



# **GREENE COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE AGENCY**

**ANNUAL REPORT 2016**

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## VISION

Greene County Veterans Service Agency is dedicated to providing the highest quality of service to the Veterans and their families.

## MISSION

Our mission is to:

Educate Greene County Veterans and their families about the benefits they have earned

Represent and guide our Veterans in obtaining benefits and services through the VA and other local agencies

Make our Veterans an economic force in education, employment and business development

## SUMMARY

Our Agency provided services to 2055 veterans, veteran family members and veteran advocates in 2016. We had a staff of four full time employees, and one per diem driver; and one part time New York State Division of Veterans Affairs employee who represented Greene and Columbia County veterans from our office twice per week. All of our programs and services are provided directly through our agency; while, all benefits and payments received by our clients are provided directly from federal and state sources.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

There are approximately 860,000 veterans in New York State, and approximately 4000 veterans are estimated to live in Greene County. While Greene County's total population only represents 0.25% of the total estimated New York State population, our veterans represent nearly 1% of the total state veteran population. The veteran population density in Greene County is 84 veterans per 1000 residents, which is among the highest in the state, as well as many other regions of the country.

Approximately 17% of Greene County's estimated veteran population are receiving VA Disability Compensation for service-connected disability or VA Disability Pension for nonservice-connected disabilities, a 2% total increase from 2016. Approximately 30% of our veterans are utilizing VA Healthcare, up 4% from 2016.

Though the VA statistical model shows Greene County's veteran population declining, it is only a hypothetical model based on various other data; e.g., morbidity and mortality rates of veterans, so-called snow-birding of retirees, or the overall reduced armed forces populations available to separate from active duty and repopulate veteran categories. Regardless, we continue to see a rise in the number of unique veterans seeking and receiving VA benefits in Greene County; so, we continue to meet the VA's statistical veteran population model with skepticism.

## 2016 GOALS

The Agency goals for 2016 were:

- Procure wheelchair accessible van for transportation program
  - We obtained our wheelchair accessible van on July 26, 2016, it was put in service on August 17, 2016, and made 12 wheelchair transports through the remainder of the year.
- Revise agency filing system, eliminating unnecessary paper files
  - We have revised our filing system, and segregated approximately 5000 files for archiving.
- Digitize approximately 13,000 existing paper files
  - We have not accomplished this goal yet, due to setbacks with software and agency priority, but continue to work with Records Management to move forward for a 2017 deadline.
- Continue to increase overall productivity, ensuring as many Greene County veterans as possible are aware of and obtaining their VA and other veterans benefits
  - Veterans Services increased the number of VA Disability Compensation awards received by Greene County Veterans by 12%.
- Continue to streamline interagency services, by coordinating with other local agencies and departments who refer clients
  - We continue to interact with the Department of Social Services, Department of Human Services, Greene County Mental Health, and the Greene County Clerk and DMV, making and receiving referrals to ensure our veterans are

## 2016 GOALS (CONT)

advised and properly assisted in obtaining benefits and assistance available to them, as needed.

- Implement a Greene County Peer to Peer program for veterans who need additional support transitioning to civilian life
  - Due to transitioning staff and training, and steep increase in claim count for 2016, this program creation has been temporarily tabled, with hopes of forming and implementing by early 2018.
- Complete the veterans work station within the office, allowing Veterans seeking employment, to access a computer, printer, resume building software, and the internet.
  - We were unable to complete this project due to funding.
- Continue to partner with local businesses and the County Clerk in maintaining and expanding the Greene County Return the Favor Program
  - Through collaborative efforts with the Greene County Clerk's office, local businesses, and Greene County's Veterans Service Organizations, we have at least 95 local businesses participating in the F.A.V.O.R Program, offering various discounts to local veterans.
- Proudly honor two deserving veterans in our Honor a Vet Memorial and Veteran of the Year ceremonies
  - We hosted, under the aegis of Greene County Government, two beautiful and well-attended Honor a Vet Ceremonies in 2016; honoring well-deserved and respected members of our

## 2016 GOALS (CONT)

Greene County Veterans community. Our program is so well-received, other NYS counties are mirroring our programming—honoring a living veteran each year, and organizing a large-scale community event. Upon attending veterans events outside of the county, we have received numerous compliments from our counterparts in surrounding counties. We are very proud of this program; and, strive to continue to improve it.

