Minutes for Idaho Veterans Affairs Commission
July 15, 2020
Virtual Meeting via Microsoft Teams

Call to Order
This virtual meeting of the Idaho Veterans Affairs Commission was held on Wednesday, July 15, 2020, via Microsoft Teams. It began at 8:30 a.m. and was presided over by Commissioner Patrick Grace.

Attendees
Commission Members in attendance included: Patrick Grace, Jinny Cash, Art Gimpel and Josh Callihan.

Leo Dub was unable to attend due to technology issues.

IDVS Staff Members in attendance included: IDVS Chief Administrator Marv Hagedorn, IDVS Deputy Chief Administrator Tracy Schaner, IDVS Business Support Services Bureau Chief Paul Spannknebel, IDVS Financial Officer Debbie Spence, ISVH-Boise Administrator Rick Holloway, ISVH-Pocatello Administrator Josiah Dahlstrom, ISVH-Lewiston Administrator Mark High and Administrative Assistant Mitzi Cheldelin.

Number of Citizens in attendance: 0

Announcements
The next IVAC meeting will be held virtually (because of COVID-19 concerns) on Wednesday, October 21, 2020.

Approval of Minutes
A motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting on May 13, 2020 was made by Jinny Cash. Minutes were unanimously accepted.

Division Bureau Reports

Boise Veterans Home Report presented by Rick Holloway
1. Average daily census for the 4th quarter of FY20 was 96 nursing care residents – 79% occupancy.
2. Cautious about new resident during COVID but have admitted patients from the VAMC.
3. Receipts are remaining steady.
4. Food costs are higher, but we are feeding staff so that outside food is not brought into the facility. Each staff member is allowed one meal per day.
5. Each staff member is screened before entering the facility. We have staff members in place to help with the screenings.
6. Volunteers are not allowed in the facility at this time.
7. Our customer satisfaction rating was over 95% this quarter.
IVAC Meeting Minutes 07-15-2020

8. We have two residents currently testing positive for COVID. One resident is asymptomatic and the other had a fever which as of this morning was below 100 for the first time.
9. 100% of residents and staff are tested every 14 days.
10. We have been able to achieve 100% negative pressure in the facility – everywhere except 1West.
11. UV Lights throughout the facility to sterilize the air and ionizers in the venting system.
12. Resident Putting Green was completed by Forever Lawns.
13. Staff is remaining positive and we have had several days with no staff members calling in sick.

Pocatello Veterans Home Report presented by Josiah Dahlstrom

1. Census for the last quarter of FY20 was 73% of the 66 available beds.
2. Admissions have decreased due to the public's caution about admitting their loved ones into a nursing home during COVID, however with the precautions we take there probably is not a safer place in Idaho than a State Veterans Home.
3. As with the Boise Home, our receipts are down due to the decreased census.
4. Food costs are up, but we are offering staff one free meal a day to limit staff from leaving the building during the day.
5. Our customer satisfaction rating is 4.7 out of 5.
6. Upgraded the facility air filtration system to include new UV lights, greater flow and pressure and installation of ionization machines to reduce the risk of spreading any bacteria or virus throughout the Home.
7. We had a Survey that assessed our COVID response in the Home.
8. Our staff is assisting residents to connect with family members through technology and everyone has been very patient with the process.
9. Thank you to Mike Gwinn in Purchasing who has made sure we have the PPE we need.

