

Is fee-based help to veterans a rip-off?

by Michael Jackson, Dane County Veterans Service Officer

In 2008, it came to our attention that there are companies distributing misleading information to places such as Assisted Living facilities and Nursing Homes soliciting to assist veterans in obtaining U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) benefits for a fee. I understand the fee can be up to \$400, which is a huge disservice to our veterans.

It appears that such entities and schemes continue to increase. Our staff recently met with a representative from one such company that has offices in Madison and Milwaukee. My understanding is that they will help veterans gather information for veteran benefit applications, “batch” the documents and forward them to another office and that office will submit the application to the VA. This, we were told, is done at no charge to the veteran. When asked how the organization made money, the response was that about 20 percent of the veterans they see have assets that exceed VA limits. In such cases, they help the veteran “reposition” their assets to help them become eligible for VA benefits. They are then paid “a commission” for their service.

Once these companies have contact with the veteran, or a person representing the interests of the veteran, they are leading them to believe that they can work more effectively in the veteran’s behalf by getting the VA claims through the system faster and with a higher rate of success than the County Veteran Service Office. They are also intimating that they will give more hands-on assistance. In my opinion, none of that information is true! No matter who files the VA claim or how quickly the claim is submitted, once it reaches the VA it is subject to VA’s processing time frame, current back logs, etc.

CVSOs are trained and accredited to assist veterans with all aspects of state and federal VA benefits. In addition, we receive many hours of continuing education each year to maintain the ability to assist vet-

erans with a high degree of efficiency, accuracy and success. Veterans should never have to pay to apply for VA benefits to which they may be entitled.

You can help us to keep veterans from being taken advantage of by these unscrupulous companies and do them a great service in the future by referring veterans, their families, guardians, POAs or others representing the interests of the veteran to their County Veterans Service Office. In that way, veterans will receive accurate and efficient hands-on service that does not come with a fee. In Dane County call 266-4158.

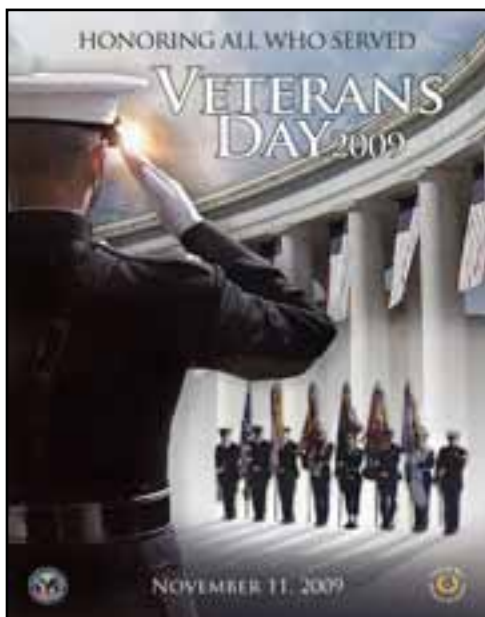


The Veterans Service Office staffed an information table at Military Appreciation Day at the Dane County Fair on July 16. Pictured is Michael Jackson.

ACTIVITIES IN THE COMMUNITY

VETERANS DAY

Wednesday, November 11, 2009



They Stood for Us – Now Stand for Them

Capitol Rotunda Madison WI

Program

9:30 – Band concert

10:00 Welcome

Rose ceremony

Rifle salute & taps

Recessional

Invocation

Introduction of guests

Presentation of colors

National Anthem

Pledge of Allegiance

11:00 – 11th hour of 11th day of the 11th month

Stoughton

Stoughton Senior Center, 248 W. Main St.

11:45 – Presentation at Senior Center

12:00 – Roast Beef lunch (free for all veterans)

Please call 873-8585 for reservations by

1:00 on 11/10/09

Verona

11:00 – Flag ceremony at Hometown Junction

11:45 – Lunch at the Verona Senior Center,
108 Paoli St. Please call 845-7471 in
advance for reservations

12:15 – Program

Verona

4:00 – Chili Supper at the AL Post 385
207 N. Legion St

Waunakee

10:30 – Program at Middle School Gym
1001 South Street

Deerfield

8:00 a.m. – Program at Deerfield High School
414 Beloit Street

Sun Prairie

VFW Post 9362, 949 S. Walker Way

Program details not worked out as of printing

Oregon

Sponsored by VFW Post 10272

11:00 – Memorial service/short program at WWI
Monument in Triangle Park

12:00 – Free lunch and musical entertainment for
veterans at Oregon Senior Center
219 Park St.

