

MEMORANDUM

TO: Tammy L. Sciavillo
FROM: Michelle Romalin Black, Director
SUBJECT: 2013 Annual Report
DATE: April 1, 2014

Enclosed are 2 copies of the Veterans Service Agency's
Annual Report for the year 2013.
An electronic copy will follow.

MRB: ta
Enc.

**GREENE COUNTY
VETERAN'S SERVICE AGENCY
159 Jefferson Heights
Suite A104
Catskill, New York 12414**

TO: The Honorable Board of Legislators of Greene County

The Annual Report of the Greene County Veterans Service Agency for the period January 1, 2013 to December 31, 2013 is respectfully submitted.

Michelle Romalin Black, Director

**REPORT OF THE GREENE COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE AGENCY FOR THE PERIOD OF
JANUARY 1, 2013 TO DECEMBER 31, 2013**

I. Administrative Organization:

Personnel:

GCVSA Director	(4/11/11 to present)
Veterans Van Chauffeur	(10/11/11 to present)
Senior Clerk	(12/1/10 to present)
Chairman Honor A Veteran Committee (Volunteer)	(01/01/13 to present)

Employed by NYS Division of Veterans' Affairs:

Counselor (Part time) one day a week - Wednesdays	(7/01/11 to present)
NYS DOL Local Veterans Employment Rep. Wednesdays	(7/01/11 to present)
Wednesdays	(10/24/12 to present)

II. Administrative Expenses

A. Expenses

1. Salaries	\$ 102,532.11
2. Equipment	\$ -0-
3. Rent for Offices at Greene Medical Arts Center	\$ 16,335.60
4. Office Supplies and Postage	\$ 1,384.63
5. Repairs	\$ -0-
6. Veterans Transportation Services & Travel	\$ 7,662.70

7. Equipment-Vehicles	\$ -0-
8. Employee Benefits	\$ 69,177.45
9. Insurance	\$ 2,581.29
10. Telephone	\$ <u>2,689.78</u>
Total Expenses	\$202,363.56

III. Reimbursement

1. Salaries, Office Supplies, etc. – NYSDVA	\$ 8,529.00
2. Private Donations	<u>-0-</u>
	\$ <u>8,529.00</u>

Operating Costs to County \$193,834.56

IV. Claims and Benefits

A. Compensation – Service-connected disability incurred or aggravated in service.

Applications: Pending from 2012	26	
Filed in 2013	<u>37</u>	
	63	
Approved	25	\$728,533.00
Denied	3	
Pending	32	
Withdrawn	<u>3</u>	
	63	

B. Pension – Non-service connected disability based on low income, age, physical condition and inability to pursue a gainful occupation.

Applications: Pending from 2012	6	
Filed in 2013	<u>2</u>	
	8	
Approved	1	\$ 810.00
Denied	0	
Withdrawn	2	
Pending	<u>5</u>	
	8	

C. Widows and Children – Compensation (in-service death or death from service-connected disability), or pension from service (non-service connected death).

Applications: Pending from 2012	14	
Filed in 2013	<u>3</u>	
	17	
Approved	3	\$ 7,432.00
Denied	0	
Unknown	0	
Pending	12	
Withdrawn	<u>2</u>	
	17	

D. Burial Allowances:

Applications: Pending from 2012	6	
Filed in 2013	<u>10</u>	
	16	
Approved	3	\$ *
Pending	13	
Denied	0	
Withdrawn	<u>0</u>	
	16	

Education Allowances: Pending from 2012	3	
Filed in 2013	<u>2</u>	
	5	
Approved	0	\$ -0-
Denied	1	
Pending	4	
Withdrawn	<u>0</u>	
	5	

TOTAL AMOUNT OF BENEFITS RECEIVED \$ 717, 731.00*

*(Burial benefits awarded not reported back to GVSVA)

STATISTICAL REPORT OF SERVICES RENDERED

A. Contacts for 2013

Veterans – World War I	0
World War II	53
Korean War	48
Vietnam War	401
Persian Gulf War	212
Peacetime	91
Servicemen	10
Other (funeral homes, nursing homes, DSS, veteran’s dependents, VA hosp.,etc.)	626
TOTAL CONTACTS	<u>1,763</u>

B. Services Rendered

Armed Forces	157
Blind Annuity	3
Burial	265
Compensation (Veteran & Dependent)	680
Education-H.S. College	24
Education-Vocational Rehabilitation	0
Labor – Civil Service, Employment, Re-employment, Unemployment	64
Insurance	7
Legal	4
Loans	14
Hospital, Dental	198
Pension (Veterans & Dependent)	168
Personal Affairs	20
Social Security	12
Social Services	3
Taxes	36
Counseling – in-depth	2
Other	141
TOTAL	<u>1,798</u>

