

Wednesday, October 25, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

Present Ms. Takosha Swan, Vice Chair
Mr. Joshua Kopsie, Secretary
Mr. Steve Mendez, 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. Russell Feagin, Executive Director, Health & Memorials Division, GDVS
Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer, GDVS
Mr. Bryan Webb, Attorney General's Office
Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW Service Officer, Appeals Division, GDVS
Ms. Raven Holstick, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer
Mr. Melvin Weaver, State Commander, American Legion
Ms. Dylester Scott, AMVETS
Mr. Carlton Deese, Executive Director GWVNH, Augusta, GA
Mr. Bobby Davis, Director, Veterans Education & Training, GDVS
Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information and External Affairs, GDVS
Ms. Shareka Monday-Robinson, Director, Human Resources, GDVS
Ms. Ramona Roper, Director, Training Division, GDVS
Ms. Sherri Whitfield, Director, Veterans Benefits South Region, GDVS
Mr. Ken Childre, Director, Veterans Benefits North Region, GDVS
Mr. Edwin Berry, Director, Appeals Division, GDVS
Ms. Veda Brooks, Coordinator, Women & Minority Veterans, GDVS
Mr. William Wilson, Network Administrator, GDVS
Ms. Irene Mackson, Business Support Analyst, GDVS
Ms. Julie Hammond, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner, GDVS

On Wednesday, October 25, 2023, the Veterans Service Board meeting was held in person and by video/tele-conference.

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

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

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

Wednesday, October 25, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

The following reports were submitted for the Board meeting:

Mr. Melvin Weaver, State Commander, American Legion

Our new national commander has an initiative called “Be the One.” We have established a homeless committee and a suicide prevention committee to get information out into our communities.

We continue hospital visits and will be in Milledgeville and Dublin next.

Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW

- The Department Service Officer attended the Monthly VSO/Community Partner PACT Information and Listening meeting hosted by Lauren Ruchin, Atlanta VHA. The virtual meeting was held on September 21, 2023, at 12PM – 1PM.
 - The purpose of the meeting was to share information about the PACT Act and to discuss how our Veterans are being impacted by the PACT Act.
 - Also, we discussed ways to ensure that our Veterans gain access to healthcare, benefits, and resources they earned and deserve!
- The Department Service Officer hosted a VFW GA Post Service Officer training course on September 23, 2023, from 10AM – 3PM, at VFW GA Post 658 located at 4864 Harrison Road, Macon, GA 31206.
 - The purpose of the training was to provide information on the duties and responsibilities of a Post Service Officer.
 - VA representative provided an overview of the Veterans Readiness and Employment (VR&E) program.
 - GDVS Suicide and Prevention Coordinator provided information on suicide prevention.
- The Department Service Officer attended the VAVS Quarterly Committee meeting. The virtual meeting was held on October 11, 2023, at 1PM.
 - The VAMC initiative regarding the PACT Act and the CDCE continues to support VAMC operational status.
 - Discussed the upcoming events to include the Veterans Appreciation Day on November 10, 2023, from 9AM – 12PM.
 - Volunteers to host the coffee cart at the local CBOC.

Wednesday, October 25, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

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- The Department Service Officer attended the Atlanta VA Medical Center (VAMC) Quarterly and introduction meeting with Daniel Ducker, Interim Joseph Maxwell Cleland VAMC Director. The meeting was held on October 17, 2023, at 11:30AM.
 - Interim Director introduction and provided a brief overview of his outreach initiatives.
 - Overview briefings from VAMC Department Chairs

Ms. Raven Holstick, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer

- Service officers (Raven Holstick, Tonjala Williams-Moton, Ed Kent) met for final review to discuss Fall conference for October 27-29.
- Mr. Melvin Weaver (Commander), Mr. and Mrs. Fultz, Mr. Randy Goodman (A/NEC), Department Service Officer, and the Assistant Service Officer visited the Atlanta VA Medical Center and Atlanta VA Regional office on September 26, 2023. Hospital and RO provided a presentation concerning the operations and plans for the hospital and RO and a tour.
- Post 127 held a Veteran claims clinic September 22-23. Department service officer and Assistant service officer assisted and advised over 20 people concerning VA benefits.
- Post 290 had a veterans' forum on September 22nd. DSO gave a presentation to veterans and Family members.

