

VETERANS & SENIORS COMMITTEE
OF THE
SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE

Minutes

A regular meeting of the Veterans & Seniors Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature was held in the Rose Y. Caracappa Legislative Auditorium of the William H. Rogers Legislature Building, 725 Veterans Memorial Highway, Smithtown, New York, on March 11, 2008.

Members Present:

Leg. Steven H. Stern, Chairman
Leg. Jack Eddington, Vice-Chair
Leg. Jon Cooper (not present)
Leg. John M. Kennedy, Jr.
Leg. Edward P. Romaine (not present)

Also In Attendance:

George Nolan, Counsel to the Legislature
Alicia Howard, Clerk's Office
Verna Donnan, Budget Review Office
Deborah Harris, Aide to Legislator Stern
Holly Rhodes-Teague, Director of Office for the Aging
Tom Ronayne, Director of Veterans Service Agency/Human Services Div.
Paul Perillie, Aide to Majority Leader
Debra Alloncius, AME Legislative Director
Slava Vero, SeniorNet @ Family Service League
Eric Vero, SeniorNet @ Family Service League
Roe Oeticker, SeniorNet @ Family Service League
Nick DeFlorio, SeniorNet @ Family Service League
Bill Faulk, Aide to Leg. Romaine
All Other Interested Parties

Minutes Taken By:

Diana Kraus - Court Stenographer

Minutes Transcribed By:

Denise Weaver - Legislative Aide

(THE MEETING COMMENCED AT 1:15 PM)

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Good afternoon everyone. Welcome to the Suffolk County Legislature Committee on Vets and Seniors. Please rise and join us in the Pledge of Allegiance led by our Presiding Officer, Legislator Lindsay.

SALUTATION

I ask everyone to please remain standing and join us in a moment of silence as we keep in our thoughts and prayers our brave men and women fighting for our freedoms overseas.

MOMENT OF SILENCE

Thank you. Welcome everybody. Thank you for being with us today. Actually, I'm going to go in order. So, Tom.

58DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, members, Presiding Officer. Thank you for the invitation to appear before you again today. I've only got -- I imagine there may be some questions following up from our last session, I've only got a couple of items that I'd like to share with you.

The first one is -- well, very much to my surprise with the assistance of Jim McDonough, the new Director of the New York State Veterans -- Division of Veterans Affairs, I got a letter from Jim this morning sharing with me information that the Federal Government will now share with federal, state and local governmental agencies and certain not-for-profits the discharge information for our return veterans.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Very good.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

As you know, we've been struggling with this for a very longtime. As we speak the request to the Department of Defense is being prepared in my office to request the information for our Suffolk County folks. This will now eliminate the need for us to work on that program that we had discussed on the state level with the state doing mailings on our behalf, we'll be able to do that in-house now, which was ultimately the goal that we were hoping to achieve.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

That's great news. Any idea how much time it's going to take for us to get that information?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I do not. I have no idea. It's a fairly technical and specific letter that has to be done to request it. As I said, that letter is being prepared as we speak. Hopefully it will be -- I think only because of what's involved and the numbers of names and the privacy information concern, once the letter has been drafted I'm going to run it through the County Attorney's Office and get a blessing before we actually submit it. So it maybe a week before we get the letter in the mail. I'm hoping it's done today and I'll have it up to the County Attorney's Office tomorrow. That being said, once the letter does go, I don't know what timeline would be -- that we'd be following before we receive it. But the fact that we're even in a position to request it at this point is a big improvement over what we had.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Very good.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Okay. I reported very briefly at the last session that the 142nd Aviation Brigade based out of the Air National Guard facility at Islip's MacArthur Airport, they are going to be deploying. They're going overseas. They're going to take their Black Hawks with them. There is a pre-deployment event that the Family Readiness Group is going to be hosting. My office will be participating. We'll be there to give some informational talks. We possibly will be doing a workshop for the families of those who will be going over. And again, certainly providing information, literature and details about services and programs that are potentially available.

