

**ANNUAL REPORT
OZAUKEE COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE
PORT WASHINGTON, WI
March 1, 2006**

**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, 2005 through December 31, 2005.

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).....	\$	467
Education Grants.....	\$	<u>55,599</u>
TOTAL State Benefits	\$	73,701

Federal Department of Veterans Affairs Benefits

Primary Mortgage Loan.....	\$	9,920,688
Compensation (Disability) & Pension.....	\$	4,886,000
Death Indemnity Compensation/ Insurance.....	\$	604,000
Education and Vocational Rehabilitation	\$	322,000
VA Healthcare	\$	2,687,203
TOTAL Federal Benefits.....	\$	18,419,891

There has been a significant decrease in the utilization of the State's Primary and Home Improvement loans this past year. This decrease is due to the very limited number of individuals who qualify for Primary Home Loans utilizing "tax-free" bonding money. The drop off for "taxable bonding" monies is due to the lending market undercutting WDVA loan rates for both Primary and Home Improvement loans. The VA has ceased reporting DIC / Insurance / Burial Benefits separately, so the numbers appear combined.

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 2005 and FY' 2006 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 2006. Proposed budgets for FY '06 may cause a reduction in the utilization of the Healthcare system, if they are approved as submitted to Congress.

During the past year our office has provided transportation to 235 veterans for hospital appointments and day surgeries. This number is expected to increase in the coming year, due to the aging veteran population as well as the large number of Ozaukee veterans who have enrolled during the past five years. 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, not to mention our newest veterans returning from conflicts overseas. We do have concerns over the proposed Federal budget for 2006, which may place restrictions on those utilizing the system, as well as potential future enrollees.

Our office has seen approximately 1100 veterans/surviving family members during the past year. We have opened 280 new files and said farewell to 96 of our county's veterans.

We have three residents at the state retirement home at King, and one at the Assisted Living Facility in Union Grove. I continue to get negative responses from veterans regarding enrollment at King, primarily because of the distance from family and friends. We will have to see if there will be any increased interest in enrollment in state run veteran's nursing home facilities, as the Southern Wisconsin Center plans near completion. Southern Center began its' first phase of operations in 2001, with a Community Based Residential Facility (CBRF). Construction of the nursing home has begun, and we anticipate the facility to be fully functional sometime in mid 2006.

The coming year should provide quite a challenge on both the State and Federal levels. We are now seeing the first of what will be many "returnees" from the War in Iraq. This influx of new veterans will in turn be seeking to avail themselves of their benefits.

The Veterans Trust Fund at the State level is not 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**". If there is not an infusion of monies from outside the Veterans Trust Fund, we will be seeing a reduction in State of Wisconsin Veterans' Benefits. The process has already resulted in a significant reduction in those seeking some of the State's programs, as reflected in the annual numbers. 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.

Veterans Service Office Annual Report for 2005 (cont.)

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. This will undoubtedly create shortfalls.

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 yet 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.

My staff and I will naturally strive to minimize any negative impact, but delays may become unavoidable. I have communicated this to the county's veteran's community, and hope that they will be understanding.

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

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