

Tuesday, October 25, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

Present Mr. Shawn Hanley, Chair
Ms. Takosha Swan, Vice-Chair
Mr. Joshua Kopsie, Secretary
Mr. John Kubinec, Member
Mr. Tim Paslawski, Member
Mr. Pete Peterson, Member
Ms. Patricia Ross, Commissioner

Visitors: Ms. Shelly-Ann Simpson, Executive Director, Field Operations & Appeals, GDVS
Present Mr. Mark Bannister, Executive Dir., Health, Memorials, Finance & Development, GDVS
Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer, GDVS
Mr. Matthew O'Brien, Assistant Attorney General, Attorney General's Office
Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW Service Officer, Appeals Division, GDVS
Ms. Raven Holstick, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer
Ms. Amy Stevens, Georgia Military Women and Vetlanta
Mr. Doug Middleton, Chair, Veterans Service Foundation Board
Ms. Kim Scofi, United Military Care, Inc.
Mr. Joel Willis, Veterans Coalition Foundation
Mr. Norm DeWalt, Veterans Coalition Foundation
Mr. Drew Keenan, Veterans Coalition Foundation
Mr. Wilbert Jordan, Veterans Coalition Foundation
Mr. Michael Murphy, 360 Health and Hygiene
Mr. Vince Pritchett, Director, Veterans Benefits South Region, GDVS
Mr. Ken Childre, Director, Veterans Benefits North Region, GDVS
Ms. Ramona Roper, Director, Training and Professional Development, GDVS
Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information and External Affairs, GDVS
Mr. Russell Feagin, Director, Health & Memorials Division, GDVS
Ms. Tonya Jarrett, Clinical Director, Health & Memorials Division, GDVS
Mr. Edwin Berry, Director, Appeals Division, GDVS
Mr. William Wilson, Network Administrator, GDVS
Mr. Bobby Davis, Director, Veterans Education & Training, GDVS
Ms. Shareka Monday-Robinson, Director, Human Resources, GDVS
Ms. Veda Brooks, Coordinator, Women & Minority Veterans, GDVS
Ms. Calandra Ferguson, Coordinator, Suicide Prevention & Outreach, GDVS
Mr. Carlton Deese, Executive Director GWVH, Milledgeville, GA
Mr. Mark Demers, Grant Program Implementation Manager, GDVS
Ms. Kirsten Dennis, Purchasing Agent, GDVS
Ms. Julie Hammond, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner, GDVS

On Tuesday, October 25, 2022, the Veterans Service Board meeting was held in person and by video/tele-conference.

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Mr. Hanley called the meeting to order at 12:30 p.m. Ms. Swan gave the invocation. Mr. Paslawski led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Mr. Kopsie made a motion to approve the October Agenda. Ms. Swan seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Mr. Kubinec made a motion to approve the September minutes, which were previously distributed for members to review. Mr. Paslawski seconded the motion. There were no objections. The motion passed.

The following reports were submitted for the Board meeting:

Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW

- The Department Service Officer attended the VFW Skilled Level Training Conference held at the DoubleTree Annapolis Hotel, 210 Holiday Court, Annapolis, MD 21401. The VFW training session provided updated information on VBA matters. The training was held from September 18-22, 2022. The training material was shared with members of the GDVS field operations and Appeals Teams.
- The Department Service Officer hosted a VFW GA Post Service Officer training course at the VFW GA Post 6605, 1011 Corder Road, Warner Robbins, GA 31088. The purpose of the training was to provide information on the duties and responsibilities of a Post Service Officer. The training was held on September 24, 2022, from 9AM – 3PM.
- The Department Service Officer attended an Atlanta VBA Regional Office Directors/VSO Quarterly Zoom meeting with members of the Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA) Scheduling Team. The BVA Team briefed on the upcoming changes in the BVA system. The meeting was held on October 18, 2022, from 9:45AM – 11:45AM.

Ms. Amy Stevens, Georgia Military Women and VETLANTA

Vetlanta's next summit will be Dec. 7 at the Atlanta History Museum. We continue to be present in the community with lots of activities. Showing up does make a difference.

Ms. Raven Holstick, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer

- The Assistant Department Service Officer (Ed Kent) assisted 39 veterans with VA benefits related inquires this month.

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- District 9 National Revitalization was September 22-24 at American Legion Department Headquarters. Department Service Officer (Raven Holstick) and Assistant Service Officer (Tonjala Moton-Williams) assisted veterans with benefits and questions on the PACT Act, provided informational handouts concerning the PACT Act, and provided veterans with information on their local GDVS office.
- Department Service Officer and Assistant Service Officer attended and spoke at American Legion Post 75 Annual Commanders Banquet September 24, 2022.
- Mr. Will Simmons, Commander, Ms. Pat Morgan, President ALA, Mr. George Gray, Commander SAL, Mr. Randy Goodman, A/NEC, Department Service Officer, and Assistant Service Officer visited the Atlanta VA Medical Center and Atlanta VA Regional office on September 27, 2022. Hospital and RO provided a presentation concerning the operations and plans for the hospital and RO and a tour.
- District 5 National Revitalization was October 6th and 7th at post 264. Department Service Officer (Raven Holstick) assisted veterans on benefits and questions on the PACT Act, provided informational handouts concerning the PACT Act, and provided veterans with information on their local GDVS office.
- Upcoming event: Milledgeville Georgia Veterans War Home November 2 @ 1:00pm (Milledgeville, GA)
- Upcoming event: Dublin VA Medical Center November 2 @ 9:00 (Dublin, GA)
- Upcoming event: Montgomery VA Medical Center November 17 @ 1:00 (Montgomery, AL)
- Upcoming event: Tuskegee VA Medical Center November 18 @ 9:00 (Tuskegee, AL)

Commissioner Patricia Ross

Commissioner Ross added the following to her report: GDVS is one of the recipients of the SSG Fox Suicide Prevention Grant. We plan to execute this November after the VA approves our policies and procedures. Also, the Foundation's website should be active this week. We will have donations processed through PayPal so that people can give electronically.

On Monday, September 19, 2022, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's Meeting. She also had budget meetings.