# PROGRAMS & SERVICES

## ➤ VA Disability Compensation Claim Representation

- Represent veteran clients against the Department of Veterans Affairs in Disability Compensation claims
- Provide guidance to veterans obtaining necessary medical evidence
- Develop and submit each claim to American Legion Department Service Officer for review
- Submit accepted claims to the appropriate Department of Veterans Affairs Regional Office for rating or approval
- Interact with Congressional office to ensure all viable claims are accurately rated

## ➤ VA Educational Benefits

- Assist veterans in obtaining their Certificate of Eligibility for the GI Bill
- Assist eligible veterans' dependents in applying for Chapter 35 Survivor and Dependents Assistance for Education
- Advise veterans of potential education benefits for self and dependents
- Advise higher education institutions of CFR Title 38 Part III Chapters 30 through 36 regulations as necessary

## ➤ VA Pension Claim Representation

- Represent eligible wartime veteran clients or their surviving spouses in VA Disability Pension claims



## PROGRAMS & SERVICES (CONT)

- Assist veteran, family members and advocates in obtaining necessary financial information
- Assist same in obtaining necessary medical information
- Develop and submit claims to American Legion Department Service Officer for review
- Submit accepted claims to the appropriate Department of Veterans Affairs Regional Office for approval
- VA Healthcare and Enrollment
  - Guide veterans through application process
  - Provide explanation of benefits
  - Assist veterans in disclosing their financials to the VA
  - Screen applicants for potential VA Disability Compensation claims
  - Assist veterans who were denied VA Healthcare
  - Help veterans navigate VA Healthcare benefits and billing
  - Advocate for veterans who are not receiving appropriate care at VA medical facilities
- County Veterans Transportation Program
  - Provide daily (weekday) transportation for county veterans to VA medical facilities
  - Pick up and drop off veterans at their homes
  - Provide transportation as requested for disability compensation assistance

## PROGRAMS & SERVICES (CONT)

- Transport veterans after hours or weekends for special events as requested
  - Create and maintain eligibility requirements and standard operating procedure
  - Ensure vehicles, staff, and services meet all federal, state and local standards
- Honor a Vet Ceremony
- Hold two Honor a Vet Ceremonies each year
    - One memorial ceremony in May for a chosen deceased veteran
    - One Veteran of the Year Ceremony in November for the chosen living veteran
  - Supervise a nine member panel of committee members
  - Create and disseminate submission packets annually
  - Review and assess submissions for accuracy and eligibility
  - Coordinate with Buildings and Grounds, Sheriff's Department, Catskill Police Department, and Greene County Courthouse for location set up and traffic control.
  - Coordinate with local entertainers, clergy, and veterans service and other organizations to ensure each ceremony is tailored to the honoree and his/her local community

## PROGRAMS & SERVICES (CONT)

- Coordinate with Greene County Agencies and Departments
  - Coordinate with County Clerk's office in obtaining and submitting veterans discharge documents
  - Coordinate county's Return the Favor program, periodically canvassing local businesses to provide discounts to area veterans and/or update their existing offers with County Clerk's office who maintains accurate listing

# ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION

## Personnel

GCVSA Director	04/11/2011 to present
Veterans Benefits Representative	08/22/2015 to present
Veterans Service Assistant	12/28/2015 to present
Veterans Service Driver – Full Time	10/11/2011 to present
Veterans Service Chauffeur – Per Diem	06/01/2014 to present
Honor a Veteran Committee Chairman (Volunteer)	01/01/2013 to present
NYS Division of Veterans Affairs Benefits Advisor (Part Time)	07/01/2011 to 03/01/2017

# ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES

## COMPARATIVE OPERATING EXPENSES

	2015	2016
Salaries	\$123,873.65	\$154,773.11
Rent	\$15,615.11	\$23,419.64
Office Supplies	\$3,428.50 *	\$2,169.34
Postage	\$283.42	\$209.65
Repairs	\$16,407.38 **	\$131.03
Travel	\$9,700.68	\$13,209.86
Employee Benefits	\$69,682.42	\$68,213.53
Events	\$375.45	\$547.54
Vehicle Insurance	\$2,414.75	\$1,129.39
Telephone	\$2,737.00	\$2,993.11
Total	\$244,518.36	\$266,796.20
NYS Reimbursement	\$8529.00	\$8529.00
Total Operating Expenses to County	\$235,989.36	\$258,267.20

