

# New Hampshire Military Leadership Team

*A Meeting to Build Partnerships & Improve Services for  
New Hampshire Veterans, Service Members and their Families*

21 October 2020

9:30am – 11:30am

**Webex Virtual Platform**

## **New Hampshire Military Leadership Team Attendance**

X	Major General David Mikolaities
X	Jim Adams, NH State Office of Veterans Services (Chair, Veterans Council)
X	Steve Ahnen, President, NH Hospital Association
A	Matt Albuquerque, Next Step Bionics and Prosthetics
X	Pete Burdett, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army
X	Amy Cook, Administrator, Community Based Military Programs, NH DHHS
A	William Gaudreau, Director, NH Office of Veteran Services
X	Paul Lloyd, Chair, State Veterans Advisory Committee
X	Margaret LaBrecque, Commandant, NH Veterans Home
X	Bradley Mayes, Director, VA Regional Benefits Offices in MA, NH & VT
X	Kevin Forrest, Acting Director, Manchester VA Medical Center
X	Paul Lloyd, Chair, State Veterans Advisory Committee
X	Ginger Munson, Family Representative
A	Jeffrey Newman, Administrator, Division of Higher Education, NH Department of Education
X	Warren Perry, Deputy Adjutant General, NH National Guard
X	Dr. Brett Rusch, Director, WRJ VA Medical Center
X	Roger Sevigny, NH Veterans Council
X	Pam Szacik, Employment Service Bureau Director, NH Employment Security
<b>GUESTS IN ATTENDANCE:</b>	
X	Carol Hitchcock, WRJ VA Medical Center , White River Junction, VT

## **Meeting Minutes**

### **I. Welcome**

Introductions were completed and the agenda was reviewed.

### **II. Review of August Minutes**—One spelling correction was made to the August minutes. Ginger Munson moved to accept the minutes with the spelling correction. Brad Mayes 2<sup>nd</sup>, all members approved.

### **III. Comments from General Mikolaities**

Thank you for your collaboration and drive to produce tangible results. Keep ideas coming. Service members, Families and the Veteran community continues to be Department of Military Affairs and Veterans Services focus. Recruiting continues to be important, but challenging so seize any opportunity to promote the benefits of a military career.

### **IV. Initiative Status Updates**

#### **Veteran-Friendly Business Recognition Program Update**—Amy Cook

Nineteen businesses including Next Step Bionics & Prosthetics, Inc and New Hampshire Hospital Association have been recognized as NH Veteran-Friendly Businesses. Recognition event will take place on 12/9 at ECTC. All MLT members will be invited. Virtual attendance will be an option. In-person event will be dependent on state of COVID in NH. WMUR included a plug in their

broadcast this week for the program and several inquiries have come in following that. A logo design has been chosen. Student winner is senior from Exeter High School and Seacoast School of Technology.

**Virtual Living Room**—Paul Lloyd

No update. The Berlin VFW is still exploring how it might be possible to install a handicap ramp in order to make the building accessible.

**Supports for Military Spouses/Families**—Ginger Munson & Amy Cook

Recently met with representatives from the Veteran Spouse Network from University of Austin in Texas to find out how they developed their programs, what challenges they've encountered and what needs they have met. Conversation was helpful.

Moving forward with researching, exploring and designing opportunities for Veteran and military spouses/families to connect and learn about resources through online activities/events such as podcasts, social media pages or groups, facilitated virtual activities. As COVID comes to a close, we'll evaluate whether to keep opportunities largely virtual or try to offer in-person opportunities as well. Will be hosting a virtual meeting to bring people and organizations interested in this topic together on 12/11 in order to start building a coalition that can take on responsibilities and participate in work.

**V. Old Business**

**Revisions for tri-fold brochure**

Kevin will send Amy revisions for the VAMCs.

**Suicide Prevention Letter to Veterans signed by Governor's Office**—Warren Perry

Mostly due to COVID, it appears that this didn't get any traction at the Governor's Office. Will try to re-engage in the future when focus can more easily shift from COVID.

**VI. New Business**

None

**V. Information Briefs**

**Dept of Military Affairs & Veterans Services Update**—Warren Perry

i. **National Guard**

Many remain on federal status. Assisting with contact tracing & mapping, testing, managing PPE Warehouse. End of September, those assisting NHES ended that assignment. Deployment ceremony coming up for those leaving to assist with southern border security. Many will be returning from deployments.

ii. **Division of Community Based Military Programs**

*Together With Veterans* continues to move forward in the Lakes Region. Division continues to solicit resources through SAMHSA for suicide prevention efforts.

iii. **Division of Veterans Services**

VSOs continue to schedule appointments. 213 appointments with Veterans last month; 2300 contacts. Virtual appeals have been successful.

iv. **NH State Veterans Cemetery**

Masks are requested; internments are up; there will not be a Veterans Day event open to the public, it will be streamed live on the internet. The event will be hosted by DAV.

