

Wednesday, October 27, 2021 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Peachtree City, Georgia

Present Ms. Patricia Ross, Chair
 Ms. Takosha Swan, Vice-Chair
 Mr. Shawn Hanley, Secretary
 Mr. John Kubinec, Member
 Mr. Eddie Whitted, Member
 Mr. Joshua Kopsie, Member
 Mr. Timothy Paslawski, Member

Visitors: Mr. George Canavaggio, Assistant Commissioner, Field Operations & Appeals, GDVS
Present Mr. Mark Bannister, Assistant Commissioner, Administration, Health & Memorials
 Mr. Kerry Dyer, Director, Operations Division, GDVS
 Ms. Mary Catherine Greaber, Assistant Attorney General, Attorney General's Office
 Ms. Monisha Rallapalli, Office of Planning and Budget
 Mr. Vince Pritchett, Director, Veterans Benefits South Region, GDVS
 Mr. Dale Bell, Director, Veterans Benefits North Region, GDVS
 Mr. Bob Norman, Training and Professional Development, GDVS
 Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information Division, GDVS
 Mr. Chris Hambright, Director, Accounting, GDVS
 Ms. Shelly Ann Simpson, Director, Appeals Division, GDVS
 Mr. Ernie Cowart, Director, Glennville Cemetery
 Ms. Tonya Jarrett, Clinical Director, GWVH, Milledgeville, GA
 Mr. Russell Feagin, Director, Health & Memorials Division, GDVS
 Mr. William Wilson, Network Administrator, GDVS
 Mr. Jerry Lahr, Network Administrator, GDVS
 Mr. Dan Holtz, Secretary, GMOAA
 Mr. Kevin Hammond, State Commander, VFW, Department of Georgia
 Ms. Susan Hall, Auxiliary President, American Legion, Department of Georgia
 Ms. Camala Ball, Budget Analyst, GDVS
 Ms. Veda Brooks, Director of Women Veterans Office, GDVS
 Mr. Bobby Davis, Director, Veterans Education & Training, GDVS
 Mr. Steven Fay, Training & Professional Development Division, GDVS
 Ms. Monica Dorsey, Communications & Outreach Specialist, GDVS
 Ms. Debra O'Neal, Office Manager, Lyons Field Office, GDVS
 Mr. Glenn Massey, Office Manager, Gainesville Field Office, GDVS
 Mr. Rico Johnson, VSO, Gainesville Field Office, GDVS
 Ms. Rose Ann Rudisill, Office Manager, Demorest Field Office, GDVS
 Ms. Rita Barnhart, Office Manager, Canton Field Office, GDVS
 Mr. Will Greene, VSO, Columbus Field Office, GDVS
 Mr. Randy Brown, VSO, Griffin Field Office, GDVS
 Ms. Dawn Perry, VSO, Athens Field Office, GDVS
 Mr. Ken Childre, VSO, Rome Field Office, GDVS
 Mr. William Smith, Office Manager, LaFayette Field Office, GDVS

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Mr. Ron Cason, Office Manager, Athens Field Office, GDVS
Ms. Marie Lundquist, Office Manager, Oakwood Field Office, GDVS
Mr. Winslow Hill, Office Manager, Grovetown Field Office, GDVS
Mr. Ian Ketterer, Office Manager, August VAMC Field Office, GDVS
Mr. Mark Churning, Office Manager, Washington Field Office, GDVS
Ms. Christine Collins, VSO, Blairsville Field Office, GDVS
Mr. Eddie Fontaine, Office Manager, Blairsville Field Office, GDVS
Mr. Barry Hunter, Office Manager, Rome Field Office, GDVS
Mr. Scott Waters, Maintenance Supervisor, Glennville Cemetery, GDVS
Mr. Rob Ehrhart, Jr., Office Manager, Brunswick Field Office, GDVS
Ms. Sarah Zingovelli, American Legion Auxiliary
Ms. Ruth Zingarell, American Legion Auxiliary
Ms. Ava Redd, Administrative Assistant, Appeals Division, GDVS
Mr. Kelly Johnson, Office Manager, Dalton Field Office, GDVS
Ms. Courtney Cleare, Office Manager, Macon Field Office, GDVS
Mr. Charles Isaac, Office Manager, Hinesville Field Office, GDVS
Ms. Julie Hammond, Confidential Secretary to the Commissioner, GDVS

On Wednesday, October 27, 2021, the Veterans Service Board meeting was held in person and by video/tele-conference. The in person session was held at the GDVS Annual Training, Hilton Peachtree City/Atlanta Hotel and Conference Center, 2443 Hwy. 54 W., Peachtree City, Georgia.

