

2020 Annual Report

# Calumet County Veterans Service Office

“Connecting Veterans with their Benefits”

WISCONSIN  
**Calumet  
County**

Veterans Service Office

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**Veterans Service Director:**

Gregory T. Brittnacher- Accredited with National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO), Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), American Legion (AL), Wisconsin Department of Veteran Affairs (WDVA), and Disabled American Veterans (DAV).

**Veterans Service Administrative Assistant:**

Michelle A. Wynveen – Accredited with NACVSO, WDVA, AL, VFW, and DAV.

**Accreditations:**

The Veteran Administration (VA) accreditation is for the sole purpose of providing representation services to claimants. Yearly education requirements are required by our staff in order to maintain accreditation. The accreditation also allow our staff with full access to federal databases and files to further assist our veterans, dependents, and widows.

- Formal studies prove Veterans receive 50% more benefits and larger awards by using professional Veterans service representation (i.e., Calumet County Veterans Services) than if he or she file individually or with a non-professional.



# Calumet County Veterans Service Office

## Mission Statement:

The mission of the Veterans Service Office is to support Veterans, their dependents, and surviving spouses by providing advocacy and professional services to assist Veterans in pursuing all obtainable benefits. We will be there to guide them through the complexities of the application process with the intent to maximize benefits.

## Our Vision:

Improving the quality of life for Calumet County Veterans and their dependents through accessing all available local, state and federal benefits that were earned by the sacrifice and service to their country.

## County Veterans Service Office History

The first County Veterans Service Offices were self-appointed concerned Veterans of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) who took it upon themselves to aid and assist the Veterans, dependents, and survivors of their counties.

- The first CVSO, Leo Promen, was appointed in Fond du Lac County in 1932.
- The WI CVSO Association was established in 1935.
- Legislation was passed in 1946 requiring each county to have a CVSO and required each CVSO to have served in a branch of the Armed Forces (State Statute 45.80).
- Legislation was passed in 1973 authorizing a state grant for the CVSO office.



**Goal I:** Continue to improve the economic impact of the county by increasing the number of Veterans and dependents who qualify for compensation and pension benefits.

**Objective I:** By the end of the year, expand the foot print of the Veterans Service Office by promoting programs and benefits for Veterans, their dependents and survivors by expanding outreach at Veterans Service Organizations (American Legions, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Disabled American Veterans), job fairs, e-mail, newsletter, website, Facebook page, senior fairs, Calumet County fair, Assisted living facilities and other meetings and outreach events.

**Objective II:** By the end of the year, established relationships with local medical and mental health providers that would assist Veterans in obtaining private medical opinions for VA compensation claims.

**Objective III:** By the end of the year, obtain retroactive benefits totaling \$200,000 from VA compensation and pension claims.

**Goal II:** Continue to enhance technology capabilities and streamline the process to increase office proficiency and further enhance services for our Veterans.

**Objective I:** By the end of the year, digitalize all records, digitally migrate them to VetraSpec, IMS21 and back up records on the external hard drive with the intention to securely destroy all paper copies.

**Objective II:** By the end of the year, adopt and implement *Adobe Sign* or similar technology that will enhance office capabilities by providing easier accessibility to our Veterans to complete claims digitally outside of traditional office hours.

**Objective III:** Daily, track open cases and document all communications in VetraSpec, which will be used as a data collection tool to ensure all cases are full completed.

**Goal III:** Develop and implement a positive onboarding process for the new employee.

**Objective I:** Prior to the hiring, develop procedural checklists, to include day to day operations, VetraSpec (client in-take & claims management) and phone protocol.

**Objective II:** Have new employee engage in at least three professional development opportunities to obtain National Accreditation, Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs Accreditation, and Training, Responsibility, Involvement and Preparation of Claims (TRIP).

**Goal IV:** Actively engage in professional development opportunities necessary to enhance services for our Veterans and dependents.

**Objective I:** Participate in quarterly County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO) meetings with Congressman Gallagher to remain current on best practices to further educate and assist our Veterans and dependents.

**Objective II:** Engage in two professional development courses to fully utilize available computer technology within the office to assist Veterans and their dependents.

**Objective III:** Maintain Veteran Service Organization Accreditations by engaging in two National or State accreditation trainings that are offered throughout the year.

#### **What has 2020 taught us during a time of uncertainty?**

*Additionally, while the year of 2020 has proven to be challenging for all, we have seen many opportunities in the Veterans Service Office. It was difficult to maintain face-to-face outreach like our office normally would. However, with changing times came an opportunity for innovative thinking. We were offered a tremendous deal with VetPro our new and much more efficient tracking system. VetPro is a software package that allows Veterans Service Officers to work remotely with their Veterans and it has afforded us the opportunity to work from anywhere and serve our clients more efficiently, and just as effective. We can submit claims both to the client for signatures and then directly to the Veteran's Affairs. We have also had ample opportunity to work on training and transcribing our data from scanned files to our databases. We have been able to cross-check our Blue Water Navy Veterans' (newly passed legislation) and have been able to reach out with many Veterans for further development and re-adjudication of previously denied claims.*

*This year has afforded us in the Veterans Service Office, the chance to find new ways to get in touch and keep in touch with our veterans and show them that we have their best interests in the forefront of our efforts for Calumet County Veterans Service Office successes.*

**Why we do what we do:** Pure numbers cannot quantify the value of what Calumet County Veterans Service Office does, although we do bring a great deal of additional federal funding to the county every year. There is a real, human value to the service we provide, which is seen and felt by the Calumet County Veterans and families we help. Following are some of their stories.