The event is going to be on Saturday, April 5th. I can get you some contact numbers if any of you would like to participate or be in touch. Apparently for security reasons, you will have to be pre-approved for access to secure facilities. So that being said, I'll have an e-mail sent out with the contact name and the contact number to all the committee members and the Presiding Officer's Office should anybody want to contact them.

It certainly not going to be on the scale of what we did for the Fighting 69th. They're looking at it in a very different -- in a very different way. It's going to be more of an informational and educational farewell versus a full blown ceremony. I have some posters here for anybody who would like to post them in their district offices or anywhere else, put them in the back window of your cars. Posters with all of the information on the Veterans Stand Down that we have coming up, it is on -- it will be on Friday, April 11th on the Brentwood campus of the college in the gymnasium, auditorium portion of the Police Academy building. So we're hoping anybody that was not able to visit the last Stand Down that we held last year and witness the successes, please, I think you'll be doing yourself a service by going over and seeing just what takes place at the Stand Down, it's quite impressive.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

The last one was a great success.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Yes.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And what is your plan for distributing these fliers, where are they going, what efforts are going to be made to try and bring in as many people as you can?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Certainly with the veterans service organizations, the VFW's, the AMVETS, the American Legions, we're working with them. We're also working with the members of the County Executive's Veterans Advisory Board to get the information out into the community.

As a part of regular outreach, when we go out we're also working with hospitals, supermarkets. DPW has allowed us to start putting posters up in all of the bus enclosures. We'll be putting two of these placards on each of the 160 odd public transportation buses that we have in Suffolk County. Just a lot of word of mouth, a lot of veterans service organizations and as much in the community work as we're able.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Very good.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Okay. Armed Force's Day, this is the annual ceremony for Armed Force's Day. Invitations will be going in the mail in the next week, one to two weeks for anybody who's looking at a calendar, it will be Saturday, May 17th at the H. Lee Dennison building Armed Forces Plaza. And that will begin at 11:00 a.m. The ceremony will begin.

Some of you may have been aware that when the Fighting 69th deployed when we held the going

away ceremony one of the Officers, Lieutenant {Delapezi}, had requested that I provide to the unit on behalf of the County Executive a Suffolk County flag. The purpose of that was that when they get into Iraq and they take over the FOB or the Forward Operating Base that they'll be running, they would like to fly the Suffolk County flag over the FOB. At such time as they bring the flag down, the plan is that they will retire the flag and return it to us whether they mail it back to us and we receive it and do it that way or if they hold onto it and present it formally when they return; we don't know yet. But that flag has gone out so it's in the mail so to speak. And we look forward to their safe return and certainly to getting the flag back so that we can retire it and put in on display in some appropriate place in the County.

P.O. LINDSAY:

They're going to Afghanistan.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I'm sorry.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Aren't they going to Afghanistan, the Fighting 69th?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

You're correct, yes. Very good.

Okay. We've also had a request from the -- an organization that many of you are familiar with, the Gold Star Parents. There is an annual event that takes place in Arlington, again, once a year to commemorate the Gold Stars. We unfortunately have a growing population of Gold Star families on Long Island in Suffolk County. And one of the concerns was that for any number of reasons, it's not always feasible or practical for these families to be able to travel to Washington for this service.

What they would like to do going forward is on the last Saturday of September, the last week of September is Gold Star week, they would like to hold a similar ceremony, again, at Armed Forces Plaza. I have provided to them the application and request forms that Parks requires or DPW requires to use County property for non-County purposes. I don't imagine they'll have any difficulty with their application process. But once that's approved I look forward to working with them and honoring and respecting their sacrifices by having a service here in Suffolk County.

We have a meeting scheduled with the team from the Veterans Administration and with the representatives from the County Executive's Office to host one more walk through of the Riverhead County Center site for the Community Based Outreach Clinic, which would be the VA clinic that we've all been discussing. That meeting is tentatively scheduled for the week after next. There are a number of people involved. And as schedules have changed, the time and date have changed once or twice. So I'll say that that's tentative. As soon as we have a firm date, we'll get out there and hopefully move forward on that process.

