

UNITED VETERANS LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL OF MINNESOTA

Veterans Service Building

2nd Floor • 20 West 12th Street • St. Paul, MN 55155-2079



Army



Air Force



Marine Corps



Coast Guard



Merchant Marines



Navy

“A Consortium of Veterans, Military, and Auxiliary Organizations to exchange information and support issues relating to Entitlements for Veterans, Military Retirees, the National Guard and Military Reservists, their dependents and survivors.”

UVLC Website – www.mnuvlc.org

UVLC Minutes –Wednesday, July 8, 2009

- **Call to order – 09:30**
- **Invocation – Joe Schimmers VFW**
- **Pledge of Allegiance – Al Loehr**
- **Recognition of visitors and guests and Commander’s of VSO’s**
Jim Mingey –CEO/President of Veterans Corp a guest of VICTRI. He will speak later.
Cheryl Thieschafer welcomed the UVCL to the St Cloud VA Medical Center, invited us to have lunch after the meeting and a tour of some of the facilities after lunch.
- **Reports from: Chairman, Jerry Kyser- Vice Chairman Ralph Donais**
Chairman attended corner stone opening at the Mpls Vets Home. There were over a 100 in attendance. July 2nd the Saints Baseball team held a Women Vets Appreciation Day. The 1st ever MN Missing Woman Flight Formation was performed and 20 Women from WWII to OIF and OEF conflicts were honored on the field. It was the largest Saints attendance (9381) ever. Vice Chair is glad to be back after travel to Japan and US bus tour for a Elk River Choir.

1. State Agencies and MN Veteran Assistance Organizations

[MN Dept of Veteran Affairs](#) – Anna Lewicki Long – MDVA Communications Director

Talked about the Corner Stone opening ceremony at the Mpls Vets Home and the many placed in it 75 years ago. The reconstruction project for building 9 is expected to be a three year project. The viability study for potential vets in cities around the state will be available in the next few weeks. The study will be on the MDVA website also. Anna announced that on July 1 MDVA in a partnership with MNDOT, Met council and Metro Transit, a new initiative that gives free transportation to disabled Veterans on Metro Buses and Light Rail. In greater MN, arrangements have been made with Bus Companies for specific bus routes for the free rides. All you need to have is a current VA ID card that has Service Connected written under your photo. You can get a VA ID at the Mpls or St Cloud Medical Center. Care providers who are assisting the Veteran are also allowed to ride free. Spouses traveling with the Veteran would also be a provider if the Veteran needed assistance. The free pass does not include Metro Mobility. They are a different transportation system.

MN Assistance Council for Veterans (MACV) - Executive Director, Kathy Vitalis

MACV received \$20,000 from the VFW this year. It is tough going with finances this year and they appreciate all the help they receive. They are applying for stimulus \$\$ from the Gov. The Legislature cut back on the amount given this year for programs but they again are grateful for what they received. A Tribute Fest is scheduled for Aug 14th and 15th in Duluth with profits to go to MACV. A Comedy Show Fundraiser is set for Sept 16th at the St Paul Depot and a Healing of Memories Workshop is to be held Oct 23-25. More and more homeless Vets are women. For the younger homeless Vets, 1 out of every 10 under the age of 45 is a woman. They are now putting \$ aside to give more grants to women in that category.

MN Veterans Initiatives Center and Research Institute –VICTRI – Jack Scharrett, Pres.

The newly passed Veterans Preference bill for Veteran–Owned Businesses (VOB’s) went into effect July 1st. Also passed was a Veterans Hiring Preference Bill for State employment openings for veterans and personal returning from deployment after Sept 11, 2001.

VICTRI received their 501c (3) title and can now receive tax deductible donations directly.

AMVETS recently donated \$ to VICTRI and they appreciate it. VICTRI is open for business and is helping over 2 dozen Vets start new businesses. The open house was a success and the Attendees were encouraged by the progress in such a short amount of time. Victory is working On a a joint venture with The Veterans Corp(TVC) new CEO, Jim Mingey to become regional center for VOB support and serve as a national model for helping Vets and their families start, build and sustain successful long-term businesses

Jim Mingey, CEO of The Vets Corp (TVC), was introduced an discussed the fresh start they are making with TVC. It includes regionalization of support of Veterpreneurs, development of new for-profit businesses that will support Vets business, create jobs and continue to support Vets for other financing starting new businesses.

2. Federal Agencies

VA Regional Office –Public Affairs Officer – Peter Panos

Peter is new to the job and was previously the spokesperson for the St Paul Police Dept The VA Regional Center is hiring many new people to be trained as Veteran Service Repts. to help process the many claims an lot quicker. Hiring is also going on for the Reg. Loan Section, Pension Section, Vets Compensation and benefits section. If Vets did not receive their stimulus \$ yet there is a contact e-mail to find out where their \$250 is. Letters for the MN disabled Vets county property tax reduction are being sent out to the eligible Vets. The Reg. VA is doing a story with the local media on the VA’s outreach to homeless Vets and how they are interacting with the VA Med. Centers, State Agencies and Vets Org. about temporary housing.

VISN 23 – Jim Dank for Dr Pezel who is in Wash DC as the Acting Principal Deputy Under Sec.

