

BVS POC REPORT - CEMETERIES

- Date of Report: September 21, 2023
- BVS POC(s): John Lesinski, Victor Angry
- Service Area/Program: Cemeteries
- DVS Director/Program Manager: Michael Henshaw
- Mission of service area/program (i.e. what does it do?): Provide dignified final resting places in places of honor in perpetuity for Virginia's veterans, eligible family members, and eligible members of the Guard and Reserve and their dependents.
- Who does the service area/program serve (i.e. who are the customers)?
 - Veterans, eligible dependents, eligible members of the Guard and Reserve and their dependents;
 - The veteran community and veterans service organizations;
 - Volunteers and members of the local community; and
 - All Virginians.
- What are the service line's primary objectives?
 - To ensure that cemeteries are maintained as National Shrines;
 - That there is sufficient burial space by anticipating future burial rates; and
 - To treat each customer with compassion, dignity, and respect.
- What are the key results that support the objective(s)?
 - Achieving scores of 97 or higher on the triennial VA inspection and be designated as a National Shrine;
 - Achieve an overall customer satisfaction rate of 97% or higher on the VA's annual Survey of Customer Satisfaction; and
 - Perform extensive, targeted outreach to ensure that veterans and their families are aware of their burial benefits.
- What specific objectives has the service line established and what progress has the service line/program made toward achieving the objective(s).
 - Creating a diverse workforce comprised of at least 20% veterans. Currently Cemeteries are at 13.5% veterans; and
 - Establish in-house honor guard units at Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery and the Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery (Amelia has a local VSO to provide honors). Dedication dates for both honor guards is estimated to be late 2023/early 2024.
- What are some operational highlights from the past year?
 - Amelia cemetery – \$2.3 million federal grant to add 1,080 additional columbaria niches. Expected completion November 2023;
 - Dublin cemetery – \$1.2 million federal grant to add additional 960 columbaria niches. Expected completion December 2023;

- Suffolk cemetery – \$7.1 million federal grant to add additional 4,800 columbaria niches, 2nd committal shelter, and funeral cortege lane. Design complete. Construction will begin late 2023;
 - Virginia General Assembly approved legislation during 2023 session to waive the Spouse/Dependent burial fee (currently \$400) and the Guard/Reserve burial fee (currently \$1,700 - \$2,000), contingent on appropriated funding; and
 - Budget bill passed by General Assembly (2023 Special Session I) and signed by Governor on 09/14 includes \$350,000 General Fund for FY24 that will allow DVS to waive the Spouse/Dependent and Guard/Reserve burials fees.
- What type of outreach did the service line conduct and what are the results?
 - Outreach to the veterans community, veterans service organizations, civic groups, church groups, funeral homes, etc.
 - DVS usually receives several completed “pre-applications” after each outreach event.
 - What, if any, new initiatives / innovative solutions were launched during the past year?
 - Roof-mounted sound systems play patriotic and memorial songs, “To the Colors,” “Retreat,” and other songs/tunes throughout the day.
 - What are the biggest challenges facing the service area / program at present?
 - Lack of columbaria niches – Amelia is currently out of niches, and Suffolk will be depleted by years end. Construction projects underway will rectify that;
 - Road surfaces at Amelia are at/past the end of useful life – cracking, low spots, etc. from 25+ years of use, construction traffic, thousands of visitors a year, etc. Repair and repaving needed.
 - How does delivering the service/program help Virginia’s veterans?
 - Provides an honored and dignified final resting place for those who served our Nation.
 - By helping the veteran, how does it help the Commonwealth?
 - Demonstrates the Commonwealth’s perpetual commitment to honoring those who served.
 - What strategic opportunities are there for the future?
 - The Suffolk cemetery will run out of available in-ground burial spaces (pre-placed outer burial receptacles) in less than four years, and columbaria niches shortly after that. DVS will need to apply for federal grant funding by next summer to “get in line” for federal funding for phased expansion;
 - The Suffolk cemetery will run out of room for future phase expansion in approximately 20 years at projected burial rates. There is land adjacent to the cemetery that may be available for purchase in the next year or so, especially before it if rezoned for commercial and/or residential development.
 - What else do you want the Board to know about this service area?
 - October 19: ceremony at the Suffolk Cemetery to inter the remains of 21 veterans and 1 spouse from the State Anatomical Program;
 - December 16: wreath ceremonies at all three cemeteries.