Ms. Ross called the meeting to order at 12:31 p.m. Mr. Whitted gave the invocation. Ms. Swan led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Ms. Ross welcomed the guests and performed a "roll call" of people listed above.

Mr. Hanley made a motion to approve the October Agenda. Mr. Whitted seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Ms. Swan made a motion to approve the September minutes, which were previously distributed for members to review. Mr. Kopsie seconded the motion. The motion passed.

The following reports were submitted from the Veteran Service Organizations:

Mr. Dan Holtz, GMOAA

Mr. Holtz announced that the award ceremony on October 9th at the National Infantry Museum in Museum was held as scheduled.

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Ms. Dawn Thomas, Appeals Division, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer:

The following information is submitted for this month's board meeting:

- Department Service Officer Attended a Monthly VSO/CMA Meeting on Oct 15, 2021 conducted by Brian Morgan.
- The Assistant Department Service Officer (Ed Kent) assisted 22 veterans with VA benefits related inquires this month and one Post with financial assistance for.
- Upcoming events – October 22-October 24 2021 Department Service Office will conduct training and fill out forms and check claims for the 9th District.

Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW:

The following information is submitted for this month's board meeting:

- The Department Service Officer hosted a VFW GA Post Service Officer training course at Post 7720 174 Cornelia Crossing Shopping Center Cornelia, GA 30531 held on October 15, 2021 from 10AM – 2PM.
- The Department Service Officer attended VA Regional Office Monthly VSO/CMA meeting the Brian Morgan, CMA with the introduction to the new CMA Adrienne Becnel-Taylor with a Q&A session on the Atlanta VA Benefit System held on October 15, 2021 at 1130AM. A summary of the meeting was provided to the VFW Commander, Staff, and community.
- The Department Service Officer hosted a VFW GA Post Service Officer training course at Post 6330 732 Veterans Parkway Jonesboro, GA 30328 held on October 16, 2021 from 10AM – 2PM.
- The Department Service Officer attended the GA Veteran of Foreign Wars Department Fall Conference held at the Macon Marriott City Center 240 Coliseum Drive Macon, on October 22-24, 2021.

Interim Commissioner Shawn Hanley

Mr. Hanley expressed his thanks to the field service officers who were in attendance for all their hard work, and reiterated how their services are worth it and much needed across Georgia. He touched on the physical and mental issues facing veterans, as well as the fact that with the medicines available today veterans are surviving longer. He acknowledged the issues they face: homelessness, PTSD, and substance abuse. He mentioned the changes that have taken place in Afghanistan and stressed that

our veterans accomplished their goal – to keep American safe and to keep another 9/11 from happening.

Mr. Hanley discussed a pilot program – an Advisory Committee to the next Commissioner, to assist the new Commissioner. This committee will provide feedback. Charlotte May has developed a guide for this as follows:

**COMMISSIONER'S
ADVISORY COMMITTEE
PILOT PROGRAM PROPOSAL**

GOAL:

Promote internal feedback and recommendations on agency goals, initiatives, and policies from an advisory committee composed of Georgia Department of Veterans Service employees.

- Promote and strengthen communication among GDVS leadership and employees
 - Offer an open forum for staff to speak and develop policies with GDVS leadership
- Encourage greater input on proposed and established policies
 - Help find ways to improve new or existing agency programs and initiatives
 - Meet with the Commissioner to provide advice on a range of matters
 - Coordinate with fellow GDVS staff to provide feedback and recommendations on proposed projects or policy
- Support and represent the interests of a broad group of agency employees as an advisory body to department leadership

ESTABLISH - First steps include determining oversight, scope and purpose of advisory committee, establishing members, rules and procedures, and meeting schedule.

COMPOSE - Participation open to all GDVS employees (Leadership, Administration, Claims and Appeals, Nursing Homes, Cemeteries).