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On Tuesday, September 20, 2022, Commissioner Ross met with Dr. Brian Moore from the Kennesaw State AMES Center. She also assisted a constituent, Yvonne Murphy, with an issue she had with the VA. At the end of the day, she was interviewed by Janet Siroto for an article in the University of Tampa Journal (alumni magazine).

On Wednesday, September 21, 2022, Commissioner Ross attended a Returning Veterans Task Force meeting where the discussion centered around veteran mental health and suicide prevention. Two Community Support Board organizations presented along with the Suicide Prevention and Outreach Coordinator. She also attended the Veterans Service Board meeting and a Unite Us Weekly Implementation Meeting.

On Thursday, September 22, 2022, Commissioner Ross attended a meeting of the VMHS State Veteran Nursing Facilities Subcommittee. She also attended a meeting with America's Warrior Partnership in preparation for her panel discussions the following week.

On Friday, September 23, 2022, Commissioner Ross attended a meeting with the new Director for Senate Budget & Evaluation Office, Brent Churchwell, and discussed the two budget priorities: raises for veteran field service officers and cemetery workers, and digitization of DD-214s. She also attended a meeting regarding GWVH RFP. Later in the day she met with Sheldon Andrews on the Unite Us presentation to the Technical College System of Georgia College presidents. Commissioner Ross had a phone meeting with Jerri Sher, Director of the documentary *Quiet Explosions: Healing the Brain* about a possible showing of the film in the Atlanta area. The film showcases personal journeys of PTSD and TBI and the pioneering doctors who use innovative methods to treat these injuries. The showing has been confirmed for Nov. 1 at 6:45 p.m. at Kennesaw State University.

On Monday, September 26, 2022, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's Meeting. She also participated in a photo op with Governor Kemp as a state agency that supports minority-owned, women-owned, and veteran-owned small businesses.

On Tuesday, September 27, 2022, Commissioner Ross had a "Meet & Greet" with the VA regarding the SSG Fox Grant for Suicide Prevention. Later that afternoon she travelled to Columbus to speak to the TCSG college presidents about Unite Us.

On Wednesday, September 28, 2022, Commissioner Ross met with David Bockel and Graham Younger. Mr. Younger is the Georgia representative to DC based organizations "Mission Readiness" and "Council for a Strong America." These organizations focus on military families. Commissioner Ross also attended a GDVS Agency Legislation meeting and a Unite Us weekly implementation meeting. GDVS proposed seven legislative changes and is awaiting information from the Governor's office on how to proceed.

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On Thursday, September 29, 2022, Commissioner Ross attended a Unite Us Meeting. She also attended a Kick-Off Webinar regarding the Fox Grant and met the veteran service officers in Warner Robins.

On Friday, September 30, 2022, Commissioner Ross attended a meeting with the panelists for the America's Warrior Partnership Symposium for introductions and run-of-show guidance.

On Monday, October 3, 2022, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's Meeting. She was also a keynote speaker at the Liberty County Chamber of Commerce meeting at the Capitol in cooperation with State Representative Al Williams. Commissioner Ross also visited the GDVS office area at the Chattahoochee Tech VECTR Center.

On Tuesday, October 4, 2022, Commissioner Ross attended the Ribbon Cutting Ceremony and Open House for the Chattahoochee Tech VECTR Center. She was also a panelist for the America's Warrior Partnership Symposium on community integration. She later met with the Chief Veteran Experience Officer for the VA to talk about data needs.

On Wednesday, October 5, 2022, Commissioner Ross attended a V.E.T. meeting and the Unite Us weekly implementation meeting.

On Thursday, October 6, 2022, Commissioner Ross served as a panelist for the America's Warrior Partnership Symposium along with three other states about suicide prevention efforts. She also attended a meeting regarding the Veterans Service Foundation website.

On Friday, October 7, 2022, Commissioner Ross and Mark Bannister met Curtis Jennings, Kerry Buck and Bud Hart, a design and construction firm known for their work on state veteran homes at the GWVNH in Augusta for a tour and meeting. Estimated costs for a 128-bed facility with the new small-home concept is ~\$66M.

On Monday, October 10, 2022, Commissioner Ross was the keynote speaker at the American Legion Post 307 Meeting.

On Tuesday, October 11, 2022, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's Meeting. She also met with Representative Yasmin Neal, followed by a Fox Grant Budget Discussion, a bi-weekly meeting with the Miner Agency, and a meeting regarding the Foundation.

On Wednesday, October 12, 2022, Commissioner Ross met with VA Secretary McDonough at the Regional Office and VA Medical Center.

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On Thursday, October 13, 2022, Commissioner Ross attended an SAO Transition meeting. She also met with Unite Us, had a Resolution and Budget Session and previewed a LifeScore Demo.

On Friday, October 14, 2022, Commissioner Ross held an Open Forum for GDVS employees. She also had a GWVH RFP Discussion and met with Ms. Nao Aarii, Consul of Economic and Intergovernmental Affairs for Japan and said farewell to the Consul General.

On Saturday, October 15, 2022, Commissioner Ross attended the Korea Department of Veterans Affairs Chapter Launch Meet & Greet.

On Monday, October 17, 2022, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's Meeting. She also had a GWVH RFP Meeting.

From Tuesday, October 18 – Thursday, October 20, Commissioner Ross served as the Georgia representative at the annual business meeting of the Military Interstate Compact Commission (she was appointed by the Governor in 2013 and is the longest serving member in Georgia).

Highlights:

- Press Release on the award of the SSG Fox Suicide Prevention Grant
- PayPal option for donations to the Foundation; website operational by the end of October

On the horizon:

- Execution of both the Unite Us and Fox grants
- Database creation
- Veterans Day at the Capitol, 9 November at 1300
- Veterans Day at the Battery, 12 November

Ms. Shelly-Ann Simpson, Executive Director, Field Operations and Appeals

GENERAL

- On September 21, the Returning Veterans Task Force quarterly meeting was held. The focus was on mental health, and we had briefings from Highland Rivers Behavioral Health and Pathways.
- On September 29, attended a meeting for a preliminary Women Veterans Summit to be held November 2023.
- On September 29, attended a Hispanic entrepreneur's event at the Atlanta Metro Chamber.

