



SHEBOYGAN COUNTY VETERANS SERVICES

Charlene K. Cobb

Veterans Service Officer

Todd Richter

Assistant Service Officer

Craig Stewart

Veterans Benefit Specialist

February 28, 2017

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

Subj: **2016 Veterans Service Department / Commission Annual Report**

Enclosed is the 2016 Annual Report of the Veterans Service Department and Veterans Service Commission. The Veterans Service Commission ended the year with a positive variance of \$35,162 and the Veterans Service Office ended with a negative variance of \$10,999 due to personnel costs and flags and markers increases.

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 War on Terrorism and their families. 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 give each and every day from Assistant Veterans Service Officer, Todd Richter, who is still learning but also teaching fellow workers, Benefit Specialist, Craig Stewart, who hit the deck running and constantly pushes himself to become more familiar with the myriad of information we deal with, to part time Senior Aid (federal grant) worker, Sue, who tackles any job with grace and precision, and the addition of two part time VA Work Study veterans, who not only aid in the day-to-day operations of the office but are purging and scanning files for us.

We thank you for the continuing support and trust you have placed in us and look forward to 2017 meeting the ever changing needs of our Veterans and their families. We hope to collaborate with all our partners as we look for ways to care for our Veterans and their families. 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
Veterans Service Officer

Enclosure

SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED SINCE 1935

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2016 ANNUAL REPORT VETERANS SERVICE DEPARTMENT

MISSION STATEMENT AND SUMMARY OF RESPONSIBILITIES

The Veterans Service Department's mission statement is:

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 elect/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 2016

Hire and train the Veterans Benefit Specialist (VBS).

The VBS was hired in January and on-the-job training started immediately. We were also able to get him to formal accreditation training with the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs and with the National County Veterans Service Officer Association contract training. He has accomplished the training requirements for Veterans Affairs (VA) to receive his 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.

CVSO and ACVSO maintain NACVSO Accreditation.

Todd and I 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 PIV cards that allow access to the federal VA website when assisting our clients.

Publish the Office Procedure Manual.

The manual was completed in June 2016 and we reviewed it at a staff meeting with the County Administrator. It is a valuable tool for the staff to get an overview of a particular program and the steps we need to take to assist our Veterans and their families.

Train the office staff to increase their proficiency in assisting Veterans and their families.

I hold regular meetings 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.

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.

Purchase the Veterans database program (VETRASPEC) and convert the current database files to the new program.

The program was purchased in June and the files from the old database were migrated into the new one in July and we have had several months to work with the files with no apparent loss of data or functionality. We continue to learn about all the features the new program offers us in assisting our Veterans.

BUDGET

Our Veterans Service budget was \$10,999 over its \$226,833 tax levy + \$13,000 grant budget for 2016. Even with this overage the department budget is still less than ¼ of 1% of the amount of federal dollars (over 33 million dollars) we helped bring into the county.

The shortage was due to the additional personnel related expenses and an increase in cost of flags and markers. The 2017 department budget is \$252,552.00 tax levy + \$13,000 grant; an increase of \$25,719 from the 2016 budget, which encompasses the additional funding needed for personnel related expenses and the flags and markers.

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. **Still we aided county Veterans in receiving \$33,319,000 in annual federal benefits.**

In 2016, Sheboygan County had 2817 clients file claims for federal benefits. Along with this we continue to lose our World War II, Korean and Vietnam Veterans, 352 in 2016 and that 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 2017

1. Veteran Service Officer, Assistant, and Benefit Specialist to maintain VA accreditation with continuing education units.
2. Conduct training in the office to keep current on new federal and state programs as well as changes to their current programs.
3. Conduct training with Assistant on duties of the Service Officer / Department Head.
4. Conduct training with Benefit Specialist on the Commission responsibilities.
5. Continue purging and electronic scanning of office records and files.
6. Outreach to the community partners and Veterans Service Organizations.

2016 ANNUAL REPORT 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.

CVSC Members

David C Williams, Chairman
Konrad K Kaczkowski, Secretary
Vacant, Member

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES ACHIEVED IN 2016

The following is a composite of the activities of the Commission for 2016.

Cases Accepted	56
Cases Not Accepted	9

BUDGET

The 2016 CVSC budget was \$45,623. We ended the year under budget by \$35,162. The Commission disbursed \$5,920 in assistance to needy veterans. The 2017 budget is \$33,619.

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 2017

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