Upcoming events:

- Monthly Virtual Post Service Officer training will be held for new service officers. Training topics will be on the roles and responsibilities of a post service officer. This training will continue to be held monthly as new service officers arrive.
- October 27-29 Fall conference. DSO will teach a class on 28th at 1:00 to Post level service officers.
- Georgia War Home (Milledgeville) November 1st @1:00
- Dublin VA Hospital Visit November 2nd @9:00
- November 4th Veterans standdown Gainesville GA
- Montgomery, AL VA Visit November 15th @1:00

**Wednesday, October 25, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia**

- Tuskegee, AL VA Visit November 16th @9:00

Commissioner Patricia Ross

On Wednesday, September 27, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the Returning Veterans Task Force Meeting. She then met with Assistant Commissioner Fielding from the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Development Disabilities about their suicide prevention efforts and the \$50,000 sponsorship for next year's forum. She also attended the September Veterans Service Board Meeting.

On Thursday, September 28, 2023, Commissioner Ross met with Matt Payne from the Outer Circle Foundation, an approved 501(c)(3) organization. Their mission is "to provide care and support to Veterans and First Responders, and their family, during times of need."

On Friday, September 29, 2023, Commissioner Ross joined the Secretary of the VA, Denis McDonough, at Tuskegee University in Tuskegee, Alabama for their 100th anniversary. She also met with the Director of the Central Alabama VA Medical System and the Commissioner of the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs.

On Saturday, September 30, 2023, Commissioner Ross assisted veterans at a PACT Act event at Augusta Technical College in Augusta, Georgia hosted by the Warrior Alliance.

On Monday, October 1, 2023, Commissioner Ross met with OPB, Russell Feagin and Carlton Deese regarding capital assets. She then held a weekly Director's Meeting. Afterwards, she briefed the Governor's Office on our budget. Commissioner Ross then met with GTA regarding their Digital Equity grant and how GTA can align grant goals with GDVS accessibility goals and program. She then met with Kimberly Mitchell of the Veterans Benefits and Banking Program as they shared resources available to veterans and their families. She ended her day with a Unite Us bi-weekly meeting and a Fox Grant update meeting.

On Tuesday, October 3, 2023, Commissioner Ross met with Camala Ball, GDVS Budget Analyst. She then attended the Transition Advisory Committee meeting. Afterwards, she and Veda Brooks were interviewed by Jennifer Smith on her Podcast, where they discussed PTSD due to MST (Military Sexual Trauma).

On Wednesday, October 4, 2023, Commissioner Ross met with Austin Trott and Kaitlin Little from the Senate Budget office to discuss our AFY23/FY24 requests. Also in attendance were Camala Ball, Mark Demers and Kerry Dyer. She then welcomed the Korean Vietnam Veterans Association, with their new Consul General Sangpyo Suh and President Bong Hyun Yeo. 13 members of KVVA were presented Vietnam Veteran certificates. Afterwards, she met with Paul Wright, the National Veterans Legal Support Program Executive Director about their support to Georgia veterans.

**Wednesday, October 25, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia**

On Thursday, October 5, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the Veterans Service Foundation Board Meeting. She then served as a panelist for the Staff Sergeant Fox Forum hosted by Veterans Service Board Chair Shawn Hanley at the Capitol. Afterward, she attended an additional budget request meeting with the House budget team. She ended the day at the Korean National Day, where she presented congratulatory remarks.

On Friday, October 6, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the Leadership Training, along with her leadership team, at Ocmulgee State Park in Helena, Georgia. There was a time of teaching and team building led by Dr. Joe Richardson.

On Saturday, October 7, 2023, Commissioner Ross spoke at the Korea Defense Veterans Association annual conference held at the Battery in Atlanta.

On Wednesday, October 11, 2023, Commissioner Ross spoke at and assisted with the ribbon cutting ceremony at Jim 'N Nick's in Athens. She received a \$2,500 donation to the Veterans Service Foundation, which will be used to assist an organization in Athens that aids veterans. She then met with Unite Us and TCSG.

On Thursday, October 12, 2023, Commissioner Ross and Kerry Dyer attended the grand opening of the new kitchen at the Milledgeville Veterans Home hosted by the new contractor, STGi.

