

UNITED VETERANS COUNCIL
“2007 VETERANS ORGANIZATION OF THE YEAR”
An Ad-Hoc Alliance of Veterans Service Organizations in San Diego County
“The Voice of the Veterans Community in San Diego”
WWW.SDUVC.ORG

Veterans Museum and Memorial Center
2115 Park Boulevard
San Diego, CA. 92101-4753
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Summary of Meeting

Saturday, June 23rd, 2007

The Chairman: The Chairman called the meeting to order at 9:30 A.M., and Stuart Hedley led the Pledge of Allegiance, with Allen Miliefsky offering the Invocation. All Council Officers were present with exception of the Secretary, who was absent and excused, along with forty members of the Council and Guests.

Appropriate introductions were conducted, and The Chairman recognized and lauded the Past Chairmen of the Council and past, as well as present Veterans of the Year who were present.

The Chairman then introduced California State Assembly Member Mary Salas of the 79th District. She spoke about what has transpired in the past six months that she has been a Freshman Assembly Member, and her term to date as the Chair of the Assembly Veterans Affairs Committee. She indicated she also serves on the Health Care, Jobs, Economic Development and the Economy, and Water, Parks & Wildlife Committees. She commented that her Father and all six of her Uncles served in the U.S. Armed Forces, and her goal as Chair of the Veterans Affairs Committee is to ensure that California's Veterans receive the benefits they have so rightfully earned.

She cited Assembly Bill 581, which she authored, which establishes the Combat Stress Support Team Program in the California Military Department, which will provide emergency crisis counseling, referral and personnel support, Combat Stress evaluation, and mental health support for the State Military Personnel and their Family members.

In 1997, the California State Legislature allocated \$5 million annually to fund the States' County Veterans Service Officer Program, which they have yet to have received on an annual basis. She authored Assembly Bill 389, which would have ensured the Counties receive their necessary annual funding, but the Assembly did not pass the Bill. She intends to bring the Bill back in the next session.

She also commented on some of her experiences in the State Legislature, and on how appreciative she is of the solid working relationships she has with various members of the San Diego Veterans Community, and that she intends to continue and expand these relationships in the future. Several members posed questions to Assembly Member Salas or gave comment.

The Chair then commented on one of the UVC's objectives to inform Veterans, their family members and all County citizens about the symptoms of and treatment opportunities for victims of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). He then introduced Mike Sloan and Bill Rider of the American Combat Veterans of War (ACVOW), who provided a short presentation concerning their efforts to educate returning Combat Veterans about PTSD. Mike described the origins of their organization, and their "peer-to-peer" mentoring

program. They have an office at the VA Medical Center in La Jolla as well as at Camp Pendleton, and have advised between 7,000 and 8,000 individuals about PTSD, and where they can find assistance with this disability, over the past five or six years. They also routinely participate in group-discussions with active duty Marines within 72 to 96 hours after their return from combat zones, most recently with a group of 1,200 non-commissioned officers at Camp Pendleton, with another 3,000 to 5,000 Marines attending their group discussion sessions over the past few years.

The Chairman initiated a discussion about how ACVOW and the UVC can work together to assist Veterans in learning about PTSD, with the San Diego VA Healthcare System Director, Gary Rossio providing comment, amongst others. Bill Rider gave an example of how Combat Veterans of all eras can succumb to this disability. Several other members posed questions or gave comment. For more information about ACVOW, contact their office at the VA Medical Center at (858) 552-8585, extension 7501 or email Michael.Sloan@med.va.gov

The Chairman then introduced Dr. John Nachison, who spoke about Mobilizing Community Resources for Returning OIF/OEF Veterans and their Families. Dr. Nachison spoke about the number of active duty persons that will be discharged into our Community in the future, and the problems that will arise when the existing infrastructure cannot support these new Veterans and their family members' needs. He proposed a Summit of all interested organizations to be held at the Veteran's Museum & Memorial Center on Wednesday, July 11th, 2007 to formulate an integrated Community response that utilizes all of the assets of the various Federal, State, Local agencies as well as non-profit organizations in the County.

The Chairman encouraged all present to attend the Summit, as well as participate in "Stand Down 2007".