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Mr. Hanley then expressed his thanks to Assistant Commissioners George Canavaggio and Mark Bannister for all their hard work. He then gave the microphone over to Mr. Canavaggio to announce the recipient of the Employee of the Quarter Award. The recipient, Mr. Scott Waters, is the Maintenance Supervisor at the Glennville Cemetery. Mr. Russell Feagin said that Mr. Waters always goes above and beyond what is required. He developed an invention that assists in weed-eating around the headstones so that it takes less time to accomplish. Mr. Ernie Cowart said that Mr. Waters can be trusted and always depended upon. Mr. Waters was given a certificate and plaque, and photos were taken to commemorate the event.

Assistant Commissioner George Canavaggio, Field Operations and Appeals:

Mr. Canavaggio highlighted from his report that he has been in discussion with Allen Dowell from the Michigan Department of Veterans Service. They wanted to know how our department is organized, and possibly model their agency after the GDVS. They currently run on grants. Mr. Canavaggio sent them a copy of our mission brief to assist them.

GENERAL

- On October 09, 2021, Assistant Commissioner George Canavaggio spoke at the 62nd Georgia MOAA Conference in Columbus, Georgia.
- On October 05, 2021, Assistant Commissioner George Canavaggio met with Kevin and Cecilia Miller of the Georgia Veterans Day Association. Assistant Commissioner George Canavaggio gave them a copy of the 2021 Veterans Day Proclamation. We also discussed the upcoming Veterans Day Parade and Observance Ceremony on November 06, 2021. I assured them that the information and invitations concerning the Parade and Veterans Ball will be passed on to our Interim Commissioner. They said they look forward to seeing us at the parade and ball.
- On October 2021, Assistant Commissioner George Canavaggio spoke to Allen Dow the Strategy and Outreach Specialist for the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency. The Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency was interested in our organization structure and what our Veteran Service Officer provision model looks like. They were hoping to derive a good list that would assist them with improving their agency in supporting their veterans.
- On October 25 through 29, 2021, The Department conducted its Annual Training in Peachtree City.
- Welcome Home Letters:
 - 6 Welcome Home Letters were mailed out in September.

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- Department Electronic Claim's Assistance Processing System (Vetra Spec) currently 309,574 entries, this is an increase of 1,080 from September 17, 2020.

PROJECTED POSITIONS

- Current openings in, Decatur VAMC, Statesboro, Thomasville, Douglas, LaGrange, Dublin VAMC, Hinesville CBOC, and Waycross.

Veda Brooks, Women Veterans Coordinator (WVC)

Ms. Brooks added that she planned an event on October 30 in Newnan with her suicide prevention team, Relieving Stress through Exercise, in partnership with Kaiser Permanente and Emory.

- October 4, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in Cobb Senior Center Women Veteran Meeting.
- October 6, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in planning meeting for Exercise to Relieve Stress.
- October 7, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in Veterans Court, and Unite Georgia Network Hub Support.
- October 8, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in American Legion 5th District Revitalization and helped 6 veterans with paperwork and answered 25 questions.
- October 12, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in Women Veteran Outreach Calendar Plan.
- October 13, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in the Women Veterans Health Committee Monthly Meeting.
- October 14, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in planning meeting for Exercise to Relieve Stress and Veteran's Court Training.
- October 15, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in Unite Us training.
- October 18, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in Governor's Task Force Planning Meeting.
- October 19, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in Coweta County Family Connection.
- October 20, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in Violence Prevention TF Meeting.
- October 21, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in Veterans Court.
- November 3, 2021, Ms. Brooks has a BVA Hearing.

Current committees

- Women's Veterans Health Committee (monthly meetings and joint outreach events)
- Georgia State VFW Homeless Committee
- VA/SAMHSA Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families Georgia Team
- Atlanta Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans
- The Birdwell Foundation Board Member

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- Coweta County Race, Equity, and Justice Committee

Ramona Roper, Training and Professional Development Division:

- September 30-October 27, 2021 - The GDVS Training and Professional Development Division prepared for the 2021 Annual Training program
- October 14, 2021, Mark Demers attended VFW Senior Leadership meeting

Upcoming Events:

- 2021 GDVS Annual Training is October 25-29, 2021
- Daily continued ongoing support to the Regional Directors and Veteran Field Service Offices.
- Final preparations for the GDVS Annual Training (in-person)

Shelly-Ann Simpson, Director of Appeals

Ms. Simpson stated in the meeting that there was no word from the VA yet on vaccines. She was trying to stay under the radar until a decision is made. After the meeting, Ms. Simpson sent a message to add to the report. This message is as follows: "The VA is actually now requiring that our employees in the RO be certified by 11/22/2021. The requirement is that we certify if we have been vaccinated or not and if we seek an exemption. No word yet on what will happen when all the info is tabulated."

