

**PORT WASHINGTON, WI**

**March 1, 2005**

**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, 2004 through December 31, 2004.

**Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs Benefits**

Primary Mortgage Loan..... \$ 636,445

Home Improvement Loan..... \$ 15,000

Personal Loan Program..... \$ 15,000 Emergency  
Grants (Health or Subsistence Aid)..... \$ 237 Education  
Grants..... \$ 38,729

**TOTAL State Benefits \$ 705,411**

**Federal Department of Veterans Affairs Benefits**

Primary Mortgage Loan..... \$ 5,871,838

Compensation ( Disability ) & Pension..... \$ 4,401,210

Death Indemnity Compensation..... \$ 595,861

Burial Allowances ..... \$ 3,650

Government Life Insurance Proceeds ..... \$ 26,250

Education and Vocational Rehabilitation ..... \$ 288,707

VA Healthcare ..... \$ 2,687,203

**TOTAL Federal Benefits..... \$ 13,874,719**

This is the second year we have had fiscal estimates from the VA regarding healthcare expenditures by county. The number is based on what they call "unique" patients. Our County has far more veterans enrolled than what VA statistics reflect for "unique" patients. Therefore I suspect that the actual expenditure is considerably higher than what is listed.

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 2004 has included another increase 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 2004. 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 268 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 1200 veterans/surviving family members during the past year. We have opened 280 new files and said farewell to 93 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 late 2005.

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 on Terrorism, as well as 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. and those that may face restrictions or elimination. This process will be undertaken by the current term of 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.

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.

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