

**ANNUAL REPORT
OZAUKEE COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE
PORT WASHINGTON, WI
March 5, 2008**

**TO THE HONORABLE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS,
OZAUKEE COUNTY, WISCONSIN**

I hereby submit the report of activities of the Veterans Service Office for the period of January 1, 2007 through December 31, 2007.

Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs Benefits

Primary Mortgage Loan.....	\$ 0
Home Improvement Loan.....	\$ 0
Personal Loan Program.....	\$ 17,635
Emergency Grants (Health or Subsistence Aid).....	\$ 0
Education Grants.....	<u>\$ 55,599</u>
TOTAL State Benefits	\$ 73,234

Federal Department of Veterans Affairs Benefits

Primary Mortgage Loan.....	\$ 2,997,004
Compensation (Disability) & Pension.....	\$ 5,183,352
Death Indemnity Compensation/ Insurance.....	\$ 421,293
Education and Vocational Rehabilitation	\$ 318,060
VA Healthcare	\$ 5,009,000
TOTAL Federal Benefits.....	\$ 13,928,649

There has been a significant decrease in the utilization of State and Federal Home loans this past year, in keeping with the current market trends regarding the overall mortgage crisis.. Lack of utilization of State of Wisconsin Benefits can also be attributed to the significant “tightening” of the various programs eligibility criteria. This is a direct result of the WDVA 10-Year Solvency Plan.

The VA has had “computer problems” this year, so figures are estimates based on 2.6% increase over FY’ 2006 data, that was authorized by Congress. Actual data will not be available until April or May 2008.

Since 1998 we have seen significant changes to eligibility for VA health care, whose full impact is only now fully apparent. The federal budget for FY 2007 and FY' 2008 has included increases for the VA Healthcare System. In January of 2003, the Department of Veterans Affairs "froze" new applications for individuals who exceed their maximum income caps. This "suspension" of enrollments was continued into 2008.

During the past year our office has provided transportation to 271 veterans for hospital appointments and day surgeries. This number has stabilized over the past year, due to loss of some of our "regular clients". The average age of a WWII veteran is now well over 80. The Korean War population has now reached the age where increased medical care is required, and the oldest of our Vietnam veterans have started to become a factor in this increased demand as well. Our newest veterans returning from conflicts overseas, are making a regular appearance in our office. We do have concerns over the proposed Federal budget for 2008, which may place restrictions on those utilizing the system, as well as the increased number of returnees from Iraq and Afghanistan

Our office has seen approximately 800 veterans/surviving family members during the past year. We have opened 176 new files and said farewell to 96 of our county's veterans.

The Veterans' Homes at King and at Union Grove have continued their operations, and our county's residents continue to be reluctant to make application to those facilities, due primarily to their desire to remain near their relatives, and the local community. I currently have one application pending to Union Grove.

The coming year should provide quite a challenge on both the State and Federal levels. We are now seeing many "returnees" from the War in Iraq. This influx of new veterans will in turn be seeking to avail themselves of their benefits. The advent of the Wisconsin GI Bill has been a real boon to our State's veterans. We had some in the Legislature who tried to limit the program during the most recent budget cycle, but the Veterans' Community was able to prevail on their better judgment.

The Veterans Trust Fund at the State level has not been in the best of financial health, and all of the veterans groups have been asked to "prioritize" the benefits that need to be continued. This process was undertaken by the State Legislature, in what has been dubbed "*The 10-Year Solvency Plan*". The financial picture for the Trust Fund has shown some improvement, and the CVSO community will be lobbying to restore those benefits that were either eliminated or severely restricted because of the previous cash-flow issues. Some inroads were made during the past year on the Legislative level, but a great deal more needs to be done to restore programs restricted by the Solvency Plan.

On the federal level, there never has been, nor will there ever be, enough funding to care for every veteran seeking healthcare. The VA has directed all of their medical centers to place a higher priority on new veterans returning from the war overseas, than on the existing veterans population. These new “returnees” have a five year “window” of eligibility for healthcare through the VA, even if they do not have any service-connected disabilities.

Veterans with Service Connected disabilities will continue to receive the highest priority.

We started charging veterans for transport to their appointments at the VA Medical Center during 2003. The process of billing and recording of payments, adds another administrative burden on my staff and myself, but has provided a source of “revenue” outside of our annual grants from WDVA for office operations and transportation. In 2007 we collected about \$1500 from this co-pay arrangement. The Veterans Service Commission has waived the co-pay requirement for 6 veterans to date, due to their low-income status. WDVA has also added new reporting requirements for the Transportation Grant Program. This has added yet another layer of paperwork.

By adding the out-of-county disabled veteran transportation system to ours, we now have contracting issues as well as new coordination issues to deal with.

My staff and I will continue to provide the highest quality service possible to the veterans of our county, while remaining within budgetary limits,

I would like to thank County Veterans Commission and the Veterans of Ozaukee County for their support during this past year. It has been a rewarding year. I look forward to continuing to serve the veterans of this county in the coming years.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kenneth A. Brown
Veterans Service Officer