C. Veterans Van Service

(Transporting Veterans to and from VAMC in Albany, three days a week)	908
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2013 ANNUAL REPORT

SUMMARY

The most recent figures available from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) estimates Greene County's veteran population at approximately 4,430. This figure is based on a statistical formula derived in 2007 that uses an assumption that the mortality rate of pre-Persian Gulf Veterans will exceed the number of post Persian Gulf era Military Troops transitioning into Veterans. However, a reevaluation was completed in 2012 that showed an approximate 5.2% increase in the population of Greene County Veterans between 2011 and 2012, and is reflected on the Department of Veterans Affairs annual report for 2012—the most recent available. In light of the local Army National Guard unit, DOD draw-downs and other cuts in Military spending in addition to the culmination of the Iraq War, and speculative end to the Afghanistan War, these Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Population analyses may not accurately reflect the full Veterans population in Greene County.

VA expenditure reports reflect the actual dollars received by Greene County Veterans for Compensation and Pension benefits, Education benefits, and Insurance and Indemnities benefits. Additionally, the total expenditure figure includes the VA's cost for healthcare provided to Greene County Veterans. The Compensation and Pension figure typically reflects claims that were filed approximately 24 months prior or earlier. All other expenditures reflect the actual fiscal year. In 2013, \$8,005,000.00 in Compensation and Pension benefits were paid to Greene County veterans and their families in fiscal year 2012. VA statistics show, 2013 medical expenditures for Greene County veterans of \$12,492,000.00. Educational payments (GI Bill and VRAP) of \$586,000.00 were paid out to Greene County Veterans. Insurance and Indemnities increased slightly to \$250,000.00 for 2013. This category is case-by-case every year, based on death of Veterans who purchased VA Life Insurance upon discharge or within 2 years of receiving a VA Disability Compensation Award. The total Veterans Administration expenditure for Greene County considering all services rendered totaled \$21,333,000. This number reflects a significant loss, most directly caused by a severe decrease in education benefits paid. This loss is directly attributed to latest changes to the GI Bill touted as an increase in benefits for our Servicemen and Women seeking a college education. Unfortunately, several strict new policies, including loss of benefits during gaps between semesters, confusion due to convoluted language, lack of training available for school officials and service officers, and severely understaffed VA Educational offices resulted in gross overpayments in 2012 and a very significant loss in education benefits nationwide in 2013.

The Greene County Veterans Service Agency and Greene County Veterans would benefit significantly from re-instating and filling the position of Deputy Director as a part-time position. New York State Division of Veterans Affairs (NYS DVA) refuses to provide a counsellor to this office more than one (1) day per week, in order to better serve Columbia County; and, there are several weeks each year that NYSDVA does not cover this office at all. Limited staffing is inhibitive; and, our claim-count continues to suffer due to the cut in services to Greene County Veterans by NYSDVA, in order to better serve Columbia County Veterans who enjoy an additional counselor four (4) days per week.

Two accredited VSO's working solely for Greene County Veterans would allow the Agency to significantly increase its presence in its respective communities. The overall cost for a part time salary and benefits to the county is nominal in comparison to overall benefit to

Greene County. The entire budget for this agency is less than 1% (less than 0.8% actually) of the total VA's expenditures for Greene County Veterans. Having a part-time counsellor would not only expand availability to our Veterans, but would also allow me, as the Director, to spend more time researching and advocating for Greene County Veterans to combat the adversarial trends originating at the Federal level, that continue to cost our Veterans millions in VA benefits. Greene County Veterans Service Agency is in dire need of a part-time Veterans Service Officer.

I oversee the Greene County Honor a Veteran Committee. The committee budget is \$500.00. The expenditures include flag cases presented to the Veterans or their families, and the printed programs distributed to the attendees. We hold two Honor a Vet ceremonies each year in May and November. The May ceremony honors a deceased Veteran, specifically a Killed in Action (KIA) Veteran every other year; and, we honor a living Veteran in November. The events are also an opportunity to bring awareness to our community's Veterans twice per year, and to bring our elected officials into our community. Since our November 2011 ceremony, we have enjoyed visits by our Congressman Chris Gibson and our Assemblyman Peter Lopez at each event, in addition to most of our Greene County Legislators. In 2013, I appointed a full-time chairman to the Honor a Veteran Committee, Timothy Broder, a Vietnam Combat Veteran; whose hard work and dedication to this office and Greene County Veterans has been invaluable.

Lastly, I would like to address our Greene County Veterans Service Agency Transportation program. This past year we, significantly reduced the number of hours the van was available, and by proxy the number of Veterans that we transported to Albany Stratton VAMC. Although, this may have directly saved Greene County a small sum from the Veterans Agency budget, we also saw a much more significant drop in VA Medical Expenditures and total Unique Patients using VA Healthcare in the past two years—over a 15% loss of expenditure over two years, or just under two-million dollars. I think it is important that we consider increasing availability to this service. All other counties in our region operate wheelchair accessible min-buses, staff at least two regular drivers, and provide *daily* service to the VAMC in Albany. Additionally, all other County Veterans Service Agencies in our region with VA Clinics also provide transportation to such, including Columbia County that provides transportation to the Catskill Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC).