- The total number of actual hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for September **2021** was **123**.
- The total number of pre-hearing actions for September 2021 was **324**. Post-hearing actions was **95**.
- The total number of correspondence conducted by the Appeals Division (with veterans, BVA/VA employees, and VSO field offices) for the month of September was **2,145**.
- As of September 1, 2021, the Atlanta VA Regional Office completed the following claims for the Service Organizations represented by GDVS:

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Types of Claims	Number of Awards	Benefits paid out
Compensation	99,668	\$169,543,066
DIC	2,940	\$4,237,700
Survivor Pension	917	\$684,951
Veteran Pension	1,858	\$1,934,118
Grand Total	105,383	\$176,399,834

NORTH GA, Dale Bell, North Area Director

Mr. Bell highlighted the retro awards in North Georgia, as stated below. He also mentioned the number of contacts, office visits, emails/phone calls and claims submitted, as stated below.

- On October 10th, Rose Rudisill of Demorest assisted Belinda Boldoe with VFW District 2 Service Officer Training in Cornelia.
- On October 16th, Herbert Ward of Ft McPherson assisted Belinda Boldoe with VFW District 3 Service Officer Training in Jonesboro.
- On October 23rd, Ian Ketterer of Augusta VAMC and Winslow Hill of Grovetown conducted a Pre-Deployment Briefing for 169th MDVS (Reservists) at Ft Gordon.
- On October 24th, Glenn Massey of Gainesville conducted a Benefits Briefing for members of the 802nd Ord Co (Reservists) in Gainesville.
- September 2021 total retro awards reported by North Georgia Offices: \$2,425,509.00. Included in that amount are single awards of; \$147,443.00 reported by Glenn Massey of Gainesville; \$139,018.00 and \$128,911.00 reported by Ken Childre of Rome; \$124,332.00 reported by Eddie Fontaine of Blairsville; and \$340,820.00 reported by Rita Barnhart of Canton!
- Director Site Visits / Inspections: Augusta VAMC, Carrollton, Conyers, Ft McPherson, Newnan
- North Region Gains/Losses:
 - Chris Kicklighter of Lawrenceville resigned September 30, 2021.
 - Charolette Hamilton of Decatur VAMC transferred to Appeals October 1, 2021.
 - Cynthia McNair of Augusta (GWVNH) resigned October 15, 2021.
 - Sharonica Thomas rehired for Augusta (GWVNH) October 18, 2021.
 - Tamika Nicholas rehired for Augusta (VAMC) October 18, 2021.
 - Kelvin Burford of Decatur CBOC transferred to Lawrenceville October 18, 2021.

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- North Georgia Region Veteran Population: 443,313
- Office Visits

Average Visits Per VFSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:			North				
Month:			September-21				
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
			D / E		G / E		
			Average		Average		
			Total		Total		
			Monthly		Claims		
			Office		Submitted		
			By VFSOS		Submitted		
			To VA		By VFSOS		
			Daily		To VA		
Office Name	Last Name	#	Visits	Month	Day	Monthly	Daily
Number of VFSOs:			59	13,541	881	15.37	2,493
Number of Offices:			34	Average Visits/Office:		398.26	Average Claims/Office: 73.3235294

SOUTH GA, Vincent Pritchett, South Area Director

Mr. Pritchett highlighted the retro awards in South Georgia, as listed below. He also mentioned the number of phone calls/emails, visits and claims, as listed below.

