



SHEBOYGAN COUNTY VETERANS SERVICES

Charlene K. Cobb

Veterans Service Officer

Todd Richter

Assistant Service Officer

Craig Stewart

Veterans Benefit Specialist

February 28, 2018

To: Sheboygan County Board of Supervisors
County Administrator Adam N. Payne

Subj: **2017 Veterans Service Department / Commission Annual Report**

Enclosed is the 2017 Annual Report of the Veterans Service Department and Veterans Service Commission. The Veterans Service Commission ended the year with a positive variance of \$23,794 and the Veterans Service Office ended with a positive variance of \$4,439.

Our client base consists of over 8,900 Veterans from WW II, Korea, Vietnam, 1st Gulf War, Operation Enduring /Iraqi Freedom, Cold War, Peacetime, the continuing Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) and an untold number of qualified survivors and dependents of disabled and/or deceased Veterans. We provided assistance and advocacy for these residents helping to bring more than \$33 million dollars of federal benefits into the County.

I am extremely proud of the hard work and dedication our staff gives each and every day including Assistant Veterans Service Officer Todd Richter, Benefit Specialist Craig Stewart, and part time Senior Aid (federal grant) worker Sue. Our current military involvement in the GWOT is unique in a couple of areas, first it has created an unprecedented number of activated members of the National Guard and Reserve forces and second it has also created a substantial increase in the number of women serving in war zones as combat participants. Each war seems to create it own set of issues (particularly health) and concerns and we work diligently with our partners to meet those needs.

We thank you for the continuing support and trust you have placed in us and look forward to 2018 meeting the ever changing needs of our Veterans and their families. We hope to collaborate with all our partners as we look for ways of providing a level of service to our clients that is commensurate with their commitment of preserving and protecting the principles of justice, freedom and democracy. We invite your inquiries and feedback throughout the year and will be happy to provide additional information as may be needed.

Sincerely,

Charlene K. Cobb

Charlene K Cobb
Veterans Service Officer

Enclosure

SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED SINCE 1935

VETERANS SERVICE DEPARTMENT

MISSION STATEMENT AND SUMMARY OF RESPONSIBILITIES

The Sheboygan County Veterans Service Department will provide timely and quality service for veterans seeking assistance with local, state, and federal benefit programs. We advocate for and support the military veterans and their families in our county. "Serving Those Who Served"

The Veterans Service Department exists under Chapter 45, Wisconsin Statutes, which mandates that each county in Wisconsin shall appoint an honorably discharged veteran of the U S military service to the position of County Veteran Service Officer (CVSO). The CVSOs primary function is to act as an advocate for veterans, their dependents and survivors. These duties include:

- Advise persons living in the service officer's county who served in the U S armed forces regarding local, state, and federal benefits to which they may be entitled.
- Assist in resolving any problems veterans encounter accessing the programs provided by the federal or state Veteran's Administration.
- Provide service and assistance to qualified dependents and/or surviving spouse to ensure they are informed of benefits they may be entitled to.
- Maintain a record of burials of all veterans within the county.
- Cooperate with other local, state, and federal agencies to provide services to veterans and answer questions regarding veteran's issues.
- Serve as executive secretary of the Veterans Service Commission.
- Ensure Veterans and their spouses are interred in a decent and respectable manner in any cemetery in this state.
- Furnish information about veterans' burial places within the county.
- Responsible for case management of federal and state Veterans' Service programs which may include Compensation, Pension, Education, Burial, Survivor Benefits, VA Loans, Grants, and Insurance.
- Work independently to apply State and Federal policy and procedures to dynamic situations to ensure accurate benefit determinations.
- Work in a fast paced environment handling multiple interactions daily covering a wide variety of topics and benefits.
- Handles urgent inquiries relating to health, home and family needs in a time sensitive manner.
- Assist with applications for Wisconsin G.I. Bill education benefits for veterans and eligible dependents.
- Assist with Vocational rehabilitation benefits for disabled veterans.
- Assist with federal and state home loans, personal loans and home improvement loans.
- Provide burial benefits (i.e. cemeteries, markers, burial flags, funeral honors, etc.).
- Provide dependent and survivor benefits (i.e. healthcare, education, pensions, etc.).
- Enrollment of veterans into VA medical system.
- Register discharge papers/DD-214 with county.
- Assist military retirees and their surviving families with Department of Defense (DOD) benefits and services.
- Coordinate Transportation to and from medical care.