There are three separate VA Admn. The Health Admn, Vets Benefits Admn and the Cemetary Admn. The Vets Benefits Admn is hiring but he Health Admn is not. Jim brought a lot of the Fed Benefits booklets and the Vets health care overviews for us to hand out our Vets groups. He asked to get the information to the Vietnam Era vets who do not seem to be in the information stream of all the benefits they have earned. Jim talked about VA Hardship Benefits, Priority Group 8 Enrollment Relaxation changes. The details are in the VA Healthcare handout that Jim brought. The press release for the Disabled Vets free bus and train rides was handed out. A question was asked why was the Mpls VA Medical Center is reimbursed \$2000 more than St. Cloud VA Medical Center for the same patient treatment, physical or other service? Jim replied that the funding to facility is derived from the cost for providing care to a patient. Mpls has a lot of specialty patients and programs. Mpls is a Specialty Care facility and St Cloud is a Primary Care facility so it cost less to provide care a place like St Cloud. Budgeting is not derived from the cost of the individual service provided each day for a patient. It is derived by the percent of patients who would go to specialists to have services done. Since Mpls is a specialty care facility, with a large volume of patients the average cost is much higher in Mpls than St Cloud.

Mpls VA Medical Center – Mike Rosecrans- Patient Advocate

Work is continuing on the parking lot and it will be done this year. Mpls has submitted a proposal for a parking structure for the future with no start date. The Fisher House area is being prepared for construction by removing trees and obstructions. The CBOC is at headquarters for final approval. Steve Kleinglass has been meeting with interested parties including Congresswomen Bachmann, Vets groups, Mayors and others. No decision has been made on the location yet. The new CBOC for Rochester is opening July 27th.

St Cloud VA Medical Center – Cheryl Thieschafer

UVLC meeting attendees were invited to a tour of the areas under construction after lunch. The medical lab is moving to the basement of the of the main building and the former lab area will become an Urgent Care Clinic. A same day surgery center is being constructed and will be completed in the spring of 2010.

The Brainerd CBO Clinic is now serving over 4500 Vets in a renovated roller rink building. A CBO Clinic is scheduled to open in Alexandria in Sept of 2009.

Vets Employment & Training Service [VETS] – Jodi Bean

Two complete grants have been awarded every three years. MACV applied for and was awarded \$300,000 for the Homeless Reintegration Grant. They are happy to work with MACV for the next 3 years and hopefully longer. The other grant was from the Dept of Labor to help Veterans with job training. Resources Inc. of Mpls was awarded over \$407,000 and will operate in the 7 county metro areas. They are very helpful to Vets in seeking jobs. They are working on a 5 year State Grant that pays for Reps in the Workforce Center who do outreach statewide. Employment Rights Violations have slowed with the declining economy but another large group of Vets will be returning and the hope is that violations will stay low.

3. Federal Congressional Senators and Representatives

7th District Representative - Collin Peterson- Al Loehr

Al Paid tribute to the Gov and the Legislature for the successful session in which Veterans did well with the programs and bills in our favor. We did not get all we wanted but in these times we are happy with what Vets received.

Federal Military Construction and Vets Affairs Committee passed spending bills that need to be worked out with the Senate. With over 403,000 claims pending the VA needs to hire and train more Reps. These Pension and disability Claims need to be taken care of ASAP. It's been a problem for many years and the system must change.

A Comment was made about the lack of attendance to the UVLC meeting by Members. The Presenters of the Federal and State agencies show up along with the Congressional Staffers and the members should do the same.

1st District Representative –Tim Walz - John Pierce

Rep Walz worked on a bill dealing with NG and Reserve leave compensation issues. DOD is having personnel be redeployed again with compensating them for their last leaves. Rep Walz is pushing for the electronic health records coordination between DOD and the VA. It needs to be implemented NOW.

2nd District Representative – John Kline - Chaz Johnson

Rep Kline, Rep McCollum and others read the names of the Men on the MN Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall on 6-13-2009. Rep Kline has become the ranking Minority member of the Education Comm. This will enable him to further Education issues for the Military and Vets that he has championed. He has written and supported bills that help NG and Reserve refresh their academic skills after deployment. He is also supporting Higher Ed. Pell Grants for Children of deceased OIF/OEF Vets with the 911 GI Bill, that determine eligibility for Fed. Financial Aid. He also supports legislation in the Nat Defense Authorization Act that would provide funding for the fulfillment of the promises of Concurrent Receipts for retired Retirees and increased benefits for them.

6th District Representative – Tara Westby

Rep Bachmann held the 2nd roundtable for the NW CBOC and is hopeful that the process stays on tract. Tara is now assigned to the 6th district Vets History project along with her current duties.

4. **Announcements – Chairman – I Thank the MDVA for their leadership in the production of the Vietnam Era Vets Tribute. Commissioner Dyrud, Anna Long and Sarah Graves of the Communications Dept, Richard Jenkins (Commander MOPH) and the many Veteran Service Organizations are to be commended on a great day. We worked on it for over a year and it was very emotional day for all of us involved. Thanks Again!!**

Vice Chairman – Ralph pointed out that the current situation with the Veterans Health Care goes back to the late 1980s when the VA downsized prior to Desert Storm. Many facilities were neglected, closed and had funding cuts. After Desert Storm the VA was not funded properly to take care of Veterans needs and they have never been able to catch up and get to where they should now be. It has been a problem not solved by White House and Congress for over 20 years.

Treasure – Jimmie Lee – After Lunch anyone interested was invited to go up to Salk Center to visit a Valley Forge Village and see a presentation about what is happening there.

5. **Meeting in Recess for Lunch**
6. **Old Business –Treasures report \$4400 + in the bank. Dues Owed by 8 members**
7. **New Business – There were not enough members for a business meeting and was cancelled until Aug 5th**

**Adjournment/ Next Meeting 9:30 AM - Wed, Aug 5, 2009 Building 9 Auditorium
Mpls Medical Center Campus, Mpls, MN**

There were 31 people in attendance