- *Total Monthly Office Visits includes Remote Work: 2,895 In-person Office Visits and 10,646 phone calls and emails
- On October 8, 2021, Sherri Whitfield (Albany field office) and Vincent Pritchett conducted interviews to fill the Veterans Field Service Officer 1 (VFSO 1) position left vacant by Quavondo Samuels' transfer to our Valdosta field office.
- On October 15, 2021, Charles Isaac (Hinesville field office) and Vincent Pritchett conducted interviews to fill the VFSO 1 position in Hinesville. This position was left vacant when Priscilla Prescott was promoted and transferred to the Glennville field office.
- On October 22, 2021, Tara Phillips (Dublin field office) and Vincent Pritchett conducted interviews to fill the vacant VFSO 1 position in Dublin. This position was left vacant when Tara Phillips was promoted to manager to replace Melanie Crowder.
- South Region offices reported retroactive payments totaling \$458,251.78 with the highest single payment of \$164,030.51 reported by the Warner Robins field service office.

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- South Region Gains/Losses: Effective October 1, 2021, Melanie Crowder left the Dublin field office. Effective October 10, 2021, Courtney Jenkins left the Valdosta field office.
- South Georgia Region Veterans Population: 244,963
- Office Visits for September: South Georgia offices handled 6,240 phone calls and emails.

Average Visits Per VFSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:		South Region					
Month:		September-21					
A	B	C	D	E	D / E F	G Total	G / E Average
			Total	Work	Average	Claims	Claims
	Veterans' Field		Monthly	Days	Office	Submitted	Submitted
	Service Officer (VFSO)		Office	In	Per	To	By VFSOS
Office Name	Last Name	#	Visits	Month	Day	Monthly	Daily
	Number of VFSOs:	37	2,411	703	3.43	1,746	2.48
Number of Offices:	30	Average Visits/Office:		80.37	Average Claims/Office:		58.20

Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information Division

Ms. May's only addition was the handout on the Advisory Board that is listed under Mr. Hanley's report.

GENERAL

Personnel

- Charlotte May, Director (Speeches, Major News Release Announcements, Digital Media, Websites [External & Internal])
- Monica Dorsey, Communications Specialist (Administrative support in all aspects of the GDVS Public Information mission/function [External & Internal])

INFORMATION OUTREACH

Facebook Post Highlights –

1. SAA and Southeast Lineman Training Center (SLTC) – highlighted Bobby Davis's visit to a SLTC hard hat presentation ceremony for veteran students. Shared information on OJT programs in Georgia and SAA's role in approving them.

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2. Georgia Rental Assistance – shared information on the Georgia Department of Community Affairs program which uses federal monies to assist individuals, families, and landlords in need of assistance from hardships due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Job Fairs and Hiring Notice – shared information on upcoming career events and GDVS recruitment for key positions throughout the agency.

Public Information Division Contacts *(Since January 1, 2021)*

- Replies to VA eBenefits Messages = 3,135
- Replies to General Questions = approximately 1,415
- Individual Request for the State Certificate of Honor = approximately 255

GOVERNOR'S (VIETNAM VETERAN) CERTIFICATE of HONOR PROGRAM-

- The latest and most accurate totals (since March 2015) –

State Certificates of Honor issued via GDVS – An estimated 28,920
(Honors Ceremonies and Central Office Mail Outs)

DoD Vietnam Veteran Lapel Pins presented via GDVS – An estimated 23,205

Honors Ceremonies supported/coordinated by GDVS – 346

Defense Department's Vietnam Veteran Surviving Spouse CoH – 268

UPCOMING EVENTS -

- Daughters of the American Revolution Honor Vietnam Veterans at the Assembly on Watson Boulevard, Warner Robins – November 6, 11 a.m.
- Veterans Day Parade and Freedom Ball – November 6, 1 p.m., The Battery Atlanta
- Honoring Women Veterans in Cobb County – November 6, 1-3 p.m., Jim Miller Park and Event Center
- State of Georgia's Veterans Day Proclamation Signing with Governor Kemp – November 8, 10 a.m., Georgia State Capitol Building
- Daughters of the American Revolution Honor Vietnam Veterans at Liberty Park Community Center in Grovetown – November 13

Mr. Bobby Davis, Director, Veterans Education and Training Division (State Approving Agency):

Mr. Davis added that his department is closing out FY21 and are waiting for their annual rating from the VA. He expects a satisfactory rating.