On Monday, October 16, 2023, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's Meeting. She then attended the Unite Us bi-weekly meeting and the Fox Grant update meeting.

On Tuesday, October 17, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the final Transition Advisory Committee meeting. As part of the working group, recommendations will be presented to the Commission (led by former SecDef Chuck Hagel) to Congress. She then met with Nick Stout who is looking to transition from active duty to the GAANG.

On Thursday, October 19, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the CPI Increase and Mental Health Grant discussion with OPB, Camala Ball, Russell Feagin, Mark Demers and Kerry Dyer. She then attended the October Women in Leadership Luncheon.

On Friday, October 20, 2023, Commissioner Ross joined the GDVS Leadership Institute students in Milledgeville for a tour of the cemetery and War Veterans Home.

On Monday, October 23, 2023 through Tuesday, October 24, 2023 Commissioner Ross attended the October State Workforce Development Board meeting in Savannah.

Highlights:

Ssg Fox suicide prevention forum

Wednesday, October 25, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

Upcoming Events:

Veterans Day Ceremony at the Capitol on 6 October at 1400.

Commissioner Ross announced that the GDVS Leadership Institute visited Milledgeville to tour the home and cemetery. The new contractor is transitioning well. The grand opening of the kitchen took place recently and now the residents will have hot food. One of the biggest complaints was the cold food, due to it being brought to the facility from off-site kitchens. The sub-acute unit will be opening in the next 6 months.

Ms. Swan asked about the \$50,000 sponsorship from DBHDD, which Commissioner Ross stated will be used for our suicide prevention forum.

UniteUs is going into year two. TCSG is partnering with us to do promotion videos and a social media/marketing push within the college system. Mr. Kopsie asked if we were ready for a televised commercial. Commissioner Ross stated we are not quite there.

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

GENERAL

- On October 4th, along with the Commissioner, we presented Vietnam Veterans Certificates to a contingent from the Korean Vietnam Veterans Association who served as allies during the Vietnam War.
- On October 4th, we had a visit from Paul Wright, the Executive Director for National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP) and Renee Burbank, Director of Litigation. GDVS has a memorandum of understanding with NVLSP that affords veterans who have GDVS as their POA to have skilled, knowledgeable counsel at the Court of Veterans Appeals in Washington, D.C.
- On Thursday October 5th, along with the other GDVS personnel, I attended the Staff Sergeant Fox Forum held at the Capitol.
- On October 17th, I attended the Quarterly VSO briefing at the VAMC. We were introduced to the Interim Director, Mr. Daniel Ducker.
- **DD 214's and Welcome Home Letters: 388** Welcome Home Letters were mailed out in September, 2023.

PROJECTED POSITIONS

- Current opening in Augusta VAMC.

Wednesday, October 25, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

Ms. Ramona Roper, Director of Training Division:

- September 13, 2023, Ms. Sandra Bennett conducted a benefit briefing for the 876th Engineer Support Company, National Guard Armory. Ms. Bennett explained state and federal Department of Veterans Affairs benefits and answered the service members' questions.
- October 3, 2023, Mr. Charles Isaac and Ms. Sandra Bennett conducted Hybrid training via MS Teams. The subject for the training was Appointment of a Veteran Service Organization (POA).
- October 6, 2023, Ms. Ramona Roper attended the Director's Leadership Training at the Little Ocmulgee State Park and Lodge in Helena, GA.
- October 10, 2023, the latest DROP Class was administered via the Absorb Training Portal. The class was "New and Relevant Evidence". The class defined the term "new and relevant evidence" as it relates to presenting evidence to the VA on Supplemental Claims for previously denied conditions.
- October 11, 2023, Ms. Sandra Bennett and Mr. Charles Isaac conducted Hybrid Training via MS Teams. The subject for this training was Dependency Indemnity Compensation (DIC).
- October 12, 2023, Ms. Ramona Roper assisted Ms. Veda Brooks with preparations of swag bags for the Atlanta Pride festivities.
- October 17, 2023, Mr. Charles Isaac and Ms. Sandra Bennett conducted Hybrid Training via MS Teams. The subject for the Training was Appointment of a Veteran Service Organization (POA).
- October 19, 2023, Mr. Glenn Massey and Mr. Steven Fay conducted Hybrid Training via MS Teams. The subject is Appointment of a Veterans Service Organization (POA).
- October 25, 2023, Ms. Sandra Bennett and Mr. Charles Isaac will conduct Hybrid Training via MS Teams. The subject will be Dependency Indemnity Compensation (DIC).