(November 7)

Madison

9:00-11:00 Elks Club Breakfast

711 Jenifer Street, Madison

Free to all veterans – must prove veteran status
\$8 for non-veterans

(November 14)

London

11:00 – Program at Veterans Park in London.

Ceremonies for veterans don't just happen

by Michael Jackson, Dane County Veterans Service Officer

Many of us take the annual Veterans Day and Memorial Day ceremonies held at our state capitol here in Madison for granted. Year after year, veterans are honored and citizens are able to pay tribute to the fallen and offer their respect to the sacrifices made by this special population.

What most people who attend these ceremonies do not realize, or never think of, is the months, days and hours that go into the planning for these solemn activities. The Madison Veterans Council is the engine that drives these successful activities year after year after year.

My observations during the past 21 years is that there is a small percentage of individuals who attend Madison Veteran Council meetings (usually held the second Monday of the month August through November and February through May at VFW post 1318) and even a smaller number who step up to the plate to fill leadership positions (president, vice president, treasurer and secretary).

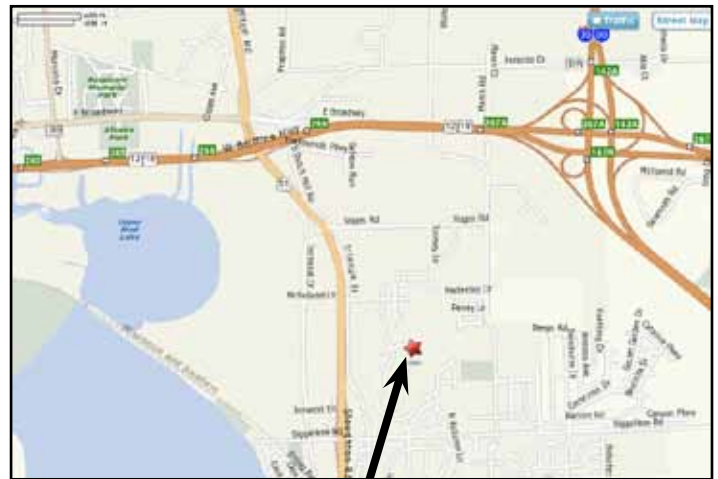


Although the Council has been fortunate in that committed individuals have taken on the burden of leadership down through the years, it is unfortunate others rarely step forward to replace them and take their turn in providing stewardship to this important and historic organization. What a tragedy if Memorial Day and Veterans Day ceremonies cease because current leadership ends and no one steps forward to take their places.

Veterans Memorial Park dedication

by Dan Connery, Assistant CVSO

Saturday, December 5, at 1:00, Veterans Memorial Park in Madison will be dedicated. Please come and celebrate the dedication of Madison's newest veterans memorial. Veterans Memorial Park is located at 4601 Star Spangled Trail on Madison's southeast side, near McFarland.



Veterans Memorial Park

After the dedication, VFW Post 7591, 301 Cottage Grove Road, will be serving chili to all dedication attendees, with free-will donation proceeds going to the Veterans Memorial Park.

Donations are still being accepted for maintenance and upkeep. Donations should be sent to the City of Madison Parks Foundation (PO Box 2987, Madison, WI 53701-2987), marked for Veterans Memorial Park or they can be sent to VFW Post 7591, marked for Veterans Memorial Park.

Calculating your VA rating

by Dan Connery, Assistant CVSO

VA service-connected disability ratings have been the source of confusion for countless veterans. It is reasonable to assume if a veteran has two 20% service-connected conditions and one 10% condition, he/she would have a combined VA rating of 50%, since $20 + 20 + 10 = 50$. Not so fast! The VA uses a *Combined Ratings Table* to calculate a veteran's disability rating. Using the illustration to the right, ratings are calculated in the following manner:

Step 1- plot the two highest conditions and note where they intersect on the chart to the right. Twenty (20) and twenty (20) using the horizontal axis and vertical axis intersect at 36.

