



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Summary Minutes
June 21st, 2016**

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 those who were killed in the Orlando shooting. 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

Jim Campbell, Commissioner, made a motion to approve the May 2016 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the May 2016 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. Team River Runner – Joe Mornini, Executive Director and Co-Founder; Alex Nielson, Member

Website: <http://www.teamriverrunner.org>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/TRRUSA>

Team River Runner (TRR) was founded in 2004 at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center (WRNMMC). TRR was started with the original mission of working with Veterans who were injured resulting in an amputation from Iraq and Afghanistan. Within two weeks there was interest from Veterans of other conflicts. TRR provides opportunities for wounded service members to enjoy nature and realize its social, physical, and emotional benefits, whether tackling whitewater rapids or paddling on peaceful flat-water. Wounded service members endure many months of surgeries, physical and readjustment therapy, prosthetic fittings, and other life changes. They are attracted to whitewater and adventure kayaking because it offers an exciting way to improve their health, strength, and connection with nature. Through paddle sports, TRR volunteers and partners provide local communities unique opportunities for the active, safe and positive support of healing service members and their families.

As Veterans began leaving WRNMMC, TRR worked with VA recreational therapists throughout the country to fundraise and set up chapters in other states. TRR has 54 chapters in 31 states. In 2001, they had over 2,100 unique and individual Veterans paddle and over 1,850 paddling events throughout the country.

TRR offers year round paddling with almost all chapters offering clinics at indoor pools. TRR has kayak clinics on Tuesdays from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at WRNMMC in the pool. On Wednesdays they hold white water and flat water sessions at Lock 6 at the C&O Canal. On Thursdays they have a kayak football session in the evenings at WRNMMC. A kayak football tournament is held every spring in Canton, Ohio the same day as the Hall of Fame game. The weekly Sunday paddle session starts at 2:00 p.m. at Riley's Lock. The Elks Club provides a free picnic cookout and Calleva provides the venue. The Sunday sessions also offer adaptive paddle sports to non-veterans with disabilities who are taught to kayak by Veterans.

TRR is the largest national program for adaptive paddling for veterans in the country. The Outtasight clinic, which was started five years ago, teaches blind Veterans how to kayak. They use their own kayak and are guided by other Veterans.

Alex, a Veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan and TRR participant, spoke about his experiences transitioning out of the military and into civilian life. He had enlisted in the military at age 18 and was a medic. When he got out of the military, he had trouble fitting in at college and was concerned of the stigma that comes with serving in the military. Alex talked about how the program helped him successfully get through college. He has traveled throughout the country and met with other

chapters. He has assisted blind Veterans in successfully guiding them on kayak trips including the Grand Canyon. He currently is in medical school to become a doctor.

The floor was opened for questions.

Randy Stone, Vice Chair, asked Joe where he'd like to see TRR in 10 years. Joe would like to continue creating the groundwork for programs available returning Veterans and expanding adaptive technology. He would also like to see paddle sports become more mainstream for persons with disabilities. Paddlesports is the fastest growing sport in America. There are only two adaptive kayaking schools in the country.

Bill Gray, former Commissioner, asked about kayak football. Joe explained that white water kayaks are used as they are smaller and games are played in a pool. Walter Reed has an olympic sized pool that they use for their games.

Wayne Stinchcomb, General Public, commented that he has to Riley's Lock four times to participate in the TRR program and is learning how to kayak from the Veterans who attend.

Marek Posard, Commissioner, asked Alex if he thinks University of Maryland students who are Veterans are receiving the support that they need. Alex said since he left UMD they have developed a Veterans group – TerpVets – that connects student Veterans and hosts social events as well as provides volunteer opportunities. He suggested that student Veterans take advantage of such groups and programs like TRR so they can connect with other Veterans. TRR currently has six chapters located in universities or colleges. Each chapter is run by a volunteer chapter coordinator who goes through an extensive training process. Once completed the chapter can then buy equipment and start training Veterans.

TRR has an annual budget of \$500,000. They work out of donated office space and staff are all volunteers. Funding is received through various methods. TRR receives a VA grant every year that is used specifically for renting pools, buying equipment for new and growing chapters throughout the country, and for trainings. Small grants are received from organizations such as the Delta Gamma sorority, which provides funding for the Outtasight clinic. TRR also holds fundraising events throughout the year including two biatholons. The Elks regularly hold fundraising events and use the money to purchase adaptive kayaks that are then donated to TRR. Funding is also received through regular donations from individuals. TRR is seeking companies that would like to donate \$5,000 and in return a logo of the company will be displayed on a kayak for a year and are displayed at the biathalons. Their goal is reach 100 companies and they currently have 60.

There are issues of accessibility and erosion at the current pier / boat ramp at Riley's Lock. The ramp is used by both kayakers and those unloading power boats, which also is a safety issue especially for children and persons with disabilities. Riley's lock has signs posted by US National Park Service, Maryland DNR and Maryland National Capital Area Park and Planning. It is unknown which entity has jurisdiction over the pier / boat ramp. Betsy will investigate the issue.

IV. Chair and Vice-Chair Report:

Dan Bullis, Chair, noted that the Maryland Center for Veteran Education & Training (MCVET) was featured in [Washington Post article](#) on June 20th.

