



VIETNAM VETERANS of AMERICA WISCONSIN STATE COUNCIL

**UNAPPROVED MINUTES
Camp Victory, Mead, Wisconsin
June 23, 2022**



Camp Victory It's all about healing for veterans at Camp Victory

by Dean Lesar

At Camp Victory, the goal is clear: Give veterans a place to heal. In all the work that happens, we give those who were injured in defense of their country a chance at what the camp's name implies.

Few yet know about Camp Victory, a 300-acre mostly wooded area west of Greenwood, WI on the southern edge of the town of Mead, WI. Developed and owned by Al and Kay Lamovec of Willard, WI, the land for years was a place for hunters with disabilities to gather in the fall, but it has since been called to a higher purpose.

Al Lamovec always had plans for the 80 acres he bought along Sterling Avenue in 1992. With his dad, Henry, he built a small cabin, laid out miles of forest trails, and developed food plots for the local wildlife. He had his eyes, as well, on an adjoining piece of land, and with that 200 acres, he thought, he could develop a hunting camp.

That vision progressed when Al joined the late Dale Petkovsek in establishing a local annual deer hunt for those with disabilities. Each year he welcomed to his acreage several hunters who had various physical issues that made it difficult to hunt without assistance. Of those, he began to notice several who had served their country, and some who were both physically and emotionally worse for wear.

"About 30 percent of those were veterans," he said of the early hunters.

Lamovec did eventually buy the 200 acres, plus another adjacent nearby 40. In 2002, he and Henry built a log cabin, which became the headquarters of the annual hunt. After Petkovsek passed away in 2012, he was no longer associated with that project.

As he further developed his land, Lamovec was looking ahead to its future use. Through the years, he planted 250 fruit trees and a hardwood stand, built and graveled four miles of woodland trails, added a pond, and



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built an addition to the cabin, all while thinking about its eventual purpose. A Marine Corps and Vietnam-era veteran himself, that purpose became clear.

Lamovec during his tenure as a Board member of the Highground, Al learned of their evolving mission to heal veterans — especially those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) — he and Kay decided in 2018 to give their land to the cause. In February 2019, the land was turned over, The Highground taking ownership while Lamovec and an 8-man Board took over camp operations. The place had become known as Wisconsin Adventures on Wheels during its days of working with hunters with disabilities but was renamed Camp Victory to signify its goal of helping veterans win out over their PTSD.

After turning the land over to the Highground, Lamovec regained ownership and Camp Victory is now a nonprofit used for veterans retreats. The La Crosse Veterans Center holds retreats at Camp Victory for veterans with PTSD. Four special 4-day archery hunts are held every fall for various veterans groups. There is one for “in country” Vietnam vets, another for Purple Heart recipients, one for Wisconsin combat veterans, and another for those who served in the Persian Gulf.

Along the four miles of trails are nine enclosed 8' X 8' wheelchair-accessible hunting shacks, 12 ladder stands, and various food plots that bring in the deer and turkeys. The cabin sleeps 10 in a bunkhouse that adjoins a large space that seats 45 people for meals and camaraderie. It's a busy place during the fall hunts.

Under development, is a campground area that will be fed by electricity. Plans call for the erection of a plumbed restroom facility near the campground, which will be reserved for veterans and others invited to use the camp. Lamovec says it's also used for youth groups as an education location – another camp priority.

With its secluded location, miles of serene trails, and expanding facilities that now include female quarters, an accessible shower, and a spacious meeting area,

“The outdoors is one of the key ingredients,” Lamovec said. As such, he is currently adding six rest stops with benches along the Camp Victory trails where counselors can sit with veterans and talk through their issues.

Another main healer for veterans, Lamovec said, is to be able to share with someone who understands their experiences. That is the magic of the annual hunts, he said, where the opportunities to take a deer are secondary to the camaraderie.

After each day's hunt, Lamovec said, the veterans return to camp and share a meal. After stories of bucks and does are exchanged, the talk gets more serious as the veterans find an outlet they may not have had before in their new friends.

“We get out of the way,” Lamovec said. “They get a chance to talk to each other about their experiences. Most of these veterans don't even talk to their wives. We get a lot of satisfaction out of seeing the people communicate.”

With the campground facilities, Lamovec wants veterans to be able to bring their wives, and children, as they use Camp Victory to heal. Spouses of veterans may find others who understand what they deal with each day, too.

“The spouses don't get any help,” Lamovec said. “They're not getting support from anywhere. They can help each other through the highs and lows.”



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Lamovec said he didn't necessarily see this as the end purpose for his land, which he and his brothers hunted when they were kids — but it's a perfect fit now.

"It was a natural, especially since they came to the realization 10 years ago that PTSD was a major issue," he said. "It's a real good marriage."