Upcoming Events:

- Daily continued ongoing support to the Regional Directors and Veteran Field Service Offices
- Continuation of performing duties as VSO's
- Continuation of Quality Review checks of VSO's work
- Preparing for 2024 annual Training conference
- Future Hybrid Classes for the Second Quarter

Mr. Edwin Berry, Director of Appeals Division

- The total number of hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for September 2023 was 45.
- As of **October 1, 2023**, the Atlanta VA Regional Office processed benefits as follows for GDVS and the Service Organizations represented by GDVS:

Types of Claims	Number of Awards	Benefits paid out
Compensation	104,524	\$220,762,62576
DIC	3,822	\$6,370,833
Survivor Pension	758	\$701,774
Veteran Pension	1,473	\$1,695,130
Grand Total	110,577	\$229,530,312*

*Represents an increase of \$1,242,226 from the previous month.

Mr. Kenneth Childre, Director Veterans Benefits North Region

Retro Awards: September 2023-\$1,175,170.11

Included in the Retro Awards were single awards:

Compensation

Smith-2921-\$184,048.03 (Rico Johnson-Gainesville)

Strickland-1129-\$100,332.13 (Rita Barnhart-Canton)

DIC

Wilbanks-8306-\$151,128.20 (Rita Barnhart-Canton)

Debt Waiver-Not included in retro awards.

Daum-2143-\$47,949 (Blairsville)

Director Site Visits/Inspections: 1

Community Involvement:

6 Sep-Marie Lundquist (Jasper) Speaking engagement at Dahlonga American Legion Post 239. Talked about what the state offers, various types of VA benefits...compensation, pension and DIC.

**Wednesday, October 25, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia**

Other events between these dates were discussed at the last board meeting.

30 Sep-Augusta Technical College PACT Act Event. Wanda Brown (Augusta VAMC), John McKenzie and Sharonica Mitchell (Augusta War Veterans Home), Dkendrick Roebuck (Grovettown), Mark Churning (Greensboro), Patricia Ross, ShellyAnn Simpson and Ken Childre. Assisted over 30 Veterans/family members with benefits.

North Georgia Gains/Losses:

Dawn Perry (Athens)-Resigned Effective 20 Sep

New hires in Athens and Grovetown

Marietta Clinic opening after an employee moved to Canton

Average Visits Per VFSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:		North					
Month:		September-23					
A	B	C	D	E	D / E	G	G / E
					F	H	
					Average	Total	Average
			Total	Work	Office	Claims	Claims
	Veterans' Field		Monthly	Days	Visits	Submitted	Submitted
	Service Officer (VFSO)		Office	In	Per	To	By VFSOS
Office Name	Last Name	#	Visits	Month	Day	Monthly	Daily
	Number of VFSOs:	53	8,313	24	346.38	1,715	71.46
Number of Offices:	30		Average Visits/Office:		277.10	Average Claims/Office: 57.1666667	

*Total monthly office visits include: 2,339 In-person and 5,974 phone calls/emails.

Ms. Sherri Whitfield, Director Veterans Benefits South Region

- On October 21, 2023, Sherri Whitfield, Jason Lane, and Denoris Lane supported AMVETS Post 607 in Valdosta, GA. This event focused on VA health and disability claims for veterans of Valdosta, GA.
- On October 25, 2023, Melissa Ingle in our Americus office gave a benefit briefing to residents of Magnolia Manor of Americus.
- South region offices reported lump sum payments since the last board meeting of \$922,379.01 with the highest single amount of \$146,276.89 reported by the Ft. Moore field office.
- South Georgia Region Veterans Population: 237,759.

Wednesday, October 25, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

- We plan to do several briefings at prisons in the area.