Lewiston Veterans Home Report presented by Mark High

1. Census for the last quarter of FY20 averaged 75% of the 64 available beds.
2. Admissions have decreased due to the public's caution about admitting their loved ones into a nursing home during COVID, however with the precautions we take there probably is not a safer place in Idaho than a State Veterans Home.
3. As with the Boise & Pocatello, our receipts are down due to the decreased census.
4. Food costs are up, but we are offering staff one free meal a day to limit staff from leaving the campus and to reward them for their hard work during this pandemic.
5. We have had almost full staffing during the pandemic, very few call outs or job openings.
6. Our customer satisfaction rating is 4.6 out of 5.
7. We have not had any complaints from residents or family members. We usually have a very low occurrence, but we have not had any – people are appreciative of the precautions we are taking.
8. Our building averages 4.1 air turnovers or air exchanges per hour in each resident room; with many rooms as high as 8 air exchanges per hour.
9. The new Chapel opened just about the time COVID hit, K&G Construction came and finished the sod, so we have a beautiful grassy green area.
10. We have installed 45 air ionizers and 12 UV air sanitizers to kill viruses in the air; plus we have a UV "scrubber" to sanitize mail and packages before they enter the Home.
11. We purchased 300+ sets of scrubs for the staff to change into so they don't bring germs into the Home on their own clothing.
12. The space formerly used by OVA staff has been converted into a screening area and changing room.
13. Architects are working on plans for a new visitor area, employee entrance, and screening area.
14. We were able to open our building to structured family visits on June 29, but that didn’t last long when the local area was forced back to Phase 2 because of increased outbreaks.
15. Our activities staff is doing an incredible job modifying activities and to keep residents active and engaged.
16. Residents and staff received 4 rounds of COVID testing, but there is currently a shortage of tests, so we are pulling back on that for the time being.
17. We currently have plenty of PPE on hand thanks to Mike Gwinn and his amazing efforts.
18. A social-distancing employee BBQ was held in May to show the Administration's appreciation for our staff.
19. Angie Johnson, an RN Senior, was recognized in June as the Employee of the Quarter. Angie shows exceptional leadership skills, willingness to help wherever needed, and the great asset that she is for our Home.

Veterans Cemetery Report presented by James Earp
1. There were 142 internments for the fourth quarter – bringing to a total of 689 for FY20 – down 8% over last year; along with 162 pre-registration applications – a result of the impact of the actions implemented due to COVID-19 precautions.
2. With reopening guidance from the Governor's Office, interments have gradually increased to pre-pandemic levels.
3. During the early stages of the heighten reactions of the stay at home directives, no committal services were performed and there were large amounts of deferred services for cremations and inurnments. This produced diminished totals for March-May but we had a 125.8% increase for the month of June.
4. Currently under Stage 4 we remain fully staffed and have implemented the highest safety standards for our employees, volunteers, Honor Guard personnel and our clients.
5. Drive-up or curbside service has been implemented so the public can still receive the up best possible assistance from the Cemetery staff.
6. Every employee and volunteer remains diligent in doing our part to prevent the spread of COVID-19 by practicing social distancing, wearing face masks when applicable, monitoring gathering sizes, individual and routine cleaning of surfaces and common areas used by the public or individuals.
7. Fourth quarter revenue was $109,414 for a total of $664,948 for FY20. This exceeded our projected revenue for FY20 by about $100,000. This increase reflects recent positive improvements in the timeliness of the VA's processing of payments and our ability to consistently monitor and submit information in the manor that allows for the ease of review and faster processing.
8. Due to the tenacity and hard work of our Senior Financial Technician Pamela Jayo our accounts receivables are all less than 30 day old.
9. FY22 Budget submittals for both Boise and Blackfoot Cemeteries have been prepared and submitted to the Central Support Office for review and updates.
10. Volunteers completed only 199 volunteer hours during the 4th quarter for a total of 2417 volunteer hours for FY20 – a decrease of 20% over last year but that directly correlates with the COVID-19 pandemic.
11. Construction updates at the Boise Veterans Cemetery
   a. Replacement of the joint seals on the concrete surfaces throughout the Cemetery
   b. A new flagpole designated for the Idaho State flag has been added to the star traffic circle – it is the completed Eagle Scout project donated by Christopher Kaplan
12. Working with ITS on the improvements of the cemetery management database, this is critical for the accurate reporting of information to the VA and State. This database will also be used at the future cemetery in Blackfoot.
13. A grant application has been submitted for expansion of our Boise Cemetery which if awarded would include the construction of the new memorial wall feature in the upper section, expansion of
the urn burial sections, and the design and build of two sections of columbarium walls. Selection could happen as soon as October 2020.

14. Memorial Day
   i. The Mission Continues, Young Marines and others volunteered their time to raise the Avenue of Flags for the Memorial Day weekend.
   ii. Over 5000 American flags were placed on gravesites
   iii. Flyover of vintage aircraft courtesy of the Warhawk Air Museum
   iv. A special video was put together in conjunction with Idaho Public TV and the Governor's office
   v. People spontaneously gathered at the Cemetery on Memorial Day even though there was no formal ceremony due to COVID-19

15. In March, Landscape Caretaker Jesse Bowery attended and completed the National Cemetery Administration's Cemetery Caretaker training in St. Louis.

