

Scituate Veterans Advisory Council, May 15, 2012

TOWN OF SCITUATE MASSACHUSETTS

SCITUATE VETERANS ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes – May 15, 2012

Location: Scituate Maritime Center

Members Present: Joseph Kelley (Chairman), Edward Covell (Vice Chairman), Michael Scott (Secretary), Vincent Fountaine, James Hunt, Richard Johnson, Karen Kelley, Jack Manning, John Miller, Dennis Badore, Donald Knapp (VSO – ex officio)

Members Absent: Robert McHugh (Treasurer), Thomas Edwards, Ben Summers (Associate), Richard Faust, Robert Young, VFW Commander

Guest Speakers: Jim Kelley (President, Military Friends Foundation)
Sarah Keller-Likens (Exec. Director, Military Friends Foundation)

Meeting called to order at 7:05 pm by Chairman Kelley

Pledge of Allegiance recited

Chairman Kelley took-up the Meeting Agenda

Minutes

Mr. Manning made a motion to approve the 4/17/2012 meeting minutes as drafted
Motion seconded
Motion passed unanimously – minutes approved and accepted

Facebook

Chairman Kelley recognized that Mr. Fountaine has created a VAC page on Facebook
Mr. Fountaine stated that he will be administrator of the page and he will police the sight

Town Web Page

Chairman Kelley stated that VAC now has page on town's website
VSO Knapp will oversee edits to web page and will set up link to VAC's Facebook page

Resignation

Chairman Kelley acknowledged resignation of Member Richard Faust via a letter to Selectmen
Flag Replacement

General discussion led by Chairman Kelley of status of military flag replacements

Cudworth Cemetery has 10-12 needing replacement

Union Cemetery needs work

St. Mary's and Mt. Hope cemeteries missing flag holders; VSO Knapp stated he has several available and Mr. Hunt will retrieve same

Mr. Fountaine stated that he conducted a full inventory of St. Mary's and that several markers and footstones are missing; Mr. Fountaine will share his findings with VSO Knapp; Mr. Hunt noted that it is up to

each family to decide on type of marker for grave

Chairman Kelley reported on the May 5 flag replacement event with the local boy/cub scouts; several inaccuracies were noted in the field and Chairman Kelley proposed that a good Eagle Scout project would be to conduct a full inventory of military/veteran gravesites throughout Scituate, similar to an Eagle Scout project that Director Jermyn told him about in Hingham

Mr. Johnson noted that it would be up to each individual Eagle Scout candidate as to their interest in such a project

Chairman Kelley stated that he will invite Boy Scout troop leaders to the next VAC meeting to propose a cemetery inventory as an Eagle Scout project

Chairman Kelley passed around a Scituate Mariner photo montage from the May 5 event

Mr. Hunt reported that Groveland Cemetery needs 10 markers and 26 flags, and that there are 206 veterans buried in the cemetery

General agreement that the flag replacement item will remain on the VAC agenda until all work is complete

Memorial Day

Vice-Chairman Covell led a general discussion of the upcoming ceremonies

Boat trip in the morning for a wreath-laying ceremony in honor of veterans lost at sea is discussed

Meet at Harbormaster's office at 8 am

Two vessels – 40 foot Coast Guard cutter and NOAA research vessel – will depart at 8:15 am for the open waters and then return by 9 am

Chaplain Eleanor Grossman will throw the wreath

American Legion rifle squad will be on hand for an appropriate salute

Assemble at Town Hall at 9 am for parade

Participants/marchers scheduled to appear are Scituate police and fire vehicles, American Legion color guard, VFW color guard, Sons of Union Veterans, Scituate High School band, Gold Star and Blue Star mothers, police and fire color guards, veterans at large, town officials, guest speakers, COA, KofC, Masons, Scituate Rotarians, Gates band, boy and girl scouts, youth athletics

At the Town Common, VSO Knapp will be master of ceremonies

Joe Norton, a veteran, will speak on behalf of the Selectmen

Commander of the Sons of Union Veterans will speak

General Sellers will speak

SHS band will face the crowd and play a medley of military service academy songs

Girls scouts will face the crowd and sing

Invocation will be delivered by Chaplain Grossman

Benediction will be delivered by Father Cannon from St. Mary's Parish

Chairman Kelley will read the names of 39 Scituate veterans who have died since last Memorial Day;

Lawson Tower bells will ring once for each name read

Vice-Chairman Covell will speak for the American Legion

Sound system for events appears in order

General discussion of who is allowed on boat trip for wreath toss

VAC members will march in parade

Discussion of ceremonies then moving from Town Common to Cudworth Cemetery

Taps, rifle salute, flag raising, and national anthem at both locations

Chairman Kelley stated that purpose of formal ceremonies is to provide a meaningful day for Scituate and its veterans, past and present

