

Minutes
Air Force Public Affairs Association
Board of Directors Meeting
Tampa, Florida
Thursday, October 26, 2023

Call to Order: President John Dorrian, on behalf of Chairman Brett Ashworth, called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. EDT.

Roll Call: Secretary Carla Sylvester called the roll. A quorum was present.

Board Members Present: President John Dorrian, Vice President Eric Schnaible, Treasurer Phil Ratliff, Secretary Carla Sylvester, Julie Briggs, Dick Cole, Jim McGuire, Chuck Merlo, Perry Nouis.

Board Members Absent: Chairman Brett Ashworth, Col Allen Herritage, Mike Paoli.

Others Attending: Judy Bivens, Jay DeFrank, Art Forster, Clem Gaines, John Gura, Maryellen "M.J." Jadick, Johnnie "J.B." Kump, Ed Memi, Christine Queen, David Smith.

Approval of Board Meeting Minutes: Jim McGuire moved to approve the minutes of the Oct. 13 special meeting. Julie Briggs seconded, and the motion passed.

Financial Report: Treasurer Phil Ratliff reported no significant changes since the last board meeting. He's working on taxes and end-of-year financials.

1. Endowment Fund: Phil reported our balance remains around \$530,000.
2. Annual Meeting: Phil warned this may turn out to be our most expensive annual meeting to date. For example, our lunch at Macdill AFB cost \$63 per person. The on-base conference center, operated by a contractor, charges an additional 27% in fees in addition to the cost of the meal. The banquet at the hotel is actually less than the luncheon on base. Phil has paid some of the bills for the annual meeting; a positive note is we haven't had to pay sales tax because we're tax exempt in Florida. Jim McGuire asked how long we've kept the registration cost to members the same. Phil replied it has been \$200 for at least five meeting years, and so we probably need to look at raising the registration fee. To cover the total cost with registration fees would be too expensive for attendees, but we can offset it a bit.
3. Other Expenses: Other recent expenses include costs for the membership committee and the Dalton Scholarship.
4. Fundraising: Phil announced we have new challenge coins with the new organization name available for \$10 each. He also explained the Centurion Fund opportunity. For a \$100 donation, members are entered into a drawing to have their room expenses covered. For every \$1,000 donated, we have a drawing for one room reimbursement for three nights. Phil added that the endowment fund was created with two purposes. The first is to fund normal operations of the association in perpetuity, with a goal of a \$300,000 balance, which we have exceeded greatly. The other was to help offset expenses for annual meetings. Since then, we've added other expenses, including the Dalton Scholarships and the Hall of Fame. Phil noted another expense, the Best of the Best Award, is funded by Lockheed Martin, which donates \$5,000 to cover the annual meeting hotel and travel expenses for the award recipient and a guest, and an award of \$1,000. It also helps cover the cocktail party Saturday sponsored by Lockheed Martin.

5. Donations: Phil noted that we used to solicit corporate donations, which accounted for much of the seed money for the endowment fund. Jim Hart played a large role in bringing in those donations. Phil said at one time as many as nine companies were contributing, but over time that has fallen to just one, Lockheed Martin, and that's because Ron Rand institutionalized it. We already have the funds from them for next year. Phil said with our new name and structure, corporations that might have been reluctant to donate to alumni organizations might now be more willing. Chuck Merlo suggested that corporate sponsorship might be a natural fit for the Dalton Scholarship. Phil replied that we actually have an anonymous donor for the Dalton Scholarship. In addition, the fund receives occasional donations from other sources. For example, when Doug Kennett passed away shortly before this annual meeting, Eileen donated his registration fees to the Dalton Scholarship fund.

Committee Reports

A. **Annual Meeting**: Perry Nouis was delayed in joining the meeting; Phil Ratliff reported in his absence.

1. Tampa Meeting: Phil emphasized all attendees need current IDs to enter MacDill AFB Friday. P.J. Crowley's presentation Saturday will be a Q&A format.
2. Next Year: The next annual meeting is in San Antonio, Oct 3-6, 2024. We have a contract for the Wyndham Riverwalk, the same location as the last meeting in San Antonio, and the cost is similar to what it was then. John Gura has already created a logo for the meeting.

B. **Membership**: Christine Queen reviewed the membership report that she distributed ahead of the meeting. We have 451 members; the number has fluctuated depending on the number who renew. She sent renewal notices with the directory. This year's directory will probably be sent by mid-November. John Gura sent a blast in August, and Judy Bivens will put a reminder on the Facebook page. Christine stated that with the new name and dues structure, as of Jan. 1, 2024, everyone is a full member, and the membership application will change accordingly. She said there was a talk with Jay DeFrank and Jim Hart regarding the affiliate and adjunct categories, and whether they should pay dues or not. It was decided they would pay the same dues as full members. We have one affiliate member, Steve Everett. We also have three adjunct members who are spouses of lifetime founders; under the former structure, they did not pay dues. Christine said that going forward, we will have to ask the board to approve that and make a change to the bylaws.

