



# **GREENE COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE AGENCY**

**ANNUAL REPORT 2017**

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## VISION STATEMENT

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

## MISSION

- Educate Greene County Veterans and their eligible or advocating family members, about the various benefits Veterans have earned
- Represent and guide our Veterans and their eligibly family members, in obtaining benefits and services through the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, and other state, local, community, and private sources
- Make our Veterans an economic force through education, employment and business development

## SUMMARY

Our Agency provided services to 2897 veterans, veteran family members and veteran advocates in 2017—over a 29% increase in total services. Our full time staff included our Director, one Veterans Benefits Representative, one Veterans Services Assistant, and one Veterans Services Driver, and one per diem driver. 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. The operating cost of this agency remains approximately 1% of the total federal, health, education, pension, life insurance, and low income pension benefits, which are afforded to our Veterans and their eligible family members, per annum. The most recent full data set for VA Expenditures available to render this calculation, is for 2016; however, there has been no significant flux over the past five (5) years.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

According to the US Department of Veterans Affairs' current 30 year veterans estimated population model, utilizing statistics and projections based on the 2010 and earlier US Census reports; there are now approximately 806,000 veterans in New York State, and approximately 4000 of these 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 of Greene County is approximately 85 veterans per 1000 residents, or 8.5% of our total Greene County population; which, includes us among some of the highest of New York State's rural counties, as well as many other regions of the United States.

Approximately 16.6% 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 0.4% total decrease from 2016.

The most recent data set available for VA Healthcare is between 2015 and 2016. Approximately 30% of our veterans continue to utilize VA Healthcare, there was a slight increase from 28.1% to 29.5%; however, this change more significantly reflects the population drop annotated for 2015.

Though the VA statistical model still shows Greene County's veteran population declining, it is only a hypothetical model. Regardless, we continue to see a rise in the number of unique veterans seeking and receiving VA benefits in Greene County.

## 2017 GOALS

The Agency goals for 2017 were:

- Continue eliminating unnecessary paper files
  - We have completely replaced our old filing system, with a more streamlined, and efficient system. We have eliminated over 13,000 paper index cards, that utilized approximately 25% of hard copy file storage space; we have created a digital database to replace our catalogue system; which, allows for cross-referencing of information, in order to locate files by a variety of selected information. Additionally, all of our staff annotations to files are also digitized, removing excess paper from each file.
- Digitize approximately 13,000 existing paper files
  - This goal is continued for 2018, until it is met.
- 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
  - We have increased the number of services provided by 29%, the number of claim approvals at the US Department of Veterans Affairs' Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), by 58%, while reducing the number of denials by 68%.
- Assist Greene County veterans previously represented by NYSDVA in moving their POA's to our agency:
  - In March, NYSDVA removed its Benefits Representative from Greene County. We were able to immediately take over all of NYSDVA's clients; and, at year's end nearly 99% of Greene County Veterans previously represented by NYSDVA, chose to move their

## 2017 GOALS (CONT)

representation to Greene County Veterans Service Agency. We made the transition simple for our new clientele by interacting on their behalf with NYSDVA, to obtain the necessary records and documentation to continue their claims with the Department of Veterans Affairs.

- Continue to streamline interagency services, by coordinating with other local agencies and departments who refer clients.
  - This is an ongoing goal, most often met by contacting outside agencies and prompting them to modify, correct, or include necessary information, that we can serve our Veteran and eligible family clients to our best capacity.
- Proudly honor two deserving veterans in our Honor a Vet Memorial and Veteran of the Year ceremonies
  - This year Greene County Veterans Service Agency, with the assistance of the existing Honor a Vet Committee members, created a set of procedures to ensure continuity in the selection process, and that the expectations and responsibilities of the membership and titled roles, including the non-member Advisor, are unmistakable. Subsequently, the Honor a Vet Committee elected a new Committee Chairman, George Greiner, to a two-year term; and, successfully held its traditional Honor a Vet Memorial Ceremony on May 20th, honoring, a most beloved Purple Heart Veteran of Catskill, Mr. G.L. “Johnny” Lyles, resulting in one of the largest audiences this program has ever enjoyed; and, our traditional Veteran of the Year

## 2017 GOALS (CONT)

Award, honoring a living veteran, on November 4<sup>th</sup>, the charming, Mr. Robert Stefanko a decorated Vietnam Combat Veteran and self-made entrepreneur of Windham. This Agency was very pleased with the participation from the Greene County Community for both of these ceremonies. We continue to receive compliments on Greene County's unique Honor a Vet Program, from State and Federal Elected Officials, as well as many visitors from our neighboring counties. We are very proud of this program.

