



Vietnam Veterans Of America

Chapter One

www.vietnamvetschapter1.org

NOVEMBER 2022



MINUTES OF CHAPTER MEETING NOV. 9, 2022

At Chapter 1's Zoom meeting, attendees included Andy Megrath, president; Tim Lonergan, vice president; Richard Reed, treasurer; Jack Crowther, secretary; and Directors Bill Ellwood, and Michael Murphy.

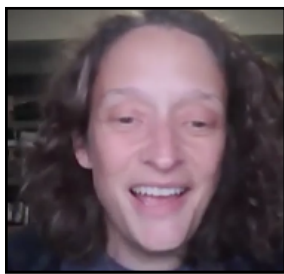
A nominal meeting of the Board of Directors was held; no business was transacted.

The minutes of the October meeting were approved as printed in the newsletter.

Treasurer Richard Reed reported a balance of \$117,474.46 in all of the chapter's accounts. Net income from the sale of break-open tickets for the current fiscal year, which began in March, is \$12,954. The report was approved unanimously.

We began the meeting with a presentation by Jennie Gartner of Rutland. She is the community partnership coordinator for the southwest and central Vermont section of the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants. It is a private refugee resettlement organization that has existed for more than 100 years. It is one of nine refugee resettlement organizations in the U.S., two of which operate in Vermont. It voluntarily works with the U.S. government.

Jennie noted that as of today, there are 100 million forcibly displaced persons in the world, a number reflecting the recent surges of refugees from Ukraine, Afghanistan and Venezuela. She explained that the U.S. president establishes quotas of refugees to be allowed into the country each year. Organizations like hers work with the U.S. State Department, letting it know how many refugees they are able to assist.



Jennie Gartner (screen shot from Zoom recording)

Almost 23 million of the refugees are designated by the United Nations as refugees, meaning they are legally allowed to apply to another country for refuge. Different laws apply to "refugees" than "asylum seekers" or "immigrants" in this country. She noted that the 1980 Refugee Resettlement Act was prompted considerably by the end of the Vietnam War.

Jennie said only one percent of refugees are offered resettlement in a third country. Most people winding up in refugee camps "will live and die" in refugee camps, she said, showing a slide of a massive camp in Egypt. "The goal of the United Nations high commissioner of refugees is to return people to the home from which they were forced," she said. If that cannot happen, the goal is to settle them in a third country.

Chapter 1 has a particular interest in Afghans who assisted the U.S. military effort in Afghanistan. They are designated "humanitarian parolees," another legal designation. Jennie's group helps this group, as well as those with other designations, such as "refugees" and "asylum seekers." Her group's main work is with refugees, but the Afghans have a special designation, also shared by people escaping the Ukraine war. The designation has a time limit. An interesting distinction in terminology is that someone given "refugee" status is allowed to stay here for life and begin the process to become citizens.



Longtime Chapter 1 members Dick Doyle (left) and Mark Truhan, the third president of the chapter, were present on Veterans Day when we updated the Honor Roll at the Rutland County Vietnam Veterans Memorial of those from Rutland County who served in the Vietnam War.

Humanitarian parolees only have a limited time to stay in the U.S., a period extended by President Biden from one year to two years for both Afghans and Ukrainians.

Fortunately, the administration has created a process to speed up the processing of their documents. Other special designations for Afghans include a Special Immigrant Visa, which allows the person to stay and have access to benefits and services allowed other refugees. The Priority 2 program is yet another category for Afghans. Most of the Afghans Jennie has worked with in Rutland are eligible for SIV status. "Asylum" is generally the most indicated status for the Afghans, she said, but the process is "long and involved." In some cases, human rights violations committed by the refugees can affect their bids for asylum.

Twelve Afghan men are in the area, two unmarried and the rest married with families back in Afghanistan. Jennie's three-person team has been able to find everyone housing and jobs. The majority of what they earn is being sent home to their families. "Our guys are working 72 hours a week right now," she said.

