



Vietnam Veterans Of America

Chapter One

www.vietnamvetschapter1.org

NOVEMBER 2023



Scenes from Chapter 1 Luncheon

Reviews from Chapter 1's Oct. 11 "Honor Our Vietnam Era Veterans" luncheon at the Rutland Country Club have been uniformly positive. Above photo shows some of the 60 guests. At top right, Chapter 1 President Bill Ellwood introduces past presidents of the chapter. From left to right are Andy Megrath, John Bergeron, Mike Divoll, and Mark Truhan. (Missing: Don Bodette*, Jake Jacobsen,* and Steve Faye.) Current cake technology enabled us to have the Chapter 1 logo on the large sheet cake that served as our dessert.

*Deceased.



MINUTES OF CHAPTER MEETING NOVEMBER 8, 2023

At Chapter 1's November meeting, held on the Zoom app and in person at our office at the VFW, attendees included Bill Ellwood, president; Tim Lonergan, vice president; Richard Reed, treasurer; Jack Crowther, secretary; Directors Andy Megrath, Michael Murphy and Carl Baldwin; and members Larry Gold, Mike Divoll, John Pisanelli, Tom Rousseau, and Mark Truhan. This was the largest turnout in recent memory.

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

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

Treasurer Richard Reed gave his report on the chapter's accounts. He noted that the savings and checking accounts with Heritage Family Credit Union earn a quarter of a percent interest. Richard said he plans to meet with the bank to find out why the chapter needs three accounts, the third being a money market account. The report was unanimously approved.

Bill Ellwood reported the chapter has 130 members, including new signups. New members include Dave Gouchoe, Norman Hawley, and Marty McDonough. Bill Whiteman and Albert and Mary Trombley are rejoining members. Having been early members of Chapter 1, the chapter is sponsoring life memberships for them.

Luncheon a success

Looking back on the chapter's celebratory luncheon on Oct. 11, Bill said, "I felt the luncheon was very successful. We had 60 people attending. There were probably 20 or so that are actually chapter members. There were some other veterans that are eligible for chapter membership. Everybody that I've talked to gave me positive feedback on it. They enjoyed it; they enjoyed the presentations that were given. They thought the food was good. So I felt that it was a very positive experience, worth what we invested in it, to generate some interest. And hopefully we're going to get more participation going forward. I appreciate everyone's efforts that were put into it to make it good." Others spoke up to agree with that assessment. Bill is thinking of it as a "trial run" for the chapter's 45th anniversary in April of 2025, the chapter having been chartered as the first in the nation in April 1980.

Andy Megrath expressed his appreciation for the tributes paid to him, as the luncheon was dedicated to him in honor of his 19 years of service as president of the chapter. "Even though they threw me under the bus," he quipped, referring to the fact that it was a surprise.

Bill said he was the guest speaker at the Rutland Historical Society's annual meeting. The society has partnered with us in making the chapter's digital archives — a collection of more than 900 files — available on its website and in its collections. Bill noted that four members of the chapter attended the Veterans Town Hall Nov. 3 in Rutland. Bill and Andy Megrath spoke at the event, designed to allow vets to share their experiences. Bill hopes to see the chapter more involved in future sessions of the town halls.

As part of his efforts to boost chapter membership, Bill used his recent attendance at a West Rutland American Legion breakfast to recruit a new member. He encouraged Chapter 1 members to attend the informal veterans breakfasts at Denny's at 9 a.m. on the second Tuesday of the month, the next being Nov. 14.

Jack Crowther said that while the chapter is trying to find ways to donate its money, "It's proving to be not as easy as you would think." He noted approaches he has made to Rutland's Project Vision, the mayor's office, and the housing project for veterans at 140 North Main St. to offer the chapter's assistance. So far, though, there have been no specific requests.

Dodge House Status

Larry Gold asked about the Dodge House for homeless vets, which has been closed for several months. In the past, Chapter 1 has supported Dodge House, which was named for Michael Dodge, a Vietnam veteran. A project spearheaded by Robert Rummel, also a Vietnam veteran, Dodge House formally opened in 1998.

John Pisanelli said he had received a notice that the Dodge House was reopening at the end of the month. Post 31 of the American Legion appears to have the lead in the home's operation following a shakeup of the administration for the house.

Chapter 1 has not received information on the status of the Dodge House, despite its longstanding relationship. Bill Ellwood asked John Pisanelli to forward the information he had. "We do want to help the

Dodge House, if we can,” Bill said. Chapter 1 had approved spending \$400 for security cameras at the Dodge House, but that was never paid because of the upheaval in the operation. Bill proposed removing that money from the chapter’s “committed funds,” in light of the changed situation. Tim seconded the motion. Passed unanimously.