- 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 and 2017, this program creation has been temporarily tabled, with hopes of forming and implementing by the end of 2019.
- Complete the veterans work station within the office, allowing Veterans seeking employment, to access a computer, printer, resume building software, and the internet.
  - This project goal remains unmet due to unmet digital file goal. At this time, we continue to require this space for paper records storage.
- 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 (Find and Assist Veterans of Record) Program, offering various discounts to local veterans.

# PROGRAMS & SERVICES

## ➤ VA Disability Compensation Claim Representation

- Represent veteran clients to 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
- Assist veteran, family members and advocates in obtaining necessary financial information
- Assist same in obtaining necessary medical information



## PROGRAMS & SERVICES (CONT)

- 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
  - 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

## PROGRAMS & SERVICES (CONT)

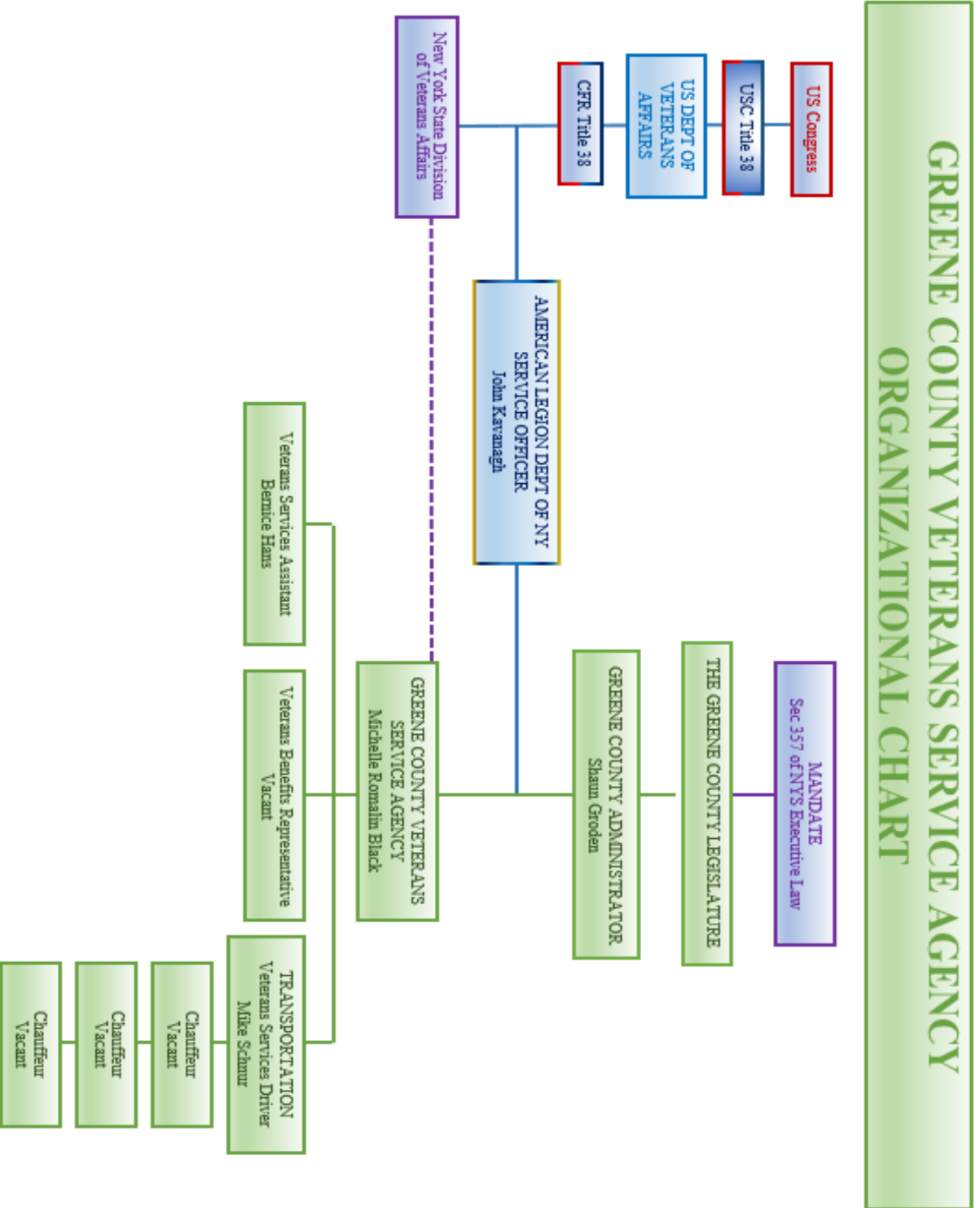
### ➤ Honor a Vet Ceremony

- 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

### ➤ 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



As of 12/31/2017

## ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION (CONT)

### Personnel

GCVSA Director	04/11/2011 to present
Veterans Benefits Representative	Vacant
Veterans Service Assistant	12/28/2015 to present
Veterans Service Driver – Full Time	10/11/2011 to present
Veterans Service Chauffeur	Vacant
Veterans Service Chauffeur	Vacant
Veterans Service Chauffeur	Vacant
Honor a Veteran Committee Chairman (Volunteer)	01/01/2013 to present

