



**CITY OF SCOTTSDALE  
VETERANS ADVISORY COMMISSION  
REGULAR MEETING**

**MINUTES**

**Wednesday, November 3, 2021**

**Scottsdale Community Design Studio  
7506 E. Indian School Road  
Scottsdale, AZ 85251**

**PRESENT:** Chairperson Pete Palmer; Vice-Chair Denise Pulk; Commissioners, Deborah Dominick and Joel Stempil

**ABSENT:** Commissioners Michael Ragole and Steve Ziomek

**STAFF:** Kelly Corsette, Communications/Public Affairs Director

**GUESTS:** Ann Atkinson, Elizabeth Dole Foundation Fellow  
Sharon Grassi, Elizabeth Dole Foundation Fellow  
Paula Pedene, Executive Director, Honoring America's Veterans

**1. Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance/Roll Call**

Chair Palmer called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

Members present as listed above.

**2. Discussion and possible action to approve September 1, 2021 Commission meeting minutes**

VICE-CHAIR PULK MOVED TO APPROVE THE SEPTEMBER 1, 2021 VETERANS ADVISORY COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES. COMMISSIONER STEMPIL SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED FOUR (4) TO ZERO (0). CHAIR PALMER, VICE-CHAIR PULK, COMMISSIONERS DOMINICK AND STEMPIL VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

### **3. Presentation and discussion – Elizabeth Dole Foundation programs for military caregivers**

Ann Atkinson, Elizabeth Dole Foundation Fellow, talked about her caregiving journey and challenges that military, veteran, and caregiver families face. She said her husband sustained combat-related injuries during his time in the service that progressed over time and she has been his caregiver since 2012. It was difficult for her to find and maintain gainful employment with flexibility she needed to care for her husband and offer health coverage for her family. The VA offers counseling, support groups, and a whole health program, but stipends are hard to qualify for. She said that the VA whole health program has been an important tool for her family and has helped her fix what was broken in her life. She noted that the Phoenix VA will soon offer a whole health program for caregivers. She said that one thing she learned from the Elizabeth Dole Foundation is that if you see something wrong, don't just talk about it, fix it, that differences don't matter, and that working together toward the same goal can move mountains.

She quoted Elizabeth Dole as saying: "The Foundation's legacy will be a shift in culture, an America where caregivers are empowered, they're appreciated, they're listened to; an America where caregivers are woven into the very fabric of our nation's appreciation for the military."

Sharon Grassi, Elizabeth Dole Foundation fellow, talked about her caregiving journey and paid tribute to the programs within the Foundation. She said her son's injuries were sustained over a series of events causing post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injuries. She talked about the time it took to recognize his injuries, the struggles she and her other children have dealt with in caring for him, helping him navigate the VA medical system, and in assisting him with reintegrating into the civilian world. She said with the help of a team of family and friends they were able to transition the parent/child relationship into one of friendship and she was able to begin advocating for caregivers.

As an Elizabeth Dole Foundation fellow she has been able to work with legislators, AARP, medical providers and VA administrators on a campaign for inclusive care, including online training modules for those who are interested in building a care team that is caregiver inclusive. She has also partnered with AARP and the Dole Foundation to write a military caregiver guide and a toolkit for employers called "Caregivers in the Workforce."

Ms. Grassi noted that the TEAM Veteran Caregivers Act was signed into law in 2020. The act is legislation that requires the VA to recognize the caregiver in the veteran's record and provide transparency about decisions made concerning caregiver status. Additionally, the Dole Foundation has built a journey map that the VA has adopted. An additional journey map addressing mental health is currently being developed.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Ms. Grassi talked about impacts on the "hidden helpers," which are the kids who are family members helping with a disabled veteran. She said that in most cases the experience makes the kids strong and compassionate human beings. She noted that the Elizabeth Dole Foundation partners with Sesame Street, offering camps and other resources for kids. Ms. Grassi noted that over the past five years, the Foundation has established a fellow to advocate for caregivers by working with legislators in every state.

Ms. Grassi stressed that the Foundation is available to work with veterans from all branches and all military eras. Information about the comprehensive program for Caregiving through the VA

and respite relief can be found at [hiddenheros.org](http://hiddenheros.org). Ms. Atkins added that there are six Arizona fellows who are available to help seniors with using technology to access resource information.

A military caregiver resource fair and family day is being held on Sunday, November 7, 2021 at Vista del Camino park from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Mr. Corsette announced that Ms. Atkinson and Ms. Grassi were recently interviewed as part of the Veterans AZ program.

