

VETERANS' COMMITTEE MEETING

March 1, 2010 – 2:30 p.m.

PRESENT: Chairman M. Johnson; Supervisors Barrett, Lucia, Thompson, Wright, Yepsen; Southworth, Hargrave, Collyer; Spencer Hellwig, Mgmt. Analyst; Jen Ciulla, Publication Specialist; Bob Mitchell, Victor Isca, Veterans' Service Agency; Gene Corsale, Veterans Volunteer; Press

Chairman Johnson called the meeting to order.

Mr. Lucia moved to approve the minutes of the meeting of February 1st. Mr. Wright seconded. Unanimous.

Chairman Johnson introduced Mr. Isca. She said he is our Veterans' Service Officer who will be leaving us at the end of March. He was a Navy veteran for four years and then went into the Army National Guard for 20 years and was employed by the federal government, came to the County as a part-time van driver, and then moved into his present position for the past 6 ½ years, she stated.

Mr. Isca thanked the Committee for the opportunity to explain what he does for the Veterans' Service Agency. He stated the Service Officer is the nuts and bolts of the office. Each day brings new opportunities such as disability compensation claims, pension claims, enrollments in V.A. health care, helping homeless veterans find shelter, burial benefits or education benefits, he said. He said all claims start with an interview. Through the interview, I try to understand what they are seeking and what they qualify for, he said. Sometimes, we have to tell them they do not qualify. I help them develop their claim, he stated. We try to help gather their records, he said. I package the claim and mail it to the proper office, he stated. He said he counsels them on what they can expect from the V.A., and he helps them decipher correspondence from the V.A. He stated he reviews all of the decisions and asks his claimants if they are satisfied. If not, we have to go through an appeals process, he said. He pointed out in the next 18 – 24 months, Iraq forces will expect to be decreased. They will all come home and feel they deserve a claim. What I do is vital to providing benefits to our veterans, he stated. He said the workload in their office will increase. He mentioned he has 84 claims that have been open for the past 1½ years. He has seen 482 claims to conclusion, and 95% of them have been successfully awarded. He said they experience 300 – 400 contacts per month, and it is getting extremely difficult. Our office is hard pressed to provide timely services, he said. He said if his position is eliminated, many veterans would not be able to obtain benefits.

Mr. Hellwig stated there is no intent to de-fund this position. Chairman Johnson said it is a service we definitely need to keep. Mr. Hellwig said the Vacancy Review Board does not mean elimination. Ms. Yepsen asked how many other counties have this position. Mr. Mitchell said 56 counties, and the others circumvent the system. He said they received a 43% increase in State aid, and this year they will receive \$12,982. He said he

is requesting that this position be filled, as Victor is leaving on the 25th. He said Mr. Kalinkewicz in Personnel told him there is a 30-day vacancy review. Chairman Johnson stated this Committee can only recommend this position be filled. Mr. Hellwig said how to help with the transition is a decision for Personnel to make. Chairman Johnson said she will talk to Mr. Kalinkewicz. Mr. Mitchell pointed out the V.A. spends \$43 million a year in this County for veterans.

Chairman Johnson wished Mr. Isca a great retirement, and she thanked him for serving his country like he has.

Ms. Yepsen stated the Guardian House Program was launched over a year ago to establish a home for homeless women veterans. The one to be established this year in Ballston Spa will be the first in New York State. Through grassroots efforts, we raised \$127,500. She said they have two grant requests in to the Federal V.A. and the State Homeless Alliance Agency. We are expecting to hear back from the State within two weeks, she said. The site has been chosen, and renovations have been designed, she said. A storage unit has been provided free of charge, and it is full. People have reached out from over 10 counties to donate money and items, and we need the grant to get us open, she said. She stated the Board of Supervisors did a letter of support last year, and Rural Preservation would very much like the Board to do an updated version to put with their grant application. **Mr. Lucia moved to authorize a letter of support. Mr. Wright seconded. Unanimous. (Committee approval only).**

Ms. Ciulla distributed copies of a list of Military Band Concert Potential Performance Dates and a list of differences between having a concert at SPAC or the City Center for a comparison. Chairman Johnson stated Board Chairman Peck is interested in having us come up with something. Mr. Thompson said what about the Fairground. Ms. Ciulla said it is limited in the number of spaces and it depends on the time of year. Mr. Mitchell said we usually get 5,000 people at a concert. Chairman Johnson said the concern there is the parking, and it could be rough walking. Mr. Barrett stated at least SPAC and the City Center provide shelter. Mr. Wright said he does not want to do this just to do it and have it watered down. Ms. Ciulla pointed out one way to cut cost is to eliminate the fireworks. Having a concert on Sunday, September 19th in the afternoon would be a little warmer than an evening concert in September, she said. She said the City Center can only have 2,300, and SPAC is relatively unlimited in our terms.

Mr. Lucia suggested cutting down on the length of time for the advertising. Mr. Hargrave said they can advertise the concert in his town's newsletter at no charge. Mr. Wright suggested finding sponsors. Mr. Barrett said we should try to hire the Army Field Band as our first choice. The place and time depends on the second choice, he said. Ms. Ciulla stated the Air Force Band is available July 5th and so is the City Center. She said September is questionable for them, but she would check. Ms. Yepsen said that might be a busy time in the City, and parking may be limited. Mr. Barrett said to do this and do it right, we need to focus on SPAC. He said he is sure there are companies in the area that feel this concert is important and would be willing to step up and support it.

Maybe we will get some calls if it is seen in the press, he said. It should be clearly stated it is for the veterans and not for the County, he stated.

It was the consensus of the Committee to pursue the Army Field Band as first choice, and if that does not work out, pursue the Air Force band as the next choice and for a concert to be held at SPAC as the Committee's choice of venue.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Elaine M. Sodemann