# CLAIMS & BENEFITS

## Claims Filed Directly By Greene County Veterans Service Agency Staff

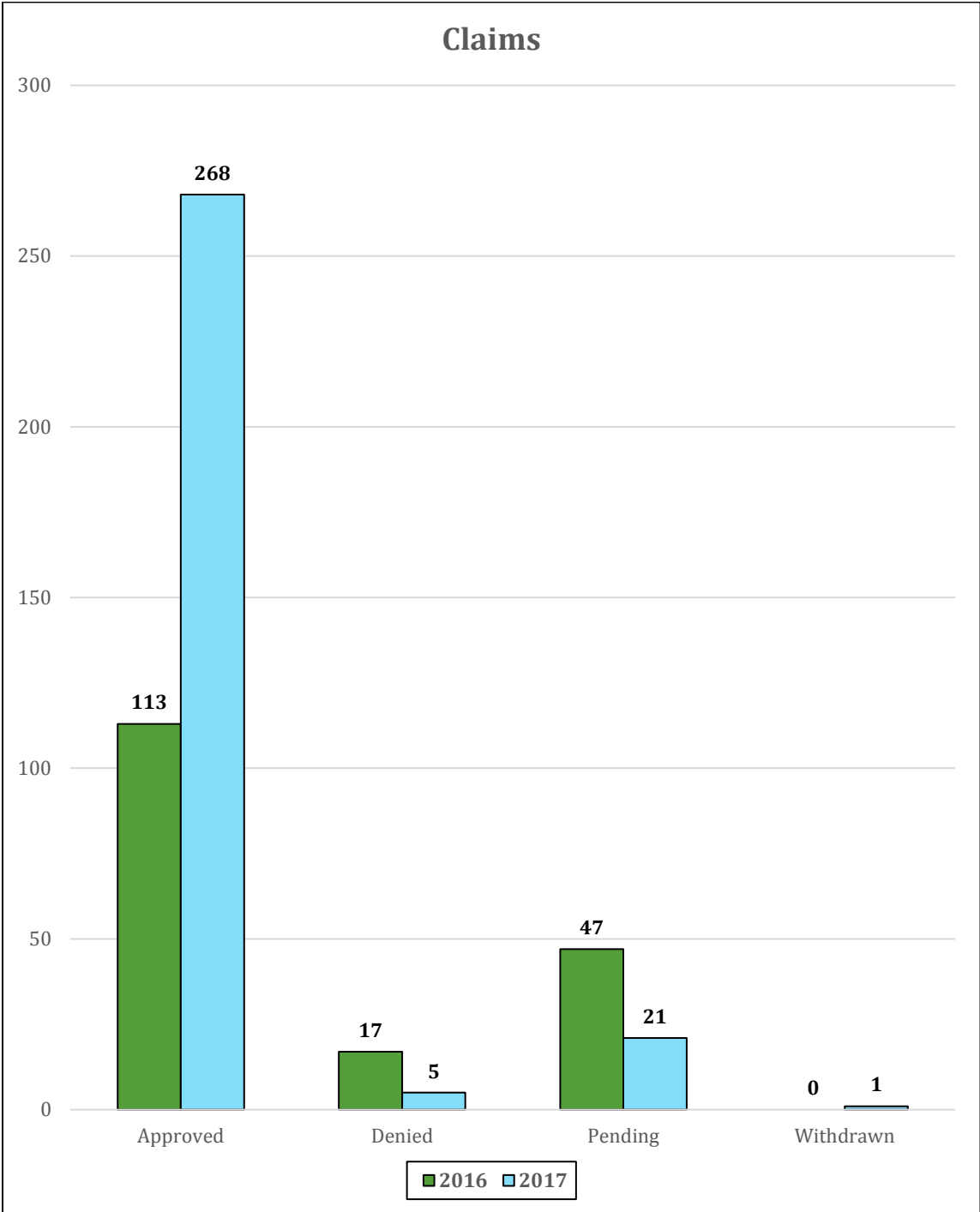


Figure 1

## CLAIMS & BENEFITS (CONT)

In 2017 the agency filed 59% more VA claims than 2016. 98% of those claims have been approved, which is a 12% increase from 2016 year, while less than 10% remain pending (almost 18% less pending claims than the previous year), and 2.25% were denied, approximately a 25% drop in denied claims in contrast to our 2016 statistics. Overall, we have seen a significant increase in claims filed, while performing statistically higher, with