Though overtime requested has always been approved, I have tried to work within the confines of our budget. Unfortunately, attempting to do so continues to result in what I think is an unacceptable number of rejected requests for transportation on off days or for later appointments. In 2012, we only transported 1043 Veterans to and from the VA, a 20% decrease, and this year we only transported 908 an additional 13% decrease. In light of the VA's own reduction in medical benefits to our Veterans, I propose adding a full-time 40 hour supervision position, adding two (2) wheelchair accessible mini-buses to the Agency's fleet, extending our service to include the local CBOC, and provide daily service to each location (M-F); while, maintaining the current 33-hour and Per Diem positions and 2 commercial passenger vans. **Transportation to the CBOC is an important component of the VA's decision regarding the final location of the clinic. Columbia County already has this program in place.** Additionally, I believe that expanding our transportation service, will significantly increase the medical services expenditures by the VA provided to Greene County Veterans; as, the VA's in-home healthcare programs continue to suffer the greatest cut-backs.

2013 ANNUAL REPORT

HIGHLIGHTS

During 2013, the Agency sponsored two “Honor a Veteran” ceremonies recognizing Greene County veterans for their military service and service to their communities. These events increase awareness for the agency, bring our state and federal representatives to our area to visit, and show Greene County Veterans and their families, that their government and community appreciate their service.

On November 2nd, with the assistance of the Greene County Honor a Veteran Committee, I completed the process of becoming a Designated Purple Heart County, and honored all of our Purple Heart Veterans in a special Purple Heart Ceremony attended by our Assemblyman, Pete Lopez, our New York State Senator, Celia Tkaczyk, and our Congressman Chris Gibson. Additionally, the Department Commander of the Military Order of the Purple Heart and several representatives of the National Purple Heart Hall of Honor, as well as several of our own Purple Heart Veterans, and over 100 Greene County Veterans, and their families and friends, including members of our local American Legion, VFW, Marine Corps League, Civil Air Patrol, and Boy Scouts. Musical entertainment was provided by Laura Marriott, Charlie “The Wee Piper” Murphy, and James Gregg, retired Catskill High School Band Instructor.

This agency continued lobbying the DVA, our local Veterans Administration Medical Center (VAMC), and our relevant elected officials, to maintain our current Veterans Clinic in Greene County. Speculatively, we have been reassured that the Catskill VA Clinic will remain in its Jefferson Heights location in the future. We will continue to maintain close connection with the Congressman’s office in this matter, lobbying when appropriate, until we have definitive proof the VA Clinic will remain in Greene County.

Greene County Veterans Service Agency continues to maintain a partnership with the County Clerk to keep the Greene County Veterans discount program for honorably discharged veterans active and positively received among Greene County Merchants. We are constantly working to increase participation in the Greene County F.A.V.O.R. program, and many businesses in the county provide significant discounts to Greene County Veterans. In 2013, we added three more Greene County Businesses to the F.A.V.O.R. program in Cairo, Freehold and Greenville: The newest members are Frank’s Express Pizza, Story’s Nursery, and Kelly’s Pharmacy, respectively. They all provide a 10% discount to Veterans, Military, and their immediate family members.

As Director of the Greene County Veterans Service Agency, I hold the position of Service Officer for the Greene County American Legion and the Greenville American Legion Post 291. Each organization holds monthly meetings, and I attend and/or provide a service report to each organization monthly as needed. I also provide a service report to any Veterans Service Organization’s Service Officer who submits a request in a timely manner. I sit on the executive committee of the Greenville American Legion Post 291, and attend an additional monthly meeting for that committee, which is directly responsible for many charitable donations to the local community and local and regional Veterans programs, including substantial donations to the Military Hospitality Room in the Albany International Airport. The Hospitality room provides comforts such as food, couches, showers, clean clothes, television, video games, books, toys and various vouchers for extended delays, to deploying and/or laid-over Servicemen and Women and their families.

In July, I was invited by the American Legion Department of New York Training Coordinator to teach an upcoming Basic Training class for newly appointed County Veterans Service Officers—the same class I attended in 2011 to obtain my accreditation. There were 15 students, including several new County Veterans Service Agency Directors. All of “my” students successfully passed their accreditation exam, and continue to seek my assistance and advice in filing claims for VA benefits.

I appreciate your attention to Greene County Veterans, and your consideration in the matters I have addressed in this Agency’s summary. I am confident that the extended services I have proposed will provide benefits to Greene County Veterans, and ultimately Greene Government and all of its tax-payers, that will far out-weigh the expenditure.