

Sarasota County Veterans Commission

DRAFT Minutes: January 14, 2016

- Meeting was called to order by Vice President, Todd Hughes at 1:00 PM.
- President Ted Smith was absent due to illness.
- Opened with a prayer by Chaplain, Barbara Vaughn, followed by Pledge to the Flag.
- BG Jim Hesson presented a short video commemorating the Vietnam War IHO Vietnam veterans.
- David Taylor moved to accept Minutes from December meeting. Minutes accepted.
- Treasurer's Report was accepted subject to Financial Committee review.
- Danny Bilyeu reported from Congressman Buchanan's office that implementation of new Veterans ID card is in progress. He also introduced a new intern in the congressman's office.
- Sarasota County Commissioner Paul Cariagulo wished everyone a Happy New Year on behalf of the Sarasota County Commission.
- Director John Rosentrater, Sarasota National Cemetery, reported:
 - Volunteers with the Wreaths Across America project placed 9,300 sponsored wreaths on graves at Sarasota National in mid-December. On January 9th an equally enthusiastic group of volunteers picked them all up in under an hour. Suncoast Metals is recycling the wire from the wreaths
 - Sarasota National Ceremony celebrated its 7th year of operation on January 9, 2016. There have been 12,500 burials.
 - Two new veterans cemeteries have been opened in Florida, one in Cape Canaveral and one in Naples.
 - "Flags for Fallen Vets," a volunteer group, is looking for donations toward their Memorial Day project. The group will be placing flags at each gravesite at Sarasota National Cemetery. For more information visit the group's website.

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- Gene Sweeney with Monuments and Memorials reported:
 - An outstanding veterans party was held in December at John Saputo's facility at Lakewood Ranch and thanked "Homes for Heroes" which was the chief sponsor of the event.
 - Major Frank Towers, 97 years young, appeared at the Al Katz Holocaust Resource Center in Cortez, Fl., an annual reunion of the survivors of the "Train" which Frank Towers Patrol liberated Jews from the boxcars on the way to Bergen Belson Camp. Gene also reported on a video tribute, "Oceans Away" produced by Elton John.
 - Phil Berkowitz, Mr. Sweeny's partner, is negotiating a permanent home for the Todah Menorah Memorial.
 - 911 Memorial in Patriots Park in Venice now has more than 600 names engraved on the marble base, including the Benghazi four. Names of the victims of the Blackhawk crash near Eglin AFB will soon be added to the Memorial.

- Georgie Alfano Cronk was absent.
- Jerry Koontz was absent.
- Art McGinnis had no report.
- Deb Kehoe with "Homes for Our Troops" announced that their Jan 30th golf tournament is sold out. She also showed photos of veterans as they are receiving their new homes. BG Hesson presented Deb with a 50th Anniversary Commemoration pin in honor of her husband who was a Vietnam veteran.
- Andy Hooker presented a special recognition proclamation to Jill Rothenburg for her promotion of "Salute to Veterans" at McIntosh Middle School and other area schools. The proclamation from the Sarasota County Veterans Commission honored Jill for her work in promoting patriotism among school children and urging them to learn about the veterans in their families. Jill shared a scrapbook of her work with the students.

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- Troy Scott, Chair of the Fourth Annual JFCS Tribute to Veterans Service to Community Awards Luncheon, announced that the Luncheon will be held on Monday, May 2nd at Michael's on East. Nomination forms and criteria are available.
- BG Jim Hesson spoke about the 50th Commemoration of the Vietnam War. He said their goal is to make sure that all Vietnam vets are acknowledged and thanked. Pins of commemoration will be presented to all vets that he can find. He and members of his group are available to go to any veterans organization or group to hold a ceremony and present the pins.
- Veteran's Caregiver Support is a group founded in our area by Julie Cook Downing. Her intention is to share the experience she's gained with other care giving groups. To that end, she is holding a "lunch and learn" for veterans' caregivers. She is seeking a lunch sponsor(s), and a giving partner who can work with the Community Foundation to underwrite the program. She requested that the Veterans Commission forward an email flyer regarding the program to our mailing list. A motion was made and passed to forward an information flyer to our email list.
- CJ Bannister, Director of Goodwill Manasota, was absent.
- Marty Donner, Vice President of the Sarasota Manatee Navy League announced their upcoming dinner on Jan 27th. Commander Daniel O'Shea of SEAL Team 3 will be the guest speaker. His topic will be "Into the Lion's Den" an historic exhibit about a battle during the Vietnam War. Marty also thanked Jill for promoting patriotism. He has participated in her school veterans program. Additionally, he showed us a Marine Corps elf that he brought to present to Ted Smith. Since Ted was out ill, he said he would deliver it to him.
- Allen Merrklein reported the great success of Thunder by the Bay. Of the total 87,000 attendees, approximately 60,000 were veterans.
- JoAnne DeVries, president of the Hearing Loss Association, announced an upcoming March 5th event at Manatee Technical College, which will include panel discussions and exhibits.

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- Woody Schiffman spoke about the additional costs associated with Wreaths Across America, i.e. EMS and police coverage. He is also seeking assistance from Congressman Vern Buchanan's office to modify the flag code to prohibit burning.
- Todd Hughes announced the opening of a new veterans center at USF Manatee in March, exact date TBD.
- **Matt ???** The "father" of the so-called "Kissing Statue" on the Bayfront, Jack Curran, passed away in December. The statue is only in place for 10 years. Veterans groups need to lobby for a longer term as it has become "home" to numerous veterans and patriotic events. Andy Hooker provided some historical context and suggested we do some research before rejoining the "political battle." Mr. Curran will be laid to rest next week at Sarasota National Cemetery.
- Danny Bilyeu noted that the 75th anniversary of Pearl Harbor is coming up this year – events TBD.
- Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) is now a partner with the 50th Commemoration of the Vietnam War. Jean Catsakis presented certificates from the DAR to those Vietnam vets who were present.
- 50/50 drawing was held and the winner **???**
- Benediction was provided by Chaplain Vaughn. The meeting was adjourned at 2:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Barbara Vaughn
On behalf of Marlene Hauck