a nearly 100% of our claims approved. We will continue to strive for a perfect 100% approved claims, in 2018. (See Figures 1 & 2).

# CLAIMS & BENEFITS (CONT)



Figure 2

# STATISTICAL REPORTS

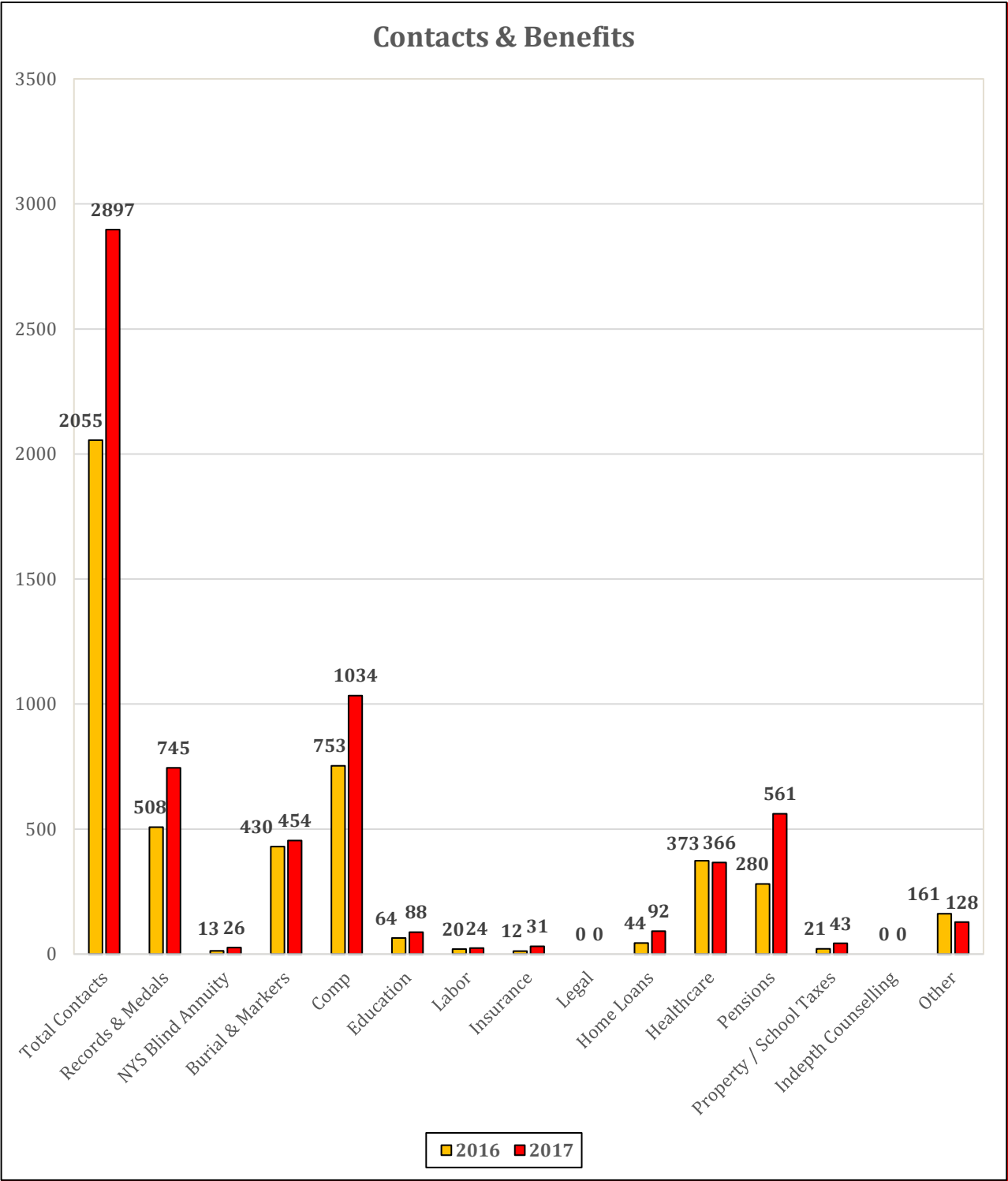


Figure 3



## STATISTICAL REPORTS (CONT)

**Contacts and Benefits** (Figure 3) describe the number of individual contacts that Veterans Service Agency made with individuals throughout the year. In 2017, we made 2897 contacts, 40% more than 2016. This report is further broken down, describing what benefits or other assistance we assisted with during each contact.

