerPoint Presentation: <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CVA/Commissions%20Oct%202015.pdf>

Since the start of the Peer Navigator services in June 2013, ST has provided services to 328 veterans. The majority of calls received are from veterans who are dealing with financial stress, homelessness and employment concerns with VA benefits and VA housing falling closely behind.

Jessica Fuchs serves as the co-chair of the Montgomery County Veterans Collaborative alongside Rich Schiffauer, Program Manager II, Health and Human Services. ST is also now the lead for the Loudon and Fairfax County Veterans Collaboratives. Julie serves as a member of the Walter Reed Veterans Collaborative and Jessica Fuchs, Project Director of ST, serves as a member of the Frederick County Veterans Collaborative.

The ST website was recently relaunched to make the site more user-friendly. Several hundred Northern Virginia resources were also added to the site. Julie noted that if an individual calls to make a complaint regarding a resource listed on the website that provider or organization is immediately pulled from the site until the complaint is resolved.

ST sends out a weekly e-mail every Friday. Individuals can sign up for the e-mail distribution list by visiting <http://servingtogetherproject.org> and scrolling to the bottom right hand corner of the page.

Julie recounted an example of how ST works with providers in the area to assist veterans with specific requests. A formerly homeless veteran contacted ST to locate funds that would enable him to purchase a plane ticket so he could fly home and attend his sister's funeral. Julie contacted Dan Bullis, Chair, who is affiliated with the non-profit organization the [Walter Reed Society](#) (WRS). Within two days WRS had donated the necessary funds and Dan hand delivered the check to the gentleman. As a side note, when he returned home from his sister's funeral, he was approved for a HUD-VASH Voucher and is now being placed into permanent housing.

IV. Remarks – Retired Air Force Colonel Fred Cherry

Retired Air Force Colonel Cherry, who now lives in Silver Spring, was on a combat mission on October 22, 1965, when his F-105 Thunderchief fighter-bomber was shot down over North Vietnam. Colonel Cherry ejected and was subsequently captured, becoming the first and highest ranking black officer to become a prisoner of war in Vietnam. Subjected to harsh interrogation and repeated torture, he spent more than seven years as a prisoner of war in Hanoi until his release on February 12, 1973.

Colonel Cherry was awarded the Air Force Cross, the Silver Star, the Legion of Merit, two Distinguished Flying Crosses, two Bronze Stars, two Purple Hearts, the Meritorious Service Medal and the Outstanding Service to the Military Community award from the Tuskegee Airmen.

Mr. Cherry's life is the subject of the book, *Two Souls Indivisible: The Friendship That Saved Two POWs in Vietnam*, by James S. Hirsch.

Colonel Cherry will be a special guest at the Salute to Vietnam Veterans October 24th event.

V. Update of Plans for Community-Based Outpatient Clinic and Montgomery Cable TV Show “Homefront”, – Commissioner Mike Subin

Mike Subin, Commissioner, reported that Dan Bullis will be interviewed for “Homefront” this Thursday. County Executive Leggett was the first guest on the show. You can view the episode online:

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/CCM/homefront.html.

Mike will be contacting Brian Hawkins, Medical Center Director, DC VA Medical Center, to discuss the possibility of having non-profits located at the proposed Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC). He noted that the University of Maryland Dental School is interested in having a space in Montgomery County and this may be a good fit for the CBOC.

It was suggested that Colonel Cherry be a guest on “Homefront” in the future. Suggestions for guests on “Homefront” can be shared with Betsy or Mike.

VI. Chair and Vice Chair Report:

Dan Bullis, Chair, announced that Jerry Godwin has resigned as a Commissioner representing the Department of Economic Development. Jerry has left the Montgomery County Government and taken a position with the Office of Veterans Business Development, U.S. Small Business Administration, Washington, D.C., (202) 205-6376.