The Minutes: The Chairman called for a review of the Minutes of the May 26th, 2007, Council meeting. He called for corrections or additions, and hearing none, the Chairman indicated they stood as published.

Treasurer's report: The Chairman called for the Treasurer's report. The Treasurer, Joe Brunner, described the ledger, to include receipts of a \$1,000.00 donation from the 2006 CPO Pride Day Committee, \$100.00 from the Mt. Soledad Memorial Association and \$10.00 from the bumper sticker fundraiser. There was an expenditure of \$735.39 to replenish the bumper sticker supply. He reported an ending balance of \$2,770.31 in the checking account and \$100.23 in the savings account, for a total of \$2,870.54.

Chairman's comments: The Chairman, Tom Richards, commented on the very successful Veterans Seminar, Job & Resource Fair that was held at the Veterans Museum & Memorial Center on June 2nd, with 105 vendors' participation, of which 80 were employers. He indicated nearly 1,300 job seekers attended the event with approximately 1,000 of them being Veterans. The morning's Transition Seminar and afternoon's Legislative Panel were also well attended. San Diego Mayor Jerry Sanders was the Keynote Speaker at the Noon luncheon, where awards were presented to Veteran-friendly employers from the area. He lauded Terry Jensen of the California Economic Development Department for his contribution to the event.

The Chairman indicated that in keeping with the Councils' Vision, Mission & Objectives Statement, he gave a brief overview of the various Committees and Subcommittees that still need to be developed and solicited for volunteers to staff these entities.

1st Vice Chairman's comments: Allen Miliefsky, the 1st Vice Chairman, reminded everyone about tomorrow's Padre vs. Red Sox baseball game, with about thirty-five local Veterans attending the game courtesy of the Jewish War Vets.

2nd Vice Chairperson's comments: The 2nd Vice Chairperson, Betty Nimits, encouraged those present to volunteer for one of the Council's Committees.

Good of the Order: The Chairman called for issues pertinent to the Good of the Order.

Steve Campbell indicated that volunteers are still needed to help staff the “Internet Café” at the VA Medical Center in La Jolla during the weekday.

Eagles Wings: Chaplain Ron Ritter reported that the next series of Eagles Wings bereavement counseling sessions would begin on July 8th, with ten men and women who will be attending. He explained the purpose and function of Eagles Wings being a unique counseling program for Widows and Widowers of the Military and Veteran Community in San Diego.

Legislative reports: The Chairman called for the Legislative reports.

U.S. House Legislation: John Smith commented on HR 327, *The Joshua Omvig Suicide Prevention Act*, which provides additional funding for PTSD treatment, HR 1284, *The Veterans Compensation Cost of Living Adjustment Act*, HR 1538, *The Wounded Warriors Act*, and HR 797, which would provide funding for the VA Work Study program to be used by State agencies.

U. S. Senate Legislation: The Senate Legislative Chair remains unfilled. The Chairman gave brief comment on Senate legislation.

State Legislation: Stephen Arends gave brief comments on HR 551, *The Veterans Homeownership Act of 2007*, which would support the State’s Qualified Veteran Mortgage Bond Program, and the 44 of the State’s 53 California House members, including all five from San Diego County, have co-sponsored the Bill. He also reported on S. 22, *The Post 9/11 Educational Assistance Act of 2007*, and commented on various State Assembly and Senate Bills.

Veteran’s Museum and Memorial Center: RADM Rod Melendez, Director of the Center, reported that the Museum may host a Combat Veterans Town Hall meeting at the Museum in July, and more information will be promulgated when known. The Chair also indicated that the Veterans Museum and Memorial Association would hold its Annual Membership Meeting on July 11th at 7:00 P.M. in the upper Hall at the Museum.

VA San Diego Healthcare System: Gary Rossio, Director of the VA Healthcare System in San Diego, reported that there is no truth to the rumor that a Veteran has to be service-connected for PTSD to be eligible to get treatment for the condition, and that never has been true. They have increased the size of their Staff to be able to get OIF/OEF Veterans seen for PTSD as soon as possible. He gave extensive comment about the disability of PTSD, and that there is help from a variety of resources in the Community to assist in helping Veterans cope with this disability and reminded everyone that all honorably discharged OIF/OEF Veterans are eligible for two years of free health care from the VA.