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- On October 3, visited the Chattahoochee VECTR to view the new offices (We began seeing veterans 10/17).
- On October 5, attended the morning session of the America's Warrior Partnership Symposium with the Commissioner. Their focus was on mental health.
- On October 8-9, participated in the Atlanta Pride events with the Women and Diversity Coordinator and the SPOC. We engaged with 400+ event participants who were either veterans or who have veteran family members. Many thanked us for our presence and our commitment to serving ALL who served.
- On October 12, visited the Atlanta Regional Office with the Commissioner to meet with Secretary McDonough while he was being briefed by the RO. We were treated to a walk-through of the current construction of the 1st floor. We were later joined by Senator Jon Ossoff for the VAMC portion of the visit.
- On October 18, attended the Warrior Alliance VIP breakfast where they spoke about their partnership with the Braves and the initiatives that they are currently working on.
- On October 18, the Appeals leadership, and DSOs met with 2 representatives from the BVA. We presented a certificate of appreciation to coordinator Amy Moody along with a GDVS coin. We also presented coins to her supervisor Matt Saylor and her co-worker Jamison Jean. We spoke to them about some of our challenges and they briefed us on ongoing changes at the completion of our 57 legacy appeals the BVA will be switching to a national scheduling system. More to follow as we get information.
- On October 23, attended the Dobbins Airforce Base Family Day providing outreach assistance to Veda Brooks.
- **DD 214's and Welcome Home Letters:**
 - 696 Welcome Home Letters were mailed out in September 2022.

PROJECTED POSITIONS

- Current openings in Augusta, Atlanta, Marietta, and Newnan.

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Ramona Roper, Training and Professional Development Division

- September 18-22, 2022, Ramona Roper attended the 2022 VFW National Service Officer training in Annapolis, MD.
- September 21, 2022, Ms. Sherri Whitfield made a site visit to the Moultrie VFSO.
- September 21-22, Mr. Charles Isaac made a site visit to the Brunswick VFSO.
- September 28, 2022, Ms. Sherri Whitfield made a site visit to the Warner Robins VFSO.
- September 28, 2022, Mr. Charles Isaac made a site visit to the Valdosta VFSO.
- October 17, 2022, Mr. Steven Fay made a site visit to the Newnan VFSO.
- October 19, 2022, Mr. Steven Fay made a site visit to the Gainesville VFSO.
- October 20, 2022, Training Division team meeting to start planning the 2023 Regionalized Training events.
- October 21, 2022, Mr. Steven Fay made a site visit to the Demorest VFSO.

Upcoming Events:

- Daily continued ongoing support to the Regional Directors and Veteran Field Service Offices.
- Development of a Standard Operation Procedure manual for Veteran Field Service Officers.
- Continuation of Field Office visits.

Edwin Berry, Director of Appeals Division

- The total number of actual hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for September 2022 was 81.
- The total number of pre-hearing actions for September 2022 was 242. The total number of post-hearing actions was 31.

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- 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 724
- As of October 1, 2022, the Atlanta VA Regional Office completed the following claims for the Service Organizations represented by GDVS:

Types of Claims	Number of Awards	Benefits paid out
Compensation	101,663	\$189,723,521
DIC	3319	\$5,088,647
Survivor Pension	827	\$703,150
<u>Veteran Pension</u>	1,677	\$1,837,435
Grand Total	107,178	\$197,352,754

The total benefits awarded to Georgia veterans and their families increased again. The increase through the end of September 2022 is \$1,211,743.

Veda Brooks, Women Veterans Coordinator (WVC)

Ms. Brooks added the following to her report: We will be participating in the “Dare to Dream” Operation Feed Atlanta. The goal is to feed 7,000 people, not all veterans. We will be serving police officers, fire departments, emergency medical services, and homeless encampments. Ms. Brooks hopes to register homeless vets into UniteUs and assist them with getting their DD214s.

- September 16, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in the Coweta County MIA/POW Ceremony.
- September 17, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in the Dekalb County Veterans’ Expo, held at the Central Dekalb Senior Center. Ms. Brooks also participated in the Veterans Coalition Annual Awards Dinner. She accepted the award for our past Executive Director, George Canavaggio.
- September 20, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in the Georgia Governor’s Task Force Meeting.
- September 21, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in Returning Veteran’s Task Force.
- September 23, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in Trauma 101, Understanding the impact of Trauma.
- September 24, 2022, Ms. Brooks presented at the State VFW Post Service Officer Training.
- September 28, 2022, Ms. Brooks presented at the Cobb County Women Veteran Meeting.
- September 29, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in the Hispanic Entrepreneur Celebration.
- October 1, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in a community clothing give-away.
- October 4, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in the Marietta Stakeholders Quarterly Meeting.
- October 6, 2022, Ms. Brooks provided training to the Columbus Field Office on Mental Health Claims, and proper narrative review for higher level review claims.

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- October 8-9, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in Atlanta Pride. A very big thank you to all GDVS family that helped us make this happen. (See AAR and Pictures)
- October 11, 2022, Ms. Brooks spoke at a women's Breast Cancer Awareness Event, hosted by Kaiser Permanente.
- October 13, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated at the YMCA Kennesaw Veteran's Expo. Thank you, Raven and Scott, from appeals - we appreciate your support.
- October 18, 2022, Ms. Brooks attended a meeting hosted by BVA.
- October 23, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in Family Day, at Dobbins AFB.

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
- Coweta County Race, Equity, and Justice Committee
- Unite Georgia Community Advisory Committee
- GDVS Presence at Atlanta Pride & Atlanta VA 2022

GDVS Presence at Atlanta Pride & Atlanta VA 2022

AFTER ACTION REPORT

Executive Summary

Atlanta Pride Festival

October 8-9, 2022

Review of Event: Atlanta Pride is a 2-day festival held the first weekend of October in midtown Atlanta, Georgia, celebrating LGBTQ+ unity, visibility, and wellness. The 2022 Pride festival was estimated to attract approximately 350,000 attendees.