16. Nicole Cooper will join us tomorrow as a fulltime Office Specialist II at the Boise Cemetery

17. Interviews have been completed for the temporary Business Operations Specialist at the Veterans Cemetery in Blackfoot

18. Southeast Idaho Veterans Cemetery at Blackfoot (DPW 17-603)
   a. Construction is progressing with visual results seen in various stages of construction including the administrative office, maintenance building, committal shelter, columbarium walls, roads and curbing, installation of preplaced crypts, and the front entry walls.
   b. Additional work to establish the irrigation line to the canal has been completed and it will be tied into the new headgate that was installed just before the canal was filled with water
   c. At this stage in construction the Idaho State Veterans Cemetery in Blackfoot has a defined presence and will be an incredible facility for Southeast Idaho.
   d. Department of Public Works will be working on future additions to be completed in FY21
      i. Public restrooms accessible to visitors on the cemetery grounds
      ii. Conference room space to be used for the privacy of families scheduling burial services
      iii. Additional maintenance bay to accommodate the backhoe and equipment
      iv. 30' x 60' maintenance building for secure storage of special use items and materials
   e. Estimated project completion and opening – November 2020
   f. Total project budget $7,371,817
   g. Total construction budget $5,741,171

19. Drone video of the Blackfoot Cemetery was shown.

Office of Veterans Advocacy Report presented by Bill Heyob
1. OVA had the following stats for FY20 as compared to FY19
   a. Office Interviews – FY20 6611 / FY19 4030 (Increase of 2581)
   b. Phone Interview – FY20 45,512 / FY19 51,317 (Decrease of 5805)
   c. POA’s Filed – FY20 4708 / FY19 51,317 (Decrease of 507)
   d. Claims Filed – FY20 8038 / FY19 8843 (Decrease of 805)
   e. Correspondence – FY20 7265 / FY19 11,241 (Decrease of 3976)
   f. Appeals – FY20 369 / FY19 382 (Decrease of 13)
   g. Home Visits – FY20 188 / FY19 228 (Decrease of 40)
   h. Veterans Seen by OVA in Veterans Courts – FY20 675 / FY19 766 (Decrease of 91)
   i. State Emergency Grants Approved – FY20 4 / FY19 4 (Same)
2. All numbers are down because of COVID. OVA is working from home and doing business, but many veterans are hesitant to file claims because they don't want to come in for medical exams or other appointments.

3. Boise VARO has been closed since the third week in March. Currently in Phase 1 of reopening as of June 22, 2020 – which only allows for 25% of the workforce in the office. The public cannot be in the VARO until Phase 2.

4. Boise VARO has been recognized in the top 5 of the Nation in Quality of Rated Claims – no longer working Non-Rating Claims.

5. The VA began processing Blue Water Vietnam Veterans and Survivor DIC Claims on January 1, 2020 with huge retroactive payments being made. We have already had two awards over $500K each and may near $200K.

6. During the height of COVID, almost all pending claims had exams cancelled resulting in many denied claims. VA has ordered all cancelled contract exams to be rescheduled. Many VA Rating Decisions were not mailed to claimants during COVID.

7. VA Debt Management Center has stopped collecting debts owed during COVID.

8. Since COVID began, VA stopped public facing DBQs (due to OIG Report showing fraud), 48-hour VSO Review period of Rating Decisions (had been in effect since 1956).

9. eBenefits.va.gov has been replaced by VA.gov as of June 30, 2020.

10. Vocational Rehabilitation and Education (VR&E) changed their name on June 22, 2020 to Veterans Readiness and Employment Service.

11. Board of Veterans Appeals currently has 86,000 pending appeals nationwide (20,000 are legacy appeals) with 106 Board of Veterans Appeals Law Judges. Due to VARO closures, most hearings are being conducted virtually if the Veteran/Claimant has the ability.

12. Hired James "JT" Ramondetta several days before COVID restrictions in March as the second VSO in Twin Falls. JT is a 15-year Retiree of the Air Force as a Security Forces Dog Handler and came to us from IDOC.