**VA Updates (Manchester)**—Kevin Forrest

Working to find right communication strategy to use with Veteran community—need Veteran patients to be compliant with facility's mask mandate. There is a patient responsibility to muscle through pandemic fatigue—this will allow the facility to remain open.

**VA Updates (Manchester)—continued...**

Warming huts will be placed outside for winter months—screening will take place here. Driving will be re-routed. There have been a number of 2-year hires to work as screening staff. Drive through flu clinics have opened in various locations—by appointment only. Call your site for more information. The Mission Act will cover the cost of a flu shot administered by CVS.

There have been changes to the Caregiver Program as of 8/1/20. Compensation will be available to caregivers for Veterans in service prior to 1975.

Administrative Services have moved to the Brady Sullivan building in Manchester. Will expand clinical services at the Manchester facility.

A continued focus on virtual visits.

The Mountain Entrance will be ready for use in late spring/early summer.

The Mental Health Building is scheduled to open in April 2021.

**VA Updates (White River Junction)—Dr. Rusch**

Project updates—lawn has been dug up, pipes replaced. Large federal investment in physical campus at WRJ VA—the updates should last for at least the next 30 years. Additional imminent projects—adding secondary chiller above the operating suites in order to modernize HVAC.

Through end of the winter holidays, Operating Room will be closed for renovations. Urgent cases will be transferred. Modernization of the in-patient facility taking place and will last three years—this will result in single rooms for all patients. Facility maintains safety pre-cautions for COVID.

**VBA Update—Brad Mayes**

Currently in Phase 2 of opening. All three facilities are open (WRJ, Boston, Manchester) for appointments. Skeleton crew is operating in office—most staff continue to work remotely. May roll back to Phase 1 if/when deemed necessary. Vet Readiness & Employment Specialists had a name change (previously Voc Rehab). Resuming hearings with Board of Veteran Appeals—video hearing presently which takes more coordination and logistics. Can wait for Travel Board or go to Washington DC if prefer not to participate in video hearing.

Despite COVID, the three offices had 105% productivity compared to 2019. 100 new vocational rehabilitation plans; 493 positive outcomes; 50% increase in positive outcomes compared to 2019. COVID has changed how the VBA does business.

**Member Updates & Announcements**

**Jim Adams**—More uniformed members in schools will help with recruiting. Obviously difficult when schools are working remotely, but keep Veterans Day ceremonies in mind.

**Roger Sevigny**—Agreed that lack of access to kids in schools due to COVID makes recruiting more difficult, so need to get creative about where/how Veterans reach children.

**Pete Burdett**—Recruiting continues to be a struggle and something that should be on everyone's minds at all times. If anyone speaks on Veterans Day, let audience know how your military career helped you and what financial incentives were available. Army Museum in DC will be opening soon. There will be a video tour available online. Pete will be touring next week.

**Steve Ahnen**—NH Hospital Association and its members are facing the same concerns given state of COVID. NHHA has been working through past VA claims with community hospitals & providers. Steve, Kevin Forrest and Congressman Pappas have been part of the team working through this to see a resolution. They are making progress.

NHHA was recognized as a Platinum NH Veteran-Friendly Business!

**Pam Szacik**—NH Employment Security has been hosting virtual job fairs that have been largely successful so far. Up to 200 employers can participate. 300 job seekers attended first virtual fair. In the Veterans Services program, not much is happening right now, but the program components are still available.

**Margaret LaBrecque**—The Veterans Home has been COVID-free for its residents to date. They are using a new surveillance testing model that will include testing staff and residents. A lot of PPE has been required and storage has become a problem as large spaces are required. In June, admissions were re-started. Since then, they've admitted at least 1 Veteran/week. New logistics have presented due to the quarantining requirement prior to admission. The new telehealth program rolled out by the VA has been working well in the Home. They have been doing a variety of appointments including wheelchair assessments and mental health appointments. The Veterans Home will have a virtual Veterans Day ceremony.

## **VI. Next Steps**

Next meeting date—**Monday, December 21, 2020; 9am-11am**

Location: Virtual meeting