Ms. Veda Brooks, Women Veterans Coordinator (WVC)

- September 26, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in a zoom meeting with Women Veterans Treatment Programs w/ Universal Health Services.
- September 27, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the RVTF Meeting.
- September 30, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in Be the One Training at American Legion Post 57.
- October 5, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in an outreach at the Community Outreach Resource Empowerment Plus shelter.
- October 11, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in Women Veterans Health Committee Monthly Meeting.
- October 15, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in Atlanta Pride.
- October 18, 2023, Ms. Brooks Georgia attended Veterans Network (CVEB) under United Military Care, Inc. connecting/collaborating with nonprofits. Hosted by Coweta Foundation.
- October 20, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in an outreach at the Community Outreach Resource Empowerment Plus shelter.
- In November we will have an outreach event where we hope to feed 7,000 homeless veterans in four counties.

Current committees:

- Violence Prevention Task Force
- 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
- Farmer Street Cemetery Commission

Ms. Calandra Ferguson, Suicide Prevention and Outreach Coordinator (SPOC)

- September 23, Ms. Ferguson conducted Suicide Prevention Training for the Veterans of Foreign Wars annual conference.
- September 30, Ms. Ferguson conducted Suicide Prevention Training for the American Legion's "Be the One" Campaign.
- Monthly Ms. Ferguson submits reports on the events and referral data for the Fox Grant.
- Monthly Ms. Ferguson conducts the Governor's Challenge Task Force meeting.
- October 10, Ms. Ferguson submitted her EOY SSG Fox Grant Performance Report.
- October 14, Ms. Ferguson participated in "Atlanta Pride" distributing Suicide Prevention Material.

Mr. Mark Demers, Chief Development Officer/Chief Financial Officer

Accounting:

Routine operations are continuing. We are continuously working to improve all accounts payable processing, to apply proper coding, accountability, organization of purchase orders, and on time payments.

Budget:

As part of the fall legislative development process, we have responded to several inquiries from the Office of Planning and Budget. The information was routine budgetary submission follow-up related questions.

Grant Program:

- SSG Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program- (\$747,464)
 - As of September 20, 2023, GDVS was awarded the SSG Fox grant for a second year!
 - We are in partnership with Kennesaw State University AMES Center to implement the grant. The latest submission to the VA on October 5, 2023.
 - Calandra Ferguson provided the outreach and training data reports, and we transmitted them to the VA on October 5, 2023.
 - Calandra Ferguson or Veda Brooks will report all the outreach and training events regarding Suicide Prevention under the Fox Grant.

Wednesday, October 25, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

- The first-year end of year performance report was submitted on October 17, 2023.
- The end of year FER/FFR reports are due December 15, 2023.
- **Unite-Us Grant-** (American Rescue Plan-Negative Impact Grant)- \$6.1m per year (\$18.3m) over the course of 3 years starting July 1, 2022:
 - Data ingestion and secure data transfer for the platform and social connector is moving forward. As of October 17, 2023, we have 265,222 veterans in the system. We have submitted 956 community partners and 313 healthcare partners for inclusion to the platform since August 2022.
 - Our Warner Robins GDVS office is ranked #6 with 3826 Unite Us referrals received in the entire national network.
 - Below is an activity snapshot from Unite Us Insights:



- **Veterans Mental Health Services Program Grant (HB 414)-** Georgia Governor Brian Kemp signed HB 414 on April 25, 2023, with the support of state legislators and the Georgia Department of Veterans Service (GDVS). The bill creates the Veterans Mental Health Services Program, which is a grant program to improve access to mental health services for military service members, veterans, and their families in the state of Georgia. The grant program is funded through state appropriations in Fiscal Year 2023. The total grant funding is \$750,000 for FY2023 (executed by no later than 30 June 2023). The grant was awarded to two vendors:
 - Aspire (Cohen Veterans Network) for \$650,000.

Wednesday, October 25, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

- Emory Healthcare for \$100,000.
- The money was allocated to both awardees, and they have received the funds.
- The first quarterly reports are due to GDVS on October 23, 2023.

Mr. Russell Feagin, Executive Director, Health & Memorials Division, GDVS

State Veterans Homes

State Veterans Homes Census (Through October 13, 2023) +

Current Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	94	111	205
Service Connected *	25	36	61
Total Patients	119	111	266
Last Month			
Regular Patients	97	105	202
Service Connected *	26	36	62
Total Patients	123	141	264

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

+ The numbers reported to the VSB are the total numbers from September 16, 2023, through October 13, 2023.