13. Debbie Harmon retired out of the Pocatello office – 16 years of service. We are currently going through the hiring process for a new Pocatello VSO.

14. With the new FY21 budget which increased our VSO staffing, we are going through the hiring process for a new Boise VARO VSO.

15. Many office changes due to COVID and removing our OVA staff from the Homes.
   a. Kelly McCartney at the Caldwell Veterans Memorial Hall
   b. Michele Padgette at the Caldwell Department of Labor with Wes McAuslan
   c. Lewiston OVA moving to the H&W building on 16th Street
   d. Pocatello OVA moving to the Department of Labor in Pocatello
   e. Twin Falls OVA moving to the Twin Falls County West Building

16. Currently, the Post Falls and the Caldwell Veterans Memorial Hall are the only OVA staff in their offices and seeing clients. The remainder are continuing telework due to VARO and DOL offices being closed to the public and awaiting IT needs being met at new locations. Frank Fabbi is seeing Mountain Home service members at the Mountain Home American Legion Hall a couple days a week for pre-discharge claims.

17. 2020 Annual County and Post Service Officer Training was cancelled due to COVID.

18. Wes McAuslan and Bill Heyob attend the VFW Virtual Proficiency Training Course during the month of June – exempt from taking the final exam.

19. During this year's Legislative Session, the Idaho 100% Service-Connected Property Tax Break was expanded to include those on Individual Unemployability and the deadline to file this year was extended to June 15th.
**Veterans Education Bureau Report** presented by Paul Spannknebel on behalf of Tonya Erhardt

1. The Annex Building that was being used for Education is being cleared out to be utilized for employee COVID screenings.
2. Working on getting the Education Bureau fully staffed after the departure of Doug Jacobson.
3. We reposted Doug’s position because the description in the original posting did not meet our needs. We have 101 applicants and we are reviewing those.
4. Tonya Erhardt will be stationed at the Department of Labor offices in Caldwell.
5. Our State Approving Agency contract is under negotiation with the VA. They want to add an addition 8 site surveys required to our new 2-year contract.
6. Tonya is currently our only Appointed Approving Authority for IHLs. She is doing an amazing job getting everything done and meeting our requirements of the contract.
7. Our Education budget for FY21 is $142,000 – up from $129,000 for FY20.

**Financial Report** presented by Debbie Spence

1. 4th Quarter FY20 Average Cost Per Resident Per Day (as of 6-30-2020)
   a. Boise Home - $446.171
   b. Pocatello Home - $493.91
   c. Lewiston Home - $481.07
2. 4th Quarter FY20 Average Daily Census
   a. Boise Home – 78.45%
   b. Pocatello Home – 73.08%
   c. Lewiston Home – 75.12%
   d. IDVS Average – 75.55%
3. FY20 Year-End Fiscal Status (Preliminary Report)
   a. Total Appropriation - $87,646,395
   b. Expenditures - <$45,128,725>
   c. Remaining Appropriation - $42,517,670
   d. Less 2nd Cemetery - <$3,918,000>
   e. Less 4th Veterans Home - <$35,868,400>
   f. Less Encumbrance Requests <$46,130>
   g. Remaining Appropriation - $2,685,140
4. FY20 Year-to-Date Nursing Occupancy Rate
   a. Boise – 83.8%
   b. Pocatello – 81.6%
   c. Lewiston – 78.6%
   d. IDVS Average – 81.9%
   e. State of Idaho Average – 61.0%
5. FY20 Average Cost per Resident Day
   a. Nursing - $399.92
   b. Dom/Residential - $180.73
6. FY21 Budget Appropriation $46,186,800
   a. $20,569,220 – Federal Funds VA – 44%
   b. $11,034,931 – Receipts Medicaid – 24%
   c. $7,443,769 – Receipts Private Pay – 16%
   d. $3,951,900 – Veterans Recognition Income Fund – 9%
   e. $1,213,300 – General Funds – 3%
   f. $1,057,200 – Endowment – 2%
   g. $916,480 – Federal Funds Medicare – 2%
7. General Fund Percentage of Appropriation is 2.6% for FY21
8. FY21 Appropriation Includes:
   a. $<178,800> - Change in Benefit Costs
   b. $360,500 – Inflationary Adjustments
   c. $389,300 – Replacement Items
   d. $8,000 – Statewide Cost Allocation
   e. $420,000 – Change in Employee Compensation (on hold)
   f. $333,600 – Cemetery Blackfoot Operations (pro-rated)
   g. $6,609,500 – Post Falls Veterans Home Construction
   h. $139,000 – Veterans Recognition Fund
   i. $1,245,200 – Additional Staffing (18.2 FTP)
   j. $239,300 – Reclassify LPNs to RNs
   k. $154,700 – Compensation Market Alignment
   l. $5,000 – New Capital Outlay
   m. $415,200 – 24/7 Security at Veterans Homes
   n. $43,500 – Office of Information Technology Services
   o. $<24,300> - General Fund Reduction of 2%
   p. $80,000 – Idaho Suicide Hotline (on-going)
   q. $5,918,000 – Reappropriation Authority – Second Veterans Cemetery
   r. $36,868,400 – Reappropriation Authority – Fourth Veterans Home

