

Jennifer Ellis
Region 8 Report
July 26, 2022

Normally I would begin my report by giving an update on my progress here in Region 8 yet I believe there is a serious issue needing our attention and support that should come first.

During the last VVA Board Meeting in April of this year, held in Silver Spring, MD, we were made aware that there were potential plans in place to minimize care and or completely shut down some of our VA Medical facilities across the entire VISN (Veterans Integrated Services Network). This was definitely an eye opener as to the proposed changes occurring to our local Veteran Administration Medical Facilities. I am grateful to Sharon Hodges, VVA Government Affairs Chair, who spoke to all of us regarding the potential shutdowns of many of our hospitals and clinics throughout the 22 VISN areas across the nation. She had made clear according to her understanding, that these changes were not “etched in stone” but as many of us have discovered are in fact occurring already. Sharon wrote: “Under the Mission Act, Title A of Title II (Public Law 115-182), the Asset & Infrastructure Review (AIR) Commission has until January 31, 2023, to study the Secretary’s recommendations released and to write a report on restructuring the VA’s health care.” June 28, 2022, a bipartisan group of senators announced June 27th they will block the AIR Commission. The senators believe that the AIR Commission would ultimately disadvantage veterans. Located here within VISN 20, which includes Washington, Oregon, Alaska, and Idaho we have one of many of these shutdowns in play. The location in question, is the Roseburg VA Medical Center in Douglas County, Oregon. Though they did not have approval to go ahead, they have already begun dispersing specialists and sending Veterans long distances for care and who now have to wait months to be scheduled and receive treatment. This was not to take place as the AIR Marketing reports, on which these decisions were based, were found to have no merit and were not fully investigated. This particular facility here in Roseburg offers services to tens of thousands of Veterans all over Southern Oregon, from the coastal regions all throughout the southern half of the state. I hand carried the VISN AIR Marketing report back to our VVA Chapter 805 President, Bill Duncan, who along with myself, began to investigate and sound the alarm as to what was actually taking

place. I am now part of the Task Force here made up of 18 Veterans Organizations who are taking on the duty to protect and defend our Veterans here in Oregon. The majority of the Veterans (mostly Vietnam), VA Facility Employees including providers, and our local communities (several counties) were not informed of this decision. Our veterans are suddenly being sent elsewhere for their care if they can even get an appointment within the VA system or through community care which is limited in staff and overwhelmed. Our civilian medical communities cannot absorb such a number of patients thus causing an overload to the system. In addition, many providers will not take on VA benefits due to low reimbursement amounts and slow payment schedules. Thousands of Veterans and their families moved here (purchased properties and settled down) just for the access to our Roseburg VA Medical Center. There have been numerous letters sent to local Congressman, Senators and the VISN 20 Director who has not yet responded to our request for some sort of communication. Our local Commissioners are extremely concerned that this action by the VA will drastically effect our businesses, real estate market and most importantly healthcare of our Veterans and the general public.

Recently, I had an opportunity to meet with our VA Facility Director along with other VVA Officers. I asked him what he needed to stop the bleed and restore services, he responded with "An increase in Locality Pay". Thus, we are on a mission to Restore Services to our local VA to save lives and our community from a mass exodus.

On to the progress in Region 8! Chapter 805, of which I am the President, raised over 7K for Moods In Music guitar program at our annual Welcome Home Dinner and Auction, May 7th. We had a full house and everyone had a fabulous time. There is a great deal of work and dedication put into this event as it takes us approximately 7 months to prepare for. The event gives our local businesses and community an opportunity to give to our Veterans in a unique and positive way.

I have been traveling along with Bill Duncan, VVA Chapter 805 President, Roger Boucock, VVA Chapter 805 Vice President, Bruce Ellis Board Member 805, AVVA State Representative, Ruth Feliciano and Don Feliciano. We are visiting various VVA chapters in the state of Oregon 271 and 392 to revive the AVVA members and encourage the VVA leadership and membership to appreciate the value of

the AVVA. I presented a Power Point presentation that has stirred up their enthusiasm and given them ideas of how to proceed. We had the privilege to meet a member by the name of Debra Miller who is legally blind and crochets lap blankets, using her own funds, for our wheelchair bound veterans in the Portland area. We presented her with a Certificate of Appreciation and flowers because heroes are sometimes hidden and she deserved our recognition.

In addition, 3 of the six states now have newly elected State Representatives, Oregon – Ruth Feliciano, who took my place, Washington – Steven Jordon and Montana – Willa Burgess of which I encouraged to step up. Steven recently requested to proceed with incorporating a chapter in his state of which I am so excited. Thank you Bobbi Morris for getting him going in the right direction.

I am looking forward to attending the Leadership Conference being held in Greenville, SC, August 9-13. I hope to see many of you there, safe travels.

Jennifer Ellis
Region 8 Director