\* Office furniture included in total

\*\* Construction for new office spaces

# CLAIMS & BENEFITS

Greene County Veterans represented by American Legion Accredited Representative

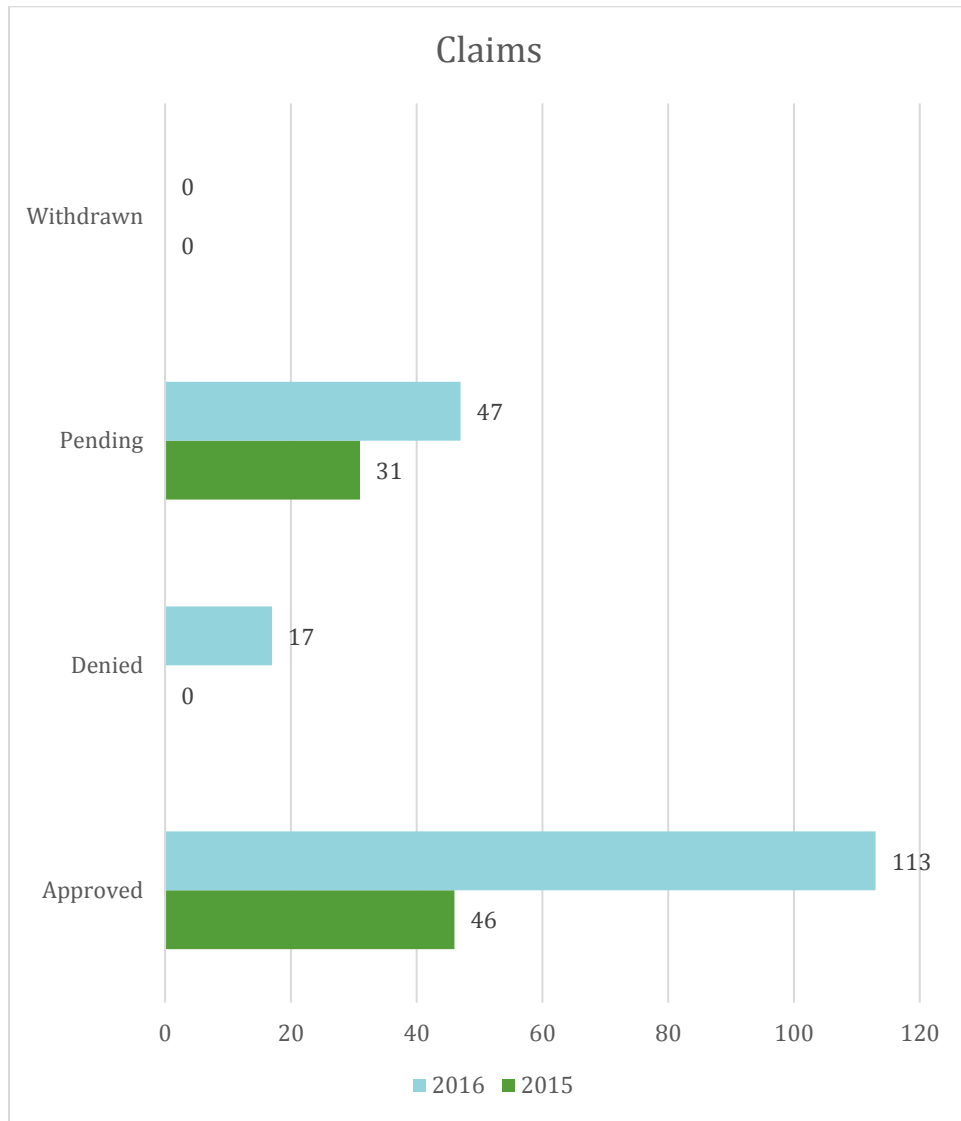


Figure 1

## CLAIMS & BENEFITS (CONT)

In 2016 the agency filed 26.67% more VA claims than 2015. Of those claims, 64% have been approved, a 3% increase from last year, by the Department of Veterans Affairs for payment of benefits, while 27% remain pending, and 9% were denied. Of the denied claims, 99% were expected, as they were claims filed on demand, but lacking substantiated merit, and 1% were unexpected. Approximately 60% of those denials, are currently in appeals, and accounted for in the “pending” status in figure 1 above.

Additionally, our New York State Division of Veterans Affairs (NYDVA) Veterans Benefits Representative filed 82 VA claims, status of which is unavailable. The total Agency and NYDVA claim count for 2016 which is not reflected in the graph above, is 178 which is 45% higher than the number of claims file in 2015. In 2014, our combined claim count was 96, which was an increase of 23% for both agencies.

Though this is 2017 information: going forward, NYSDVA, without notice, pulled its representative from the Greene County Veterans Services office; effective March 1, 2017; therefore, we will no longer have access to their data for subsequent reports.