9. Two audits are currently in process
   a. 2019 Myers and Stauffer Cost Report Desk Review

10. FY22 Budget Preparation
   a. We are starting the FY22 budget request process
   b. All bureaus have submitted their budget requests to Central Support
   c. Central Support is reviewing the bureau requests with the Bureau Executives and will compile the Division budget requests.
   d. Chief Administrator will meet with DFM and the Governor's Chief of Staff to discuss necessity of request.
   e. Division Budget will include:
      i. The Veterans Recognition Fund plan
      ii. Our plan for operating if there is a reduction of 10% or more in federal funds that we receive per Governor's Executive Order #2014-03

Business Support Services Report presented by Paul Spannknebel

1. Thank you to the Department of Building & Safety for the temporary use of office space in their offices in Blackfoot.
2. The Business Support staff at CSO has done a phenomenal job the last several months during the COVID pandemic to support all our Bureaus in their unique needs. Kudos go to our Fiscal and Purchasing staff.
3. In HR we have made market alignments to move CNAs up to 85% and LPNs up to 90% of policy for pay.
4. We are processing Hazard Bonuses for over 200 staff members in the Homes. There are certain qualifications that needs to be met and we are working closely with DFM and DHR to make sure we meet those.
5. We are waiting to see if staff at the Cemetery qualifies for any of the Hazard Bonuses.
6. We are working with DHR to convey our Return to Work policy with employees.
7. Our staff is doing the Contact Tracing on positive COVID cases because the Health District does not have the time or manpower.
8. The first positive test of an employee was last Wednesday in the Boise Home.
9. State Procurement Director has given us permission to purchase what is necessary for the critical needs of our agency regarding PPE and staffing of temporary personnel.
10. Working on procuring additional COVID test kits during this time of nationwide shortage.
11. We are doing mandatory testing of staff and residents at the Homes and contractors working in the Homes.
12. IDVS is the only State agency doing mandatory testing.

Division Updates presented by Tracy Schaner
1. Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) & COVID-19 Testing
   a. There is a shortage nationwide, but we have had the procurement resources to stay on top of our demand.
   b. Our relationship with the Boise VAMC has ensured we have been able to obtain COVID test kits even though there is a shortage.
   c. We are also looking at obtaining our own test kits via other means to ensure our residents and staff continue to have regular testing.
2. Our IDVS Team has done an incredible job keeping up with the constant changes in the COVID situation and staying on top of everything for the health and safety of our residents and staff.
3. Our Home residents are making the largest sacrifices because of the restrictions on visitors and movement within the Homes.
4. Realistically this will not be the only pandemic we will face so we are looking at making permanent changes in our Homes for the future.
   a. Visitor Centers will be retrofitted in the Homes (including Post Falls) to allow for visitors to enter from an outside entrance into a negative pressure room to visit with their loved one on the other side of a plexiglass wall utilizing an audio system.
   b. Front Entrances will have screening areas with one way in and one way out.
   c. Separate entrance for employees for screening and changing clothes.
5. Nine Grants Currently in Process
   a. Post Falls Home – we broke ground in June. We have met all deadlines but are waiting for the MOA with the VA which has been delayed due to the pandemic. Once that is received, we can begin construction.
   b. Post Falls Home – additional grant for changes to retrofit the facility for future pandemic situations.
   c. (2) Life Safety Grants (Pocatello & Lewiston) - securing access points and doors
   d. (2) COVID Grants – (Pocatello & Lewiston) – improvement of HVAC systems for negative pressure, ionization, and UV lights (Boise did not qualify because there is a 20-year recapture period and we plan on replacing the Boise Home)
   e. Replacing Boise Home
   f. Blackfoot Cemetery – ongoing grant
   g. Expansion of Boise Cemetery

