2016 - 2017 Annual Activity Report

Of

HARFORD COUNTY COMMISSION ON VETERANS’ AFFAIRS (HCCOVA)

Harford County Councilman: James V. McMahan Jr., Liaison

Chair: Mr. Johnny Boker

Vice Chair: Vacant

**Purpose and Authority**

Charter:

To research, assemble, analyze and disseminate information and educational materials relating to activities and programs that will assist in meeting the needs of all veterans and their families;

To institute and conduct educational and other programs, meetings and conferences to promote the rights and opportunities for veterans;

To advise the County Executive and County Council on the status of programs and services in the State and County related to the needs of veterans and their families;

To assist in planning appropriate public acknowledgement of the contributions made by veterans and assist in planning commemoration activities recognizing the contributions made by veterans.

Special thanks are due. Special thank you to the **County Executive** for providing his support and equipment that equaled vertical tripod banners with Commission information, a signature table cover, Commission business cards, a County email address .gov, palm cards and a walking banner for our upcoming parade. The Commission also was able to gain shirts with the County logo to present a professional appearance when we conduct outreach.

Thank you to **Councilman McMahan** for his tireless support, advice, encouragement and of course for his selfless service to the County and his Country as a Soldier.

A very special thank you to **Ms. Debbie Button** who has been instrumental in all facets of the Commission and continues to be a guiding light to the Commission, as well as the County.

**Bottom Line Upfront**

The Commission is a volunteer organization formed of several well educated as well as decorated Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Airmen as well as close family relatives of veterans who have served in their own meaningful capacity. Each member has dedicated, devoted and volunteered multiple hours of their time. Most all Commission members still hold day jobs, attend schools, are part of other veteran-related clubs and are in support of veterans such as the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars and many others.

Over **500** hours of outreach service by scheduled meetings, walk-ups & cold meetings in the public and during city functions such as American Legion Meetings, Sons of the Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, First Fridays, city-held Farmers Markets, VA hospitals and interactions, such as monthly AUSA meetings held on Aberdeen Proving Grounds just to name a few.

**Functions, Support, Activities & Accomplishments**

-Gold Star Mothers Recognition

-Major General Harry Greene Association of the United States Army (AUSA) Fallen Star Memorial

-MD Army National Guard Wreath Laying on Aberdeen Proving Ground

-Havre de Grace City Council Slide presentation for the Gold Star Memorial

-Harford County Gold Star Memorial Project Underway in Havre de Grace, Maryland

-Memorial Day Representation

-Bel Air Independence Day Parade

-APG Retirement Appreciation Day (2016 & 2017) with over 22 tables with VSO representation.

-APG Armed Forces Week 2016 May Harford Chamber of Commerce Mill Luncheon attendance

-Flag Day & US Army Birthday Representation and Outreach opportunity

-Veterans with PTSD & Maryland Conservatory of Music Therapy

-Baltimore VA efforts with Director Dr. Sarah for PTSD and Music Therapy

-Veterans Courts

-Outreach to 243 by name veterans in Harford County, 68 without name.

-Received Veteran-related briefings from the DLLR (Dept. of Labor, Licensing and Regulation)

-Attend Veteran’s funerals/ slow salute ceremonies and speaking upon request.

-Hospital and Citizens Care visits during holidays

-Social Media; Facebook

-Radio Broadcast, WAMD

-Supported HB 664 Display of the POW/MIA Flag on State Building and Grounds

**The Commission by Section and Sub-Committee**

**Chaplains**

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**Facebook and social media**

The Commission took itself to new 21st century leadership in many ways. Empowering one such subcommittee was the Facebook site that has garnered success in outreach and information on jobs in Harford County. The HCCOVA Facebook site.

<https://www.facebook.com/HarfordVeterans12>

With over 274 new articles and post(s) relating to the successes of Harford County Government, as well as opportunities and outreach for our veterans, this free website has enabled both young and leveled veterans to gain information on events as well as keep up with current veteran and Harford County veteran-related stories. The site boasts 292+ “likes” which equates to Harford County Veterans and their fellow comrades who follow the news feeds and relay them to others by way of sharing.

**Radio Broadcast, “Harford’s Edge” WAMD**

The Commission was fortunate to be on air twice in 20-minute intervals discussing what the public can do to support the Commission. WAMD boasts 15,000 listeners with stations in Annapolis and Easton. [www.khztv.com](http://www.khztv.com) Discussion was focused on where veterans can get assistance, number of veterans we assist, upcoming events of outreach and information and the upcoming October 7th Veterans Fair to be held in Bel Air MD. The Commission was able to announce changes in legislation to health care, benefits and other veteran-related information.

**Educating ourselves to educate the warfighter today and tomorrow**

**Speakers and lectures and meetings the Commission has hosted or attended:**

Special Guests - the Commission has hosted in the effort to educate ourselves on information vital to our current warfighters, retirees and veterans of all services.