VA San Diego Regional Office: Matt Braiotta reported on behalf of Lily Fetzer, Director of the San Diego VA Regional Office, and gave comment that the Regional Office inventory of pending claims is increasing, and they have hired 30 new Veterans Service Representatives who are in training in Seattle. They are also hosting 20 new Rating Veterans Service Representatives for training in how to evaluate Veterans disability claims. They actively continue to recruit from the Veterans Community for new personnel. Information concerning these positions can be found at www.usajobs.gov

He announced Tonia Damon is replacing him as the Community Affairs Officer for the VA Regional Office in San Diego. John Smith lauded Matt for his efforts and indicated that Matt is going back to College. Matt thanked everyone for their support, and remarked about how unique the San Diego Veterans Community is.

VA National Cemetery at Ft. Rosecrans: Bill Livingston, Director of the National Cemetery at Ft. Rosecrans, indicated that there would be a period of six to eight months where there will not be any space available for internment of full-body remains or cremains in San Diego, based on the number of internments being conducted today. He expects the Annex at MCAS Miramar to be opening in December of 2008.

San Diego County Veterans Service Office: Tom Splitgerber, Director of the San Diego County Veterans Service Office, commented on various issues, and several recent meetings he had attended.

Veterans Village of San Diego: Darcy Pavich reported on behalf of Al Pavich, Director of Veterans Village, and indicated that the “Stand Down 2007” Clothing Drive would be held on June 26th from 6:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. in the Hickman Hall Parking lot at VVSD. She indicated she stills needs volunteers, particularly on Friday, July 13th. She also reported that LT. Governor John Garamendi would be visiting VVSD on Monday at 2:00 P.M., and that this year at the National Coalition of Homeless Veterans, VVSD was awarded “Organization of the Year”. They were also awarded “Project of the Year” for VVSD Phase I by the City of San Diego Housing Commission. They also received the “Warrior Transitions Grant” which is \$976,000.00 over the course of three years, to be used for transitioning personnel. She also commented on the progress of the construction project.

“One VA” Report: John Smith, Co-Chairman of the “One VA” Committee, gave comment on their recent meeting and that the next meeting would be on July 18th, 2007 at 9:30 A.M. at the VA Regional Office. He expounded on the “One VA” concept, and how it works to address the Communities Veteran issues, including treatment of returning personnel for PTSD, particularly the presumed stigma surrounding seeking treatment for the condition.

San Diego County Veterans Advisory Council: Steve Arends reported on behalf of Nancy Owen, Chairperson of the Council, and indicated that he had nothing significant to report.

San Diego County United Veterans Association: John Weaver, Chairman of the Association, reported that the next meeting of the Association and Veterans Day Parade Committee would be on July 12th, 2007 at 6:00 P.M. in the lower hall of the Veterans Museum & Memorial Center. Joe Brunner indicated that the Parade Committee did decide that the 2007 Veterans Day Parade would be held on Saturday, November 10th, vice Sunday, November 11th due to transportation logistic problems with the participating High School Bands.

Mt. Soledad Memorial Association: John Smith reported on behalf of Bill Kellogg, President of the Association, and indicated that they are still working out the details of the Memorandum of Understanding between the U.S. Navy and the Association concerning the operation and administration of the Memorial.

USS Midway Museum: The Chairman noted for the record that Joe Ciokon was the USS Midway Museum “Volunteer of the Year” for this year.

Old business: The Chairman called for Old Business or Correspondence, and heard none.

New business: The Chairman indicated that Congressman Bilbray would be hosting a Veterans Fair at Palomar College on August 11th, and that the Council has been asked to staff a Resource table there. He asked for volunteers for this event.

He also indicated that he would entertain nominations for the “Veteran of the Year” candidate from the United Veterans Council.

He then called for any other new business, and hearing none, the Chairman admonished all present to take the information disseminated today back to the members of their organizations, and bring a Veteran to the next meeting! The Meeting was adjourned at 11:30 A. M.

The next Meeting of the United Veterans Council of San Diego County will be at 9:30 A.M. on Saturday, July 28th, 2007 in the Lower Hall of the Veterans Museum and Memorial Center in Balboa Park.

Recorded by:

Approved by:

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