

Grand jury finds vets officer 'dedicated'

BY SALLY MORRIS
THE TRINITY JOURNAL

In a recently issued report by the 2008-09 Trinity County grand jury, the county's current Veterans' Services Officer Doug Bue was commended for the work he is doing with local veterans to connect them with services they are entitled to receive, but urged the county to restore the position to full time as soon as budget conditions allow.

Bue indicated there are approximately 1,900 veterans living in Trinity County. His job is to offer them assistance in obtaining benefits such as health care, pensions for indigent veterans over age 65 and service-connected disability compensation.

A previous Trinity County grand jury last investigated the veterans' services office in 2004-05 in response to a complaint. Bue was hired in 2005 and the county increased the position from half time to full time as

recommended by that grand jury. Last August, the county reduced the position to three-quarters time due to budget constraints, and the current grand jury elected to do a follow-up review of the operation.

It found that, for various reasons, an unknown number of veterans in the county live in remote areas, are difficult to identify and do not wish to be part of any government system, including the Veterans Administration.

A veteran of the Korean and Vietnam wars who was interviewed indicated that he was glad to hear there is someone in the county to help veterans find their way through the red tape if they want help, but he would not have used the service had he known about it and he believes there are many others like him who may not be doing as well as he is.

The grand jury report recommends that a greater outreach effort be undertaken to inform potential benefit

Veterans' services office hours

The veterans' services office in the Veterans Memorial Hall in Weaverville is currently open from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Wednesday, from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Thursday and closed on Fridays. The office phone number is 623-3975. Veterans' services officer is Doug Bue.

recipients of the veterans' services that are available. It suggests placing information pamphlets in key locations throughout the county such as libraries, doctors' offices, the county courthouse and local grocery stores.

Another finding in the report is there are no travel funds available to assist veterans without transportation to get to medical appointments at the VA's Redding Outpatient Clinic where an automated system makes it difficult to coordinate people's various appointments on the same day.

The grand jury suggests there may be volunteers willing to drive to Redding on certain days every week and

veterans could schedule their appointments on those days or possibly form a network for carpooling with each other.

Regarding the veterans' service officer's reduction in hours last August, Bue indicated that the cut interferes with his ability to provide quality services, noting that many veterans do not make appointments, preferring to drop in.

The office currently closes at 2:30 p.m. on Thursdays and all day Friday, and Bue said his greatest concern is that state and county budget cuts may result in even less funding for veterans' services.

The grand jury concurs

that a full-time, five-days-a-week veterans' services officer would be desirable, but with the current budget crisis at both the state and county levels, "we realize that the full-time status is probably not possible." It recommends spreading the reduced hours over five days a week with emphasis on the afternoon hours that seem to be preferred.

The veterans' services office is located in the Veterans Memorial Hall in Weaverville.

The grand jury report concludes that the current veterans' services officer appears to be "a dedicated, knowledgeable person who is providing valuable information to the veterans of Trinity County. He is to be commended for acquiring ratings for veterans who deserve to get a service-connected disability. We would like to see his position returned to a full-time status as veterans' services officer in his present location as soon as the county budget allows."

Grand jury praises MCHD progress

BY AMY GITTELSON
THE TRINITY JOURNAL

In the most favorable Trinity County grand jury report involving Trinity Hospital in years, the recently released 2008-09 report on Mountain Communities Healthcare District lists accomplishments and praises MCHD administration.

The report by the grand jury's Health and Human Services Committee paints a much prettier picture of hospital finances than last year's review, but at the same time warns that outside circumstances could mar that picture and stresses the importance of a continued parcel tax to help support the hospital.

Committee members attended MCHD meetings, reviewed reports and interviewed hospital officials. The grand jury also accepted a patient's complaint in October 2008, finding that the complaint was handled in accordance with hospital policy.

The committee found that based on results of the district's 2008 audit, the financial status of MCHD has improved, with the skilled nursing facility, dental and

health clinics all showing profits.

"Vendor debt is still a problem; however, short-term loans have been repaid," the report states. "It should be noted that the Dental Clinic faces an uncertain future. Medi-Cal, which accounts for about two-thirds of current revenues, soon ends for adult dental care."

The grand jury recommends the district continue improving its credit rating and its ability to secure loans due to the uncertainty of state and federal budgets. It also recommends advertising so that people know Medi-Cal will still pay for dental treatment for patients under age 21, and private pay clients are welcome.

The report notes that physician and nursing recruitment has been a continuing problem, and a physician is needed to practice half time in each clinic or half time in one clinic and half time in private practice. The grand jury also notes that the nursing staff is becoming more locally based and so less costly.

The grand jury commends the administration for making certi-

fied nursing assistant classes available, and states that physician recruitment must continue. Also, the report says that skilled Trinity County residents should be encouraged to respond with bids, when possible, for services the district needs.

The grand jury found the contract with Valley Emergency Group has provided reliable, capable physicians at a reasonable rate.

The report outlines a number of positive steps the district has taken recently, including reorganization by consultants of Home Health, on the verge of closing in early 2008 and now financially stable. The second annual Strategic Planning meeting was held in April. A nonprofit Healthcare Foundation was established to support MCHD by accepting

donations and possible grant money. Critical access designation was attained to increase cost reimbursement from Medicare. New equipment has been purchased with funds from grants and donations.

The grand jury recommends an intensive public relations campaign to help the community understand the importance of supporting an ongoing parcel tax.

The report concludes, "Measurable progress has been made in the past year. We commend the administration, board and staff for their diligence and perseverance and for their increased sensitivity to keeping the community fully aware of plans, projects and progress. Due to current state and federal economic uncertainty, continuation of the parcel tax cannot be emphasized enough."

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New defibrillators at Trinity Hospital

Trinity Hospital recently acquired two new state-of-the-art biphasic defibrillators with monies from a Hospital Preparedness Program Grant.

These defibrillators use newer technology and less electrical energy to correct erratic heart rhythms.

All registered nurses have been instructed on how to use these defibrillators which are in use on the Medical/Surgical unit and in the Emergency Room.

Another change at Trinity Hospital is in the Admitting area. When registering for an outpatient test, an armband will be placed on the outpatient's wrist with their name, date of birth and hospital number. This will assure proper identification to the technician doing an X-ray, CT scan or lab work.

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4th of July

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