Construction projects continue at the Georgia War Veterans Home's campus. New projects, including paving and renovations to the Wood Building will start during November.

Conducted a ribbon cutting ceremony for the new Food Service Facility on October 12, 2023. Commissioner Ross, Mrs. Michelle Lee, Founder and CEO of STGi, and other members of STGi participated in the ribbon cutting. A very positive article about the event was published on the front page of the local paper, the Union Recorder.

Hosted a GDVS Leadership Institute Training session providing information about the State veterans homes operations on Friday, October 20, 2023.

The Homes are COVID-19 free.

**Wednesday, October 25, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia**

The GWVH will host a Veterans Day ceremony on November 10, 2023, at 11:00 am. All Veterans Service Board members are cordially invited to attend.

Ms. Swan asked about the number of patients in the homes and if they are at full capacity. Acceptance of patients is limited due to funding. The VA sets requirements for the staffing ratio per patient.

State Veterans Cemeteries

Burial Statistics (through October 13, 2023)+

State Veterans Cemetery	Cumulative Last Month	Cumulative Current Month	Increase
Glennville	2,353	2,372	19
Milledgeville	5,218	5,236	18
Total	7,571	7,608	37

+ The report to the VSB is the total numbers from September 16, 2023, through October 13, 2023.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Glennville

Routine operations are continuing.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Milledgeville

Hosted a GDVS Leadership Institute Training session providing information about the State veterans cemetery operations on Friday, October 20, 2023.

Mr. Carlton Deese, Executive Director GWVNH, Augusta, GA

We are planning special events for Veterans Day including BBQ, music and activities for the residents. It will be a two-day event.

Ms. Swan asked about the possibility of accepting more patients. Mr. Deese explained that they are licensed for 192 patients and have a capacity of 186. The numbers have dropped since Covid, but they are planning a marketing push.

Ms. Swan asked if they ever have surveys. Mr. Deese answered that Pinnacle handles their surveys. They have been receiving the best ratings ever, receiving best in class in 16 categories. They receive good feedback on the surveys.

**Wednesday, October 25, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia**

Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer

On Thursday, September 28, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Barbara Beedles and Gerald Lahr met with Natsha Simoes, Project Manager for Access Corporation, to discuss the progress of the DD214 digitalization. Later that day he attended the Capitol Arts Standards Commission meeting to discuss the Master plan for the Georgia Capitol Museum.

On Friday, September 29, 2023, Kerry Dyer spoke with Kristy Baugham, Sales and Catering Manager for the Little Ocmulgee State Park & Lodge, regarding the reservation and catering for the Director's Conference. Later that day he posted the Canton and Athens Field Office vacancies internally. He also conducted a site visit at Capitol room 341 and 216 in preparation for the SSG Fox Forum.

On Monday October 2, 2023, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's Meeting. Later that day he attended the Fox Grant and UniteUs bi-weekly meeting virtually. He also spoke with Clark Wong, State Properties Land Manager, regarding the Standard Right of Entry Agreement for the GWVH fiber optic installation.

On Tuesday, October 3, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Shareka Monday- Robinson, Linda Lavender and Russell Feagin met virtually with Gail Stowers, DOAS State Substance Abuse Coordinator, to discuss the testing procedures for the Cemetery workers. Later that day he contacted Verizon regarding the replacement of two government cell phones and one Hot Spot device. He also coordinated with GBA to pick-up the parking pass and badge for a VETD new hire.

On Wednesday, October 4, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Demers and Camala Ball attended the Agency Budget update meeting along with SAO. Later that day he spoke with Mr. Johnson, Chef at Soul Food Catering, regarding the menu for the SSG Fox Forum. He also met with Betsy and Justin, House Media Service for the Capitol to finalize the IT and timeline for the SSG Fox Forum.

On Thursday, October 5, 2023, Kerry Dyer attended the SSG Fox Forum at the Capitol. Later that day he sent Linda Lavendar a Cemetery Tech 1 potential candidate.

On Friday, October 6, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross and the Agency Directors attended the Director's Team Building/Leadership Conference at the Little Ocmulgee State Park & Lodge in Helena, GA.

