

The OCSEA Veterans Advisory Committee

The OCSEA Veterans Advisory Committee was the brain child of Dick Svoboda, a now retired OBES employee and Korean War veteran. Dick pushed hard in the early 1990's to get the OCSEA Veterans Advisory Committee added as a permanent OCSEA Board of Directors Committee. The committee was created as a special committee in 1994. Dick succeeded in getting the OCSEA constitution amended at the 1996 convention and it became an official Board Committee in the 1997 OCSEA constitution. At Dick's suggestion John Porter was assigned to staff the veterans committee when it was formed.

Since its inception there have been 4 chairpersons of the OCSEA Veteran's Advisory Committee. Dick Svoboda was followed by Hugh Williams from ODOT. Hugh Williams was succeeded by Dave Bailey and Dave Bailey was succeeded by the current chair OCSEA State Vice-President Chris Mabe.

In its early days the veterans committee was heavily involved in legislation affecting veterans. The first major legislative issue which Dick Svoboda and the committee undertook was a bill to allow veterans to buy back their service time for retirement at a cheaper rate than was currently being charged by PERS. Dick and the committee were successful in getting HB 186 passed which reduced the price charged veterans to buy back their military time towards retirement. A second major legislative undertaking was securing the passage of Senate Bill 164 which allowed state employee veterans who were called to active duty to receive the differential between their military pay and state pay, up to a certain amount. It also allowed employees to maintain their state provided health care while on military duty if they so wished. A third bill which Chair Chris Mabe and the committee pushed was the creation of the Ohio Department of Veterans Services. Previously veteran's services had been handled by the Governor's Office of Veterans Affairs. By making the agency a cabinet level entity there is more visibility and more clout for veteran's issues. Finally the OCSEA Veterans Advisory Committee strongly supported the creation of the Bonus Program for veterans of the Mideast conflict, just as a similar program was created for veterans of the Vietnam conflict.

The veterans committee has also been involved in trying to influence federal legislation. The committee has pushed to get the VA to speed up the processing of veteran's disability claims by providing more funding to the VA. The committee has also supported changes to disability determination which lead to faster claims payments. The committee has pointed out to legislators that the Cleveland VA office which processes Ohio veteran's disability claims has the slowest processing times and lowest average awards for disability of all the VA offices.

Another focus of the Veterans Advisory Committee has been to insure that OCSEA veterans are acknowledged for their service. The first prong of the committee's approach was to create an OCSEA Distinguished Veterans Service Award. The award consists of a plaque which is presented at an OCSEA convention to those individuals who have given great service to OCSEA. The first award winner was Walter H. Kyle, former State President of OCSEA in the late 1970's. Walter Kyle was the first black president of OCSEA. He served as a Tuskegee airman from 1943 to 1946. The Tuskegee airmen were the only black American flying unit in World War II. The members of the Tuskegee airmen were groundbreakers and the excellent manner in which they served helped to lead to the desegregation of America's military in 1949 through an Executive Order issued by President Harry S. Truman. Mr. Kyle also served as a navigator/bombardier in the Korean War during which he lost a leg when his airplane crashed. Walter helped to found District 6 Council as well as serving as a chapter president, state Board member and State vice-president prior to serving as OCSEA president. The Veterans Committee also nominated Brother Kyle to the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame and he was inducted posthumously in 2001.

A second recipient of the OCSEA Distinguished Veteran Service Award was Dick Svoboda. Dick was acknowledged for his tireless effort to create the OCSEA Veterans Advisory Committee, as well as his many years at OBES as a Disabled Veteran Outreach Specialist involved in providing job services to disabled veterans. Dick was a bulldog in standing up for the rights of his fellow disabled veterans.

The third recipient of the OCSEA Distinguished Veteran Service Award was Larry Dotson, who also worked for OBES and its successor agency ODJFS, as well as for the Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections. Larry had served in Vietnam as a Security Policeman for the Air Force. He was taken as a hostage in the 1993 Lucasville Riot. Larry was held hostage for 11 days while the inmates rioted, killed and injured another corrections officer, as well as a number of inmates. Larry's recollection of the riot was memorialized in the book *Siege in Lucasville*, written by Gary Williams.

In addition to a legislative agenda at the state and federal levels, the OCSEA Veterans Advisory Committee has also been involved with submitting changes to the OCSEA constitution and submitting resolutions for the AFSCME International convention. The OCSEA Veterans Advisory Committee was instrumental in pushing through a constitutional amendment to the OCSEA constitution to allow members who are on military leave to remain active members without having to pay dues while they are on leave. Under the leadership of Hugh Williams a resolution was passed at an AFSCME convention to set up an AFSCME Veterans committee. The purpose behind the creation of this committee was to provide a place for veterans from all AFSCME units to work on national veteran's legislation.

In 1997 the OCSEA Veterans Advisory committee had pins created which were sold to the membership to raise money for PEOPLE. These pins then became very popular at conventions where they could be traded. The committee raised several thousands of dollars which was given to PEOPLE, the OCSEA legislative political action committee. Under current chair Chris Mabe the committee has sold coins with veteran's motifs during the last two years. These coins are provided by Brother Jude Snell, a CO at Noble Correctional Institution. Four new designs will be on sale at the second OCSEA Veterans Conference which will take place on July 23 and 24th, 2010 at Sawmill Creek.

Another focus of the OCSEA Veterans Advisory Committee has been charitable works to benefit veterans. OCSEA has been heavily involved with the Super Kids classic. This is a soapbox derby type event run by the Vietnam Veterans of America which has dual controlled cars so that disabled children can have the same experience as nondisabled children. We have sponsored a car at this event for more than 10 years. A second charitable activity that the committee has been involved with is the Soup and Bread Luncheon at the Ohio Veterans Home in Sandusky to provide money for incidentals for indigent veterans. Other charitable activities the committee has undertaken are sending care packages to servicemen in war zones, collecting toiletries for veterans at the Brecksville VA Center, and contributing to the World War II memorial in Washington, D.C.

This is the second year of the OCSEA Veteran's Conference. The first was held last year at Deer Creek in Mt. Sterling and was very well received. We hope to make this an annual event.

Current members of the OCSEA Veterans Advisory Committee are Chair Chris Mabe, Dave Bailey, A.J. Frame, Joan Hunter, Angela Wallace and Sharon Lipps.

Special thanks to Gina Ison and Tracy Tackett for their assistance in putting on this conference.



Walter H. Kyle

Franklin County

U.S. Army Air Corps- WWII

U.S. Air Force – Korea

Tuskegee Airman; Past president of the Central Ohio Tuskegee Airmen Association ❖ Past board chairman of the Public Employees Retirement System ❖ First African-American president of OCSEA ❖ Volunteer with United Way, Central Ohio Food Bank, Operation Feed and the Holiday Basket program 📧