Dan discussed the issue of the unfilled Veterans Benefits Specialist position. The salary range for the position is \$35,000 to \$43,000. Dan suggested targeting retirees who would be interested in a position that helps veterans to supplement their retirement income. He also noted that a Veteran Service Officer is located at each of the 8 Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) posts and at each of the 5 American Legion (AL) posts in Montgomery County. The Commission will have to research and compile a list of contacts for each post.

Dan asked for suggestions of speakers for future Commission meetings. Suggestions can be sent to Betsy Luecking, Staff.

Randy Stone, Vice Chair, is working with Leisure World to schedule the offsite Commission November meeting.

VII. Roundtable:

Jim Campbell, Commissioner, reported that the newly formed [Business and Networking Group \(BANG\)](#) will be having their first meeting on November 3rd from 6:30pm to 8:30 pm at the Montgomery College Rockville Campus. BANG will have Spotlight Speaker presentations of general interest to the group and networking time with jobseekers, hiring managers and human resource professionals. For additional information, please contact Jim Dittbrenner at jimditt@verizon.net.

Mike Walsh, General Public, reported that Battley Harley-Davidson of Gaithersburg has organized a motorcycle ride from their location to the Vietnam event at Universities of Shady Grove on Saturday, October 24th. The police escorted ride will begin at 9:30 a.m. in Gaithersburg. The ride to the event will be led by the local chapter Nam Knights.

Betsy Luecking, Staff, reported that since Montgomery County implemented the hiring preference in 2010 and the non-competitive hiring practice in 2012 the County has hired 159 veterans and an additional 8 veterans with disabilities. The County has a great hiring model with innovative legislation.

Octavia Dixon, Commissioner, reported that VFW Post 2562 in Wheaton will be hosting their annual Veterans Day celebration on November 11th at 11:00 a.m.

Ken Reichard, Representative for Senator Ben Cardin, announced that Senator Cardin will be hosting a roundtable discussion on Monday, October 26th with Warrior Canine Connection at Seneca Creek State Park to discuss innovative partnerships for veterans' health. The meeting will be held from 11:15 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. and Commissioners are encouraged to attend.

Stan Siedel, Maryland Veterans Commission, shared data from the Department of Labor regarding the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) program: <http://montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CVA/WIADDataOctMtg.pdf>. The chart reflects the number of participants that entered and exited the WIA programs to receive training at the local workforce service delivery area from 10-01-2013 through 9-30-14, which is a Federal Fiscal Year. The chart reflects that veterans seeking assistance who needed some training in Montgomery County only represented 3.7 % of the total number of individuals exiting in one year. This means that veterans not only did not receive "Priority of Service" but compared to the other WIA areas, Montgomery County was the worst.

Editor's Note: Regarding this handout from Stan Seidel from Bob Pelletier: *Per your request: The statistics presented to you are not accurate and do not represent a very real commitment to veterans we have here in Montgomery County. The statistics given by Stan represent activities from 2012 and 2013 and only review one program outcome, which is part of a wide variety of programs and services available to veterans in Montgomery County. I'd be happy to tell you all the great things we are doing to support our veterans at our American Job Centers in Montgomery County. If you have any questions or concerns or would like to discuss how priority of service is monitored and implemented in our centers, I'd encourage you to reach out to our Veterans Program Manager, LeRoy Thomas at 410-767-2015 or the State Director for Veterans' Employment and Training Service, Kristoffer Evans at 410-767-2110.*

Handout: [Montgomery Public Television Salutes Vietnam Veterans](#) – Event scheduled for June 18th and 19th, 2016 at the Maryland State Fairgrounds in Timonium.

Adjournment: 7:30 p.m.

Next Full Commission Meeting: **PLEASE NOTE LOCATION AND EXTENDED MEETING TIME:** Tuesday, November 17th, 2015 from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at Leisure World, 3700 Rossmoor Boulevard, Silver Spring, MD.

Respectfully submitted:

Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I;

Betsy Luecking, Community Outreach Manager