For Al and Kay, the direction of Camp Victory fulfills them. Al has created Camp Victory into a nonprofit organization in which he is the President with a Board of Directors. Jeffery LeCount is the Executive Director since the nonprofit was created. Jeff an OEF/OIF veteran has volunteered at Camp Victory serving fellow veterans for 13 years.

Jeff, a trained chef, hosts meetings as well as dining experiences in the main lodge at Camp Victory for veterans.

[For additional information please contact Jeff LeCount at 303-945-9996.]

Edited by Secretary Mullarkey, 2022

Pledge of Allegiance

Guest Speaker

Secretary Mary Kolar, Wisconsin Department of Veteran Affairs (WDVA). Secretary Kolar spoke about WDVA and answered questions from the membership. Secretary Kolar served 28 years in the military and reminded everyone that veterans are eligible for dozens of benefits in Wisconsin (including some family members); additional information can be found on their website Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) at <https://dva.wi.gov/>. She shared that while "much has changed in the Department over the last 50 years, much remains to be done". While not playing to the Wisconsin Vietnam Veterans State Council, the Secretary shared that currently, Vietnam veterans are the largest number in the State of Wisconsin.

The Secretary's remarks fell into three categories: 1) Wisconsin's Veterans Homes, 2) Veteran Outreach and Recovery, and 3) Workforce ReIntegration.

First, Wisconsin has three (3) State veterans homes (Chippewa Falls, King [Waupaca], and Union Grove). Since the COVID pandemic struck Wisconsin admission to each home was stopped, but restarted in the first quarter of 2022 following strict COVID screening protocols and precautions that are still in place. However, workforce shortages continue at each home.

Secretary Kolar was asked about the "issues" at the Union Grove veterans home. She distributed a copy of an open letter to the membership regarding an article in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. Staffing issues existed before the pandemic and became much worse during it with Union Grove being temporarily closed to stabilize and reduce the number of residents. The National Guard was used as a temporary solution to assist at the facility. Several articles in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel have made it difficult to hire new employees; when positions are posted online, copies of the articles are posted which may have hurt the hiring process. Hiring has been paused as a result of our online efforts and the negative results. Another concern at the homes was the number of citations (which can include improper wearing of masks, etc.); one of the newspaper articles on dehydration incorrectly/inappropriately (i.e., without permission) featured residents of the facility. A Commandant isn't being used/needed at the facility since the private contractor who is running it is doing such an excellent job. The pros and cons of changing to being a state-run facility were discussed.



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Second, Secretary Kolar discussed the Veterans Outreach and Recovery Program (VORP), including suicide prevention forums held across the State (in Appleton, Wausau, La Crosse, and Milwaukee); Native American communities are next on the list of locations to visit. State grants have gone to veterans: \$300,000 in entrepreneurship grants and \$250,000 in other grants.

To learn more about the Veterans Outreach and recovery program go to the WDVA website by clicking [HERE](#) if your Minutes are electronic or their URL address is: <https://dva.wi.gov/Pages/benefitsclaims/VORP.aspx>

Finally, the Secretary addressed the Workforce reintegration of veterans was discussed including the [Wisconsin Military and Medical Corpsmen Program](#) (military to civilian healthcare positions; based on Virginia's MMAC program), and the [ETS Sponsorship Program](#) (connects those leaving the military with sponsors/mentors in the location they are moving to; the program includes profit and non-profit organizations such as tech schools, universities, and apprenticeships). This is also available to veterans in need as well. Newsletters and forums for suicide prevention and outreach and recovery programs and housing and recovery programs were also discussed.

Roll Call

The President requested the Secretary to call the roll: the Executive Officers were present Michael Demske (0731), President, Dan Sciuti (0425), Vice-President, James Mullarkey (0425), Secretary, Patrick Craney (0425), Treasurer, and Richard Lindbeck (0448), Executive Director. Also, present were the VVA Region Six Director John Margowski and the VVA At-Large Director Richard Lindbeck. The WSC Region Directors present were Region 2 Director Mike Johnson (0236), Region 4 Director Joe Heil (0005), and At-Large Director Greg Foye. Representation from the VVA Chapters included 0005, 0092, 0101, 0202, 0224, 0236, 0351, 0425, 0448, 0479, 0635, 0729, 0731, At-Large. AVVA was represented from VVA Chapter: 0005, 0206, 0351, 0635, and At-Large. With over fifty percent of the VVA Chapters represented a quorum was called.

Parliamentarian and Timekeeper were selected.

The agenda was accepted based on a motion from Margowski, seconded by Lindbeck, and approved without objection.

President's Report, Mike Demske

President Demske called for a review and approval of the March 2022 Minutes. The city in which Leadership was being held was changed. Richard Lindbeck motioned for approval, seconded by Margowski, and carried with changes without objection.