VETERANS STATE APPROVING AGENCY

- The approval and compliance surveys of educational institutions, training establishments and training programs approved for veterans training is continuing with no significant problems in any area being noted.
- Approval of new veteran's On-The-Job training sites (OJT) continues to increase. As of this date the State Approving Agency (SAA) has granted approval to 1,787 educational institutions and training establishments where Georgia veterans may attend school or job training and utilize their GI Bill educational benefits.
- The SAA participated in a graduation ceremony at Southeast Lineman Training Center, Trenton, GA on October 7, 2021. A class of 300 students graduated, 40 of which were veterans. I had the pleasure of presenting the veteran students with a stars and stripes hard hat.
- On October 11, 2021, the SAA conducted virtual training with the Georgia VA Certifying Officials organization. The training consisted of an overview of SAA functions, approvals/re-approvals of programs, Compliance Audits, future changes in the SAAs role, and a questions and answer session. Meeting consisted of 120 VA Certifying Officials from various schools in the state.

Item *	Number
Approved Educational Institutions	393
Approved Training Establishments	1394
Veteran Students Enrolled in Educational Institutions	15,882

* Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, Education Division, September 2021.

Mr. Russell Feagin, Director, Health & Memorials Division

Mr. Feagin added that construction continues at the homes. He expects the SubAcute Clinic to be ready in May or June to accept patients.

Cemetery Activities:

- Both cemeteries continue to experience higher than normal volume of burials. Discussions with funeral homes indicate many of the deceased were COVID positive at the time of death. This increase appears to be consistent with other State and National cemeteries. Georgia National (Canton) indicated last week that they were scheduling services in November as they had no available times remaining in October.
- Interments are continuing to be conducted. However, services (to include in-person military honors) have been restricted due to the recent outbreak of the virus. TAPS is played over the PA system while lowering the casket or placing the urn.
- Staffing shortages are increasing the impact of the extra volume. It has always been difficult to get people willing to work in the cemetery environment and this has gotten even worse due to the COVID pandemic.
- As indicated last month, both cemeteries will participate in the Wreaths Across America program again this year on December 18, 2021. The Glennville cemetery has reached its goal for enough wreaths for all graves. The Milledgeville cemetery has reached approximately 50% of its goal. A decision has not been reached concerning a wreath laying ceremony on December 18th due to the pandemic.

Georgia War Veteran Home (GWVH) Activities:

- Multiple construction projects continue at the GWVH in Milledgeville:
 - Installation of emergency generators for all buildings. Previous generators only supplied limited power to critical equipment/lighting with no A/C or heating support. These generators will supply power to the entire building. Generators have been installed and are operational for the Russell, Vinson, and Wood Buildings. The generator for the Wheeler Building has been received and pending installation. The generator for the Central Energy Plant is projected for receipt and installation by the end of the year.
 - Improved ventilation equipment has been installed in the Vinson Building.
 - Renovations to the Wood Building are underway. This includes repairing bathrooms, installing new wardrobes, replacing call light systems, and improvements to the nurses' stations. One floor has been completed with two floors remaining.
 - Installation of IT rooms, fiber optic cable, and wireless access points is taking place in all buildings. This will significantly improve the network connectivity of the buildings and will ultimately allow for the establishment of electronic medical records.

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- Construction of the food service facility, cottage, and renovation of the 3rd Floor of the Wheeler Building in support of the SubAcute Unit is underway. The food service facility and cottage are scheduled for completion by the end of December 2021. The 3rd Floor renovations are scheduled to be completed by March 1, 2022. The projected date for the first admissions to the unit is May 2022.
- A project has been approved and funded by the VA for improvements to the facility to help reduce the spread of COVID-19. This project includes improvements to the ventilation systems, automated screenings at entrances to the buildings and infection control screens at the nurses' stations.
- Another project to add wired drops to all rooms in the facility to expand the IT capabilities and further support the electronic medical records process is pending final approval of funds by the VA.
- As a result of the recent outbreaks at the Home and surrounding area the GWVH will not be conducting a public Veterans Day Ceremony this year. Although almost all veterans and staff at the Home are vaccinated, this is not the case for the surrounding counties. In an abundance of caution it was decided to limit the risk of exposure and subsequent infection. Family members and friends can still visit the veterans. We will have appropriate decorations and a special meal for that day.
- Tonya Jarrett will be providing details on COVID-19 statistics and vaccination rates.

Tonya Jarrett, Clinical Director, Health & Memorials Division

Ms. Jarrett made one change to her report – one Pruitt staff member has tested positive for COVID-19, a fully vaccinated staff member. They are now on Status Red Lockdown, with no inside visits. No patients are COVID positive.