Guidelines for Chapter 1 donations

Richard Reed, as treasurer, proposed guidelines for how the chapter responds to requests for assistance. Prior to the meeting, Jack Crowther suggested some tweaks to the guidelines, which Richard largely agreed with. As drafted or agreed to by Richard, the policy would require, among other things: 1) an amount requested and statement of need, 2) proof that an individual is a veteran or proof of the charitable purpose of the organization seeking help, 3) that a landlord, utility company or someone else providing goods or services receive the money, not just the needy individual or organization, 4) and that the expenditure be approved by the Board of Directors at a regular or special meeting, except as permitted in the chapter bylaws. (The bylaws allow an expenditure of up to \$1,000 between meetings, if approved by a majority of the board and officers.) The policy will be taken up at a future meeting. “We don’t want to make a big bureaucratic mess, but we want to make sure we’re giving it out to people that need the help,” Bill said.

Tim Lonergan has been a volunteer with Vermont Adaptive Ski and Sports for 12 years, helping the non-profit provide services to the handicapped. Headquartered at the Pico Mountain Ski Resort, Vermont Adaptive includes programs specifically tailored to veterans. Tim has annually made a request for financial support, this year requesting \$2,500, an increase from \$2,000 for the past year. There are about 400 volunteers involved, but adapting bicycles, skis and other equipment to the handicapped is expensive, Tim noted. Rock climbing is another activity. “Well over 300” veterans take part in the program yearly, spread over four seasons, Tim said. He said that by making the donation on “Giving Tuesday,” after Thanksgiving, the donation would be matched by a benefactor. Tim then made a motion to donate \$2,500 to Vermont Adaptive Ski and Sports. Seconded by Jack Crowther. Passed unanimously.

The chapter voted to reimburse Jack Crowther \$149.90 for his Zoom membership, which the chapter has been using for its meetings. Jack was also granted permission to use Zoom for any other need he has. Larry Gold pointed out that, looking to the future, the chapter needs to have its own email address tied to the Zoom account. That way, if Jack were not available, other members of the chapter could have access to the account and the means to verify their status as legitimate users.

President’s message: Looking forward

Outlining some goals for the future, Bill Ellwood said he’d like to see some revisions to the chapter website, including a less static format. As an example, the site could be used to inform members and the public of coming events. “The end goal will be that chapter members would go look at our website periodically to see what’s going on” he said. “Plus the public can see the background information that we still have out there, which is good information.”

Bill said he’s interested in boosting the Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America, or AVVA, a subgroup of the chapter open to people interested in taking part in chapter activities but not eligible for regular membership. He proposed the chapter sponsor a life membership for Beth Higgins, a former AVVA member and chapter secretary. Andy Megrath made a motion to pay for her membership. Seconded by Tim Lonergan. The motion was then amended to extend the offer of a free life membership to any past AVVA member who wanted to rejoin. Passed unanimously. This mirrors the chapter’s earlier decision to pay for life memberships for any former members interested in rejoining. In the case of financial hardship, the chapter could vote to pay the membership of someone who wanted to join AVVA but found the price too steep.

Bill laid out a plan to establish committees for different projects, offering as an example, a group to visit veterans who might be shut in or otherwise would benefit from company. Our chaplain, Pete Hults, has expressed interest in doing that, as has John Sabataso, a Vietnam era vet. Other potential future activities Bill offered up included social gatherings, updating the website, coordinating our activities with other

veterans organizations, and an IT-and-Social-Media Committee. (IT stands for internet technology.) He'd also like to see the chapter's office spruced up. Summarizing, he said, "We're still going with the philosophy that [we were] the first chapter in, we're gonna be the last one to go. So we gotta keep doing stuff. And even if we fail to get much momentum going, we'll still keep going. We could keep going as we have been doing, but it's good to try to revive things up and do more." Richard Reed quipped, "Just remember we're old guys. Making us to move fast . . ."

Assistance provided

At the conclusion of the meeting, we heard a request for assistance from a member facing the shutoff of his electricity, due to his owing \$436.31. That represents 3-4 months of electric service, he said. The member said that he expected to get some assistance from another program, but needed the help now to forestall the shutoff. This member had received some help from the chapter several years ago for heating assistance. Richard Reed moved to provide the full amount owed and proposed that the check be made out to the member and Green Mountain Power. That was in accord with the guidelines being proposed for assisting those in need. Seconded by Andy Megrath. Passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Jack Crowther, Secretary

**THE NEXT CHAPTER 1 MEETING WILL BE WEDNESDAY, JAN. 10, AT 4:30 P.M.
BY ZOOM AND IN PERSON AT THE CHAPTER 1 OFFICE AT THE VFW, 15 WALES ST., RUTLAND**

Here's the Zoom link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81230871900?pwd=VVo5Z1E3MHd6b0djZjVnT3d5RWVuUT09>

Meeting ID: 812 3087 1900

Passcode: 531465