

**ANNUAL REPORT
 OZAUKEE COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE
 PORT WASHINGTON, WI
 March 4, 2010**

**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, 2009 through December 31, 2009.

Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs Benefits

Primary Mortgage Loan.....	\$	144,000
Home Improvement Loan.....	\$	0
Personal Loan Program.....	\$	20,000
Emergency Grants (Health or Subsistence Aid).....	\$	0
Education Grants.....	\$	<u>9,732</u>
TOTAL State Benefits		\$ 173,732

Federal Department of Veterans Affairs Benefits

Primary Mortgage Loan.....	\$	13,651,959
Compensation (Disability) & Pension.....	\$	6,271,000
Death Indemnity Compensation/ Insurance.....	\$	733,000
Education and Vocational Rehabilitation	\$	369,000
VA Healthcare	\$	<u>5,414,000</u>
TOTAL Federal Benefits.....		\$ 26,438,959

There has been a significant downturn in the utilization of State Home loans this past year, most likely as a result of the current market trends regarding the overall mortgage crisis. Lack of utilization of other State of Wisconsin Benefits can be attributed to the significant “tightening” of the various programs eligibility criteria. This is a direct result of the WDVA 10-Year Solvency Plan. Federal Benefits continued to increase significantly from prior years.

Veterans Service Office Annual Report for FY' 2009 (cont.)

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 2008 and FY' 2009 has included increases for the VA Healthcare System, as well as a slight bump up in the means test thresholds. This resulted in access to the system opening to about 10% more veterans than under previous threshold limits.

During the past year our office has provided transportation to 334 veterans for hospital appointments and day surgeries. This number has been trending up over the past years, despite the 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 also making a regular appearance in our office. We started charging veterans for transport to their appointments at the VA Medical Center during 2003. In 2009 we collected \$2340 from this co-pay arrangement. The Veterans Service Commission has waived the co-pay requirement for 10 veterans to date, due to their low-income status. WDVA has also added new reporting requirements for the Transportation Grant Program.

We changed contractors effective January 1, 2009 for our out-of-county wheelchair transport of veterans. The previous contractor (Johnson Bus – West Bend) did not wish to renew. We have subsequently contracted with Ohana Ambulance and Transport Services out of Port Washington and the renewed their contract for FY' 2010. They have been providing timely, quality and caring services.

We saw approximately 450 veterans/surviving family members during the past year in the office. This represents just a fraction of total assisted due the volume of telephone inquiries we deal with on a routine basis. We have opened 95 new files and said farewell to 102 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 no applications pending to Union Grove or to King.

The coming year should provide quite a challenge on both the State and Federal levels. We are continuing to see 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. With the implementation of the Federal "Post 91—GI Bill" we will face some challenges in integrating it with our own WI GI Bill; those challenges continue to vex a number of us in the veterans' community.

Veterans Service Office Annual Report for FY' 2009 (cont.)

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 will be addressed by the State Legislature again, in what has been dubbed “*The 10-Year Solvency Plan*”. The financial picture for the Trust Fund has shown little improvement, and the CVSO community will be lobbying to preserve existing benefits. Some in-roads 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. If the legislature fails to address this issue, State Veterans benefits will cease to exist, except for the Nursing Homes.

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.

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My staff secretary, who had been with the office for 17 years, retired in July of 2009. Her assistance over the years was invaluable. After conducting a search for a new assistant in coordination with the Human Resources Department, a job offer was made and accepted by the best qualified applicant. She has proven to be highly motivated and willing to learn as much as she can about Veterans Benefits. She 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