- Help determine eligibility and complete paperwork for veterans' homes and long-term care.
- Provide and/or refer veterans to appropriate federal, state and non-governmental emergency financial aid.
- Assist homeless veterans and those at risk of becoming homeless.
- Assist with applications for Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) benefits.
- Assist with applications and verification for 100% disabled Veterans and eligible surviving spouses to receive their Property Tax credit.
- Assist with applications for Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources veterans' park pass benefits.
- Assist with applications for Wisconsin Department of Motor Vehicle veteran's identifier.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES ACHIEVED IN 2017

- Veteran Service Officer, Assistant, and Benefit Specialist to maintain VA accreditation with continuing education units. The office staff has maintained our accreditations with the National County Veterans Service Officer Association, Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs, American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, and Military Order of the Purple Hearts, through continuing education credits. We also have our Veterans Affairs (VA) Personal Identity Verification (PIV) card that is a credential that provides the attributes of security, authentication, trust and privacy and can be used to verify identities in order to gain access to federal computer networks.
- Conduct training in the office to keep current on new federal and state programs as well as changes to their current programs. Regular meetings are held with the staff to receive process improvement ideas from them and to train on office procedures and requirements as well as to update ourselves on the multitude of changes to federal and state benefits. We also work closely with the Veterans Service organizations in our area to share information on helping Veterans access the programs and benefits to which they are entitled.
- Conduct training with Assistant on duties of the Service Officer / Department Head. I have included the Assistant in the management of the office and he has been involved in the various responsibilities of the department head helping to develop training and various other proposals required by the office.
- Conduct training with Benefit Specialist on the Commission responsibilities. I have involved the Benefit Specialist in a revision of the Commission policy and the daily workings of the Commission. He has worked with Veterans to compile the necessary data and made recommendations on the referrals to the Commission.
- Continue purging and electronic scanning of office records and files. We continue to scan and eliminate the paper files as we meet with Veterans. We were fortunate to have the services of two VA work-study individuals that scanned several file cabinets of paperwork on our deceased veterans. This continues to be an on-going project as we have over 26,000 records to scan.
- Outreach to the community partners and the Counties Veteran Service Organizations to brief them on VA benefits. We support the County Veterans Service Organizations in their various

programs and ceremonies conducted throughout the year. We have participated with the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, Vietnam Veterans of America, Wisconsin Military Networks, and Sheboygan Area Veterans Treatment Court as well as local schools and businesses. Our intent is to heighten visibility along with honoring our currently serving Veterans and educate the citizenry of their presence in our communities.

BUDGET

The Veterans Service budget was \$252,552 tax levy with \$13,000 grant dollars in 2017. The year ended with a positive variance of \$4,439. The department budget is less than $\frac{3}{4}$ of 1% of the amount of federal dollars (over \$33 million) we helped bring into the county.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES AHEAD

The Veterans Service Department continues to face an enormous workload with the many Veterans and their families that are seeking assistance.

In 2017, Sheboygan County had 1,534 clients file claims for state and federal benefits. Additionally, we continue to lose our World War II, Korean, and Vietnam Veterans, which impacts the workload as we ensure they are honored at their passing and that their dependents receive all their entitlements.

We estimate that each case (federal, state, death) requires a minimum of 3 hours work on our part. That doesn't include all the other tasks (phone calls, walk-ins, general correspondence, meetings, etc.) that need to be handled each week.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR 2018

- Veteran Service Officer, Assistant, and Benefit Specialist to maintain VA accreditation with continuing education units.
- Continue to work with the Assistant Service Officer to indoctrinate him on the duties and responsibilities of the Service Officer to include end of year reports, budget, liaison committee meetings, service commission and other departmental duties.
- Conduct training in the office to keep current on new federal and state programs as well as changes to their current programs.
- Continue purging and electronic scanning of office records and files.
- Outreach to the Veterans Service Organizations on the benefits available to Veterans and their families from the state and federal government.
- Conduct outreach to the Assisted Living and Nursing Homes in the county to provide information on potential Veteran benefits available to their residents.

VETERANS SERVICE COMMISSION

MISSION STATEMENT AND SUMMARY OF RESPONSIBILITIES

The County Veterans Service Commission (CVSC) exists under Chapter 45 (45.81) of the Wisconsin statutes which mandates that each county in Wisconsin have in place a three member CVSC to provide financial aid to needy veterans, their survivors and dependents. The Commission consists of three honorably discharged veterans who are (appointed) to serve staggered three year terms. From among them they annually elect a Chairperson and Secretary.

Members: David Williams, Chairman; Konrad Kaczkowski, Secretary; Jennifer Sampson, Member

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES ACHIEVED IN 2017

The following is a composite of the activities of the Commission for 2017.

Cases Accepted: 66
Cases Not Accepted: 9

BUDGET

The 2017 CVSC budget was \$33,619. We ended the year under budget by \$23,794. The Commission disbursed \$8,482 in assistance to needy veterans. The 2018 budget is \$33,363.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES AHEAD

The Commission continues to work at reaching a balance of helping our needy Veterans while being fiscally responsible with those tax dollars. The Commission is for emergency assistance only; it is to be a solution to a problem and not intended to be used as a supplement to income or to facilitate mismanagement of income. We are pursuing other areas that we can be of assistance to our Veterans in the coming year.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR 2018

- Monitor, revise, and update the Commission Policy to reflect Veteran's current needs.
- Partner with Veterans Organizations to ensure we are providing the needed assistance for our Veterans.
- Refine office procedure to expedite the application process.
- Convert our files to an electronic database to facilitate claims processing.