

## **VETERANS' COMMITTEE MEETING**

**June 9, 2009 – 2:00 p.m.**

PRESENT: Chairman Barrett; Supervisors Hunter, Yepsen, Thompson, Wright; David Wickerham, Co. Administrator; Jennifer Ciulla, Publications Specialist; Bob Mitchell, Veterans' Service Agency; Gene Corsale, Saratoga Springs; Bill Schaff, Patriot Guard Riders; Emily Donohue, The Saratogian

Chairman Barrett called the meeting to order.

Ms. Yepsen moved to approve the minutes of the March 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting. Mr. Hunter seconded. Unanimous.

Mr. Schaaf stated they are a loosely formed motorcycle organization. At the request of families, we will provide motorcycle escorts for the funeral and establish flag lines, he said. He stated a couple of weeks ago, they had a call to participate in a burial of a 92 year old Chief Petty Officer. We established a flag line at the calling hours, the morning of the funeral service, from the church to the hearse, did an escort to the grave site and then a flag line at the grave site, he said. He displayed several photos of their activities. He said they do not approach the family. They have a standing relationship with the Department of Defense. The casualty assistance officer will make decisions with the family, he said. He said he is a Senior Ride Captain responsible for all of the mission calls that come in the eight counties surrounding Albany and south. He mentioned Saratoga County is in Region 4, and there are nine regions in the State. He said sometimes, their involvement may just be establishing a flag line at the walkway of the Saratoga National Cemetery. He stated that this loose association is held together by e-mail. He mentioned they are all volunteers at no cost to the family or funeral home, and they do not even pass the hat.

Mr. Schaaf stated nationwide, there is an organization called Missing In America project. The secret is within funeral homes, there remains unclaimed cremains. Whoever makes the arrangements for these people do not make arrangements to go pick them up, he said. Missing In America program seeks to have volunteers willing to go out and visit funeral homes to see if they have cremains, and if so, how many are veterans. We want to work with funeral directors to remove these people from their custodial care to show there is a better option than to keep them in the funeral home. Sometimes, the funeral directors do not even know a person is a veteran, he said. Once we have a definitive i.d. that a cremains is a veteran, we will work with that funeral home to release that

person to get the honored burial they are entitled to, he said. They will be entered in the niche at Saratoga National, he said. He stated there is only so much information that the funeral directors can share with us. There is privacy, and funeral directors cannot share social security numbers, etc., he said. He said Bob Mitchell has spoken to one funeral home that had 50 veterans' cremains. Funeral directors can share necessary information that we need with Bob to begin the process, he said. Bob can request all of the information from them, he added. He distributed copies of his business card to the Committee members. Chairman Barrett said he would like to link his town website to their website. He told Mr. Schaaf that the Committee applauds him and all of the folks involved in his organization.

Ms. Ciulla stated she is working on the invitations, ads and posters for the Army Field Band concert, and she said they will be similar to last year's. She said she would e-mail out the final drafts. She said high school band students will also be invited, and Glen Sanders will be doing the food again for the Army Field Band and the Supervisors. She said the fireworks contract will be the same as in the past - \$6,000 for 15 minutes. She mentioned the invitations will be mailed out to about 9,000 veterans. She stated Aramark has cut their prices from last year for their concessions 25-50%.

Mr. Mitchell said they came up with 1,400 living World War II veterans, and a mailing just went out to them with a questionnaire to see if they would be attending this year's Job Fair. He said if we get 1,200 coming and they bring family, we are talking about 3,000 people at the City Center. He said he only has so much space, so he will have to cut the Job Fair down a little bit to make it more of a World War II ceremony. Ms. Ciulla said we put a deadline out of June 19<sup>th</sup> to get the questionnaire back. Mr. Mitchell said October 26<sup>th</sup> is the date of the Job Fair and ceremony.

In discussing a Veterans' Memorial Highway, Mr. Corsale said the original concept was to dedicate the remaining portion of Route 4 between Stillwater and the Village of Schuylerville. He said Senator Roy McDonald's thinking was to dedicate between Waterford to the Town of Saratoga to the Military Museum in the City of Saratoga Springs. The signage will really help the National Cemetery, he stated. He said in working with other people, this has the endorsement of veterans' groups and Supervisors Connelly and Wood. Mr. Wickerham said the State Legislature are the ones who can name State roads (Saratoga County Veterans' Memorial Highway), so we would be looking for Home Rule legislation on that which would be the first step, then a bill out of the Assembly and Senate, and once that is approved, signage will be done. Mr. Wright said we will probably have to pay for directional signs to the

cemetery, as he is sure DOT will not. Chairman Barrett said maybe on the road sign itself we could attach a smaller sign showing directions.

**Ms. Yepsen moved to propose Home Rule legislation to move this Veterans' Memorial Highway dedication along. Mr. Thompson seconded. Unanimous.**

On a motion by Mr. Hunter, seconded by Mr. Wright, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Elaine M. Sodemann