I think that's all I have to report on. I'd be happy to take any questions.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Could I ask you a question?

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Mr. Presiding Officer.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Tom, is that finalized? Are we going to have the Veteran's Clinic in the Riverhead Center? Last time I heard we were talking about different options there.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Over the course of this process, three locations have been considered.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Okay.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

One of them was a set of modular buildings on the campus at the County -- at the Community College in Riverhead. As it turned out because they are modular, they're essentially trailers.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Right.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

We would never be able to obtain a permanent C of O for those trailers. The other factor was that they were not County owned. They were on County property, but they were under lease so there would be an ongoing cost associated with their use.

The second site that was considered was the new expansion that was taking place at Peconic Bay Medical Center.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Right.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

When we met, we met with representatives of the County, representatives of the County Executive's Office, Legislator Romaine was in attendance and obviously the leadership of Peconic Bay Medical Center. Prior to going out there, we had discussed a number of things, square footage, access, parking, the issues that we had discussed on all of the other sites.

One of the things that we explored was and I had gone through Workforce -- Economic Development, Workforce Housing was to get a budget on what prevailing rents were or lease rates in the Riverhead -- in the downtown Riverhead area. At the time of the meeting the rates we were told were between 18 and \$22 a square foot. So using a number of 20 as an average, we attended the meeting certainly in good faith. When I asked Mr. Mitchell, the CEO of Peconic Bay, what the costs associated with our presence in the facility would have been, his response was that we should use \$35 a foot as a number. Obviously that was considerably more than what we were told would be the prevailing rate.

The other problem with Peconic was that although they were building a very lovely extension to the facility, that \$35 a foot essentially bought us a shell. We still have to build a clinic. So the cost of the construction would have been redundant. We would have paid rent and then had to build out a space. And when you look at those numbers over a period of time, we would have hit whatever the construction cost number would have been. And then we're spending money that we never would have had to have spend anyway on an annual basis.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Yeah, the two advantages as I recall, or was portrayed, to going to the Peconic facility, number one, is you're in a hospital and you have the peripheral services of a hospital. But number two, that it would be more economic for us because the number we had from DPW to build out the suite in the Riverhead County Center was a little bit pricey. But if you're telling us that the Peconic Bay's prices changed and I guess it's more economic for us to keep it in the Riverhead Center.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

The number that we're using now with DPW, I believe, is 1.2 million for the build out of the space. That number has been discussed for a while. It's a little bit tough to say what the number is going to be because we don't have a final design. So what we did is we agreed with VA that we would

back into that number. That's the money that we believe we can allocate to the project. That being said we'll build \$1.2 million worth of space.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Will we get reimbursed from VA for that?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

The VA is not allowed to reimburse for the Community Based Outreach Clinics.

If I could just expand on one of the statements that you had made about Peconic, the fact that we would have had ancillary services available by being in a hospital, was actually perceived by the VA as a negative.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Really.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

They were going to -- well, they intend to have a primary care and mental health facility with basic services. VA feels that by going into another medical facility to -- and this was one of the selling points of the hospital was that you can use our MRI facilities, you can use our X-ray suites, you can -- VA felt that what they were doing now was putting themselves in competition with themselves by offering services in Riverhead that are available in Northport. So what they would be doing by exposing the veterans to the services at Peconic is potentially drawing away from their own patient base.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Okay. But it's more convenient for the veteran, of course, that they don't have to go all the way into Northport for an X-ray.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Well the hope is that for the majority of services the Community Based Clinic would be adequate for their needs. Should they need obviously inpatient, certain services they would have to continue to travel into Northport. But for the majority of services the VA is comfortable that they'll be able to offer those services at the clinic.

