

FMERPA VETERANS AND RETIREE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

July 14, 2009

Administrator's Conference Room

Hall of Records

Freehold, NJ 07728

The meeting was called to order at 3:10PM on Tuesday, July 14, 2009, by Chairperson, Freeholder Lillian G. Burry.

Members Present:

Lt. Col. (Ret.) Sfayer, Mr. Hoppe, Mr. Allen,
Mr. Ciufu, Mr. Cosentino, Mr. Harrison and Freeholder Burry

Guests Present:

Mr. Tobia, Mr. Nolan, Col. Olins, Ms. Cooper, Mr. Ettore

Public:

Mr. Tom Mahedy (arrived at 4:30PM)

Freeholder Burry opened the meeting with a Salute to the Flag, and welcomed all guests in attendance. Mr. Cosentino introduced Col. Eric Olin, Commander of the Patterson Army Health Clinic (PAHC) at Fort Monmouth. Col. Olin explained that the DOD plans to close the doors of the clinic to retirees in April 2011 and to veterans on the last working day of May 2011, unless the prep school is still open. The first round of letters will begin in January 2011. The pharmacy will also close. Users of the pharmacy will be able to transition to the pharmacy at Fort Dix or use the services of the retail network, ie: CVS or Walgreens. All benefits and co-pays will remain the same. Non-network users can submit their prescriptions to Tri-Care and new retirees will be enrolled at a civilian facility. Health-Net will transition to Aetna.

Freeholder Burry expressed her disappointment that the physical plant will not be available to retirees and her concern that veterans and retirees will be required to travel to Fort Dix. It is her feeling that our men & women in the armed forces are not being serviced very well.

Col. Olin reiterated that they are not being thrown out and will still be serviced by Tri-Care.

Mr. Cosentino asked what the position of the DOD is, should the prep school stay on the premises for another year. Col. Olin stated that the prep school will move to West Point, no matter what and will be closed in 2011.

Mr. Cosentino stated that Freeholder Burry, members of his staff and he attended a meeting with the Veterans Administration on June 11, 2009. He said that there are still two providers interested in providing service on Fort Monmouth. There are several options on the table which are subject to VA review and future discussion, and it is assured that FMERPA will continue its focus on the VA and our veterans and will not drop the ball on this issue.

Ms. Cooper, Fort Monmouth BRAC office, stated that they are moving forward with the BRAC initiatives and that we are approaching 24 months to closure of Fort Monmouth.

Col. Olin reiterated that there are two options for pharmacy services, either mail order or the drive to McGuire and that all benefits & co-pays will remain the same.

Freeholder Burry expressed the need to get the word out to all retirees via their newsletter and other forms of communication. **

Mr. Sfayer gave a report on the Veterans Civilian Development Program and passed out a flyer to the committee & guests. Specifically he stated that 90% of our returning vets are not aware of the services available to them upon their return. Transition assistance is of utmost importance and there is a great need to get our Monmouth County veterans connected to civilian life again. He stated that the problem is significantly underestimated. The issue of PTSD has grown within the 18-30 year old population at a much greater rate than anticipated over the last 7 years.

(See Exhibit A.)

**Freeholder Burry anticipates additional information from Lou Benevides relating to Tri-Care. This would be of particular interest to Retirees.

Freeholder Burry suggested that Mr. Sfayer and John Ciufio, Director of Economic Development and Regulatory Affairs in Monmouth County, should meet with a goal to create a more streamlined method and courses to assist in veterans' re-entry to the work force.

Mr. Ciufio stated that he is working with Fort Monmouth (garrison side) to set up job fairs and find employers.

Freeholder Burry stated that she has met with community figures to discuss the economic redevelopment in the county and that Fort Monmouth is the core of these discussions. She also discussed some of the facilities that are of interest to county, ie: the firing range and turned over the discussion to Mr. Ettore, County Engineer, and Mr. Tobia, County Dir. of Public Works & Engineering.

Mr. Ettore informed the committee that they were able to tour some of the facilities at the Fort and found that the motor pool facilities are in good condition and an opportunity to expand the county's shared services plan to surrounding towns. Discussion ensued about the use of these facilities as a satellite transportation network for bus/SCAT. He said that the buildings and infrastructure are already in place and that there is hope for early conveyance.

Mr. Cosentino confirmed the potential for this use and has asked Mr. Ettore for the sketch & plans. There is a slight concern about access, but he will meet with the Garrison in an effort to determine when the Army will no longer need the property. Mr. Ettore will provide what is necessary within the week.

The meeting was then opened to public discussion.

Mr. Nolan is concerned that there is a strong need to get any information to the vets and their families. Mrs. Burry agreed that it is of utmost importance to keep them informed.

Freeholder Burry recognized Mr. Tom Mahedy as a member of the public. He had arrived at 4:30PM and Freeholder Burry recapped much of the discussion that took place prior to his arrival. Mr. Mahedy stated that he still is in favor of keeping the hospital public and asked how to actively challenge the decision to close. He was directed by Freeholder Burry to keep the pressure on through our elected officials, especially at the Federal level, as there is very little input from them.

Mr. Mahedy then asked if the housing issue had been discussed and suggested that the Committee take a public position in favor of housing for homeless veterans at NWS Earle. Freeholder Burry and Lt. Col. (Ret.) Jim Sfayer informed Mr. Mahedy that the situation at Earle was more complicated than it appeared and assured him that the Committee collectively shared his concerns for the veterans and retirees.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:45PM.

Exhibit A**Veterans Civilian Development Program**

Update

- The process began after our last meeting and the results were significant.
 - In short we have many programs in place to support Veterans at the Federal and State level. Most of the people I talked to were well meaning but have no grasp of the size and scope of the problem we are facing.
 - Veterans are returning home after 12-15 month tours in Iraq and Afghanistan and the transition process is woefully inadequate to support them.
 - For example: Marines returning from Iraq in (2003) on their first tour were receiving between 4-7 days of transition/adjustment training. This number has decreased to a few hours in 2009.
 - The economy is placing them on unemployment and without anyone to translate their skills they cannot receive credit for their service when applying for jobs.
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Conclusion

As the war has become old-business for the American people the young men and women who have served are also old business.

The Problem

Communication

- There is no one organization that actively pursues these young men and women to offer them help in navigating the benefits process. The process is complex and cumbersome and the care is spotty.
 - There is no central repository for all Veterans (e-mail) that connects them to anyone once they are discharged.
 - Services have made an attempt but are a long way from reaching veterans on the scale we need.
 - Marine for Life
 - Army (e-mail)
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PTSD

Our veterans are coming home with an alarming rate of 10-20% with identified PTSD symptoms. Many don't know if they have it. The VA is overwhelmed and the level and quality of care varies from VA to VA.

Employment

Veterans do not have the ability to translate what they do into "civilianese" much less align their strengths with the requirements of the job.

Bottom Line

- Most young men and women are not going to spend the time to wade through the complexity of the on-line resources.
 - We need to connect with every veteran in our county.
 - We need to provide a way to help them through the process.
 - We need to provide transition training that will do two things:
 1. Prepare them for Business environment.
 2. Help them navigate the hiring process.
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Solution

**Veterans
Leadership
Council**

- Develop a Monmouth County Veterans Network
MonmouthCountyVetNET
 - Leverage the county resources:
 - Businesses
 - Retirees
 - Veterans Organizations
 - etc
 - Make a difference in our county.
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