Division Report presented by Marv Hagedorn
1. We are receiving close to $1.1 million in Permanent Building Funds for construction at the Blackfoot Cemetery of Admin offices and additional warehouse space.
2. We are in the process of negotiating the terms of the State Approving Agency contract with the VA for our Education Bureau. We are losing money on the current contract and have been augmenting the program with funds from the Homes. President Trump has asked that the State Education programs focus on certifying OJG and Apprenticeship programs, which we have done, but the VA only compensates our agency for the certification of programs with Institutes of Higher Learning under the current contract.

3. Our domiciliary payments at the Homes are less than half our actual costs to house someone in the domiciliary. We cannot discontinue the domiciliary for strategic reasons – we need those bed counts for the replacement of the Boise Home; at the same we have been subsidizing it each year by $400,000 - $500,000.

4. Our FY21 Budget is $46,186,800 but only $2,270,500 is appropriated by the legislature or statute (2.6% General Funds and 2.2% Endowment Funds), the rest of the money to fund IDVS is generated from the Homes and our effective running of those Homes.

5. We have a line item contribution to the Idaho Suicide Prevention Hotline. The amount will decrease in the future as we work on some specialized suicide prevention programs for Veterans internally.

6. The Leadership Team in this Agency has gone above and beyond in the handling of this pandemic. We are in the middle of this and have a long way to go before it is over.

7. The key to overcoming the pandemic is to have a vaccine that can be given to everyone.

8. We have utilized cutting edge technology such as the negative pressure, ionization, and UV lights which very few of our counterparts in the Country have used. Only history will tell if our proactive measures are overall successful in the end.

9. It has been heartening to see very little call-ins for sickness, because our staff is so dedicated to our veteran residents who cannot leave the Homes to see their families or for outside activities.

10. We will make another attempt in the next legislative session to get approval for a replacement of the Boise Home. The Governor was not satisfied the Chinden Campus site was the appropriate location, but I have worked with Department of Admin and we have examined all potential sites. They will be submitting a letter to the Governor stating the Chinden Campus is the best site for this facility. We will need to figure out where the matching grant funds will come from because the legislature is unlikely to provide those funds. Our numbers show that with a 158-bed facility we should come out $2.5 million ahead each year because we will not have the expense of maintaining an old building.

11. We are working with a data gathering company to try and get an accurate count on the number of Veterans in the State of Idaho. This company says we have 145,700 in Idaho, but only 48,000 have contacted our agency in some way. That number also contrasts with the number of veterans the VA estimates are in Idaho – which is only 122,000. Claims filed by OVA this year brought in $76,654,565 or approximately $3.5 million per service officer. It will be a huge impact to our economy and the lives of veterans if we can find those additional 98,000 veterans, we have never had contact with.

12. We also want to utilize this data to figure out where we need to focus our suicide prevention efforts. We will be working with other State agencies that document veterans for their services – e.g. DMV, Fish & Game.
13. We will be doing surveys with our veteran clients on a regular basis so our procedures and processes can be changed and updated in a timely fashion to offer the best possible service and benefits to our customers.

14. Idaho received $1.28 billion in Federal funds to help with COVID related issues. IDVS received $5.3 million of those funds. That money expires December 31, 2020 so we are doing what we can to utilize those funds for retrofitting the homes and other COVID related needs.

15. Drone video of the Post Falls Home was shown.

Commissioner Comments

Patrick Grace – Thank you to everyone at the Idaho Division of Veterans Services and particularly at the Veterans Homes for all you are doing to keep our residents safe during these difficult times. We appreciate your service to our Veterans.

Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 11:55 a.m.

Mitzi Cheldelin
Administrative Assistant
Idaho Division of Veteran Services