

Veterans Committee Minutes
February 10, 2014 – 3:00 p.m.

Present: Chairman Wright; Supervisors Allen, Barrett, Jenkins, Kinowski, Lucia, Martin, and Sausville; Spencer Hellwig, Administrator; Steve Dorsey, County Attorney; Ryan Moore, Deputy Administrator; Craig Hayner, Kathy Pastore-Jordan, County Clerk; Robert Mitchell; Louis Cook, David McDonald, American Legion Post 234.

Chairman Wright called the meeting to order and welcomed all in attendance.

On a motion made by Mr. Kinowski, seconded by Mr. Lucia the minutes of the December 10, 2013 meeting were approved unanimously.

Chairman Wright announced the appointment of Supervisor Kinowski as Committee Vice Chair.

Mr. McClement gave a brief update on the Veterans Office operations. He said the Veterans office provided 118 Veterans with a ride to the VA Hospital; eighteen new claims were processed; twenty-two open claim engagements were conducted; sixteen claim appointments were scheduled; and twenty-five walk-in clients were served for the month of January.

Mr. McClement said the Veterans office conducted a successful Benefits Outreach Program at the Clifton Park Library, meeting with three Veterans. He said the Veterans office will be continuing that program, and work to get the word out to encourage more participation.

Mr. Wright said it is the 50th Anniversary year for the Vietnam War. He said he has had discussions with Mr. McClement, and there will be events planned throughout the county.

Mr. McClement said currently under VA regulation, Veterans who served with boots on the ground and also served in the brown water rivers and estuaries in Vietnam were granted, "Presumption of Exposure" to Agent Orange. If an individual is diagnosed with one of a list of diseases or conditions, it is presumed that the diagnosis is directly connected to the exposure of Agent Orange. What comes along with that is medical care, monetary benefits, additional burial benefits and spousal benefits. Excluded from that are Blue Water Navy Veterans, who are Veterans who served off the coast of Vietnam. In the early 90's they were originally granted the "Presumption of Exposure", but the VA rescinded that a couple of years afterwards and ever since those Veterans have been fighting to get added back and granted back the Presumption. He said, essentially, a Veteran does not have to prove they were exposed, sprayed or handled it, they were there and it is presumed they were exposed and they are able to receive the benefits. This legislation would grant the "Presumption of Exposure" back to the Blue Water Navy Veterans.

Mr. Wright said there is currently legislation in both the Senate and Congress in support of giving the Blue Water Navy Veterans the benefits.

A motion was made by Mr. Barrett, seconded by Mr. Kinowski to support current Legislation in the Senate and Congress to return “Presumption of Exposure” benefits to the Blue Water Navy Veterans. Unanimous.

Mr. Martin said the Association of the United States Army, (AUSA) is one of the designated partners participating in the Vietnam War Commemorative events. This is the group that was sanctioned Federally and was asked to put on a number of events over a period of three years to commemorate Veterans from the Vietnam War. He said the first of the required events is not until 2015, but they would like to begin the process early in 2014. At the Military Museum in Saratoga Springs AUSA will be getting together with Veterans from all different services and all different time periods during the Vietnam War, to have them present their Vietnam War experiences. The event will take place March 29th at the NYS Military Museum in Saratoga Springs.

Mr. Hayner said the County Clerk’s office is looking closely at the “Return the Favor” Program which has approximately 3,000 Veterans signed up, along with 300 businesses. He said he has met with Veterans and both Chambers to explore ways to better promote the program to Veterans and businesses. There has been a huge amount of feedback thus far with Veterans who have signed up to volunteer their time, whether it is at the Legion Posts or talking to Town Clerks, and bringing the program to the communities. Part of the outreach is to have the technology to go to different locations throughout the county. One initiative is to re-develop the logo and encourage more businesses into the program, by helping them realize that there is a huge market for them.

On a motion made by Mr. Lucia, seconded by Mr. Barrett the meeting was adjourned unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Chris Sansom