After Action Review Team: Women and Minority Veterans Coordinator Veda Brooks, Suicide Prevention Outreach Coordinator Calandra Ferguson, VA Chaplain-Resident Noël Lemen,

Response Agencies:

Georgia Department of Veterans Services:

Calandra Ferguson (GDVS, Suicide Prevention and Outreach Coordinator)

Veda Brooks (GDVS, Women and Minority Veterans Coordinator)

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Shelly Simpson (GDVS, Executive Director of Field Operations and Appeals)
Shareka Monday-Robinson (GDVS, Human Resources)
Kirsten Dennis (GDVS, Purchasing/Procurement Agent)
Simone Dennis (GDVS, Volunteer)
Phelisia Coleman (Georgia Army National Guard Substance Abuse Prevention Coordinator)
LaShanda Edwards (Georgia Army National Guard Psychological Health Coordinator)
Raven Holstick (American Legion Service Officer)

Atlanta VA: **Noel Lemen** (Chaplaincy Services)
Kevin Thrailkill (Social Work)
Maya West (Nursing and Patient Care Services)
Douglas Taylor (MASX Health Care Information)

Event Timeline: (*list the major events and response activities*)

- 1.** Saturday October 8, 2022 0800-1030: Community Partner Marketplace Booth Setup
- 2.** Saturday October 8, 2022 1030-2030: Community Partner Marketplace Booth Staffing and Veteran Outreach
- 3.** Saturday October 8, 2022 2030-2130: Community Partner Marketplace Booth Overnight Teardown
- 4.** Sunday October 9, 2022 0900-1000: Community Partner Marketplace Booth Setup
- 5.** Sunday October 9, 2022 1600-1700: Community Partner Marketplace Booth Final Teardown and Load-out

Note: Strengths and areas for improvement can be grouped by the six critical areas: communications, safety and security, resource allocation, utilities, staff responsibilities, and patient care.

Observed Strengths:

- 1.** Engagement was high despite poor signage, with approximately 500 total contacts, including approximately 100 contact exchanges.
 - Contact exchanges included 50 QR code scans for links to VA veteran services and GDVS contacts. Notably, QR codes were only present on Sunday, which had less overall engagement of the two days. Conservative estimate had they been available both days would be 125.
 - Notable contact exchanges include Military and Veteran Services Representative for Senator Ossoff's Office and the Director of the US Air Force's LGBTQ+ Initiatives Program.
 - Approximately 10 VA employees engaged with the booth, at least 2 noting that the VA's presence at Pride had "refreshed" their desire to serve veterans after struggling with burnout. These employees represented a range of services from the Ethics Council, Behavioral Health, and Home Health Services.
 - Approximately 20 State of Georgia employees engaged with the booth, with a number expressing surprise and pleasure at the booth's presence and a desire to further engage with and coordinate with the Department of Veterans Services.

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- Many veterans were extremely positively emotional regarding our presence at Pride, some coming to tears and noting that, “I had no idea that the VA cared about *me* [emphasis added, as contextually this referred to the veteran’s LGBTQ identity]”. Another Vietnam-era female Marine Corps veteran noted that it was “healing” to have her identity as both a Marine and a lesbian recognized. Others were very excited to meet GDVS representatives and “humanize” the services offered to them, with approximately 50-75 veterans explicitly stating that they would contact GDVS due to our presence and having met representatives from that office.
2. No safety concerns were noted, as Atlanta Pride has significant Atlanta Police Department presence and has historically been a safe event. No safety issues were noted with the booth, although a stepstool would be helpful next year.
 3. Chaplain Lemen paid for the initial booth registration out of pocket, with reimbursement from GDVS through a donation by the American Legion. GDVS increased engagement significantly with their use of an interactive “Selfie Wall” with draped American and Pride flags and decorations. Chaplain Lemen provided the flags, lighting, cooler for volunteer refreshments, and a number of tools used to secure decorations as well as lock valuable items at night from her personal resources. The Atlanta VA provided outreach materials including Resource Guides, Mental Health service line brochures, “swag” such as “coozies” and ‘Support Our Veterans’ bracelets, and handheld American flags.
 4. GDVS provided most of the volunteer support, with Veda Brooks and Calandra Ferguson present the entire weekend.

Critical Areas for Improvement:

1. Early Planning Improvements

○ **Recommendations:**

▪ **VA:**

- As Chaplain Lemen only received approval from the DAC to go forward with VA presence at Pride in early September (approximately 3 months past normal deadline), recommendation is for initial Community Partner Marketplace application to be sent in at earliest opportunity in 2023. (Application period runs approximately March-June)
- Earlier volunteer signup request: signups went out in late September this year and were hampered by previously existing plans made by employees. Recommendation next year is to send out volunteer signup requests across *all* Atlanta-area VA employees no later than 01 September.
- Early engagement outside of EEO recommended next year; earlier coordination with Behavioral Health, LGBTQ+ Outreach Teams, Social Work, and other appropriate teams.

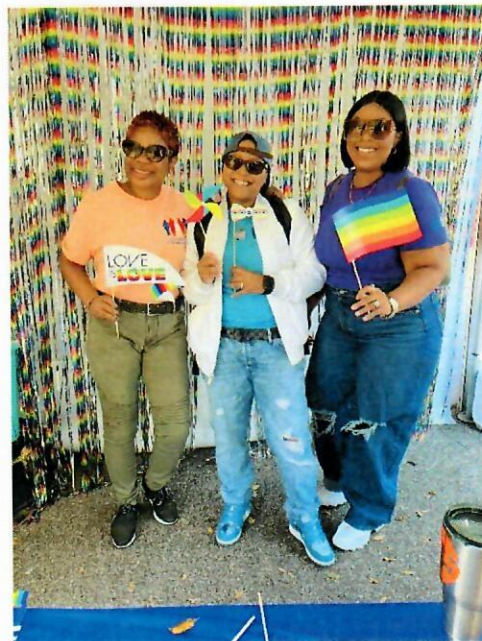
Calandra Ferguson, Suicide Prevention and Outreach Coordinator

Ms. Ferguson added that at Operation Feed Atlanta, they hope to identify veterans and the resources they need.

