

Southwest Montana Veterans Home Update #93

By Mike Lawson

Greetings once again to you, the Veterans/Counties/Communities of SW MT, who are the chief organizers and supporters of the SW MT Veteran's Home. Lots of Veteran's happenings that went on last week and this week. The big event last week was the VA coming to town and vaccinating 250 plus veterans at the American Legion Hall in Butte. This was primarily for veterans in the 75-year-old and above group that were in the VA Health Care System. We had Veterans come from about an 80-mile radius of Butte to be Vaccinated. Many of the Vaccine Vials had an extra dose in them, so I was on the phone calling veterans to come get a shot, even though they were younger than 75. Everyone who got the shot are scheduled to come back to get their second shot on March 24th. The Vaccination Plan, according to Bruce Knutson, who is the VA State Covid Coordinator, is to keep coming back to give vaccinations until all the veterans in the VA Health Care System, in SW MT are vaccinated. If you're a veteran who is not in the VA Health Care system, please see a Veteran's Representative and get signed up. We have a very good one who is located in the Armory across from Builder's First Choice Building Center here in Butte. We call him Gunny Mo, as he is a retired Marine Gunnery Sgt. He is a bulldog in helping veterans get signed up and get help in whatever is needed concerning the VA. His real name is Saajid Muhammad, and he is a great man who loves helping veterans. (Wrk Ph# 533-0910) Tell him Mike sent you and he'll have a good laugh.

Our Vet Home Community Center/Cottage #1 is staffed by Eduro's personnel and they're chomping at the bit for the first veteran residents to arrive. The issue holding the occupancy from happening is at the state's highest levels. Both of our Congressional Senator representatives have talked to the different Montana State Department's personnel who are involved, trying to get answers in getting this "Occupation Issue" resolved. These Senator Reps indicated that each of our Senators will write a letter to Governor Gianforte, to see if he can make things happen so the first veterans can be admitted. This should have happened two months ago. Frustrating to say the least. The question is, is this Politics as usual at the expense of the Veterans?

Our Vet Home is experiencing some delays due to some of the sub-contractors pulling their workers off the site to work on other jobs that they have a contract for. They might only pull them off for a week or so, but it really puts the finish time schedule for our Vet Home behind. This happens in many places across the country for the simple reason that the pool of **Skilled Craft Workers** is getting smaller and smaller. Many of these craftsmen/craftswomen are older and getting ready for retirement, without anyone to replace them. The **prime culprit is our education system**, whose main focus is steering students into college. If we had a system like Europe, who test students as to what vocation they're best suited for and steer/provide them the education for that targeted vocation through a partnership between school/business/union apprenticeship programs, that would benefit all. These partners would all fall under the umbrella of the **Local/State/Federal Educational System**, thus helping alleviate the nation-wide shortage of skilled craftsmen/craftswomen. These trained/skilled folks make great money with good benefits and are on par with most college degree workers. Our country has had to go beyond our borders to get skilled workers from other countries to fill this shortage, especially from Mexico. I've been part of both sides, in having gone through a Boilermaker Construction Apprenticeship and working as a Construction Boilermaker for 20 years, then getting hurt and going back to college to become a High School Shop/History teacher. One side is no better or worse than the other, and each has a positive place in our society. Both types of education

complement each other. Having been a teacher, I advised parents to not force their kids to go to college if their aptitude was in wanting to work in the trades. It could be a great waste of time and money for them. On the other hand, if their child's aptitude is college and they have a dream of being in a position that requires a college degree, then that's the direction to go. They might one day want a house to be built and be glad their buddy decided to be a carpenter and have him build it.

Again, Mike Ascheman and John Kotka brought me up to date as to the forward moving progress of this week and last. I value their input more than one can know. Liaison Mark Gollinger and I did our weekly walk-through. We visited with the different workers who gave valuable input as to what they were doing work wise, that is bringing this Vet Home closer to being completed.

Construction Updates:

Cottage #1: **Complete Communications**, were hooking up all the Data Control to the Community Center.

Cottage #2: Interior: The Plumbers completely finished their trim-out and moved to Cottage #4. The Floor Layers were off the job for a week but are back this week. They are expected to have all the flooring completed this week. The company **HEISCO** hooked up all the Nursing Call Station's data hook-ups. These go into each resident room by their bed and in the bathroom, which enables the resident veteran to call the nurse for help if need be. The Carpenters did some finishing of FF&E dispenser installation, hooked up the spa hoses for the soap/disinfectant, anchored the spa down, pushed all the beds into the resident rooms, finished rehanging doors after the floors were completely laid. The painters have touch-up painting left to do. Once the carpet is completely laid, the cleaners will do a final cleaning.

Cottage #3 Interior: Carpenters anchored down the spa, hooked up the spa soap/disinfectant hoses, adjusted spa wheelchair. **HEISCO** hooked up all the Nursing Call Stations, data hook-ups, going into the resident rooms and bathrooms. Plumbers are completely done. Cleaners are scheduled to do a final clean-up this week.

Cottage #4 Interior: Plumbers are running the gas-line piping from the outside of the building to the two inside boilers. They're also hooking up the zone valves in the mechanical room. The Carpenters were busy in the East Wing of this Cottage, building window/door jambs and trimming them out. With the tape/painting close to being done in the west wing, the Carpenters will move into that area and do the same trim-out work there. **HEISCO** is running the low-voltage Nursing-Station wiring to all the resident rooms. The Tile-Layers were pulled off this job to work on another off-site job. They are supposed to be back once all the resident rooms are finished with the painting and carpenter trim-out. Another example of not enough skilled workers in the labor pool.

Cottage #5 Interior: The Insulators have everything insulated, except for the sound-bat insulation on the one side of the sheet-rocked interior walls. Once these open sides are insulated the sheet-rockers will sheetrock those open sides, making these walls complete. The Sheet-Rockers are making good progress and have a good, few weeks left. The Tapers have started to tape/mud but have a lot to do. The Sheetmetal guys are installing Air Exchangers and running ductwork into all the Resident Rooms. The Plumbers are running domestic water lines into all the Resident Bathrooms. The Pipe Fitters for the Fire Suppressant System are continuing to run their piping for the overhead sprinkle-head installation.

Exterior: The Siders are completely finished. There is a change-order concerning heat-tape for the gutters on all the Cottages. This will help prevent ice build-up that could do damage to the roofs and gutters. Not sure when that work will be done.

Electrical Vault Building: The Carpenters completely sheet-rocked this small building. The Insulators blew insulation into the attic.

Receiving/Maintenance Building: The Tapers/Painters completely taped/textured/painted this building. The Plumbers/Electricians should be in this building this week, to do their trim-out work.

(Note: Notice that no electrician work was done this week. This was due to being pulled off this job to work on another off-site job, the Contractor had a bid he was doing. The labor pool for the Electricians are in need of more Skilled Journeyman Electricians. This, again, is the direction our Educational System needs to be focused on. The wage income/benefit package is incredible, and the need is without question there).

We will have had our SW MT Veteran's Home Foundation Meeting on Monday of this week. Everyone is invited who would like to be part of our Foundation, whose sole purpose is the helping of our Resident Veterans. This is always on the first Monday of the month.

We are all looking forward to spring and hopefully seeing our Veterans living in the Cottages, that make up our SW MT Veteran's Home. We must never lose hope. With that said, I'll close for now. Until next time.