Special offsite meetings with the Maryland State Commissioners: Ms. Carolynn Baker and Mr. Erwin Burtnik in Annapolis.

Special Guest: Mr. Glenn Monrad of Suiting Warriors and his effort to gather professional attire for Vets transitioning out of services or reentering the job market.

Special Guest: Mr. Howard McComas, funerals and funeral services for veterans. Howard K. McComas IV McComas Funeral Home P.A. 1317 Cokesbury Rd. Abingdon, Md. 21009 [410-676-4600](tel:410-676-4600) phone

Special Guest: Mr. Mike Farlow. Survivor Outreach Services, APG. 2503 High Point Road Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD 21005. 410-278-2435. Email: michael.b.farlow.civ@mail.mil

Special Guest Speaker: Ms. Janice Chance, President of Gold Star Mothers. Currently in discussion about Gold Star Mothers Appreciation Day as well as an initiative to construct a Gold Star Memorial at “David Craig Park” Park in Havre de Grace.

Special Guest: Colonel John Haug (ret.) to present to the Commission a presentation on V-LINC prosthetics for veterans and the VA Claims. <https://www.disability.gov/resource/maryland-vlinc-assistive-technology/> (V-LINC)

Special Guest: Mr. Joe Cassilly, State’s Attorney for Harford County and Senator Robert Cassilly discussed the opportunities and segues into JROTC and Veterans Courts. He encouraged the Commission to strive for a veteran’s court system in Harford County.

Special Guest: Madeline Cochran & Susan Fisher of AmeriCorps Mediation. The Harford County Community Mediation Program. 125 N. Main Street Bel Air, MD 21014 P: (410)-638-4807 [www.harfordmediation.org](http://www.harfordmediation.org). Discussed Veteran Mediation Programs of which the Commission was not aware.

Special Guest: Ms. Julia Bacso, PM (Program Manager) for Family and Children's Services Medical Adult Day, Harford County Comrade Project (Operation Support a Vet).

Special Guest: Jim Cooper of Reaching out to “Maryland Heroes on the Water” Jim is part of 32 Heros on the Water chapters, a completely free water kayak adventure for all veterans and even offered to special needs veterans and with disabilities due to war. His email [maryland@heroesonthewater.org](mailto:maryland@heroesonthewater.org); Jim "Coop" Cooper - 410-790-1695

**Special Flag Presentation**: To Honor USAF George Tilghman Johnson (Helen Johnson) with US Flag presentation. George passed March 2016. Mr. Robert Brown donated a folded flag with 3 expended 5.56 carbine shells inside to Mrs. Helen Johnson who was under the belief that her husband was a fallen, unforgotten Airman. The Commission honored George and Helen by official presentation of the folded flag on behalf of a grateful nation and a grateful Harford County.

**More events enabling outreach by the Commission:**

The Harford County Commission on Veterans Affairs conducted a Veterans Information Fair on October 8, 2016 at the Bel Air Armory from 10:30a-1:30p. The Fair was sponsored by County Executive Barry Glassman under the executive leadership of Councilman Capt’n Jim McMahan and Commission Chairman Johnny Boker.

The purpose of the Fair was to provide Harford County Veterans an opportunity to talk to local organizations that provide support to veterans and their families and for organizations to learn more about veterans’ needs. The sign-in roster had 42 people registered, though at one point the in-room count was over 50. There were 22 organizations participating.

2017 Veterans Fair will be October 7 in the Armory.

The Fair will bring even more outreach to all services and information from education to health benefits as well as others for veterans as well as their families. There is expected to be 22 vendors and tables and expectation is 200-300 attendees.

**Future Missions: Items under Action:**

**Toys for Tots:**

The Commission is working with newly promoted Mr. Craig Reeling with the Marine Corps League. The Commission is attempting to help the Marine Reserves Toy for Tots in finding a suitable storage area for next Christmas (2017) toys. We are working to bring this to the attention of the County Administration and a letter of support would follow if needed.

**JROTC**

In direct support with and from Mr. Jeff Brock, the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) Committee Chairman for the Susquehanna Chapter of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA). The MOAA is composed of former and retired officers and warrant officers of the military services in Harford and Cecil counties.

The Commission as well as the JROTC Committee have worked with the Harford County Public School (HCPS) system the last two years to establish the first JROTC unit in Harford County.  On the 9th of May 2016, the School Board approved the school system to submit an application and they are in the process of completing the application.

There are over 240 applications pending, so it may take significant time before HCPS is offered an opportunity to start a unit. Budget shortages and the continuing sequestration budget caps are impediments to starting new units. We remain bright and optimistic that the future holds an opportunity for Harford County.

HCPS is approved and soon to be establishing a unit at Joppatowne High School.

**Near Term Future plans, missions and follow-up actions**

Gold Star Mothers Memorial in Havre de Grace’s Tydings Park (2017)

Independence Day Parade

Veterans Day preparation

Continued outreach, seek out those veterans who need assistance.