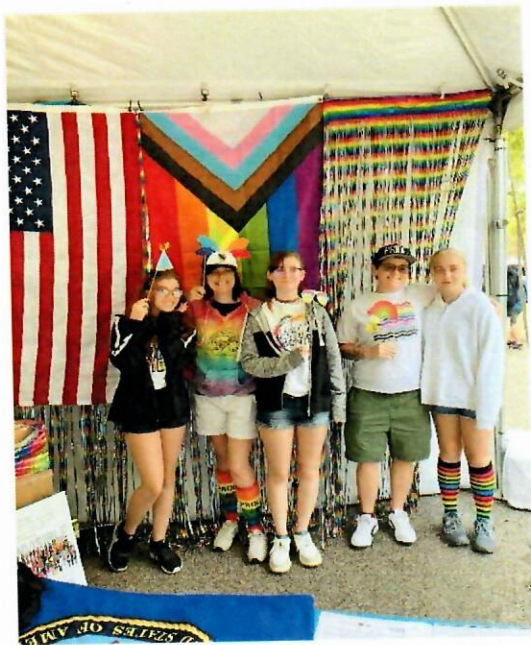
- September 16, 2022, Ms. Ferguson participated in the Coweta County MIA/POW Ceremony.
- September 17, 2022, Ms. Ferguson participated in the Dekalb County's Veterans' Expo, held at the Central Dekalb Senior Center. Ms. Ferguson also participated in the Veterans Coalition Annual Awards Dinner.
- September 20, 2022, Ms. Ferguson conducted the Georgia Governor's Task Force Meeting.
- September 21, 2022, Ms. Ferguson participated in Returning Veteran's Task Force.
- September 24, 2022, Ms. Ferguson taught SAVE, Suicide Prevention Training to State VFW Post Service Officer Training.
- September 28, 2022, Ms. Ferguson attended the Cobb County Women Veteran Meeting.
- September 29, 2022, Ms. Ferguson participated in the Hispanic Entrepreneur Celebration.
- October 4, 2022, Ms. Ferguson participated in the Marietta Stakeholders Quarterly Meeting.
- October 6, 2022, Ms. Ferguson provided training in Suicide Prevention in the Columbus Field Office on Mental Health Claims
- October 8-9, 2022, Ms. Ferguson participated in Atlanta Pride. A very big thank you to all GDVS family that helped us make this happen.
- October 13, 2022, Ms. Ferguson participated at the YMCA Kennesaw Veteran's Expo.



GDVS & VA



GDVS Volunteers





Mrs. Edwards, Behavioral Health,
Georgia Army National Guard, Volunteer



Ms. Coleman, Substance Abuse
Prevention Coordinator, Georgia Army
National Guard Volunteer, w/The SPOC

Ken Childre, Director of North Region

Mr. Childre added the following to his report: North Region had a pension debt waived for a veteran in the amount of \$164,735.

September 2022 total retro awards reported by the North Georgia offices: \$3,991,519.20

Included in that amount are single awards reported by:

Rita Barnhart (Canton)-\$111,251 (Mosteller-2544)

Rico Johnson (Gainesville)-\$131,455.77 (Bullard-7990)

\$153,737.32 (Barber-1935)

\$127,353.18 (McGuire-1666)

Glenn Massey (Gainesville)-\$132,000.42 (Hart-2163)

Director Site Visits/Inspections: 0

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19-30 September-Cartersville Office was closed due to movie filming. The VSOs did remote work during this period.

21 September (Ken Childre-North Area Director and ChanDreas Barkley-Cartersville)
 Attended Connecting Cobb Veterans meeting at Chattahoochee Technical College. ChanDreas will be the new Office Manager/VSO at the Chattahoochee Technical College VECTR Office.

North Georgia Gains/Losses: 4

- Herbert Ward (Ft McPherson)-Retired Effective 1 Sep
- Kelvin Burford (Lawrenceville)-Resigned Effective 6 Sep
- Rose Rudisill (Demorest)-Resigned Effective 30 Sep
- Daniel Moreno (Zebulon)-New Hire Effective 16 Sep (In training at Griffin Office, will move to Zebulon Office 11 Oct)

North Georgia Office Interviews: 3

- Marietta-6 Sep-Conducted interviews for open position. 10 candidates/5 interviewed.
- Ft. McPherson-7 Sep-Conducted interviews for open position. 8 candidates/4 interviewed.
- Zebulon/Pike County-8 Sep-Conducted interviews for open position. 5 candidates/3 interviewed.

Average Visits Per VFSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region		North					
Month		22-Sep					
A	B	C	D	E	D/E F	G	G/E H
	Veterans Field Service Officer (VFSO)		Total Monthly	Work Days In	Average Office Visits Per	Total Claims Submitted Total VA	Average Claims Submitted By VFSOs To VA
Number of Offices:	27	47	13,141	878	14.97	2,432	2.77
		Average Visits/Office			486.70	Average Claims/Office	90.07

*Total monthly office visits include: 2,887 In-Person and 10,254 phone calls/emails.

Vincent M. Pritchett, Director Veterans Benefits South Region

- On September 24, 2022, Tonjala Moton-Williams (Macon field office manager) was one of the speakers at the American Legion Commander's banquet in Lagrange, GA.

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- On September 27, 2022, Roger Futch (St. Marys field office manager) gave a benefits briefing to 40 service members participating in the Transition Assistance Program at Kings Bay naval base.
- On September 28, 2022, Tonjala Moton-Williams (Assistant Department Service Officer for American Legion/Macon field office manager) toured the Atlanta Regional Office and Medical Center and met with the leadership of both facilities.
- On October 8, 2022, Melissa Ingle gave a benefits briefing, answered questions, and provided GDVS paraphernalia to attendees at an American Legion Post 558 event.
- On October 12, 2022, Priscilla Prescott (Glennville field office manager) gave a benefits briefing to the Rotary Club in Glennville.
- On October 13, 2022, Stephanie Jordan (Brunswick field office manager) briefed Bureau of Prisons staff on veterans benefits at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Glynn County.
- On October 14, 2022, Shannon Daniels (Hinesville field office manager), Miguel Rivera (Savannah field office manager), and Debra O'Neil (District manager) supported an American Legion event in Savannah. They provided advice and did claims for those in attendance.
- The Albany field office reported a lump sum payment of \$393,772.00 for a veteran and the Warner Robins field office reported a payment for a surviving spouse of \$80,819.00. Warner Robins also reported two additional payments of \$16,376.00 and \$17,091.00 for two other surviving spouses.
- South Region Gains/Losses: On September 22, 2022, Monisha Chambers left the Valdosta field office due to state personnel rules.
- South Georgia Region Veterans Population: 242,136.

