



SHEBOYGAN COUNTY

Todd A. Richter
Veterans Services

March 1, 2024

Honorable Members of the Sheboygan County Board and County Administrator Alayne Krause,

I am pleased to present the 2023 Annual Report for the Veterans Service Department and Veterans Service Commission.

Our client base consists of approximately 6,636 veterans and their families. We provide advocacy and aid for these residents, helping to bring in over \$48 million of federal benefits annually to Sheboygan County. This is an increase of \$6 million in from 2022. Along with federal benefits, we help connect Sheboygan County veterans and qualifying family members to State and other local benefits, as well. This includes the Wisconsin Property Tax Credit, Wisconsin GI Bill, and the Veterans Service Commission. These benefits are core examples of why Wisconsin - particularly Sheboygan County - is a great place for veterans to settle.

The Department is once again increasing outreach to veterans and their families that have difficulties getting out of their homes. Additionally, the Department took time to review our current practices in 2023, and identified ways to better serve local veterans. One key to success is effective communication, not only in the Department, but also with community partners.

We have a staff of three full time positions and are accredited with multiple national organizations to represent clients and file claims with the US Department of Veterans Affairs. I am proud of the work accomplished by the Veterans Service Department. We work as a team, and form bonds with clients as well. Being veterans ourselves, we understand the issues other veterans face and the importance of helping them navigate the system.

I am confident that the Veterans Service Department will continue to adapt as new laws are passed that affect veterans and their families. I am excited for what 2024 will bring and look forward to continuing our advocacy for veterans. We appreciate the guidance and support from County leaders, and the trust you have in the Veterans Service Department.

Respectfully Submitted,

Todd Richter
Veterans Service Officer

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 the county.

The Veterans Service Department was established under Chapter 45, Wisconsin Statutes, which mandates that each county in Wisconsin shall appoint an honorably discharged veteran of the US 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 but are not limited to:

- Work under the three main benefit pillars of the Federal and State Veterans Affairs (VA); Health Care, Compensation/Pension and Mortuary Affairs.
- Healthcare enrollment for spouses and children that are eligible.
- Transportation to VA healthcare appointments.
- Mission Act eligibility.
- Compensation benefits for veterans that sustained an injury while serving on active duty.
- Compensation benefits for surviving spouses and children who meet the VA qualifications.
- Pension for veterans or spouses that may require in-home healthcare, assisted living or nursing home care.
- Maintain a record of burials of all veterans within the county.
- Apply for Burial Benefits for veterans that passed.
- Obtain Grave Markers, Headstones or Medallions.
- Help register for state or federal cemetery burials.
- Provide a flag and marker for veterans grave site.
- Work with funeral homes to ensure Military Honors are provided.
- Wisconsin Driver's License Identifier.
- Sheboygan County Veterans Service Commission.
- Partnering with other local agencies to help veterans that are in need.

Goals and Objectives achieved in 2023

- Partnered with the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) and the Economic Support Division to start quarterly management team meetings in the building and create a management team email group to increase collaboration between the departments.
- Due to the number of combat veterans in the County, we successfully increased the Vet Center Counselor's availability to 32 hours per week for two weeks and 40 hours per week the other two weeks of the month. The previous availability was 16 hours for two weeks and 32 hours for the other two weeks per month.

- We successfully launched a television campaign to inform Sheboygan County veterans about our Department and services with the support of an American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) grant from the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs

Budget

	2023 Budget	2023 Results	Variance
Revenues	\$328,160	\$340,626	\$12,466
Expenses	\$328,160	\$339,911	-\$11,571
Total	\$0	\$715	\$715

The Veterans Services Department approved budget for 2023 was \$328,160, and ended with a positive variance of \$715 for 2023. The approved budget for 2024 is \$347,917 with a property tax levy of \$330,042.

Issues and Challenges Ahead

The Veterans Service Department continues to struggle with rating decisions made by the VA affecting our veterans. The VA experienced a large amount of turnover in their Benefit and Compensation Center. Claims that would normally take three to six months to receive a decision are now taking nine months to one year which affects the livelihood for local veterans. The Department will strive to open a dialogue with the regional office located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin to find a solution or a more effective way to help claims get through the adjudication process.

Additionally, the Department continues to seek volunteer drivers to help build and sustain the shared ride program with the ADRC. This program is a donation-based program which helps veterans and the elderly get to their medical appointments. These appointments can go as far north as Green Bay, as far south as Milwaukee, and as far west as Madison. In 2023 we were not able to fully fund this program due to limited funding and increased requests for services. Volunteer drivers are difficult to find, which also makes it very difficult to sustain this program.

Finally, our Department was without a part time, contracted employee in 2023. This made it difficult to staff the reception area. The request has been made for a replacement from New Curative, but they have not been able to fill this position. The biggest recruitment hurdle is pay for the potential employee. This program is a federally funded and pays the federal minimum wage, which currently is a rate of \$7.25 per hour.

Goals and Objectives for 2024

- Set up an outreach program at the Adell Senior Dining site to better serve rural areas.
- Promote the Veterans Service Department, through various avenues, with the use of ARPA funding provided by the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Develop relationships with additional community partners to help better serve veterans. We will reach out to local businesses that may target veteran requests that we may not be able to help fiscally due to a limited budget.

Veterans Service Commission

Mission Statement and Summary of Responsibilities

The County Veterans Service Commission (CVSC) was established 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. They annually elect a Chairperson and Secretary.

Goals and Objectives Achieved in 2023

- Identified trends within the veteran community and targeted needs with additional programs to access assistance for veterans with the goal of creating long term stability.
- Provided outreach to smaller communities around the County to better reach rural veterans.
- Cases Accepted: 12
- Cases Not Accepted: 4

Budget

	2023 Budget	2023 Results	Variance
Revenues	\$20,812	\$20,812	\$0
Expenses	\$20,812	\$18,458	\$2,354
Total	\$0	\$2,354	\$2,354

The Veterans Service Commission approved budget for 2023 was \$20,812, and ended with a positive variance of \$2,354. The approved budget for 2024 is \$20,812 with a property tax levy of \$20,812.

Issues and Challenges Ahead

The Veterans Service Commission is challenged to develop the budget each year as it is difficult to forecast the amount of assistance that will be needed. As many pandemic-era programs are ending, requests for assistance are increasing. The Commission will work with community partners to assist with the requests we receive, and the Commission will continue to remain fiscally responsible to County taxpayers while trying to meet the needs of veterans. Finally, the Commission continues to be challenged to promote services offered throughout the community.

Goals and Objectives for 2024

- Work with the ADRC staff to attract and retain volunteer drivers to provide critical transportation to Veterans.
- Identify and track current trends for assistance requests.
- Educate the Veterans Service Commissioners on the Department's budget process. This will allow for more effective expenditures to better serve customers.