**Reaching out to our Veterans -**

Reviewing a Veteran's claims file, it appeared the VA rated him at lower percentage for his Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and denied him for Individual Unemployability due to his PTSD. Our office reached out to the Veteran and discussed the VA's decision letter with the Veteran, but more importantly encourage the Veteran to appeal the decision. Our office assisted in getting a private medical opinion from a psychologist. The VA's decision was later overturned and the Veteran was retroactively awarded \$96,566.17. The Veteran now receives 3,321.85 a month with other ancillary benefits for himself and his spouse.

**Customer Service -**

Veteran was in to get the authorization form for the Veteran Identifier on his driver's license. Upon review of his DD214 showed he service in Vietnam. We reviewed the Agent Orange presumptive list and determine that he has some of the ailments on the list. Our office assisted in obtaining all necessary medical documentation and filed a claim for compensation to the VA. Shortly later he was service-connected at 70 % and now receives a monthly benefit of \$1,567.28.

**Collaboration with other Organizations -**

Our office had been working with Veteran on his compensation claim. We had established a good rapport and he felt comfortable enough to share his financial struggles him and his wife were having. We learned that he was unable to pay one month's rent. We were able to use Veterans Service Commission funds to provide financial assistance. In addition we reached out to a local Veterans Service Organization who was also able to provide additional rental assistance, grocery, and gas cards.

**Our Impact:**

Calumet County Veterans and their dependents have received a total disbursement of combined Federal VA benefits of \$16.5 million for 2020, this is an increase of \$1.5 million from 2019. Compensation and Pension has increased over \$518,000 from 2019 to 2020 for a total over \$5.5 million.

Furthermore, our office tracked over \$996,331 in retroactive non-taxable cash payouts to Veterans and their dependents. Calumet County monthly compensation and pension benefits totaled \$532,279 with an annual total of \$6.3 million. Veterans and their dependents use these non-taxable payouts to pay taxes and purchase goods and services within Calumet County.

CVSO Measure of Efficiency in Delivering Federal DVA Benefits		
Calumet County Total CVSO Budget Investment	Projected 12 Month VA Compensation & Pension Payouts	Return on Investment
\$180,734 (.25% of Total County Expenditures)	\$6,300,000	3,386%

**Note:** The CVSO office budget investment consists of .25 percent of the total Calumet County expenditures for 2020.



## STATE BENEFITS WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

The office assists Veterans and dependents in applying for Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs provides benefits. Application for various benefits are received, adjudicated and awarded or denied based on eligibility requirements.

<u>Type of Benefit</u>	<u>Applied</u>	<u>Amount</u>
▪ Aid to Needy Veterans Grant	12	\$6,284.92
▪ WI Property Tax Credit	81	<u>\$278,648.00</u>
<b>Total</b>		<b><u>\$284,932.92</u></b>

In 2020 our office received an \$11,500 CVSO Grant from the WDVA. This money was used to enhance services to our Veterans.

In 2020 our office also received a \$1,046.08 Transportation Grant from the WDVA. This money was used to fund Veterans rides to medical appointments using the ADRC transportation program.

In 2020 the office received donations of \$800 from outside organizations and individuals to assist with the needs of our office and Calumet County Veterans.

## FEDERAL BENEFITS US DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

<u>Type of Benefit</u>	<u>Amount</u>
▪ Compensation & Pension	\$5,494,000
▪ Readjustment & Vocational Rehabilitation	\$304,000
▪ Insurance & Indemnities	\$233,000
▪ VA Health Care	\$10,509,000
▪ Federal VA Home Loans (47)	<u>\$10,292,035</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b><u>\$26,832,035</u></b>



The University of Wisconsin-Madison office performed an analysis of the economic impact Veterans Administration expenditures had on the economy of Calumet County for 2020. UW-Madison used the following economic metrics (e.g., jobs, labor income, etc.) and nature of the multipliers (direct, indirect, induced, and total) to determine totals. The impacts are summarized as follows:

### Calumet County VA 2020 Impact

Impact	Employment	Labor Income	Total Income	Industry Sales
Direct Effect	0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Indirect Effect	0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Induced Effect	0	\$0	\$0	\$0
<b>Total Effect</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>

#### State & Local Government Revenues: \$0

- Employment: Jobs, *not* full-time equivalent
- Labor Income: Wages, salaries, proprietor income
- Total Income: Labor income plus all other sources of income (e.g., social security, pensions, etc)
- Industry Sales: Industry revenues
- Direct effect: VA spending
- Indirect effect: Multiplier effect from business to business expenditures
- Induced effect: People (labor) spending income.
- Total effect: Direct plus Indirect plus Induced

## Feedback from those we have served

“Thank you so much for your help” -Jerry & Laverne

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“I cannot tell you how much I appreciate your guidance. You are so helpful.” – Jodie

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“I wish to thank you for all of your help through the years. Your experience and dedication shows through your work every day & we appreciate your kindness.” -Steve & Renee

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”I want to thank you again for all the assistance you have given me during the claims process. Your guidance and expertise helped me through this and am so thankful with the outcome.” -Richard

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“I appreciate the dedication you have given to my mother. You have went above and beyond to ensure she gets survivor benefits for my father’s service. We are truly grateful for you service. ” -James

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“A note of thanks for your dedication in helping our fellow Veterans. Your passion is over the top. Keep up the awesome work and we are happy to have you here in Calumet” -Jim

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“I can’t thank the two of you enough for your hard work and diligence in representing my disability claim with the VA. The time and effort you both put into not only tracking down employment health records, but coordinating a private medical opinion appointment was remarkable. I share this because without you fighting for me there is no chance this would have happened. The result is better than I could have imagined. Thank you.” -David

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