Office Visits for September: South Georgia offices handled 5,426 phone calls and emails.

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Average Visits Per VFSO Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:		South Region					
Month:		September-22					
A	B	C	D	E	D / E F	G	G / E H
Office Name	Veterans' Field Service Officer (VFSO) Last Name	#	Total Monthly Office Visits	Work Days In Month	Average Office Visits Per Day	Total Claims Submitted To VA Monthly	Average Claims Submitted By VFSOS To VA Daily
	Number of VFSOs:	41	2,327	801	2.91	1,579	1.97
Number of Offices:		24	Average Visits/Office:		96.96	Average Claims/Office: 65.79	

Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information & External Affairs

Ms. May added the following to her report: Lots of events are coming up for Veterans Day and we will be glad to post them on our social media if you want to advertise.

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

Division Updates

1. Georgia Department of Veterans Service Awarded VA Suicide Prevention Grant – news release announcing the award of the Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant (SSG Fox SPGP) in partnership with the Kennesaw State University Center for the Advancement of Military Emergency Services (AMES). The SSG Fox SPGP grant will be used to develop and deliver veteran and family appropriate suicide prevention programs, as well as studying trends in suicidality in Georgia veterans.

2. September GDVS Newsletter – PID published the monthly GDVS newsletter. This month’s edition featured information on avoiding Camp Lejeune scams, the expansion of VA’s tracking system for veteran complaints about care, Suicide Prevention Month activities, and Wreaths Across America at the two state veteran memorial cemeteries this December. The full newsletter is available online at <https://veterans.georgia.gov/newsletter>.
3. Website updates – PID updated information on state benefits available to veterans and their families to match current law and to make searching for certain kinds of benefits more accessible. PID monitors website traffic trends and made adjustments based on search criteria and page hits or bounces to better serve our audience.
4. Veterans Benefits Outreach
 - a. New offices in Marietta and Zebulon – two new GDVS locations, one in the Chattahoochee Tech VECTR Center in Marietta and one in the Pike County VA Outpatient Clinic, opened to veterans in October. PID added the new locations to the GDVS website and shared the opening on social media and with local media.
 - b. Job Fairs and Hiring Notice – shared information on career and hiring events around the state, including a Gwinnett County job fair, a Women Veteran Entrepreneurship Symposium, and a Hinesville career expo.
 - c. Employee Recognition – the GDVS celebrated the 5-year employment anniversary of Cassie Mickler, GVMC-Milledgeville’s assistant director, and the selection of Debbie O’Neal from Lyons as the Employee of the Quarter for Q3 2022. PID saw great online community engagement to celebrate our outstanding employees.
 - d. Suicide Prevention Month – shared a variety of resources and GDVS participation in suicide prevention month activities. Commissioner Ross was featured in 2 live streaming panel discussions at a multi-day conference on state suicide prevention initiatives and community system issues. The GDVS also featured several posts on the community engagement efforts from Calandra Ferguson and Veda Brooks.

Public Information Division Contacts (Since December 10, 2021)

- Replies to VA eBenefits Messages = 785
- Replies to General Questions = approximately 675
- Individual Request for the State Certificate of Honor = approximately 205

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 29,485

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(Honors Ceremonies and Central Office Mail Outs)

DoD Vietnam Veteran Lapel Pins presented via GDVS – An estimated **23,500**

Honors Ceremonies supported/coordinated by GDVS – **354**

Defense Department's Vietnam Veteran Surviving Spouse CoH – **290**

Mr. Mark Demers, Grant Program Implementation Manager

UniteUs is kicking off Oct. 25th and 26th. We hope to have all users registered on the platform by the end of the week.

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

Mr. Davis reported that they are attempting to register all 525 public high schools in Georgia to get seniors their dependent care funds. A discussion ensued with Mr. Kopsie regarding the drop in the number of students enrolled and the reasons behind it. There are several schools that are no longer operating in Georgia but are in other states. Some schools shut down because of Covid. Some schools have been withdrawn from the program due to inactivity. An analysis of the numbers was requested by Mr. Kopsie and Mr. Davis will be working on that report.

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 1,800 educational institutions and training establishments where Georgia veterans may attend school or job training and utilize their GI Bill® educational benefits.

Item *	Number
Approved Educational Institutions	390
Approved Training Establishments	1,410
Veteran Students Enrolled in Educational Institutions	15,952

* Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, Education Division, Sept. 2022.

Mr. Russell Feagin, Director, Health & Memorials Division

We have received a \$1.1 million grant for expansion at the Milledgeville Cemetery for the columbarium and other improvements.

For the Wood Building renovations, we will begin the bid process.

We are having a Veterans Day program on Nov. 11 at 11:00am. Ms. Takosha Swan will be performing.

Ms. Tonya Jarrett, Clinical Director, Health & Memorials Division

Ms. Jarrett added the following to her report: We had a site visit at the Shepherd Center where we discussed policies and guidelines.