The other thing about the clinic and this is regarded as where it lands in Riverhead is we've got population of veterans on both forks right now who really are not being served. So getting this thing out there and getting out there as quickly as possible is absolutely going to enhance the services that we're providing to our veterans and that's the ultimate goal.

P.O. LINDSAY:

And it's been a problem for sometime.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Yeah.

P.O. LINDSAY:

It's a problem we've wrestled with. And I think at one point in time though we were hoping to get some help from some of our Congressman in terms of some grant money for the build out, you know. That's -- I guess that isn't --

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I know there is one grant that I'm being told is secure is a Dormitory Authority grant from the State of New York for a portion of the costs. I'm not sure if it's 500 or 600,000, but I'm told that that grant will be forthcoming for the project. So we've already begun to offset the exposure to the County for the construction.

P.O. LINDSAY:

And then once we get it built, the VA will operate it; won't be any costs to us.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

The cost to us will be -- we're going to pay for the lights and taking out the trash.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Yeah.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

They will furnish it, they will staff it, they will operate it. And we'll have -- it's really going to be turn cable; put them in there and we step back and they run their own thing.

P.O. LINDSAY:

No, I like the idea, support the whole thing. I just would like to see if we could recoup some more of the money, that's all.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Well, I know the questions are being asked. If there's a way to recoup it and it may be something that we have to spend it before we can recover it.

The other thing just to expand briefly on the statement about enhancing services to the east end on both forks is not only will we have a facility, but presently DAV who provides the lion's share of the transportation to and from the Northport VA, they only go as far as Riverhead.

P.O. LINDSAY:

I know.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

They can't service east of there.

P.O. LINDSAY:

I know.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

So if we have a clinic operating in Riverhead, VA intends to expand their transportation network and base another hub out of Riverhead to serve both forks.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Yeah. The other objection at the time, I think, Legislator Romaine raised was about the clinic was scheduled to be on the second floor and he thought it would be problematic as far as, you know, the vets getting to the second floor accessibility.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

We have all discussed this. And DPW is in agreement that the construction of this space, the build out of the space in question, which is the methadone clinic on the -- I guess it would be the northeast portion of the second floor of the building will have an elevator. There'll be a small passenger cab installed serving that space as a part of the build out and it can absolutely be done within that budget.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Okay.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Eddington.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Yeah, I just wanted to add onto what Bill was asking. The elevator now, when I heard that at the meeting, I think Legislator Kennedy and Romaine both mentioned that that's a long distance. Or are we talking about our elevator at the other end?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

A separate elevator that would serve the VA clinic.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

And that would be --

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

The elevator that's being installed in the lobby is a part of the base job for the County Center.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Right.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

This would be a second elevator.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Oh, okay. Okay, great. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Kennedy.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Thank you, Mr. Chair. And Tom, I'm thrilled to hear that the decision making is moving to actually go ahead and install the elevator right there proximate to the space. However, have you spoken to the County architects or -- because you know that this plan to do the eastern complex is well underway at this point. And so what we're talking about is probably going to be a change of the existing plans that have been adopted and are underway. In other words, from what you're hearing on your side, folks are saying, that's great. Is Gil Anderson and Tom Laguardia and Tedd Godek and all those folks saying can be done, will be done and here's the amended plans?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Gil and Ted are both very much in the loop. Tom Laguardia participates in every meeting and attends every walk through.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Fine, fine.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Gerry Anderus --

LEG. KENNEDY:

Because those are the guys that have to go ahead and actually draw the line, do the line work, get approvals and everything. As long as they're saying okay, then maybe it'll happen.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

In fact, just to expand on this so that I want to be perfectly clear to everybody the architectural services actually had become an issue. It was agreed early on in the process that because VA was going to ultimately be the end user of the space, it made more sense for VA to do the architectural

design. You know, one of the -- I've come to say that, you know, if we use County vaults to do this, maybe a County countertop is 41 inches, maybe a federal countertop is 43 inches. Let the end user be the one to make the determination on paper of what we're actually going to build.