Step 2- take the 36 and start on the vertical axis. Add the person's 10% condition by seeing where vertical 36 and horizontal 10 intersect. The product is 42.

Step 3- use standard rounding (to the nearest 10) to determine the "VA rating" or percentage. The product in Step 2 is 42, so a veteran's two 20% conditions and one 10% condition will result in a VA rating of 40%, not 50%.

Essentially, the VA will award a 40% rating which suggests the veteran is 60% able (non-disabled) and 40% disabled. This is a simple example of how to use the combined ratings table; this does not explain bilateral factor situations. For a more detailed explanation, contact your veterans service office or visit: http://www.warms.vba.va.gov/reg/38CFR/BOOKC/PART4/S4_25.DOC.

	10	20	30
19.....	27	35	43
20.....	28	36	44
21.....	29		45
22.....	30		
23.....	31	38	
24.....	32	39	47
25.....	33	40	48
26.....	33	41	48
27.....	34	42	49
28.....	35	42	50
29.....	36	43	50
30.....	37	44	51
31.....	38	45	52
32.....	39	46	52
33.....	40	46	53
34.....	41	47	54
35.....	42	48	55
36.....	42	49	55
37.....	43	50	56
38.....	44		57
39.....	45		57
40.....	46	52	58

(Adapted from 38 CFR 4.25)

VA extends "Agent Orange" benefits

VA Press Release (October 13, 2009)

submitted by Chris Scoville, Assistant CVSO

Relying on an independent study by the Institute of Medicine (IOM), Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki has decided to establish a service-connection for Vietnam Veterans with three specific illnesses based on the latest evidence of an association with the herbicides referred to Agent Orange.*

The illnesses affected by the recent decision are B cell leukemias, such as hairy cell leukemia; Parkinson's disease; and ischemic heart disease. In practical terms, Veterans who served **in country** in Vietnam during the war and who have a "presumed" illness don't have to prove an association between their ill-

nesses and their military service. This "presumption" simplifies and speeds up the application process for benefits.

The Secretary's decision brings to 15 the number of presumed illnesses recognized by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

For further information, contact your Dane County Veterans Service Office. If you live in a different county, you can find your CVSO contact information at <http://www.wicvso.org/>

*Final regulations to include effective date have not been promulgated when this went to print.

Veterans outreach numbers rise in 2008

by Dan Connery, Assistant CVSO

As the activity at the Dane County Veterans Service office increases, so does outreach within Dane County. Besides the main office location, service officers conduct regular outreach in seven other locations throughout Dane County. Additionally, service officers routinely provide services at special events. From 2007 to 2008, outreach numbers rose 123 percent with over 1,430 contacts being made.

Outreach plays a crucial role in providing quality services to Dane County veterans and their families. In 2008, 41.7 percent of our clients were served through our outreach efforts.

The office proudly provides regular outreach to Black Earth, Oregon, Stoughton, Sun Prairie, Madison's VA Medical Center, UW-Madison campus, and Oakhill Correctional Institute. For more information on these outreach locations, please visit <http://www.countyofdane.com/veterans/locations.aspx>.



A veteran service officer is available at the Stoughton Senior Center on most Fridays. Call 266-4158 for an appointment at any of the seven outreach sites in Dane County.

Social Security credit for service

Taken from www.ssa.gov

Submitted by Chris Scoville, Assistant CVSO

Since 1957, if you had military service earnings for active duty (including active duty for training), you paid Social Security taxes on those earnings. Since 1988, inactive duty service in the Armed Forces reserves (such as weekend drills) has also been covered by Social Security.

Under certain circumstances, special extra earnings for your military service from 1957 through 2001 can be credited to your record for Social Security purposes. These extra earnings credits may help you qualify for Social Security or increase the amount of your Social Security benefit.

Special extra earnings credits are granted for periods of active duty or active duty for training. Special extra earnings credits are **not** granted for inactive duty training.

If you're active military service occurred:

From 1957 through 1967, extra credits will be added to your record when you apply for Social Security benefits.

From 1968 through 2001, you do not need to do anything to receive these extra credits. The credits were automatically added to your record.

After 2001, there are no special extra earnings credits for military service.