He reported that the American Legion Post 41 hosted a successful night with Mike Love, founder of the Beach Boys. Mike spoke about transcendental meditation(TM), which he has been practising for the past 45 years. Bill Gray and Wayne Miller were on the panel with Mike and they also spoke about their experiences in Vietnam and with TM.

The Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) has updated their [Resource Guide for Veterans and Their Families](#) (May 2016). He suggested that the Commission publish a similar guide or perhaps in a smaller format such as a refrigerator magnet.

State and County legislative suggestions are due by this Friday, June 24th. Suggestions should be sent to Betsy.

Randy Stone, Vice Chair, reported that he and Marek Posard, Commissioner, will be working on revitalizing the Commission's communications agenda over the summer break. Communication avenues include the County's Twitter

feed, Paperless Airplane, 311 and the Commission's Facebook page. Henry Bockman, Commissioner, volunteered to assist. The display cases at the Silver Spring Civic Building need to be updated to include items from the Global War on terror. Please contact Betsy or Randy if you have items to donate or suggestions.

V. Roundtable:

Ron Drach, Commissioner, reported that the U.S. Senate approved a bill that included an amendment that would significantly modify the Veterans hiring preference within Federal government. The bill would only allow a Veteran to use the hiring preference for their first job within Federal government and it would not be applied towards future positions. The bill is now being reviewed by a conference committee by the Senate and the House. It was noted that the American Legion is against the bill. Betsy Luecking, Staff, reported that in 2009 Montgomery County passed a hiring preference for Veterans, Veterans with disabilities, and persons with disabilities. This preference is open for all positions, from entry-level to management. Since then 178 Veterans have been hired including 8 who have a disability. The preference does not apply to spouses of Veterans, but that may be an initiative that Commission will want to work on.

Ron also reported that he attended the closing ceremony of LZ Maryland. He remarked that the ceremony was very poignant and encouraged Veterans to tell their story to their family members. Bill Gray, Commissioner, will share with Ron a list of interview questions he received from a Georgetown University student who conducted an interview with Bill that helped him to share his story.

Henry Bockman, Commissioner, is seeking a speaker for a business conference he is hosting at the National Harbor in Baltimore that will teach Veteran-owned businesses how to get government contracts.

Wayne Stinchcomb, Silver Spring Vet Center (SSVC), reported that in addition to the [SSVC's regular weekday hours](#), it is also open on the 2nd Saturday of the month from 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Marek Possard, Commissioner, reported that a work colleague of his is involved with the DC Veterans Commission and this person is interested in meeting with our Commission to discuss joint initiatives.

JoAnna Starling, Combat2College (C2C), Montgomery College, reported that C2C will be offering trauma sensitive yoga classes starting in the fall.

Jennifer Watson, Serving Together (ST), reported that ST has secured slots in the Army Ten-Miler. For more information or to register, contact jfuchs@mhmc.org. On July 12th ST will be hosting a [free workshop on Veterans Treatments Courts](#) as an effective alternative to incarceration for some Veterans dealing with mental health and substance abuse issues. The workshop will be held from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at the Henry M. Jackson Foundation in North Bethesda. MHA is hosting a fundraising event on June 30th at the Original Pancake House in Rockville.

Mike Walsh, General Public, reported that he has recently been contacted by a Montgomery College professor who will be working with students to create biographies of every Montgomery County service member from the County that lost their life in the Vietnam war. He noted that Carroll County has just completed this project. Please see Montgomery County Fallen Heroes:

[OIF/OEF](#) • [Gulf War](#) • [Vietnam War](#) - [Montgomery County Sentinel - Montgomery's War Dead 1963 to 1970](#) • [Korean War](#) • [World War II](#)

Jim Campbell, Commissioner and Liaison to Commission on Aging (COA), noted that the issue of senior citizens being scammed by companies was recently discussed at a COA meeting. He suggested that the Commission continue to work on identifying Veteran-owned businesses and developing a list thought could be shared as a resource with the senior community. Betsy noted that [VeteransList.us](#) is a website of verified Veteran-owned businesses throughout the country. Jim also reported that MOAA will be sponsoring a lunch on July 20th. The guest speaker will be Rona Kramer, Secretary, Maryland Department of Aging. Commissioners are invited to attend for a fee.

Octavia Dixon, Commissioner, reported that she was recently appointed to the Delta Research and Educational Foundation (DREF) by Delta Sigma Theta. She is looking for an educational community project that promotes diversity and would benefit veterans. Please send suggestions to Octavia.

Joan Kleinman, Representative of Congressman Chris Van Hollen, reported that the VA has signed a lease in Gaithersburg for the Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC). The address is 15810 Gaither Road. The VA lease is for 11,500 sqft. The building has an additional 57,000 square feet. The VA is hoping to co-locate other Veteran services in the same building. It is scheduled to open by the Spring of 2017, although if there is a change it will open earlier. The County will be working on providing adequate transportation, signage and publicity.

Adjournment: 7:30 p.m.

Next Full Commission Meeting: Tuesday, September 20th, 2016 from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at Health & Human Services, 401 Hungerford Drive, 1st Floor Large Conference Room, Rockville, MD 20850

Respectfully submitted:

Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I

Betsy Luecking, Community Outreach Manager