1. Georgia War Veterans Home is currently COVID free for patients and staff.
2. Status of staffing by Pruitt Health for Subacute Unit
 - a. Psychiatrist-Pruitt is recruiting nationally through the American Psychological Association (APA) for psychiatry and neuropsychology. No job offers extended currently.
 - b. Neuropsychologist- Pruitt is contracting currently with consultant, Dr. Jeremy Hertz, through Integrated Psych Solutions.
 - i. GWVH staff met with Dr. Hertz virtually on 10/14/22 for program development.
 - ii. Weekly phone meetings and monthly in-person meetings are now established with Dr. Hertz.
 - c. Facility Executive Director participates in bi-weekly call with the Pruitt recruitment staff to update on potential candidates and staffing needs.
 - d. LPN/RN- Pruitt is continuing to recruit.
 - e. OT/PT/SLP- Pruitt is continuing to recruit.
3. Status on staff training and program development
 - a. Modality training is ongoing for Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing therapy (EMDR), biofeedback training, and dynavision training for sensory processing.
 - b. Subcommittees developed for program development, marketing, evaluation and assessment tools, treatment pathways, and medication management.
 - c. Current onsite staff are developing policies, procedures, and treatment pathways for program development.
 - d. Staff education is provided through trainers, onsite in-services, and computer courses.
 - e. GDVS and Pruitt staff provided an onsite tour of the GWVH campus for Director Manuel Davila, Carl Vinson VA Medical Center, and his clinical staff on 10/5/22.
 - f. Tour is being scheduled to visit The SHARE Military Initiative at Shepherd Center in Atlanta.

Mr. Carlton Deese, Executive Director GWVH, Milledgeville, GA

We are following CDC Covid guidelines.

We are having a Fall Festival this week with various activities for residents and their families, including a cookout and a petting zoo.

Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer

On Friday, September 23, 2022, Kerry Dyer met virtually with Mark Meeks, Russell Feagin, Dan Holtz, Tonya Jarret, Mark Bannister, and Mark Demers to discuss the Georgia War Veterans Home Request for Proposal.

On Monday, September 26, 2022, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's meeting. Later that day he posted the Veterans Field Service Office vacancies for Dublin, Demorest, and Lawrenceville.

On Tuesday, September 27, 2022, Kerry Dyer dropped off the Chevrolet Uplander for its routine Preventive Maintenance Checks & Services and to have the windshield replaced. Later that day he spoke to Ms. Jacqueline Perry, Veterans Affairs Information Technology Supervisor to coordinate the IT equipment needed for the Zebulon Health Clinic.

On Wednesday, September 28, 2022, Kerry Dyer attended the UniteUs weekly implementation meeting. Later that day he posted the Veterans Field Service Office vacancies for Brunswick and Milledgeville Cemetery.

On Thursday, September 29, 2022, Kerry Dyer along with Rob Johnson, Griffin Office Manager, Dan Moreno, Zebulon Office Manager met with Rutledge Davis, Zebulon Health Clinic Facility Manager, Jason Ware, Veterans Affairs Information Technology Tech to conduct a site visit of the Zebulon clinic. Later that day he met virtually with Joseph Huber regarding the SSG Fox Grant Kick-Off.

On Friday, September 30, 2022, Kerry Dyer met with Linda Lavender at the Milledgeville Cemetery to conduct a site visit and discuss the impact to her operations due to her high attrition rate of Grounds Maintenance Tech 1 employees. Later that day he met with Russell, Tonya, and Jenelle at the Georgia War Veterans Home to conduct a site visit of the Transitional Unit and to discuss the Building, Land & Lease Inventory of Property Program.

On Monday, October 3, 2022, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's meeting. Later that day he met with Michael Payne, Veterans Services Coordinator at the VECTR located on Chattahoochee Technical College Campus in Marietta along with Commissioner Ross, Shelly-Ann Simpson, and Gerald Lahr. The purpose of the visit was to ensure the Office was functional and all of the Information Technology equipment and requirements were met.

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On Wednesday, October 5, 2022, Kerry Dyer emailed potential candidates to the interviewing officials for the Dublin, Demorest, and Lawrenceville Field Offices. Later that day he attended the UniteUs weekly implementation meeting.

On Thursday, October 6, 2022, Kerry Dyer met virtually with State American Disability Office to discuss how GDVS will recognize and support the National Disability Employment Awareness for the Month of October. Later that day he met with Royce Morales, Business Analyst- Service Design, along with Will Wilson to discuss ways to improve GDVS email account naming convention.

On Friday, October 7, 2022, Kerry Dyer met virtually with Mark Meeks, DOAS Procurement Manager, Russell Feagin, Tonya Jarrett, Jenelle Moore, Matthew Carter, DOAS Procurement Manager and Dan Holtz to discuss the timeline to release the Request for Proposal for the Georgia War Veterans Home in Milledgeville. Later that day he submitted the monthly Fleet Managers Report to DOAS, Office of Fleet Management.

On Tuesday, October 11, 2022, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's meeting. He submitted the Sexual Harassment Prevention Mandatory Annual Training Report to DOAS for FY23. Later that day he contacted Ginny Baxter, Cobb Multispecialty Clinic Facility Manager to discuss the projected timeline for GDVS to occupy the office space. He also had a SSG Fox Grant discussion with Commissioner Ross, ShellyAnn Simpson, Veda Brooks, Calandra Ferguson, Dr. Moore, Kennesaw State University Director, Center for the Advancement of Military and Emergency Services (AMES) Research, Dr. Israel Sanchez, Kennesaw State University Co-Principal Investigator and Dr. Horan, Kennesaw State University Co-Principal Investigator.

On Wednesday, October 12, 2022, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly UniteUs implementation meeting. Later that day along with Shareka Monday-Robinson, he met virtually with Department of Community Health to discuss Open Enrollment for 2022 Employee Medical and Flexible benefit plans.

On Thursday, October 13, 2022, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Bannister, Robert Orange, Camala Ball, Shareka Monday-Robinson, Bobby Davis, and Kirsten Dennis met virtually to discuss the State Accounting Office transition with GDVS and the 90-day budget projection. Later that day he posted the Atlanta Balcony Office vacancy.

On Friday, October 14, 2022, Kerry Dyer attended Commissioner Ross' Open Forum with the Department. Later that day he met virtually with Mark Meeks, DOAS Procurement Manager, Russell Feagin, Tonya Jarrett, Jenelle Moore, Matthew Carter, DOAS Procurement Manager and Dan Holtz to discuss the Bidders/Offerors Conference and the Statement of Work/Scope of Work within the Contract for the Georgia War Veterans Home in Milledgeville.

Below are the Personnel Actions Kerry Dyer and Shareka Monday-Robinson processed from September 16, 2022- October 17, 2022.