**Summary of Expenditures** (Figure 4) describes a contrast between the Department of Veterans Affairs' (DVA) Fiscal Year 2015 and 2016 expenditures attributed solely for Greene County's veterans. These figures are displayed in the thousands.

This data is the most recent provided directly by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Overall, the DVA expenditures to Greene County decreased slightly, by \$196,000.00, for a total of \$24,828,000.00 for FY 2016.

Though we see an insignificant (0.2%) decrease in unique VA Healthcare Patients, and subsequently VA Healthcare expenditures (0.4%); we make up for this in Education expenditures (1.3% for GI Bill and other VA Educational programs for Service-Connected Disabled Veterans and their Dependents), and in the total compensation and pension monies physically paid directly to Greene County's Disabled Veteran population (\$380,000.00 or 0.04%).

The most notable loss was in the highly variable Insurance and Indemnities line—as these monies are only paid out when a veteran who selected to purchase such insurance coverage passes in that fiscal year.

Overall, we consider this change insignificant, and have no concerns that this is related to our agency's performance or federal budget cuts.

STATISTICAL REPORTS (CONT)

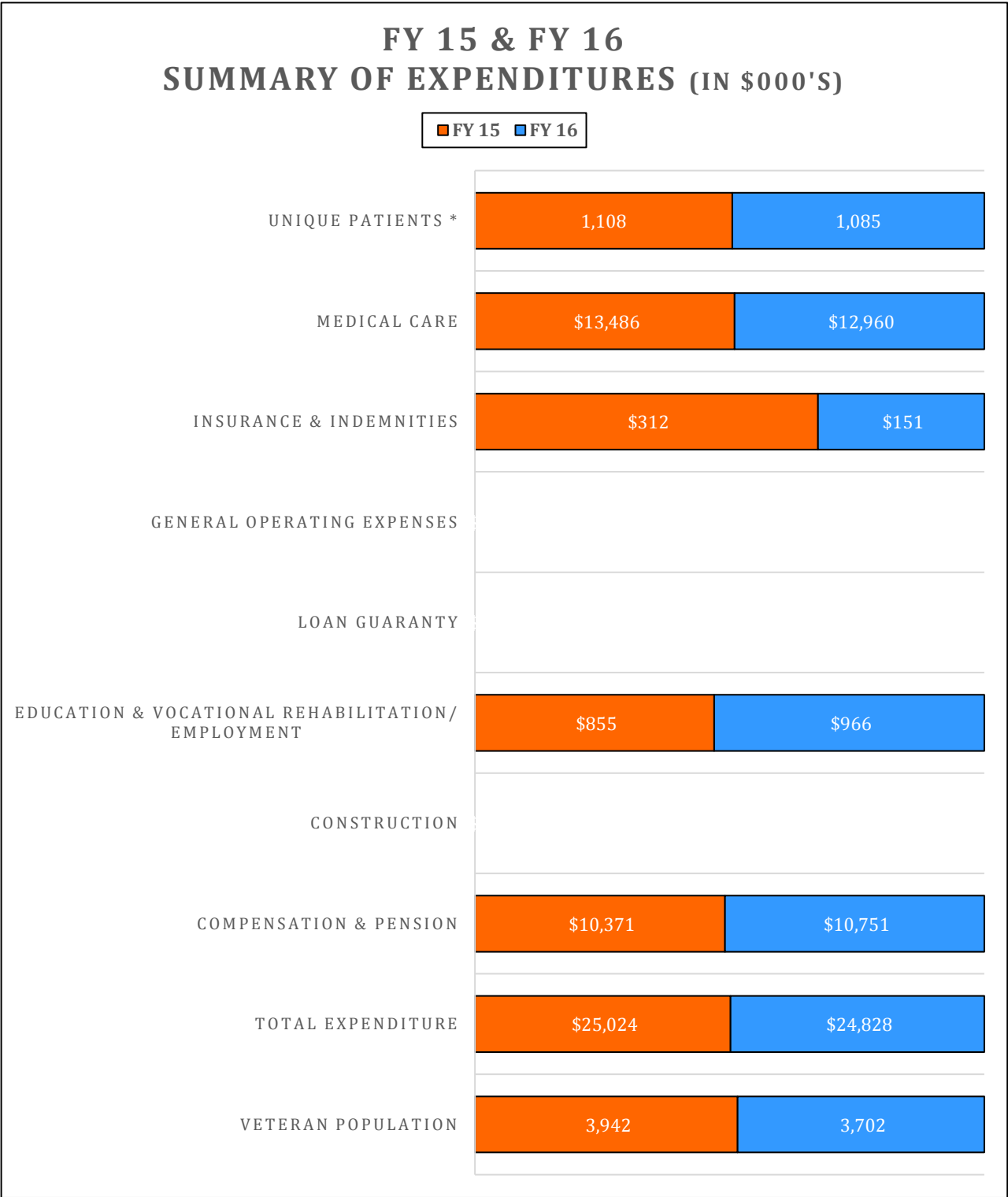


Figure 4

# STATISTICAL REPORTS (CONT)

## TRANSPORTATION

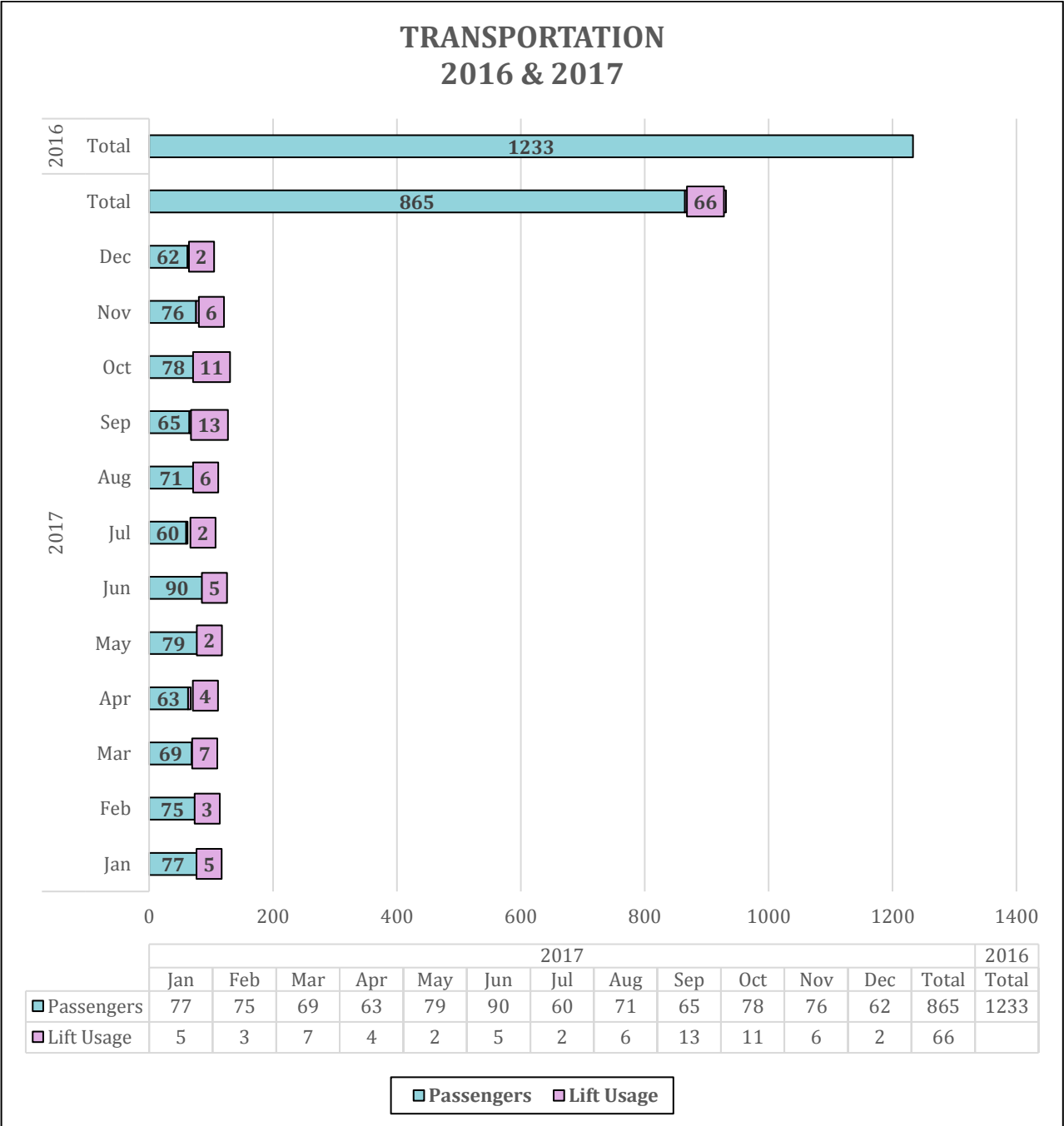


Figure 5

## STATISTICAL REPORTS (CONT)

### TRANSPORTATION (CONT)

We maintain a fleet of three vehicles: 2006 Ford Focus, 2010 Chevy Van, and 2016 Ford Transit Van with Wheelchair Lift. We experienced a significant drop in ridership this year, (Figure 5) due to a variety of reasons, including: staffing, availability of other transportation options, and age and health of our passengers. We continue to transport an average of over 70 passengers per month.

## OPERATION GREENE HOLIDAY

Operation Greene Holiday was implemented to send holiday care packages to Active Duty, US Military Troops deployed overseas, that was planned, implemented, and completed within 6 weeks. We set a lofty goal of nearly 300 troops; however, one group advised they had a sufficient number of packages for their troops, before we completed our fundraising; therefore, we reduced the number of packages to 120. This was a new project, implemented with very little time to plan, and without any funding from Greene County Government. We raised \$1990.00 in six (6) weeks. We received 43% of cash donations from the following Veterans Service Organizations: Honeyford Memorial American Legion, Post 110 Catskill, and their Ladies Auxiliary, the Greenville American Legion Post 291, their Ladies Auxiliary, and Sons of the American Legion; and the remaining 57% from private donations; in addition to several truckloads of donated goods from one local company, Essendant, Inc., Boy Scout troop and Cub Scout Pack #44 of Catskill, the ARC of Ulster-Greene, and private and YMCA Staff donations made to the Togetherhood Program of the Greene County YMCA, Greene County Staff, Greenville Central School Staff, and other private residents from Greene County, New York, to Florida, and several states in between. The 120 boxes went to troops who were deployed to Kandahar, Afghanistan in October of last year, and are not expected to return home until late May 2018.