Report of Veterans Services Officer

VSO Knapp reported on 4/25 outreach event and thanked the VAC for showing up because it made a difference, particularly Mr. Badore's smiling face at the door; event was a great success, with an estimated 35 people attending; VSO Knapp reported that he is in contact with about 15 veterans and about 5 will be eligible for benefits

VSO Knapp stated that since the outreach event, his office has been very busy

Town Administrator has provided VSO with great support
VSO Knapp recounted the story of a young veteran and his family now receiving support they had no idea they were entitled to
More outreach events are anticipated
VSO Knapp stated that 9 veterans receiving c. 115 benefits in town currently; money is there, so Scituate should get its share for its veterans
VSO Knapp mentioned that there is always someone in Town Hall who can help a veteran even if the Veterans Services door is closed
VSO Knapp thanked the VAC for its work in servicing veterans gravesites
General discussion of VAC page on town website; Secretary Scott will get together with VSO Knapp to review and post meeting minutes and other information as appropriate
Vice-Chairman Covell commends VSO Knapp for his work on the veterans outreach event and he is encouraged with the direction of veterans services in town given VSO Knapp's involvement

Supermarket Gift Cards

Chairman Kelley reported that the Scituate Food Pantry through local clergy has donated \$385 worth of supermarket gift cards to the VSO for distribution to needy and hungry veterans; at the request of Chairman Kelley, Mr. Hunt will send a thank you letter to the food pantry and/or local clergy

Military Friends Foundation

Chairman Kelley reported that representatives of the MFF are in the audience to present the VAC with a \$1,000 grant check that can be put in the bank to support VAC outreach efforts; Chairman Kelley recognized Jim Kelley, President of the MFF
Mr. Kelley explained the creation of the MFF as a non-profit organization funded with private donations to support National Guard soldiers; originally called Friends of the National Guard and intended to provide cash aid to families of deployed soldiers to help fill the gap between military pay and civilian pay; focus is on deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan since 9/11
Eventually, Friends of the National Guard evolved to include reservists and outreach to Gold Star and Blue Star mothers, so re-named Military Friends Foundation
Mr. Kelley noted his background as a Sgt Major for 30 years in the National Guard, his role on the Stoughton VAC, and his position as Commander of the Stoughton VFW
Mr. Kelley said he has been at this for 10 years with MFF and he is pleased to help veterans with a car repair bill, a boiler repair bill, or any assistance that can point a veteran and their family in the right direction
Mr. Kelley recognized the Executive Director of the MFF, Sarah Keller-Likens
Ms. Keller-Likens spoke to the mission of MFF and its sources of support and she thanked the Scituate VAC for its efforts on behalf of veterans
Ms. Keller-Likens highlighted the income tax check-off on state tax returns; the "military family relief fund" at line 32E; Ms. Keller-Likens passed around color posters promoting a \$5 check-off by Massachusetts taxpayers
Ms. Keller-Likens shared the story of a family recently assisted by cash aid from MFF; family members of LCPL Michael Ronner (USMC) from Sudbury were flown into the area for his funeral services
Ms. Keller-Likens announced a new venture MFF is planning to host in Scituate; MFF would like for Massachusetts to hold a "run for the fallen" similar to other states in the region; each state runs one mile for every fallen service member in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts; this is a community activity, not a timed road race; no entrance fee
Ms. Keller-Likens stated that MFF has commitments from 100 Gold Star families and 50 state legislators who are willing to be involved with a Run for the Fallen
Mr. Kelley stated that the event is still in the planning stages and may need to accommodate up to 2,000 people for the event; hoping to hold event in September
General discussion of possible running route and permitting process; 165 fallen service members is current Massachusetts count; most miles would be run on a track
VSO Knapp acknowledged the good works of MFF and recounted a story of a family in Leominster that was

in need and MFF handed that family a check that night

Public Comment

Chairman Kelley stated that the Iraq/Afghanistan interactive memorial will appear at Scituate Heritage Days on the sidewalk near the Jack Conway building on Front Street

Mr. Hunt asked VSO Knapp whether the VSO receives notification when a Scituate resident is discharged from the military; VSO Knapp stated "yes"

VSO Knapp discussed a recently discharged veteran who came into his office but was not in need of services

Chairman Kelley discussed the discharge process for a National Guardsman ("yellow ribbon") and how there are multiple support points, but for many it is too much, too soon; many do not want to be there but attend because it is required

Mr. Hunt proposed sending a welcome home postcard to returning veterans and said he would be happy to take on the project

General discussion of privacy concerns implicated by reaching out to a veteran

Ms. Keller-Likens advised that the state DVS has a list of discharged veterans that could be reviewed and sending a welcome home note should not raise a privacy issue

VAC members were photographed standing behind a large check from MFF

Next meeting date set for June 19, 2012, at 7 pm, at Maritime Center

Motion to adjourn meeting made and seconded; vote unanimous and meeting adjourned at 8:40 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Scott, Secretary