## CLAIMS & BENEFITS (CONT)

We anticipate most NYSDVA clients will revoke their POA's with the state, and opt for local representation through our agency, instead of travelling outside of the county for the same services.

We will continue to provide transportation for veterans who wish to maintain representation with NYSDVA representatives who are located at the Albany VAMC only, as long as said representatives accommodate our transportation schedule; and, we will ensure all veterans experience a smooth transition, regardless of which agency they choose.

As of October 1, 2016, the agency saw a combined 12.12% total increase in Greene County veterans receiving VA Disability Compensation and Pension. Please see figures in graph below for an in-depth analysis by age, gender, and disability award rating percentage rates:



# CLAIMS & BENEFITS (CONT)

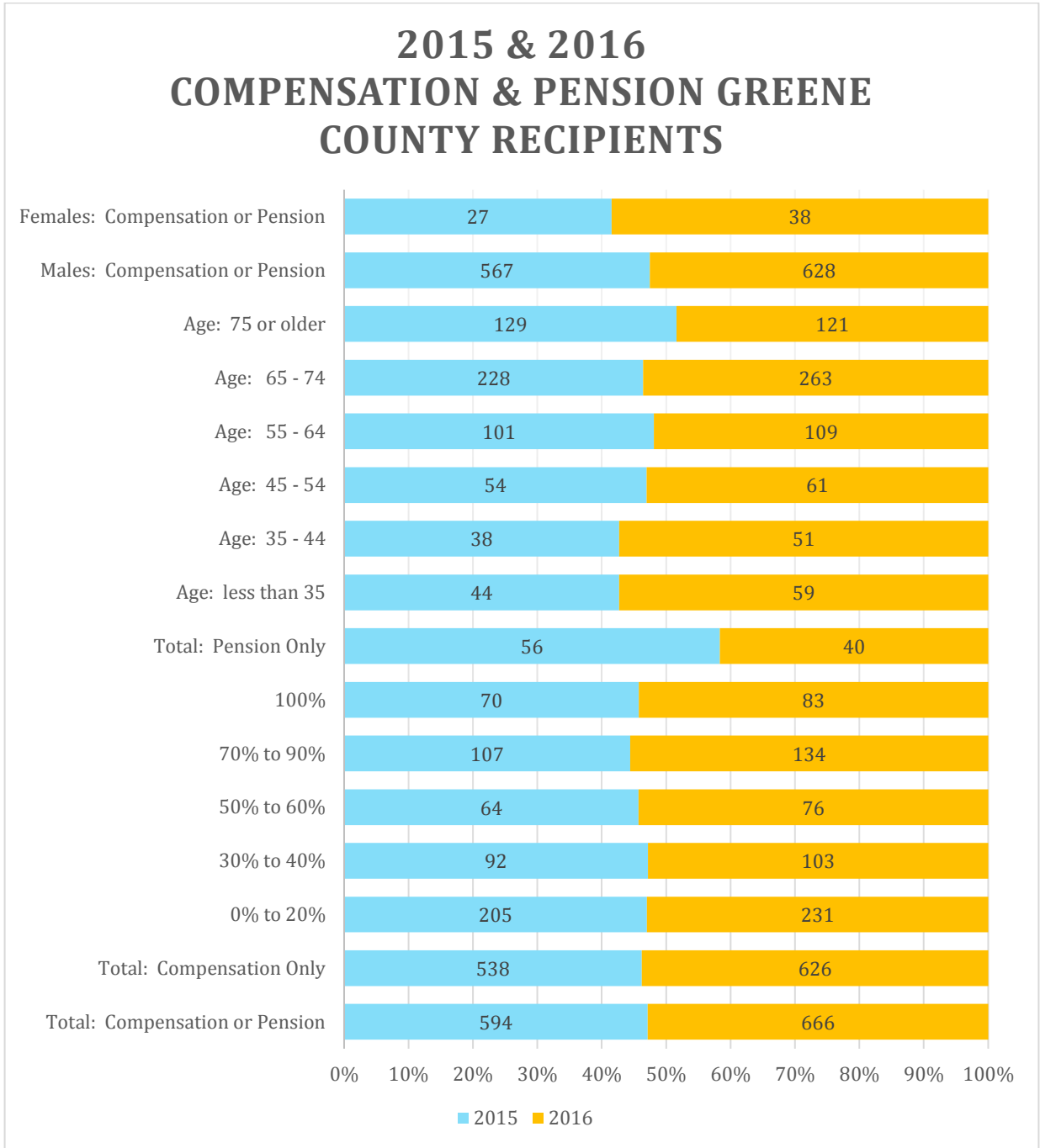


Figure 2

# STATISTICAL REPORTS

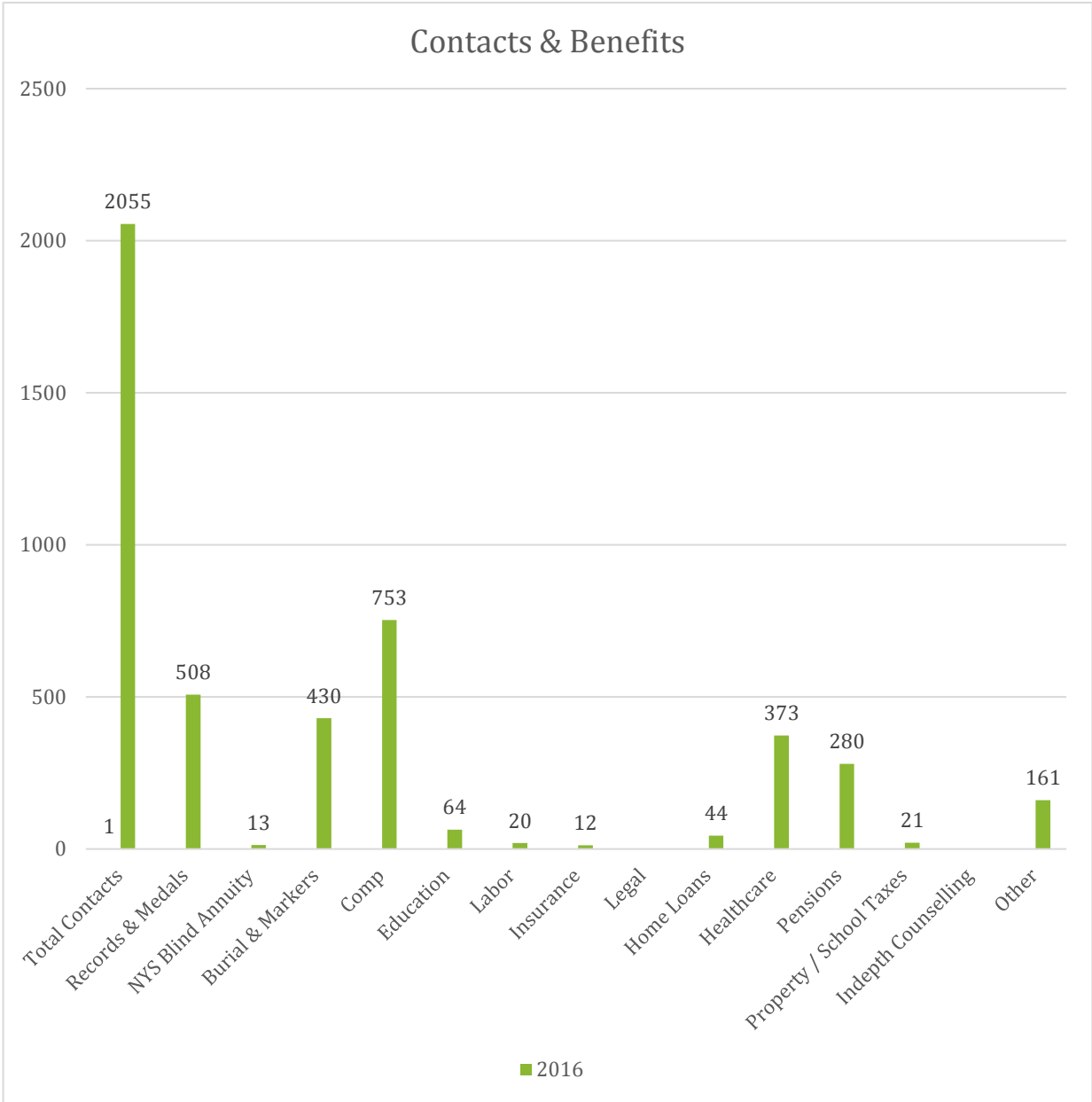


Figure 3

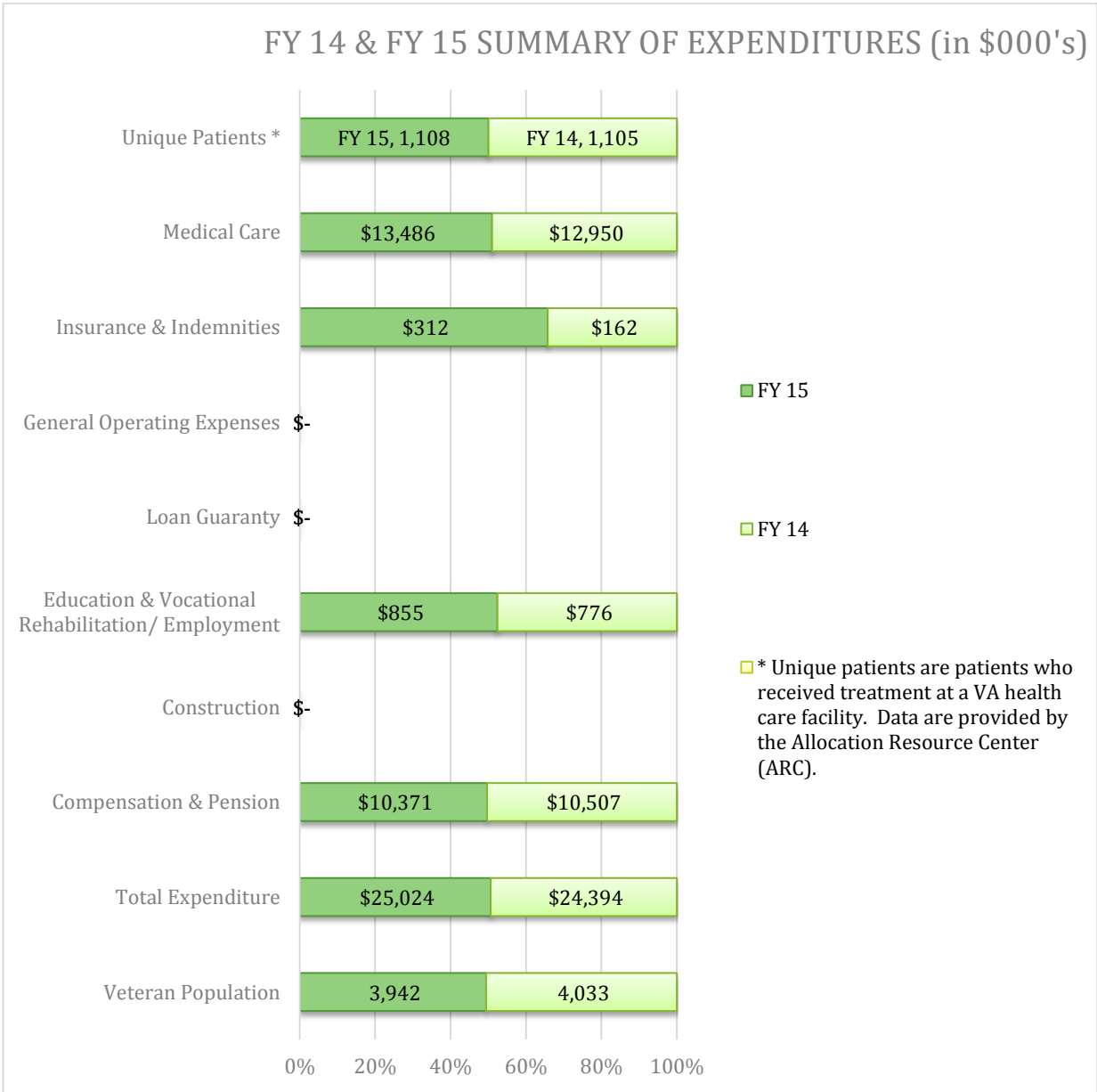
## STATISTICAL REPORTS (CONT)

2016	Claims Filed	World War II	Korea	Vietnam	Persian Gulf	Afghanistan	Other	Veteran	Dependent/Other	Telephone	Walk-In	Mail	Fax	NYSDVA	Other
Jan	5	7	14	53	17	3	38	59	62	36	43	33	10	11	110
Feb	0	31	29	59	17	4	54	87	72	83	51	24	1	32	127
Mar	13	35	24	60	31	4	76	87	135	108	55	44	15	29	193
Apr	10	23	16	45	10	1	59	72	72	69	38	30	7	17	127
May	7	23	29	49	12	1	37	66	74	55	52	23	10	23	117
Jun	13	28	22	43	8	3	51	77	76	59	51	22	21	26	127
Jul	6	33	12	41	22	5	71	72	106	99	46	28	5	48	130
Aug	8	40	29	65	15	14	59	97	111	110	57	26	15	32	176
Sep	4	32	32	66	30	6	66	101	96	89	60	30	18	44	153
Oct	5	22	17	72	22	4	58	89	91	75	62	33	10	25	155
Nov	7	31	22	62	11	12	33	73	76	73	49	21	6	11	138
Dec	18	34	34	60	32	27	78	112	92	88	74	27	15	28	176
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>339</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>675</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>680</b>	<b>992</b>	<b>1063</b>	<b>944</b>	<b>638</b>	<b>341</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>326</b>	<b>1729</b>