VA accepted that burden initially. They came back to us and said that because VA does not employ architects, it was going to be problematic for them to go out and hire an architect firm, do the design and so forth. And the agreement that was reached, and Gil Anderson and Tom Laguardia -- I know Tom was involved and I shouldn't say Gil, was that the architect of record who was working on County Center now, will be engaged to provide the architectural services working in concert with the VA engineering staff and users. The cost associated with the architectural services will be paid out of that 1.2.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Okay. As long as they're on board those were the guys that did, you know, iteration after iteration of the original line work, as long as they're saying it's okay, then it'll happen. Thanks.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Very good, all right. Tom, thanks.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Holly.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Tom's seat is nice and warm. You had him there a long time.

I just wanted to talk a little bit about the Nutrition Program mainly because we have the vehicles up for -- I guess a vote to release funds for them. You know, the Nutrition Programs, we contract with the ten towns and a number of non-profits and we provide about 600 and, I don't know, a little over 600,000 meals a year with the program. And the vehicles are really the lifeblood of the program.

The way we fund the program is we provide a unit cost to each of the contractors for the meal, for services that are provided around the meal, you know, socialization, things like that. But the vehicles really -- the way they get vehicles are through the Capital Fund and we've a -- we have a fleet of approximately of 60 vehicles that the County has purchased over the years. And we replace those vehicles approximately every ten years. It really goes based on the mileage and on the wear and tear of the vehicle and what they tell us the condition of the vehicles are.

So this year we're asking that funds be released for seven vehicles to be purchased. We took the seven vehicles that we thought were probably in the worst shape to, you know, switch over. The vehicles -- we used to use 15 passenger vans. We are now using 14 passenger transit buses because they're safer, they're easier for the seniors to get into when they're center isle vehicles. So the cost of the vehicles are more than they used to be, but they are a better vehicle for the seniors.

So I was just coming to ask your support to release the funds so we could keep the fleet moving because without them, you know, the Nutrition Program would not be able to exist. They provide the transportation to the seniors to get to the sites and also we use the vehicles to transport the meals to those who are homebound. So anything you can do to keep that moving, we'd appreciate it. Any questions.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Very good. Mr. Presiding Officer.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Holly, what is the life of one of these vehicles? How long do you get out of it?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Yeah, we just started with the transit buses about three or four years ago. So I think they're more commercial than the 15 passengers. So I'm hoping we get more years out of them. But at this point I really can't tell you. We use -- some of the vehicles we've had at the fleet --

P.O. LINDSAY:

Well, the fleet we're retiring now, how old are they?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Some of them are 10 to 12 years old. Some of them are -- sometimes you have the lemons, you know, the ones that come in and they just fix them and fix them and fix them. And the problem is the non-profits, they don't really have budget lines for huge vehicle repairs. So, you know, we try to keep them going as long as we can, but every once in a while you'll see a vehicle that has a low mileage, but it's just a terrible vehicle.

P.O. LINDSAY:

It's shot.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

So we will replace them if we have to. And then the vehicles come back to us and they go out on auction from the County. But we try to keep the fleet about the same. It's about 60 vehicles right now, but they're tough to, you know, they get a lot of wear and tear, you know, they're all over the place. Anything else?

P.O. LINDSAY:

No.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

All right, thanks so much.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Holly, thanks. Okay. Slava.

MS. VERO:

Thank you very much.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Slava, welcome.

MS. VERO:

Thank you. My name is -- can you hear me? My name is Slava Vero, I'm the Co-Coordinator of SeniorNet -- can you hear me now? No?

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Yes.

MS. VERO:

I'm the -- my name is Slava Vero, and I'm the Co-coordinator of SeniorNet at Family Service League. I would also like to introduce for a second, my -- some of the volunteers who work with me in SeniorNet and one of them is Roe Oeticker, Eric Vero and Nick DeFlorio. And I would like to mention also listening to the veterans affair that both Nick and Eric are veterans of Second World War I. Eric is a veteran of the Battle of the Bulge and Nick is a Philippine survivor. And he -- Nick also has a nephew who is serving in Iraq right now as a physician.