# OPERATION GREENE HOLIDAY (CONT)



# OPERATION GREENE HOLIDAY (CONT)

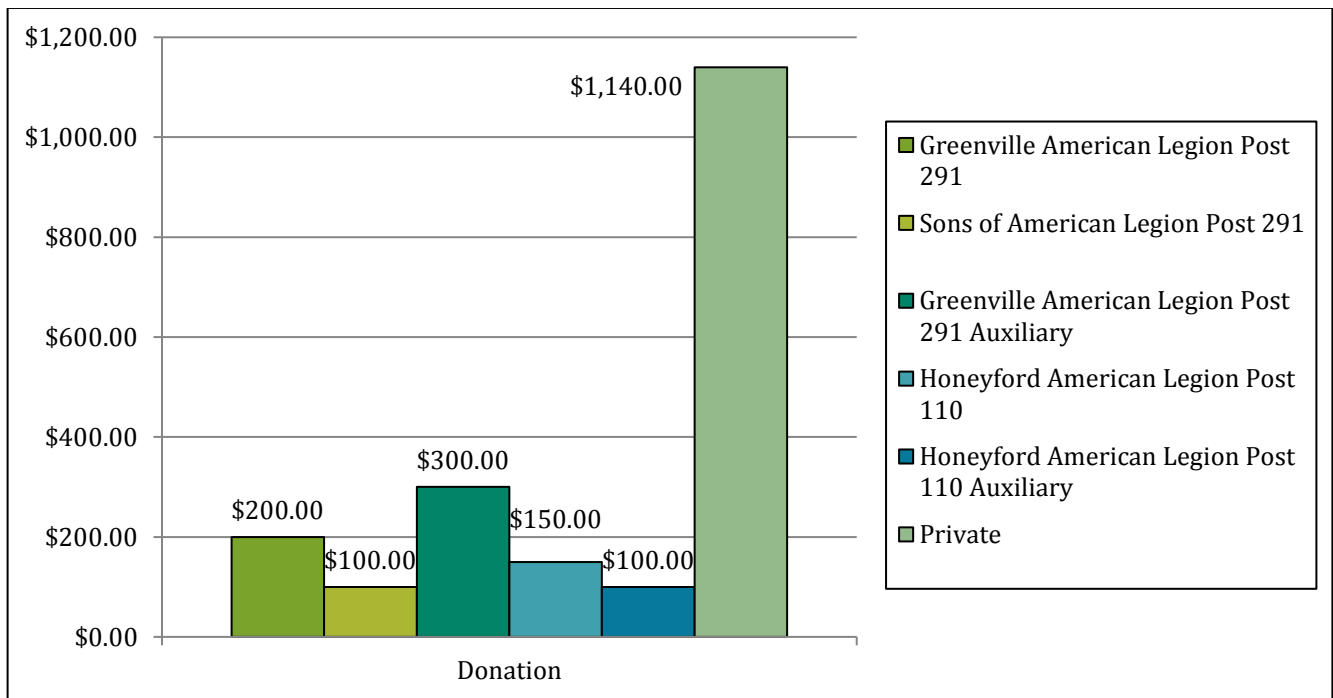
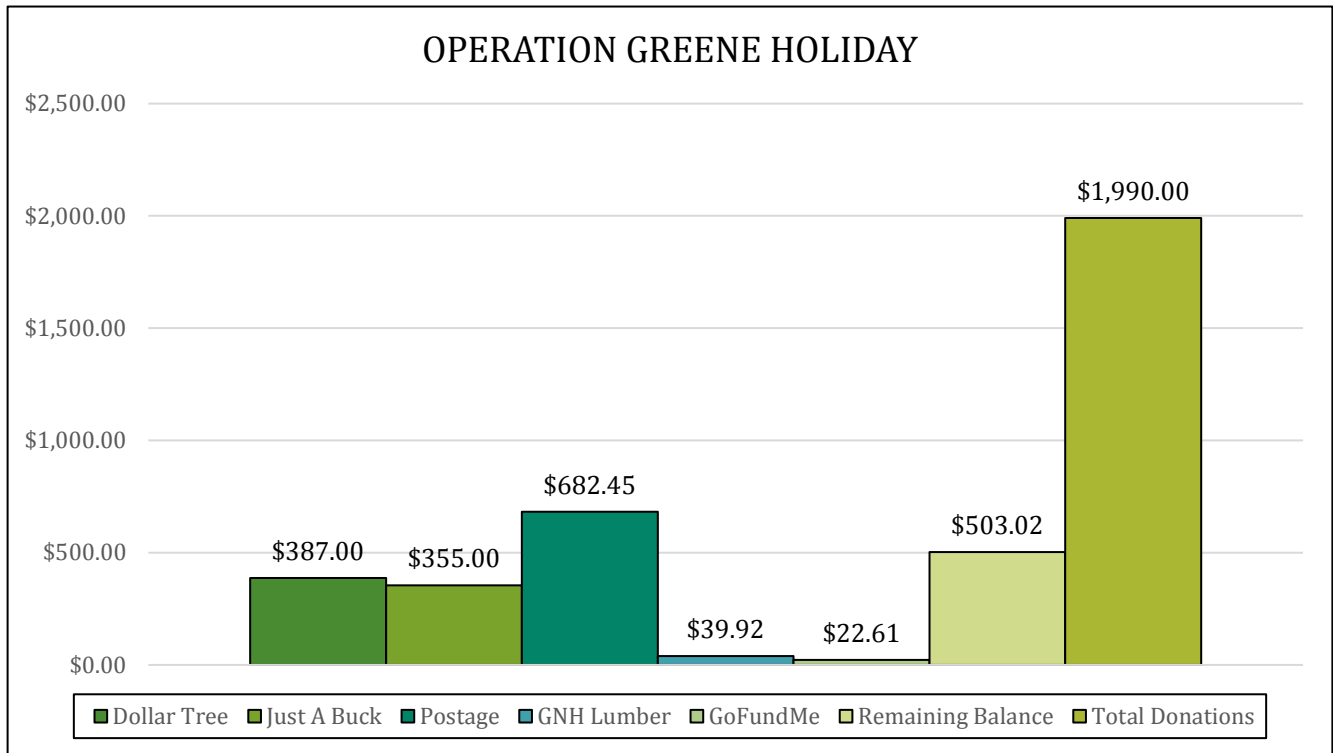


Figure 6

## 2018 GOALS

The Agency goals for 2018 are:

- Continue eliminating unnecessary paper files
- Continue to digitize the remaining sections of 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
- 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.
  - 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 where veterans can bring their own dogs to obtain a basic Canine Good Citizenship Certification, ensuring their dogs have the necessary obedience training and dispositions to be appropriate service dogs.
  - 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.

## **LONG TERM GOALS (CONT)**

- Offer financial assistance to veterans who wish to obtain certain education and/or certifications for employment in coordination with 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.