On Tuesday, October 10, 2023, Kerry Dyer spoke with Karin Dalton, Georgia Capitol Museum Collection and Exhibitions Manager, regarding the process to change the Korean monument located in Pete Wheeler Memorial Plaza. He also submitted the monthly Fleet Management Report to DOAS. Later that day he processed the transfer packer for Melissa Prichett and a new hire packet for the Athens Field Office.

**Wednesday, October 25, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia**

On Wednesday, October 11, 2023, Kerry Dyer and Camala Ball met virtually with Robert Orange, SAO, to discuss the process of retiring the Department’s old Capital Assets. Later that day he spoke to Nicole Cruz regarding her new position as a VFSO 1 at the Athens Field Office.

On Thursday, October 12, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross, traveled to GVVH in Milledgeville for the Grand Opening of the Kitchen Facility.

On Friday, October 13, 2023, Kerry Dyer met virtually with Natasha Simoes, Access Project Manager, to discuss the projected quote for the DD214 digitalization. He also processed a new hire packet for the Milledgeville Cemetery. Later that day he spoke with Calvin Johnson, Soul Food Catering, regarding the luncheon at the Central Office.

On Monday, October 16, 2023, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director’s Meeting. He also contacted Maria Jackson, Allan Vigil Ford State Fleet Manager, regarding the semi-annual service for the Ford SUV. Later that day he updated the Department Alpha Roster and Promotion Roster.

On Tuesday, October 17, 2023, Kerry Dyer started the process of retiring the Department’s old assets.

On Wednesday, October 18, 2023, Kerry Dyer continued the process of retiring the Department old Assets.

Below are the Personnel Actions Kerry Dyer and Shareka Monday-Robinson processed from September 16, 2023-October 16, 2023.

Location	Position	Status	Name	Date
Central Office	Exec, Director Finance	Retired	Mark Bannister	10/01/23
VETD	Compl Auditor/Trn	Resign	Barry Goode	10/01/23
VETD	Compl Auditor/Trn	New Hire	Calvin Waters	10/01/23
Canton	VFSO 1	Terminated	Kenneth Stearns	10/01/23
Augusta-Grove Town	VFSO 1	Resign	Dkendrick Roebuck	10/13/23
VETD	Compl Auditor/Trn	New Hire	Jerry Toney	10/16/23
Augusta-Grove Town	VFSO 1	New Hire	Joseph Hurndon	10/16/23
Athens	VFSO 1	New Hire	Nicole Cruz	10/16/23

On the horizon: Open a Veterans Field Service Office in the Perry Clinic in May/June 2024 timeframe.

State Properties has approved moving our LaGrange office to West Georgia Technical College. This will save money on rent payments.

Wednesday, October 25, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

We have been working to update our capital assets, retiring old assets from the system and adding new ones to it. The project will be completed by Christmas. It has been 50 years since the last update to the system, so there is a lot of work to be done.

Mr. Bobby Davis, Director, Veterans Education and Training Division (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 1,824 educational institutions and training establishments where Georgia veterans may attend school or job training and utilize their GI Bill® educational benefits.
- We have two new employees. One employee recently left to become a teacher.

Item *	Number
Approved Educational Institutions	394
Approved Training Establishments	1,430
Veteran Students Enrolled in Educational Institutions	17,662

* Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, Education Division, Sept. 2023.

Ms. Charlotte May, Director, External Affairs & Communications

INFORMATION OUTREACH

Division Updates

1. GDVS Newsletter – PID published a monthly newsletter in September. The e-newsletter features top stories from the month and encourages readers to get the full issue at <https://veterans.georgia.gov/newsletter>. The September edition highlighted the many activities of GDVS staff as part of suicide awareness and prevention month, a guide to starting to apply for federal assistance for those impacted by Hurricane Idalia, a feature on Mark Bannister’s retirement and Mark Demers’s new position as Chief Development Officer, a spotlight on Shannon Daniels from the Hinesville office, and a commendation for the SAA’s assistance in helping a family get Chapter 35 benefits for a high school student.