After my introduction I would like to introduce now the SeniorNet and just tell you a little bit about it. And I'll start actually with the mission. The mission of SeniorNet is to build a computer -- a community of computer using seniors in order to give older adults access to modern technology. SeniorNet was -- is part of a national and international organization, which was founded in 1986 and has over 200 learning centers. Overtime SeniorNet has extended their mission, especially our center at Family Service League to -- from the original mission by including not only education of seniors, but also protection of the environment by recycling computers as well as community outreach.

We are proud to be the first SeniorNet on Long Island. And our Learning Center was developed in partnership with Family Service League, which is a well known and respected 82 year-old human resource agency in Suffolk County. We serve residents from Huntington all the way to the east end of Long Island.

SeniorNet in Huntington was started in the 1999 by a group of volunteers under the leadership of Don Weidman. It's staffed entirely by volunteers who come from all walks of life. They are retired engineers, they are professionals and volunteers from the medical and legal field, executives, teachers and many more.

The organization is divided into six executive committees: Lab Management, Education, Finance, Membership, Development and Volunteer Services. We have an active volunteer staff of 91 people who act as -- in all kinds of areas.

Now I would just like to mention how education impacts our SeniorNet -- our senior population. Seniors have diverse motivations with respect to learning how to use computers. Some want to learn how to write letters and notes, some want to learn how to take digital pictures and use computers to help others. Some especially those who are infirm and homebound need computers as a link to the outside world. Last but not least, many seniors are forced to return to work and they need additional skills which I alluded to before.

The education of a growing SeniorNet senior citizen group is very important to keep seniors self sufficient. Long Island has seen a large increase of senior population over the last few years and the next ten years is predicted to increase even much more.

To get to the next step is our protection of the environment. We have a KeySpan/Senior Net computer refurbishing project. The computer refurbishing project was started in 2001. The objective is to protect the environment by refurbishing old computers for further use. The computers instead of being discarded are being recycled and being given an additional life. And it provides not-for-profit organizations access to computers. Without the generous donations of refurbished computers a long list of organizations will not have the skills.

I would like at this time to mention some of the organizations, which have benefited from this donation. And some of them are -- if I can find them -- yeah, the Long Island Council of Churches, Eastern Farm Workers of Bellport, Northport Presbyterian Church, West Sayville Christian School, Head Start of Suffolk County, Northport American Legion at the VA Hospital and many more.

We do a lot of community outreach. We have an in-house refurbishing project. And those computers are being donated to the community to people who are not able to afford a computer.

The other project, we have an Intergenerational Project. We work with high school students who come in during the summer and they work as interns. They work with -- on our website. They work with our teachers and coaches and maintain the computer program. It makes a -- really bridges the generation gap. The learning process passes know-how from grandchildren to grandparents. We have now a generation of grandparents who know almost as much as their grandchildren about computers. The high school students so far have come from Northport High School and Harborfields High School.

We have classes -- our main education project is classes and seminars. Since the inception in 1999 and until December 2007, we have conducted over 400 classes and also taught about 4400 students; senior students. The courses are basic computer skills. They are Basic Introduction to Computer, Introduction to Windows XP and Vista, internet and E-mail, Introduction to Graphics, Word-Processing, Introduction to Digital Camera and advanced courses and music and art, eBay, Genealogy, Excel, Computer Hardware. And one of the very important ones is computer security and viruses so people are not afraid to either shop on-line or work basically on-line. And upon request we have more classes added and workshops.

In 2007 alone we have conducted 49 classes, which were attended by 507 students. We also provided a number of scholarships for underserved seniors as well as we donated refurbished computers to students who could not afford to buy. So in other words, if one of our students cannot buy a computer, we'll definitely provide them with one.