#### **4. Presentation and discussion – Honoring America’s Veterans/Phoenix Veterans Day Parade**

Paula Pedene, Executive Director, Honoring America’s Veterans, gave a presentation describing Honoring America’s Veterans sponsorship of the Phoenix Veterans Day parade, which will be held on Thursday, November 11, 2021, beginning at 11:00 a.m. She said the primary purpose of the organization is to find ways to honor veterans, recognize them for their military service, and thank them for what they have done to defend freedom. The Phoenix Veterans Day parade is a 501(c)(3) and focuses on those elements of recognition. The parade is in its 25th year and holds the record of being the fourth largest Veterans Day parade in the country. It is officially recognized by the President and Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Ms. Pedene noted that Honoring America’s Veterans started an essay program for high schoolers, in hopes of educating youth about military, veterans, and patriotic support. The program offers a \$250 award to one winner from each grade as well as \$150 award to the assisting teacher. Winners are also invited to ride in the parade and given special memorabilia.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Ms. Pedene said that the organization will be hosting a Veterans Leadership Forum at Scottsdale McCormick Golf Ranch Club on April 21, 2022. They are also planning to hold a coin ceremony in honor of Vietnam veterans.

Commissioner Stempil noted that Ms. Pedene writes a weekly column focusing on veterans in the Scottsdale Republic.

#### **5. Scottsdale Veterans Day Commemoration Update**

Mr. Corsette announced that Scottsdale’s annual Veterans Day commemoration will be held at McCormick-Stillman Railroad Park on November 11, 2021, starting at 3:00 p.m. in front of the Merce train in its new location. The program will include performance by the United States Coastguard Auxiliary Arizona Band, speeches by Mayor Ortega; James Fawbush, representing the U.S. Army; and Nikki Stratton, granddaughter of a USS Arizona survivor and ship sponsor of the USS Arizona fast attack submarine. Mr. Corsette mentioned that Scottsdale’s commitment as a Vietnam commemorative partner is ongoing.

Chair Palmer invited commissioners to attend the annual Veterans Day ceremony at the Scottsdale Waterfront, being held in Waterfront Tower One Club room, on Friday November 12, 2021 at 5:00 p.m.

## **6. Update on Veterans Administration programs and initiatives**

Commissioner Dominick gave an overview of programs and initiatives at the Veterans Administration. Items briefly mentioned included:

- November is recognized as National Caregiver month
- VA is offering COVID-19 vaccines and boosters as well as flu vaccines by appointment or as a walk-in service
- In the wake of the events in Afghanistan, the VA assembled a group of providers to aid returning military members and personnel who are struggling with the events that occurred
- A group is available for family members, offering education on identifying and dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder
- Mask mandates at the VA and VA outpatient clinics
- Telehealth continues to be available
- VA enrollment

Vice-Chair Pulk reiterated a previous comment that she recently enrolled in the VA, because she previously thought she did not qualify for VA benefits. She commended the person who is in charge of the Phoenix VA Instagram page for posting relevant information.

## **7. Update, discussion, and possible direction regarding the VAC Work Plan**

- a. Proposed addition: Draft Veterans Quality of Life Manual

Chair Palmer noted that new Commission members should be appointed in time for the December meeting. Once new members are on board and new officers have been elected, the work plan will need to be updated for 2022.

Chair Palmer proposed the addition of an Arizona Veterans quality of life manual to the VAC work plan. The quality of life manual would be included on the website.

COMMISSIONER STEMPIL MOVED TO APPROVE THE ADDITION OF AN ARIZONA VETERANS QUALITY OF LIFE MANUAL TO THE VAC WORK PLAN. COMMISSIONER DOMINICK SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED FOUR (4) TO ZERO (0). CHAIR PALMER, VICE-CHAIR PULK, COMMISSIONERS DOMINICK AND STEMPIL VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

## **8. Commission members' reports, updates, and suggestions for future agenda items**

Vice-Chair Pulk gave an update on her personal status, noting that she is taking a sabbatical from working and her updated contact information is available through Mr. Corsette.

She suggested that Michael Arberry, Student Services Manager of Veterans Services at Scottsdale Community College, be invited to be a guest at a future meeting.

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, December 1, 2021

## **9. Adjournment**

COMMISSIONER STEMPIL MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. COMMISSIONER DOMINICK SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED FOUR (4) TO ZERO (0). CHAIR PALMER, VICE-CHAIR PULK, COMMISSIONERS DOMINICK AND STEMPIL VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

With no further business to discuss, being duly moved and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 6:20 p.m.

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