Wednesday, October 25, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

2. SSG Fox Forum – Coordinated with Chairman Hanley, Commissioner Ross, COO Kerry Dyer, and Suicide Prevention Outreach Coordinator Calandra Ferguson to develop materials, plan logistics, and identify panelists for the first SSG Fox Forum at the state capitol on October 5. External Affairs and Communications also worked with the Miner Agency to coordinate a live stream of the event on 2 media platforms and will release a final cut of the forum when the video has been edited.
3. TCSG/Unite Us – External Affairs and Communications continued working with TCSG and Unite Us partners on an upcoming narrative and video piece to promote the network of resources in place across the state for veterans and their families. External Affairs and VSOs are collaborating to identify veterans to be featured in the AJC around Veterans Day and in a longer campaign to promote awareness.
4. Mental Health and Homelessness Discussion – attended a meeting with CDO Mark Demers at American Legion Post 45 in Canton. State Representatives Brad Thomas and Todd Jones were in attendance to provide information on the intent of HB 520 (<https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/64634>) and plans to revisit the bill in the upcoming legislative season. Topics discussed included federal and state funds available for mental health treatment programs, current mental health resources for Georgia, areas of concern in the state, and the impact of losing mental healthcare and homeless shelters for veterans in crisis. The conversation ended with possible plans for a future forum for state and federal officials to align their visions on how to best assist veterans and their families, strengthen ties to streamline access to care, and share information on resources.
5. Veterans Benefits Outreach
 - a. Veterans Day activities – updated the GDVS website with upcoming events across the state for Veterans Day, including parades, outreach events, and celebrations.
 - i. Veteran Legal Services Clinic – promoted free legal advice from licensed attorneys, sponsored by the Warrior Alliance, on November 10.
 - ii. Women Veterans Symposium – promoted a free symposium for women veterans and their families in Atlanta on November 4. Veda Brooks and Calandra Ferguson will be available for claims assistance and suicide prevention outreach at the event.
 - b. Buddy Check Week – continued to promote the availability of mental healthcare resources available to veterans and their families through the first national Buddy Check Week. This week promotes reaching out to battle buddies, friends, and their families for a check in on your and their mental health.
 - c. Ribbon Cutting in GWVH Milledgeville – shared information on the new food production facility at GWVH Milledgeville to promote the home and STGI’s dedication to providing high quality care for veterans.

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- d. Jim 'N Nicks donates to Georgia Veterans Service Foundation – celebrated the opening of a new restaurant in Athens. As part of the festivities, Jim 'N Nicks donated \$2,500 to be used by Bigger Vision Athens. Bigger Vision assists homeless veterans find housing, jobs, and connects them with long term resources.

Public Information Division Contacts *(Since December 9, 2022)*

- Replies to VA eBenefits Messages = 573
- Replies to General Questions = approximately 845
- Individual Request for the State Certificate of Honor = approximately 155

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 **29,990**
(Honors Ceremonies and Central Office Mail Outs)

DoD Vietnam Veteran Lapel Pins presented via GDVS – An estimated **23,970**

Honors Ceremonies supported/coordinated by GDVS – **358**

Defense Department's Vietnam Veteran Surviving Spouse CoH – **291**

OLD BUSINESS:

There was no old business to discuss.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Ms. Swan announced the Veteran Anthem Car Show at the Monkey Wrench in Suwanee on Nov. 11 from 10am-2pm. This event is in support of veterans' mental health.

Per Georgia code, new officers should be elected to the Veterans Service Board before the end of the year.

NEW BUSINESS:

Mr. Kopsie asked about UniteUs training for board members so they can assist constituents. We will set this up in the near future.

**Wednesday, October 25, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.
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Ms. Swan asked who to contact if someone is not satisfied with their local office. Mr. Childre and Ms. Whitfield passed their business cards to her, since they should be the point of contact for anyone who has issues with their local office.

Mr. Kopsie asked if we have projected models on veteran populations for the next 10 years. Commissioner Ross mentioned the AMES study that was completed recently. She will send a copy of the report to all Board members.

Ms. Swan asked about information we send to those coming out of the military into Georgia. Commissioner Ross told her about the "Welcome Home" letter we send each week. A copy of this letter will be emailed to the Board members.

The November 16 Board meeting was scheduled. It will be a combination virtual and in-person meeting, set up at the GDVS.

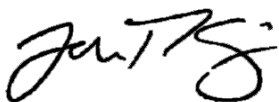
Mr. Kopsie made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Paslawski seconded the motion, which passed. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:42 p.m.

SIGNED:



Shawn Hanley, Chair

ATTEST:



Joshua Kopsie, Secretary