I'd like to talk a little bit about the demographics, where our students come from. The students' teacher and coaches as well as all volunteers involved in the daily operation of the Learning Center are all Long Island residents from eastern boarder of Nassau County to the eastern part of Long Island. 97 percent come from Suffolk County. The majority of seniors are from Huntington Township, Babylon Township and Smithtown Township. Only three percent come from Nassau, including a few from Queens. The number of seniors attending from far away is a testimony of the excellent reputation SeniorNet at Family Service League has.

And the major accomplishments, we have received a number of awards. In 2001 the New York State Coalition for the Aging has named SeniorNet at Family Service League in Huntington the first place achievement award in the category of "Seniors and Technology." The purpose of the achievement award program is they honor outstanding, innovative and creative senior services that have long-range impacts on senior citizens and/or the community.

SeniorNet volunteers have also been honored by the Huntington Chamber of Commerce in 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005. SeniorNet volunteers were also featured in Newsday under "The Everyday Hero" page. And in 2007 the crowning prize, SeniorNet at Family Service League was named the number one center in the USA and the world and was the recipient of 2007 "Chairman Award of Excellence." This competing with 200 other centers in the United States and the world like in Japan, in Malaysia, in Sweden and Germany.

How we reach our community. We have a Roadrunners event. We go out to different experts and promote SeniorNet so people will understand more what SeniorNet is giving to the community. Some of the places we've been is to the Bridgehampton Classics, the Huntington Fall Festival, the 50 Plus Senior Expo, Suffolk County Office for the Aging, Expo Summer -- the Expo Summer Picnic, and also we have annual meeting where we present our SeniorNet Program.

We have a newsletter, an Educator Forum, which goes to all our students and our volunteers. And the Educator Forum is more of a technical paper. We have the Speakers Bureau. And the student recruitment is done every three months through an open house where people are -- potential students are introduced to the program to our demonstration in the lab. And we are proud to introduce our newly refurbished lab in 2007 thanks to a grant from the Town Board of Huntington. We refurbished with 30 state-of-the-art computers.

On April 4th we are going to have the grand opening. And we'd like to invite all of you to attend. It's from 9:30 to 11:30 at the Family Service League building. We provided you with some folders and in the folder you are going to find an invitation also and we'd really like (sic).

As a result of SeniorNet at Family Service League, we'll be the first Learning Center to move to a full implementation of the Vista Program. The success of SeniorNet is attributed to the dedication of the many hours our volunteers spend each day and each month to provide a better service to our community.

With SeniorNet we like to summarize the benefits as well as the need of this very important senior program. The benefits, as I mentioned before, are the education of a senior population by teaching the basic operation of computers, provide seniors with tools to enter the 21st century and provide the seniors with the know-how to access communication and account information by computer. The refurbishing project by recycling all the old computers and to provide not-for-profit organizations with computers. Some of the beneficiary I mentioned before. And also our Intergenerational Program, I would like to mention again because our students are really eager to join us this summer again.

One of the main benefits of SeniorNet education in making seniors more independent, a computer knowledgeable senior uses fewer public services, makes fewer calls to Social Service agency, fewer trips to banks and agencies. It helps homebound seniors to keep in touch therefore unburdening your offices with requests and concerns and keeping answers and resolved on-line instead of taking up too much of your staff time.

Now I'm going to come to the needs of SeniorNet. SeniorNet wants the Legislature to be aware of the service and contribution we provide to seniors in Suffolk County. To that end, we'll respectfully request your support in providing funds to continue expanding our mission. Since all our staff is volunteer, no money is spent on salary but we need to continuously upgrade our equipment, software, publications like newsletters and the forum. We could use a new projector, scanners, new printers and other equipment. This is where all our funds go to.

And I'd like you to please consider SeniorNet at Family Service League in your next budget. We need your support. And with a large increase of a senior population we have to make sure that they stay independent and informed.