Mike discussed the difference between how toxic exposure manifests in children (and/or grandchildren) of Vietnam veterans (functional such as ADHD, behavioral, etc.) versus the children of younger veterans (structural, including fingers, toes, etc.). No action has been taken by the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) on the Toxic Exposure Research Act (P.L. #114-315). A motion came out of the committee and the National Board of Directors at the National Convention to sue DVA and the Secretary of DVA for their lack of action.

There still is no Nationally recognized birth defect registry.

The PACT Act (to improve health care and benefits for veterans exposed to toxic substances) passed the House of Representatives, was sent to the Senate (modifications were made), and was sent back to the House to



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approve the changes. Some members of the House are now saying the bill will cost too much; as of the meeting, the amended bill has not passed in the House. This is a wait-and-see period.

The Secretary was directed to send a speaking request to Dan Buttery, CEO of the War Memorial Center.

Secretary's Report, Jim Mullarkey

The new website is up and fully running. Jim is currently working on pulling in the "historical information" (very time-consuming). Some new areas on the website include a video about Vietnam on the front page and a "bubble" on the bottom right of the screen, which functions similarly to a "chat" feature.

Jim talked about "Warrior's Song" and distributed copies of one of their CDs. A 501(c)3 helps veterans heal through a specific process. The veteran tells their story, it is set to lyrics and professional musicians record the song and put it on a CD.

Treasurer's Report, Pat Craney

The State Council remains financially stable.

VVA Region Six Director, John Margowski

Strategic Plan

John Margowski and Mike Demske distributed a Working Group 1 handout and discussed it. The working groups were established to help determine if/how to dissolve VVA in October 2016 when Panel A and then Panel B were established. Panel A became Working Group 1 (WG-1) and Panel B became Working Group 2 in April 2017. WG-1 met through RING, (on—line), e-mail, and telephone before scheduled National meetings. A draft of their completed work was presented to the National Board at the 2018 Leadership Conference and a 72-page final draft was presented to the National Board at a meeting in April 2019. WG-1 was blocked from attempting to present the Final Plan for Dissolution to the membership at the 2019 National Conference. The WG-1 report was accepted by the National Board in April 2022 and is still valid for use if VVA is dissolved.

Panel of Inquiry

A Panel of Inquiry was assembled in November 2021 regarding the relationship between VVA and the Veterans Voice of America (VetVOA). A copy of "The Panel of Inquiry Report to the Board 1/15/2020" was distributed to members at the meeting.

Region Six Report

John received only one (1) response for a Region Six meeting in Iowa in July 2022, as a result, there will not be a VVA Region Six meeting this year.

At Large Director's Report, Richard Lindbeck

Although the PACT Act (\$10 Billion of funding over 10 years) has been delayed it is expected to pass.

Richard reminded members that the Leadership Conference is August 9-13 in Greenville, SC. Registration is due by July 15; there will be a membership seminar.

Legislative Committee, Dan Sciuti, Chair

HR3967 (Honoring the PACT Act): The bill was introduced in the Senate by Senators Tester (D, MT) and Moran (R, KS); more presumptive conditions were added to the bill received from the House.

A request was made to Congress to expand Arlington National Cemetery. Land for the expansion has been purchased but is meeting resistance from some who live nearby.



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A report from Dr. Tom Hall, Chair of the VVA PTSD Committee, given to a Congressional Subcommittee regarding VVA's views on VA Vets Centers was distributed to the membership.

Old Business

Secretary Mullarkey requested funding to send a postcard to all Wisconsin VVA members requesting they go online and complete a PTSD survey for Dr. Whittle with the results going directly to Dr. Whittle; approved.

New Business

None

Announcements Before Adjournment

National is not going away soon, so States and Regions need to begin meeting again.

A motion was made for a \$1,000 monetary donation to Camp Victor was passed. Motion by John Margowski and seconded by James Mullarkey. Passed with "No Objection"

Elections results for Wisconsin State Council Officers were unanimously elected: President, Mike Demske; Vice-President, Dan Sciuti; Secretary, Jim Mullarkey, and Treasurer, Patrick Craney. The only Regional Director in attendance was an interim Director; Chapters in each region will need to meet and elect their respective Region Directors.

August 9 – August 13, 2022

National Leadership Conference, Greenville, SC

September 24, 2022

Wisconsin State Council quarterly meeting; Par 4 Comfort Suites, Waupaca

December 2-3, 2022

Wisconsin State Council Holiday Gathering and Quarterly WSC VVA/AVVA Meeting; Comfort Suites Par4, Waupaca, Wisconsin

Adjournment

Respectively Submitted,

James E. Mullarkey

James E. Mullarkey, Secretary
Wisconsin State Council



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