



Together Always

**AVVA - AT LARGE NEWSLETTER  
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I hope you had a safe and Happy 4<sup>th</sup> of July. These are my notes from the Wisconsin State Council quarterly meeting (and annual picnic) on Saturday, June 25, 2022 at Camp Victory and a separate AVVA meeting.

**AVVA Meeting**

AVVA held a meeting before the regular State Council meeting.

- Pat was re-elected as the State AVVA Representative.
- Pat reminded everyone the Leadership Conference is August 9-13, 2022 in Greenville, SC; she encouraged attendance if possible.
- Richard Lindbeck oversaw the election and suggested AVVA members encourage VVA members they know to become members of AVVA to support the organization; dues are \$50 for an AVVA lifetime membership for those who are currently VVA members.

**AVVA Report**

Rick Talford, AVVA Region 6 Director, and Pat gave AVVA reports to the State Council.

Rick reported that:

- Once again, Missouri has the largest AVVA membership with over 10,00 members.
- Project Friendship donations this year will go to Fellow Countrymen, a homeless veterans organization in Greenville, SC; please contribute if you can.

Pat reported that:

- She was re-elected for another 2-year term as State Representative.
- Pat also encouraged Chapters and individuals to donate to AVVA's Project Friendship.
- AVVA Chapters need to consider how they will function when VVA dissolves; bring this up at your Chapter meetings; if there are Chapter assets to be disposed of, it will be based on State of Wisconsin rules.
- Pat reminded AVVA members they are a non-voting member of their Chapter's Board of Directors.

**State Council**

Jeffery LeCount, Executive Director of Camp Victory, welcomed the State Council and spoke about the facility.

- Camp Victory began separating from The Highground on 1/1/2022 and completed the transfer in mid-June. Camp Victory is comprised of 295 acres with 4-1/2 miles of groomed gravel trails.
- Camp Victory helps veterans cope with mental health issues; they plan to expand to include first responders (firefighters and police officers); stays are usually 3-4 days.
- All campground sites have electricity and community bathrooms and showers with plans for individual cabins in the future. To make reservations, contact them at 303-945-9996.
- Camp Victory holds archery only hunts for Vietnam, Purple Heart, OIF and all other veterans with multiple types of hunting stands; they also have catch and release fishing ponds.
- Camp Victory work days are August 11-12 to get the Camp ready for its Open House on August 13, 2022.

Special Guest Presentation

Our special guest speaker was 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 for family members); additional information can be found at wisvets.com. She shared that while “much has changed over the last 50 years, much remains to be done”.
- Currently, Vietnam veterans are the largest number of veterans in the State of Wisconsin.
- Wisconsin has 3 state veterans homes. Admissions to them had stopped during COVID but were re-started earlier this year (screening and precautions are still in place); workforce shortages continue to be addressed.
- Secretary Kolar discussed the Veterans Outreach and Recovery Program (VORP), including suicide prevention forums held across the State (in Appleton, Wausau, LaCrosse 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.
- 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 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 on-line, copies of the articles are posted and may have a negative impact on the hiring process; hiring has been paused as a result; another concern 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.
- 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). Newsletters and forums for suicide prevention and outreach and recovery programs and housing and recovery programs were also discussed.

#### President’s Report (Michael Demske)

- 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 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 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 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.

#### 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). There are some new areas on the website including 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 CD’s. It is a 501(c)3 that 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.

#### Strategic Plan Report – John Margowski

John and Mike Demske distributed out 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 by 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 6 Director's Report (John Margowski)

- John received only 1 response for a Region 6 meeting in Iowa in July so there won't be one this year.

#### At Large Director's Report (Richard Lindbeck)

- Although the PACT Act (\$10 billion of funding over 10 years) has been delayed but 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)

Dan reported on multiple items.

- 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.
- 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 go directly to Dr. Whittle; approved.

#### New Business

- National is not going away any time soon so states/regions need to begin meeting again.
- A motion was made for a monetary donation to Camp Victory; passed.
- Elections for State Council officers were held; officers were unanimously elected: President, Mike Demske; Vice President, Dan Sciuti; Secretary, Jim Mullarkey and Treasurer, Pat Craney. The only Regional Director in attendance was an interim Director; Chapters in each region will need to meet and elect their respective Regional Director.

#### Upcoming Events:

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 meeting; Par 4 Comfort Suites, Waupaca

May I send you this newsletter by e-mail? If so, please contact me at [jlfoye@frontier.com](mailto:jlfoye@frontier.com) with a subject line of "AVVA At-Large Newsletter" or by phone at 715-842-9197 (please leave your phone number so I can return your call). Any suggestions on what (or how much) information to include in this newsletter is greatly appreciated. Thank you!

Have a wonderful rest of your summer and a safe and Happy Labor Day.



Joy L. Foye

Wisconsin AVVA At-Large Representative