Jennie liked the idea of a meeting of the Afghans with veterans but noted the language barrier is a problem, though it can be addressed with translators. A few speak English, but most speak Dari and Pashto. "Our clients right now don't have a lot of needs, in terms of financial needs," she said. Assistance could be provided in terms of money sent home to Afghanistan, but a more locally confined option is providing gift cards, to grocery stores and Walmart, for example. Refugees get \$1,200 in cash assistance when they arrive, as well as access to Medicaid services for one year. They are eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance until their earnings make them ineligible.

Andy Megrath asked what portion of assistance that Chapter 1 might provide would go to administration, as opposed to services to the refugees. Jennie said the staff salaries come from a pot of money that is separate from what the public might donate. The lawyer helping Vermont refugees is paid with a grant.

Michael Murphy asked how specifically Chapter 1 might help. Jennie put up a slide showing the range of services USCRI provides, ranging from cash assistance to youth mentoring and job counseling. For the most part, the purpose of the refugee resettlement process is to help refugees become self-sufficient within three months. There are about 160 Afghans in Vermont, but she expects more to arrive.

Later in the meeting, after Jennie had left the Zoom call, Jack Crowther made a motion to donate \$1,000 to USCRI, with the understanding we would be receptive, if called on, for aid in the future. Following some discussion, we agreed that we will expect some accounting of how the money is spent. The motion was seconded by Michael Murphy. Passed unanimously.

Bill Ellwood asked if translators were available to assist if Chapter 1 members were to meet with the Afghans. Jennie said USCRI employs translators who could help with that. The Afghans are working actively on their English, she said. "I would be happy to facilitate whatever I can do that you think would be meaningful," she said.

Moving on to other business, Andy Megrath introduced a request from Richard Gallo, a Vermont veterans outreach specialist, to assist a Vietnam veteran in Danby needing assistance for a car repair and a new stove. Richard has received some help from another sources but requested \$1,000 for the car repair and \$815 for a gas stove, plus delivery. Jack moved to donate \$1,815, to be paid to the auto repair shop and the appliance store. Seconded by Michael Murphy. Passed unanimously.

Andy then brought up a request for assistance from a woman in Rutland, formerly of Danby, whose Vietnam veteran husband died in 2016 from cancer and whose son died in a logging accident in July. The son's death left the woman with some \$15,435 in funeral, burial and tombstone expenses, as the son had no life insurance or spouse. The woman said the expenses had depleted her savings, prompting the request for help. She is a good friend of Andy's as was her late husband, who is on the Honor Roll at the Rutland County Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

Jack Crowther made a motion to donate \$1,000, noting the assistance was somewhat "indirect," i.e., not directly to a vet. After some discussion, Michael Murphy proposed raising that to \$2,000, which was seconded by Tim Lonergan. Richard Reed cautioned we could be creating a "slippery slope," in that we were not paying the money to a vendor but directly to the widow of a veteran. Normally the chapter has preferred to pay vendors, such as a fuel company or car repair shop, rather than directly to the person in need. After further discussion, we decided to offer to pay the woman's rent up to \$2,000. That further amendment was approved by Jack and seconded. Passed unanimously. (Following the meeting, we learned that the woman had expressed a wish that the money be paid to Holden Cemetery Maintenance, which was holding an unpaid bill for the tombstone. Expectation was that the money would be disbursed to Holden.)

Wrapping up the meeting, Tim Lonergan requested the chapter renew the \$2,000 donation from last year to Vermont Adaptive Ski and Sports for its programs directed to help veterans. Skiing, sailing and other sport activities are offered by the non-profit group, in which Tim is an active member. Jack Crowther moved the request be granted. Seconded by Richard Reed. Passed unanimously.

Richard Reed asked that the topic of refugee resettlement be continued at the next meeting. “I have experience with these folks in the past. I’m not having a problem with what we’re doing now, but again I think we need to proceed with caution . . .,” he said.

Respectfully submitted,
Jack Crowther, Secretary

THE NEXT CHAPTER 1 MEETING WILL BE BY ZOOM WEDNESDAY, JAN. 11, AT 5 P.M.

Here’s the link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85182304854?pwd=bFNGRzYrVEhPbUNTQWtNa1hwaXI2QT09>

Meeting ID: 851 8230 4854

Passcode: 486678