C. **Communications/Newsletter**: Dick Cole reported that as previously agreed, the next newsletter will be postponed in order to include coverage of the annual meeting.

1. Lord Guard & Guide: We have several entries under Lord Guard & Guide; Art Forster and Dick asked members to contribute remembrances of Doug Kennett.
2. Hal Smarkola: Dick said that after Judy Bivens posted Todd Vician's article about Hal Smarkola on Facebook, he (Dick) requested permission to reprint it but was denied. Eric Schnaible and Dick discussed asking Todd to write another version of the article for the AFPAA newsletter.
3. Submissions Deadline: Dick said he is always soliciting photos and input, even book reviews. He has received input from Art Forster, Art Barnes, and Christine Queen. The newsletter is scheduled for publication the first month of each quarter (January, April, July, October) and submissions are due at the beginning of the month prior to publication. So Dec. 1 is the deadline for input for the January newsletter.

4. Annual Meeting: Jim McGuire asked about getting information about the annual meeting into the newsletter in time for people to plan and register. It was discussed that registration opens approximately six months before the annual meeting. Dick said Perry Nouis has been faithful about providing timely information about the annual meeting. In the next issue, Dick will include a “save the date” notice for next October, and will mention it in every issue. He added he’s been getting great support for the newsletter, and reiterated the deadline of the first of the month prior to publication.
 5. Active Members: Chuck Merlo asked about increasing content that would be of value to the active duty membership. Board members recommended deferring this topic until Jay DeFrank’s Transition Committee report later in the meeting.
 6. AF Public Affairs Agency: Julie asked whether we had trademarked the AFPAA name and expressed concern about the Air Force Public Affairs Agency being able to continue using the same acronym. Phil said our old name was trademarked, although it expired. He said in going through the legal name change with the state of Virginia, we will work on trademarking our new name. A discussion ensued about the possibility of including the Air Force Public Affairs Agency in the annual meeting next year. The discussion also touched on the possibility of aligning with Air Force PA professional development events.
- D. **Website**: Jim McGuire reported he’s been working on a new membership page as a result of the name change. He drafted a page to merge two existing pages, and now that the dues structure is resolved, he will finish the updated membership application to go live Jan. 1. He is also working on making some changes to reflect the transition to the new name and structure, incorporating many ideas from Jay DeFrank to appeal to the active duty force. He will update the site with photos from the annual meeting once those are available.
- E. **Oral History**: John Gura said he’s seeking an additional interviewer to help conduct the oral histories. John Terino has done yeoman work, but feels he can no longer do it. John Gura said he would ask Dick Cole to every so often put a blurb in the newsletter to lead readers to look at the oral histories. Judy Bivens encouraged the board to think about people not currently involved who might be good candidates to help with the oral histories.
- F. **Facebook**: Judy Bivens said she’ll try to periodically link to the oral histories. She said members are welcome to post anything appropriate to our Facebook page. She is working to stay connected to other PA-related Facebook pages.
- G. **Organization Transition**: Jay DeFrank reviewed the progress on the transition to AFPAA and the research Steve Everett has conducted on how AFPAA can appeal to the active force. He then presented two documents for review in advance of the membership meeting: a one-liner and elevator speech, and a talent and resources biography.
1. Value Proposition: Jay discussed his proposed one-liner and elevator speech describing AFPAA’s value proposition, and requested the board’s approval.
 - a. After a brief discussion of ways AFPAA can support excellence in Air Force public affairs, **Perry Nouis moved the board approve the one-liner, and Jim McGuire seconded. The motion passed.**
 - b. The board then reviewed the **elevator speech. Jim McGuire moved to adopt it, and Eric Schnaible seconded. The motion passed.**

2. Talent and Resources: Jay reviewed the idea of a site that would allow active members to access the talent and resources of the membership. He presented a sample bio that would populate such a web page.
3. Next Steps: He said his committee will work with the SAF/PA working group to put together a rollout communications plan to raise visibility of AFPAA with the active force. The plan could involve PA internal communications, conducting a webinar or series, and pitches at AF PA conferences. We can also use our newsletter, social media, and website to highlight key people, stories, and events, such as oral histories and Hall of Fame recipients.
4. Additional Discussion: Julie asked if we have a LinkedIn page and recommended exploring doing so. Jay added that videos would also be great to raise our visibility, if someone had the time and capabilities. Dick commented that after he conducted a webinar about his experiences related to the last flight out of Saigon, he was contacted by a PA planner at CENTCOM asking for his input on language to put in their plan to ensure they didn't run into same kinds of issues encountered upon the U.S. exit from Saigon and Afghanistan. Carla Sylvester suggested that a story about how Dick was able to assist in current PA operations planning would itself make a great example of the value AFPAA offers to the active force. Jim McGuire noted Dick's webinar presentation is on the AFPAA website.