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Location	Position	Status	Name	Date
Valdosta	VFSO 1	Terminated	Monisha Chamber	09/22/2022
Demorest	Sr. VFSO 2 (Office Mgr)	Resigned	Rose Rudisill	09/30/2022
Ft. McPherson	VFSO 1	New Hire	Randy Gray	10/03/2022
Marietta	VFSO 2	New Hire	Melissa Pritchett	10/03/2022
Lawrenceville	VFSO 1	New Hire	Monisha Chambers	10/17/2022
Demorest	VFSO 2 (Office Mgr)	New Hire	John Giddens	10/17/2022

Highlights:

- The Office in the Zebulon Health Clinic officially opened on Monday, October 3, 2022.
- The Office at the VECTR located on the Chattahoochee Technical College Campus in Marietta officially opened on Monday, October 17, 2022.

On the horizon:

- The Office in the Cobb Multispecialty Clinic is projected to open in November.

Mr. Mark Bannister, Executive Director, Health, Memorials, Finance & Development

Accounting

Routine operations are continuing. We are working closely with the State Accounting Office to complete end – of – year reports, to improve all accounts payable processing, proper coding, accountability, and organization of purchase orders, and on time ACH payments to the vendors of our State Veterans War Homes.

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 routine budgetary submission follow-up related questions and more information about the proposed Augusta Cemetery project.

On Friday, September 23, 2022, Commissioner Ross, and I met with Brent Churchwell, Director, Senate Budget & Evaluation Office, to brief the AFY 2022 and FY 2023 budget request and to discuss agency initiatives.

HEALTH AND MEMORIALS

State Veterans Homes

Selected members of the GDVS leadership presented an overview of the State Veterans Homes to the Senate Subcommittee on Veterans Nursing Facilities on Thursday, September 22, 2022, at 10:00 am. The purpose of the meeting was to present an overview of the homes and provide useful information and data to further examine the resources and the current operations of these facilities to help determine whether future upgrades or expansions are needed.

Commissioner Ross, and I traveled to the GA War Veterans Nursing Home in Augusta on Friday, September 7, 2022, to tour the home and to meet with Mr. Curtis Jennings, Principal, SFCS Architects. Mr. Carlton Deese provided a tour and historical background of the “Blue Goose” to the group, and we met with a few key members of his staff. Immediately following the tour, team members of SFCS listened to the ideas and goals of GDVS and Augusta University members and provided an excellent presentation on the different modules of possible future home designs and modern structures to facilitate skilled nursing and assisted living for the future of our aging veteran population in the state.

State Veterans Homes Census (Through October 14, 2022) +

Current Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	100	103	203
Service Connected *	25	39	64
Total Patients	125	142	267
Last Month			
Regular Patients	100	108	208
Service Connected *	25	40	65
Total Patients	125	148	273

* 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 9, 2022, through October 14, 2022.

State Veterans Cemeteries,

Burial Statistics (Through October 14, 2022) +

State Veterans Cemetery	Cumulative Last Month	Cumulative Current Month	Increase
Glennville	2,149	2,169	20
Milledgeville	4,868	4,909	41
Total	7,017	7,078	61

+ The report to the VSB are the total numbers from September 9, 2022, through October 14, 2022.

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.

Veterans Service Foundation Board

The Foundation Board Chairman, Mr. Doug Middleton, will provide his report during the monthly board meeting.

OLD BUSINESS:

Ms. Potter-Miller was not ready to present her information on veteran treatment courts. We will look forward to hearing from her at our next meeting.

Mr. Hanley congratulated GDVS on being a recipient of the Fox Suicide Prevention Grant. He also asked if we could assist other organizations in Georgia in receiving future grant funds. Commissioner Ross explained that we will possibly have this grant for up to 3 years and there is no timeline yet for the submission for any future grant funds. We are using the funds for outreach and training. Executing the grant is something new for us and the VA and the VA has expressed that we are their guinea pigs in the process. Mr. Hanley requested updates at the Board meetings regarding the grant.

Mr. Hanley requested information on suicide prevention training in the homes. Ms. Brooks stated that we are setting up mandatory training for our employees within the homes.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The Veterans Day Proclamation Signing Ceremony with Gov. Kemp will be held at the Capitol on Nov. 9th at 1:00 PM.

The 41st Annual Veterans Day Events at The Battery Atlanta will be 12 November and are open to the public. The Veterans Day Parade begins at 11:00am. The Veterans Festival will be from 11:00am-3:00pm. The Observance Ceremony will be at 12:00pm.

There will be a free screening of the documentary "Quiet Explosions: Healing the Brain" on Nov. 1st at 6:45pm at Kennesaw State University, Social Science Building Room 1019. It will be followed by a Q&A with Director Jerri Sher, Commissioner Patricia Ross and Dr. Brian Moore.

November will be filled with Veterans Day events in which GDVS personnel will be attending and speaking. Board Vice-Chair Takosha Swan will be singing at multiple events as well.

Sarita Dyer, wife of Chief Operations Officer Kerry Dyer, will be inducted into The Georgia Military Veterans' Hall of Fame on Nov. 5th in Columbus.

NEW BUSINESS:

Joel Willis and other representatives from the Veterans Coalition Foundation presented the "Veterans Leadership Award" for 2021-2022 to Commissioner Ross to show their appreciation for her leadership in assisting veterans across the state. The award itself was a bronze boot. Commissioner Ross stated that she was "honored and humbled to receive this award" and accepted it on behalf of the entire team.

The December 15 board meeting was scheduled. It will be a combination virtual and in-person meeting, set up at the GDVS. Mr. Kubinec made a motion which was seconded by Mr. Kopsie. There were no objections. The motion passed.

Ms. Swan made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Peterson seconded the motion. There were no objections and the motion passed. The meeting adjourned at approximately 1:33 p.m.

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SIGNED:



Shawn Hanley, Chair

ATTEST:


Joshua Kopsie, 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, December 15, 2022, at 12:30 p.m. The Webex link is: <https://georgiadepartmentofveteransservice.webex.com/georgiadepartmentofveteransservice/j.php?MTID=mff56034371488fd040935ed27a9432ab>

Meeting password: **pB6NPvrM9y4 (72667876 from video systems)**

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

Access Code: **2346 701 2707**