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Thursday, September 30, 2021											
Category	Population	Positive Cases	Positives % of Population	Deaths	Deaths % of Positives	Deaths % of Population	Recovered	Recovered % of Positives	Reinfected	Currently In Isolation	Positive for current month
Patients	302	101	33.44%	27	26.73%	8.94%	74	73.27%	12	0	4
Staff	496	118	23.79%	0	0.00%	0.00%	118	100.00%	7	0	2

Cumulative figures since March 1, 2020.

Recovered category was initially patients/staff who tested positive and subsequently tested negative twice.

In August the CDC changed their criteria to time based. Patients with no symptoms after 14 days are presumed to have recovered from the virus.

Reinfected category is patients/staff who were in the Recovered Category and have since been tested positive again.

In Isolation category is either self-quarantined, hospital, or COVID-19 unit at GWVH.

Positive for current month includes the number of veterans/staff who have tested COVID positive for the current month.

Onsite Vaccine - Date of Clinic No. 1 - Jan. 12-13, 2021

Onsite Vaccine - Date of Clinic No. 2 - Feb. 2-3, 2021

Onsite Vaccine - Date of Clinic No. 3 - Feb. 23, 2021

Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 4 - Mar. 12, 2021

Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 5- April 2, 2021

Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 6- April 16, 2021

Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 7- April 30, 2021

Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 8- May 14, 2021

Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 9- May 28, 2021

Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 10- June 11, 2021

Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 11- June 25, 2021

Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 12- July 9, 2021

Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 13- July 23, 2021

Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 14- August 6, 2021

Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 15- August 18, 2021

Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 16- August 31, 2021

Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 17- September 3, 2021

Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 18- September 15, 2021

Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No.19- September 17, 2021

Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 20- September 28, 2021

Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 21- October 1, 2021

Updated COVID information for 10/1-10/15/21 GWVH- Milledgeville

- **Patient status as of 10/15/21**

- No positive COVID patients between 10/1/21-10/15/21
- As of 10/15/21-- 169 patients out of 173 patients, 97.68%, have received at least one dose of a COVID vaccine at GWVH

- **Pruitt Staff status as of 10/15/21**

- No positive COVID Pruitt Health staff between 10/1/21-10/15/21
- As of 10/15/21--266 Pruitt staff out of 271 staff, 98.15%, have received at least one dose of a COVID vaccination
- PruittHealth reports 3 staff religious exemptions, 1staff medical exemption, and 1staff religious exemption pending

- **Mitigation Strategies as of 10/15/21**

- Vaccinated employees are tested upon exposure to COVID with rapid point of care (POC) tests
- Partially vaccinated employees or unvaccinated (exempted) employees are tested 2x/week with rapid point of care (POC) tests
- Any positive rapid POC tests are then followed with a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test to ensure results
- Patients can now receive visitors outside at scheduled times, receive video chats, and receive inside visits with guests wearing face shields and masks.
- Staff must wear face shields or eye goggles, mask, and any other necessary personal protective equipment in the Wood and Vinson buildings. Staff must wear N95 masks in addition to the other outlined PPE on the COVID Unit
- Communal dining at 50% capacity is now allowed in each of the buildings
- Vital oxide continues to be utilized as needed in the buildings
- Facility continues to maintain a level 1 COVID unit, level 2 observation unit, and level 3 general population unit
- PruittHealth implemented their vaccine mandate as of 10/1/21

Mr. Kerry Dyer, Director of Operations, GDVS

Mr. Dyer mentioned that the grant application has been turned in requesting \$6.3 million for Unite Us. Ms. Ross then explained that the program is a tech solution to referrals and will link organizations together to see the needs of veterans. These needs include housing, utilities assistance, food, etc. These needs will be met without adding an additional workload onto the field offices, with the assistance of licensed social workers. Ms. Veda Brooks has been working in the program already adding partners and county contacts.

Mr. Mark Bannister, Administration, Health, and Memorials:

Mr. Bannister added that routine ops are continuing. Chris Hambright and Camala Ball are crunching the numbers to close out the year. Ms. Monisha Rallapalli replaced Ms. Anelia Moore as our contact in OPB.

FINANCE

Accounting

Routine operations are continuing.

We are continuing to complete end – of – year reports to provide information for inclusion in the Consolidated Accounting and Finance Report (CAFR), to be published by the State Accounting Office (SAO) in December 2021.

