

Allegany County Veterans Service Agency
January 1, 2014 through December 31, 2014

Agency Profile:

The Allegany County Veterans Service Agency is a department of the Allegany County Government. The department is serviced by the Director, who is also the only American Legion Accredited Service Officer able to submit claims to the VA in the county and one Assistant Director. There are over 4300 veterans in Allegany County. The veteran's office assists veterans, widows, family members and advocates in the following areas: Service Connected Compensation claims, Pension benefits, veterans home loans, New York State Tax Exemptions for Real Property, education benefits, burial and death benefits, work closely with local funeral directors so veterans can have the proper military burial rituals, burial markers, insurance claims, correcting and having DD 214 discharge paper recorded at County Clerk's Office, ordering military medals, acquiring veterans medical and personnel records to ensure the maximum benefits, VA approved home modification, veterans identification cards. We also work closely with nursing home social workers, VA social workers, Department of Social Service, Social Security Disability, Employment and Training and Office of the Aging to ensure veterans are receiving benefits, and advise all veteran's service organizations of pending VA directives and provide a well balance of veterans to lead the Pledge of Allegiance at County Legislators meeting.

Some 2014 Highlights:

The Veterans Service Agency continues to reach out to all veterans in Allegany County. In 2014 the veteran's office made contacts with 2451 veterans and family members concerning service connected compensation, low income pension and burial benefits. Even though our contact numbers are down by 125, this office has had to dedicate more time working to assist veterans with their VA health insurance when applied to civilian hospitals. Due to the Affordable Care Act veterans who use a civilian hospital and are insured with the VA and Medicare are receiving higher deductibles or nonpayment of services. One government insurance entity will not pick up the remainder from the other. This office is spending a considerable amount of time sorting through the facts, making sure billing codes are correct along with advocating and appealing VA decisions when the VA will not pay. We are also spending a considerable amount of time reviewing veterans who are on Social Security Disability to ensure the veteran is not double dipping so they do not have to repay the government back money not due them.

We continued to assist the Allegany County Vietnam Veterans Organization. This past year, we assisted this organization to secure grants for handicap assessable wrap around deck and a pavilion for the veteran to use when they come from the Bath VA. Again this year during the winter we have made available the Crossroads conference room at night for their monthly meetings. Due to this effort, the Vietnam Veterans has seen an increase in membership participation.

Over the last four years, this office has transformed from doing basic VA compensation and pensions to a well-rounded advocates for veterans and their family in this county. We have even assisted former county veterans in other counties, Pennsylvania, Florida and California who were not getting the assistance they needed. It is also my understanding that the VA does not have a state Service Officer coming to Allegany County anymore.

The county Veterans Necrology report for 2014 is as follow: WWII – 48 (at best estimate, Allegany County has 133 WWII veterans left) / Korean – 36 / Vietnam – 43 / Peace-time 7 / Persian Gulf 2 - total 136.

According to the Geographic Distribution of VA Expenditures for year 2013, compared to counties with 7,000 veterans and less, Allegany County ranked third in securing money due our veterans to a tune of \$30,927,000.00. This is a \$5,183,000.00 over 2012 amount. I will not receive 2014 expenditures until April 2014.

The employees of the Veteran Service Agency, along with their primary duties, are involved with numerous other veterans and auxiliary organizations providing assistance with veterans funeral luncheons, breakfasts, fundraising and medical appointments. In keeping a close eye on our budget, the Veterans office was able to return \$2,017.02 back to the county taxpayer or almost 2 percent of budget. Respectfully Submitted: Michael Hennessy, Director