2016	Disability Compensation	Pension	Healthcare	Education	Insurance	Home Loan	Burial	Medals	Military Records	Gold Star Parent Annuity	Blind Annuity	Supplemental Burial	Education	Home Loan	Park Passes	Hunting/Fishing License	Employment	State Vets Home	Medals	Property Tax	Other
Jan	63	14	15	4	0	0	8	3	27	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	10
Feb	73	24	27	0	0	1	28	3	31	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	3	2	11
Mar	87	23	26	5	0	3	50	0	43	0	3	0	5	3	0	0	3	1	0	4	26
Apr	45	9	42	6	0	6	28	5	18	0	0	0	6	6	0	0	3	0	5	0	16
May	34	11	30	3	0	1	34	0	34	0	0	0	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	23
Jun	61	25	35	12	0	0	32	0	37	0	0	0	12	0	0	0	10	0	0	4	20
Jul	37	26	40	7	0	4	38	0	50	0	5	0	7	4	0	0	0	0	0	2	13
Aug	64	17	34	6	0	5	63	6	63	2	2	2	6	5	2	3	4	2	6	3	18
Sep	87	32	23	7	2	2	22	0	42	0	0	0	7	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	14
Oct	64	18	38	4	1	6	45	2	44	0	0	3	4	6	0	0	0	0	2	0	7
Nov	60	33	30	5	6	9	38	4	42	0	3	0	5	9	0	0	0	0	4	0	1
Dec	78	48	33	5	3	7	44	11	43	0	0	0	5	7	0	0	0	0	11	5	2
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>753</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>373</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>430</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>474</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>161</b>