Budget and General

As part of the fall legislative development process, we have responded to several inquiries from the Office of Planning and Budget. The information requested was budgetary follow-up related questions and more information about the proposed Augusta Cemetery project.

Due to current COVID-19 safety protocols, it is unlikely GDVS will be invited to the capitol building this year to brief the Amended FY 2022 and FY 2023 budget to the Chief Operating Officer (COO) or to the Director of the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (OPB).

HEALTH AND MEMORIALS

State Veterans Homes

State Veterans Homes Census (Through October 15, 2021)+

Current Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	116	169	285
Service Connected *	18	41	59
Total Patients	134	210	344
Last Month			
Regular Patients	97	120	217
Service Connected *	18	41	59
Total Patients	115	161	276

* One-hundred percent of the cost of these services is paid by the VA. No state funds are involved.

+ The report to the VSB are the total numbers from September 17, 2021, through October 15, 2021.

Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home – Augusta

Routine operations are continuing.

Georgia War Veterans Home – Milledgeville

Routine operations are continuing.

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State Veterans Cemeteries,

Burial Statistics (Through October 15, 2021)+

State Veterans Cemetery	Cumulative Last Month	Cumulative Current Month	Increase
Glennville	1,940	1,970	30
Milledgeville	4,524	4,560	36
Total	6,464	6,530	66

+ The report to the VSB are the total numbers from September 17, 2021, through October 15, 2021.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Glennville

Routine COVID-19 contingency operations are continuing.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Milledgeville

Routine COVID-19 contingency operations are continuing.

OPERATIONS

Human Resources

Routine operations are continuing.

Personnel Actions (Gains / Losses) (September 30, 2021 – October 15, 2021)

Location	Position	Status	Name	Date
Appeals Division	Appeals Officer 2	Resigned	<i>Wanetta Blackwell</i>	09/28/2020
Dublin (VAMC)	Office Manager	Resigned	<i>Melanie Crowder</i>	09/30/2021
Lawrenceville	Office Manager	Resigned	<i>Chris Kicklighter</i>	09/30/2021
Milledgeville	Grounds Maint Tech 1	Resigned	<i>Michael McDade</i>	09/30/2021
Central Office	Commissioner, GDVS	Retired	<i>Mike E. Roby</i>	10/01/2021
Valdosta	Field Service Officer 1	Resigned	<i>Courtney Jenkins</i>	10/10/2021
Augusta (GWVNH)	Field Service Officer 1	Resigned	<i>Cynthia McNair</i>	10/15/2020

Properties

Routine operations are continuing.

Information Technology

Routine operations are continuing.

Records Management

Routine operations are continuing as needed.

Vehicle Management

Routine service and maintenance are performed as required.

Veterans Service Foundation Board

The Foundation Board Chairman, Mr. Doug Middleton will provide a monthly update.

OLD BUSINESS:

There was no old business to discuss.

NEW BUSINESS:

The November 18 board meeting was scheduled. It will be a combination virtual and in-person meeting, set up at the GDVS. Mr. Hanley made a motion for this and Mr. Whitted seconded it. The motion passed.

Mr. Hanley made a motion to move into Executive Session. It was seconded by Mr. Whitted. The motion carried. Ms. Ross explained that the board would be holding interviews for the position of Commissioner, but not making a decision today. The Board went into Executive Session at 1:12 p.m. Each of the applicants for Commissioner were interviewed. The Board returned to the public meeting at 3:00 p.m.

Mr. Kopsie made a motion to adjourn the public meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Whitted. The motion passed by voice vote.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 3:01 p.m.

Wednesday, October 27, 2021 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Peachtree City, Georgia

SIGNED:



Patricia Ross, Chairman

ATTEST:



Shawn Hanley, Secretary

The next Veterans Service Board meeting will be held in person at GDVS but will also be available via video/telephone conference call on Thursday, November 18, 2021, at 12:30 p.m.

The Webex link is:

<https://georgiadepartmentofveteransservice.webex.com/georgiadepartmentofveteransservice/j.php?MTID=m86533d48386879c38ff1901a34314bfc>

Meeting password: **DnhPAJzx573**

Or you can call: **1-844-621-3956**

Access Code: **2333 723 3004**