Note: Change in special military service credits:

In January 2002, Public Law 107-117, the Defense Appropriations Act, stopped the special extra earnings that have been credited to military service personnel. Military service in calendar year 2002 and future years no longer qualifies for these special extra earnings credits.

For more information, please contact your nearest Social Security Administration office.

Free pass to national parks and federal recreational lands for disabled vets

Submitted by Chris Scoville, Assistant CVSO

It is easy to sometimes overlook benefits from outside the VA to which veterans may also be entitled. Disabled Americans, including disabled veterans, are eligible for the National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass. This pass, which is free of charge to disabled citizens, grants access to National Parks and also grants many other benefits to Americans with disabilities.

The pass, also known as the Access Pass, is a free, lifetime pass available to US citizens or permanent residents of the US who have been medically determined to have a permanent disability. It provides access to recreation areas managed by five federal agencies. The five Federal Agencies affected are the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service and the Bureau of Reclamation.

To apply for this pass, a disabled veteran should secure proof of permanent disability such as a rating decision letter, a VA Healthcare card noting service connected status, or some other means. The veteran must bring the information *in person* to a participating federal recreation site or office. The information must be presented in person to allow for verification of the status of the recipient by the appropriate staff.

Locations for an appropriate site can be obtained from the following places:

Bureau of Land Management <http://www.blm.gov>

Bureau of Reclamation <http://www.usbr.gov>

Fish & Wildlife Service <http://www.fws.gov>

USDA Forest Service <http://www.fs.fed.us>

National Park Service <http://www.nps.gov>

The Access Pass admits pass owners and passengers in a non-commercial vehicle at per-vehicle fee areas and pass owner +3 adults, not to exceed 4 adults,

where per-person fees are charged. (Children under 16 are always admitted free.) *Note: photo identification will be requested to verify pass ownership.* At many sites the Access Pass provides the pass owner a discount of Expanded Amenity Fees (such as camping, swimming, boat launching, and guided tours-inquire locally). The pass program is managed by five federal agencies that all function under different regulations and operating structures. Therefore, the discount program for the Access Pass is not handled in the same way on all public lands; check with local sites to obtain the most accurate information.

Passes of this nature generally run \$50 - \$80 per year. Veterans should be aware that this pass is not only free of charge, but is a lifetime pass for the entire lifespan of the pass bearer. Lost passes may be replaced in the same manner that the original pass was obtained, with no additional charge.





LZ LAMBEAU MAY 21 – 23, 2010

Welcoming home Wisconsin's Vietnam veterans

Submitted by Chris Scoville, Assistant CVSO

A statewide effort to honor Wisconsin Vietnam War Veterans culminates in a weekend of recognition and celebration of their service and sacrifices for veterans and their families at Lambeau Field in Green Bay. All veterans, family members, friends and other Wisconsin residents are invited to attend.

To find event details, register for email updates, obtain local information and details on the statewide kick-off motorcycle rally from LaCrosse to Green Bay visit their website at www.lzlambeau.org. LZ Lambeau is a partnership of the Wisconsin Dept of Veterans Affairs, the Wisconsin Historical Society and Wisconsin Public Television, along with an extensive group of veterans organizations statewide.

The Dane County Veteran is published by the
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Announcements and news contributions are
welcome.

Et cetera...



*Dan Connery "proudly" displays the
traveling troll (last place golf trophy)
from the spring 2009 CVSO conference.*

Dane County Veterans Service Office
1919 Alliant Energy Center Way
Madison, WI 53713
(608) 266-4158

A veterans service office is near you

Main Office

Monday-Friday: 7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
1919 Alliant Energy Center Way

The **Stoughton** Area Senior Center,
248 W. Main St.
Most Fridays each month from 8 until 4

UW-Madison

Student Activities Center, 333 E. Campus Mall,
Suite 3136 on most Thursdays from 8 until 4.

The **Sun Prairie** branch of the Summit Credit Union,
1333 W. Main
Most first and third Tuesdays each month, 12 until 4.

Oregon Senior Center

219 Park Street
Most 2nd Fridays each month, 1 until 4

VA Hospital

Most 4th Mondays of each month - 8 until 4.

Black Earth 1116 Mills St.

Most fourth Tuesdays each month, 8 until noon

Appointments recommended
266-4158