Figure 4

# STATISTICAL REPORTS (CONT)



**Figure 5**

# STATISTICAL REPORTS (CONT)

## TRANSPORTATION

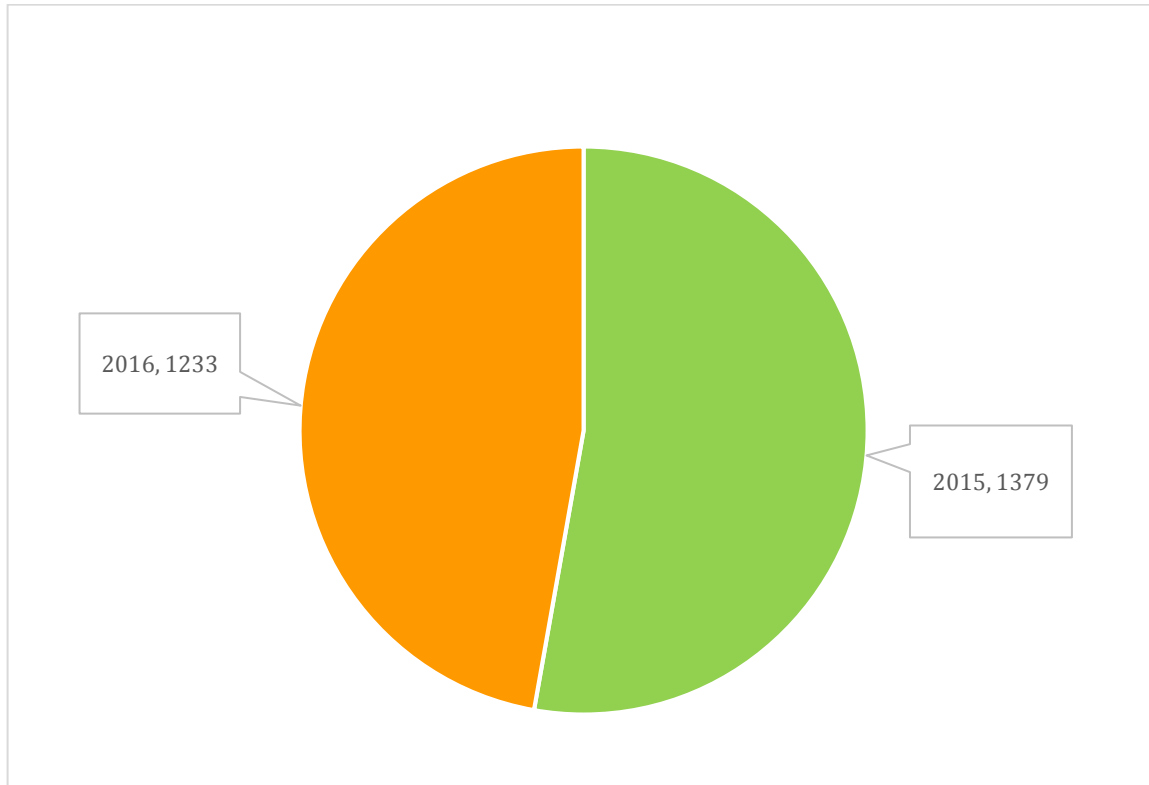


Figure 6

We maintain a fleet of three vehicles: 2006 Ford Focus, 2010 Chevy Van, 2016 Ford Transit Van with Wheelchair Lift. Our overall transportation service decreased by approximately 145 total rides for the year; we attribute this to passing and moving of certain regular passengers; and, to a significant decrease in our 75 and over veteran population—who are more likely to need assistance.

## STATISTICAL REPORTS (CONT)

### TRANSPORTATION (CONT)

This age demographic fluctuates, and we anticipate an increase in ridership over the next three years, as the larger 65-74 demographic, moves into the 75 and over category.

Moreover, the implementation of the Greene County Public Transportation program through the Ulster County ARC, may have contributed slightly to this small decline in ridership; as, a few of our veterans who typically utilizing the Catskill CBOC for the majority of their VA Healthcare, enjoy the opportunity to travel the various routes for shopping and other errand purposes; which, our transportation service does not provide. We provide medical transport only. Also with respect to the implementation of public transportation, we saw a sharp decline for the summer months: June, and July, with our ridership increasing again beginning in August; so, shortly after this public program was implemented.

Speculatively, as we did not gather specific data, we will only posit that some of our riders opted for the public transportation at its inception; but chose to return to our veterans transportation program for a variety of reasons, including cost, length of time away from home, and inability to travel to pick-up points.

## **2017 GOALS**

The Agency goals for 2017 are:

- Continue eliminating unnecessary paper files
- Digitize approximately 13,000 existing paper files
- Continue to increase overall productivity, ensuring as many Greene County veterans as possible are aware of and obtaining their VA and other veterans benefits under our representation
- Assist Greene County veterans previously represented by NYSDVA in moving their POA's to our agency
- Continue to streamline interagency services, by coordinating with other local agencies and departments who refer clients
- Continue to partner with local businesses and the County Clerk in maintaining and expanding the Greene County Return the Favor Program
- Proudly honor two deserving veterans in our Honor a Vet Memorial and Veteran of the Year ceremonies

## **LONG TERM GOALS**

- Implement a Veterans Assistance Fund, by coordinating with other agencies within Greene County Government as well as local Veterans Service Organizations and other non-profit and for-profit companies conducting business in Greene County, as well as local leadership to:

- Continue to advise, support, and interact with our local Veterans Service Organizations
  - Continue to advise and support our veterans in obtaining 100% compliance with the NYS Veterans School Tax Exemption; regardless of NYS reimbursement. Currently, only four out of ten school districts within or overlapping Greene County townships, have approved the exemption; we are advised on each status solely by members of the respective veterans' communities for each district: to date, two school boards are still taking the exemption under consideration, and one school board refuses to make any further considerations, recently rejecting its veterans request to move the discussion to the board's agenda for a vote. There have been no updates for the 2017 tax year, from the remaining three school boards.
  - Implement a Greene County Veterans Peer-to-Peer program, for vets in need of additional support transitioning to or functioning in civilian life; by, providing a location, training mentors, and facilitating peer-matching, meetings and recreational events.
  - Implement a Greene County Veterans Service Dog training program.
  - Build and equip a Veterans Back to Work Station within the office, offering vets computer access with résumé-builder software and individual assistance, in creating their résumés and internet access to search for employment opportunities.
- Offer financial assistance to veterans who wish to obtain certain education and/or certifications for employment in coordination with



## LONG TERM GOALS (CONT)

community need: e.g., Certified Nursing Assistants and Home Health Aides, through a community partnership program; where, Greene County, or another organization or business, provides full or partial scholarships to eligible candidates in return for a number of *community service* hours to that sponsor, to help minimize the documented shortage; and, simply offering small scholarships to cover some or all of the cost of testing fees, required study materials, or other expenses associated with training, temporary childcare, transportation, etc. to assist veterans who want to go back to work, but need retraining.