I would like to thank you for the time and we'll provide additional information in the folder. If you have questions, all four of us will be very happy to answer the questions.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Very good. And first of all thank you and everybody else who is here with us today and congratulations on the many honors --

MS. VERO:

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

-- that the program has received.

MS. VERO:

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

I love the idea of the Intergenerational Program and what a great example of our younger students being able to work with seniors within the community and vice versa.

Question for you, how many students have the opportunity to participate in the program?

MS. VERO:

We can probably use, would you say, one a day? One a session we could have. We have two sessions everyday, morning and afternoon. The sessions are from 9:30 to twelve and from 1:00 to 3:30 and they are five days a week. So we can probably use one for each or one for two sessions if they could stay the day. Or if they can come only once a week, we can do it once a week. It depends on their skills, their time. We have a little bit of problem with some of the high school students' transportation. They don't have -- last year one of the students was brought over by his

grandfather. We don't always have grandfathers who are available for transportation. That may be one of our -- like we could use a scholarship for the students to use for transportation. We definitely plan to continue the program.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And the program serves seniors throughout all of Suffolk County.

MS. VERO:

Absolutely, absolutely.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

But you had mentioned the fact that the students that participate are primarily from the northern Huntington area. I guess my question is what if any efforts are made to reach out to other school districts, other areas throughout Suffolk County to give other students the opportunity to come in and participate?

MS. VERO:

We haven't done anything because until now the students have come to us and by word of mouth. We had gone last -- last year, I think last May, we participated in the Farmingdale College volunteer training. And we got a lot of names from throughout Suffolk County and probably our volunteer director is going to try to contact some of the students. We can send flyers to high schools and inviting them. I'm not sure that transportation wouldn't be a problem for some of the high school students who don't have -- don't drive yet. That's probably one of the limitations.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

All right, understood. Anybody? Anybody?

MS. VERO:

Any more questions?

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Slava, thanks so much.

MS. VERO:

Okay. Thank you for the opportunity.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Thanks so much for being with us today.

MS. VERO:

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

We'll see you soon.

Okay we'll go to our agenda. We have two items on our agenda today.

INTRODUCTORY RESOLUTIONS

The first one is **IR 1113, Adopting a Local Law Refining Veterans Property Tax Exemption Afforded to Cold War Veterans. (Co. Exec. Levy)** I'll make a motion to approve.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Second.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Second by Vice-Chairman Eddington. Anybody on the motion? Just for the record this is a change. New York State Legislature had changed their Cold War veterans' legislation so this is really us amending it to keep up with the change at New York State level. All in favor? Opposed? Any abstentions? Okay. **1113 is approved. (VOTE: 3-0-0-2 Not Present: Legislator Cooper, Legislator Romaine)**

IR 1207, Appropriating funds in connection with the purchase and replacement of nutrition vehicles for the Office for the Aging. (CP1749) (Co. Exec. Levy) I'll make a motion to approve.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Second.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Second by Vice-Chairman Eddington.

LEG. KENNEDY:

On the motion.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

On the motion, Legislator Kennedy.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Verna, this is all federal funding, is this pass-through?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

This is County funding.

LEG. KENNEDY:

This is all County funding.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

It's all County funded.

LEG. KENNEDY:

352,000.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

It's Capital funds.

MS. KRAUS:

I can't hear you.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

The funds that are used for the -- it's a Capital Project. It's 100% County funding for the vehicles.

LEG. KENNEDY:

So do we get other program -- other vehicles? We don't?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

We have purchased very few vehicles under 3B or under the state funds in years. There just hasn't been funding to do that.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Okay, all right. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Okay. All in favor? Opposed? Abstention? **IR 1207 is approved. (VOTE: 3-0-0-2 Not Present: Legislator Cooper, Legislator Romaine)**

Anybody else? Anybody else? Okay. Motion to adjourn.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Second.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Second by the Vice-Chairman. We are adjourned. Thank you.

**(THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 2:15 PM)
{ } DENOTES SPELLED PHONETICALLY**