Old Business:

- A. **Hall Of Fame**: Art Forster discussed the Hall of Fame induction ceremony being conducted for the first time this weekend because there's been no annual meeting for the last four years. He briefly recapped the recipients and how the ceremony would be conducted. He noted that Dec. 1 is the deadline for next year's class. A brief discussion followed about the DINFOS Hall of Fame, into which Jerry Dalton and Stacy Pearsall were recently inducted. Art mentioned his committee is still working with DINFOS on a wall display for the Air Force PA Hall of Fame, and expects to have a proposal for the board by the next meeting.
- B. **Dalton Scholarships**: Chuck Merlo reported Phil has mailed checks to two of this year's five selectees. Last year, six recipients were selected, and we're still awaiting application for funds from one; she has one more year apply. This year the application was adjusted, and pending any further changes, the updated application will be ready for Jim McGuire to have on the website by Jan. 1. Christine noted one recipient became a member. Phil said he sends an application to recipients along with the checks, and is encouraging them to join.
- C. **Archives Project**: John Dorrian reviewed the need for someone to take the lead on establishing a digital archive of our records.
 1. Existing Files: Various members are currently storing paper and digital documents. Phil Ratliff has binders created by John Terino, and Tom Dolney has a number of boxes of files. In addition, other members have their own paper and digital files.
 2. Retention Needs: In a lengthy discussion, the board noted we need to determine what we want to retain, such as agendas, minutes, financial reports, directives, and bylaws. Members suggested we might want to consider building a database that is searchable by keywords, possibly outsourced to a professional contractor. Dick Cole and Julie Briggs have contacts who might have advice or insight.

3. Archives Committee: Jim McGuire noted he was next on the agenda with a recommendation for a membership management system that, among other things, would offer document storage with a limited search capability that might serve our needs. He recommended we seek someone to lead an archives committee. **Phil Ratliff moved** the board — specifically, Jim McGuire and John Gura — begin to **recruit an archivist** for the association. **Julie Briggs seconded** the motion. After some discussion, the motion was amended to **appoint a search committee of Jim McGuire, John Gura, Judy Bivens, and Dick Cole to solicit a volunteer chair to establish an archives committee**. With no further discussion, President Dorrian called for a vote, and **the motion passed**.

New Business:

A. **Membership Management System**: Jim McGuire suggested that AFPAA consider adopting a member management system, and he referred the board to an email, including links to videos, he had sent a few weeks before the meeting.

1. Club Express: Jim said the proposed system, Club Express, would alleviate several problems we currently face. The same service surfaced as a good solution through several separate channels. Jim found in his research it was highly rated by PC Magazine; the Army PA Association uses it; and Phil had independently learned about it.
2. Benefits: Jim said Club Express would make it easier to process new memberships and meeting registrations, track membership, send blasts or targeted emails, and host a website. It would allow for a more robust password-protected area of the site, and enable us to store documents with some ability to search by keywords. Jim emphasized that a key advantage is this would allow us to standardize and centralize our processes so someone else can pick it up — whether managing membership lists or the website, for example — without having to learn a predecessor's process.
3. Cost: The price to use Club Express depends on the number of active members. For fewer than 500 members, it's \$.34 per month per member. For more than 500 members, it drops to \$.30 per month per member. So for our current level of membership, between 400-500, it would be about \$150-160/month. Jim said they provide a great amount of support and training. He noted there would be a definite learning curve, but the benefits could outweigh the drawbacks.
4. Recommendation: Jim recommended the board evaluate the pros and cons. He suggested as a first step that we ask Club Express to do a live demo, either separate from a board meeting or at a regular meeting. After that, then we could look at a two-month free trial to experiment and see if it's worthwhile.
5. Q&A: In response to questions, Jim said for now, the AFPAA website would stay as is, but anything involving a transaction or password protection would redirect to the Club Express platform. He would check whether PayPal is the only payment compatibility. We would retain our current url.
6. Next Steps: **Julie Briggs moved to arrange a demo** of Club Express separate from a regular board meeting. **Chuck Merlo seconded, and the motion passed**. Jim urged the board to go look at the links he had sent, including www.clubexpress.com and [this video](#).

With no further business, **Phil moved to adjourn, Eric Schnaible seconded, and the motion passed**.

President John Dorrian adjourned the meeting at 4:32 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Secretary Carla Sylvester