



September 30, 2021

Honorable Michael J. Queensland
Senate Chief Clerk
State Capitol, Room B20
Madison, WI 53707
Michael.Queensland@legis.wisconsin.gov

Honorable Edward A. Blazel
Assembly Chief Clerk
17 W. Main Street, Room 401
Madison, WI 53703
Ted.Blazel@legis.wisconsin.gov

Dear Clerk Queensland and Clerk Blazel:

Pursuant to Wis. Stats. s. 45.03 (3) (b), the Department of Veterans Affairs and Council on Veterans Programs jointly submit this letter and enclosure for distribution to the Legislature under s. 13.172 (2), providing a general summary of the activities and membership over the past two years of the Council on Veterans Programs and each organization represented on the Council.

The Council generally meets quarterly and met eight times during the past two years, transitioning to virtual meetings beginning in May 2020. The Council received and assessed information on veterans' issues, topics and resources that included presentations from: University of Wisconsin MIA Recovery and Identification project, Board on Aging and Long-Term Care, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, Wisconsin Veterans Chamber of Commerce, USO Wisconsin, Fox Valley Technical College, Mental Health America, Soldiers Homes Wisconsin, Task Force Uplift and VA Great Lakes Health Care System (VISN 12).

The information contained in the enclosure was compiled from materials submitted by the organizations. Two organizations did not submit information: Veterans of World War II (AMVETS) and National Association for Black Veterans, Inc.

The Council consists of organizations enumerated under s. 15.497 (2), however, the following organizations are currently inactive or have not appointed a representative to the Council: American Ex-Prisoners of War, Army and Navy Union of the United States of America, Blinded Veterans Association of Wisconsin, Catholic War Veterans of the U.S.A., U.S. Submarine Veterans of World War II, Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mary M. Kolar', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Mary M. Kolar
Secretary

/s/ Larry Hill

Larry Hill
Chairman, Council on Veterans Programs

Enclosure

American Legion

Membership: 50,000

Mission: To provide service to veterans, their families and their communities.

Summary of activities:

- The American Legion serves 80,000 veterans each year
 - Camp American Legion hosts 1100+ veterans and their families each season at no cost to them
 - Wisconsin Service Offices helps veterans earn 22.6 million in monthly compensation and 393 million annually, serving over 31,000 veterans
 - 500 post statewide
 - 4,591 blood drive donations
 - 25,500+ veteran hospital volunteer hours
 - Wisconsin Legion Baseball has the 4th largest legion baseball program in the country with over 200 teams and 3,500+
 - 8,600+ youth reached each year through our programs
 - Over \$34k in scholarships annually
 - Full activity report at bit.ly/21activityreport.
-

Polish Legion of American Veterans (PLAV)

Membership: 326

Summary of activities: A listing of activities for PLAV for 2019-2020-2021 would be super long. Yes, 2020 did have a very long listing of activities for PLAV. I opt to present to you my report in a different format which will encompass all three of those years. Know that Wisconsin PLAV is now and has been working on their second 100 years of continued service to veterans and the country - how amazing! How many organizations have reached that honor? And with the American Flag as Our Leader! Very formidable! One word makes this possible - CIVILITY.

Under my watch as State Commander of Wisconsin PLAV since 2017, we follow the Constitution and Bylaws exclusively. PLAV serves all veterans - past - current - future - in some form or fashion - known and unknown - visible or invisible. We continue and follow past programs such as the Pedals of Honor for King VA Home. We also have many new entities/revisions to keep PLAV up to date - such as passing a resolution for an annual donation of \$200.00 to six different VA hospitals. Wisconsin stays in compliance with the national organization.

I must mention right here that it is membership support that gets the credit for keeping Wisconsin up to date along with Wisconsin having a very active commander and adjutant/finance officer (who I think puts in more hours than I every week!) who are the facilitators to keep communication open among the 6 posts. We value veterans - we value the PLAV. We value our country, and we value freedom. The flag is a daily reminder.

One ongoing result of the pandemic is the understanding that if one is absent for a scheduled meeting - this means an automatic excuse without notification. Another ongoing result is the numerous classes of various subjects the membership can participate via the computer - these are classes for many different veterans' organizations. Another result is many of these modifications which were temporary modes are now in place as an automatic or permanence in clubs - thanks to the electronic age - thanks whether we are ready for them or not - thanks to the learn or sink syndrome.

Wisconsin membership continues a gradual decline due to deaths. However, we are sustainable. The membership keeps it that way.

The pandemic has had only one hindrance for PLAV and that is no meetings or minimal face-to-face meetings. PLAV has been able to stay afloat via other means including telephone, computer,

emails, teleconference, zoom, virtual, newsletters, vehicle drive-ups, delivery via in-person, classes, U.S. postal system, other electronics, my invitation listing, bi-monthly state commander communication to posts, and other creative means which were workable and adaptable, to support veterans and communities. Hence, PLAV Wisconsin is exactly where it needs to be.

Paralyzed Veterans of America, Wisconsin Chapter

Membership: 500

Mission: The Paralyzed Veterans of America – Wisconsin Chapter (PVA-WI) works to improve the quality of life for Veterans, in Wisconsin, living with spinal cord injury or disease, including those with MS and ALS. Our work is carried out through a number of programs that focus on research and education, quality healthcare, access to benefits, advocacy and legislation, membership and outreach, and adaptive sports and recreation. Our Vision To provide programs that encourage participation, community and connectedness, and promote accessibility for all while honoring the sacrifices of those who have served and their loved ones.

Paralyzed Veterans of America, a congressionally chartered veterans service organization founded in 1946, has developed a unique expertise on a wide variety of issues involving the special needs of our members – veterans of the armed forces who have experienced spinal cord injury or dysfunction. PVA will use that expertise to be the leading advocate for:

- Quality health care for our members
- Research and education addressing spinal cord injury and dysfunction
- Benefits available as a result of our members' military service
- Civil rights and opportunities that maximize the independence of our members. To enable Paralyzed Veterans to continue to honor this commitment, we must recruit and retain members who have the experience, energy, dedication, and passion necessary to manage the organization and ensure adequate resources to sustain the programs essential for Paralyzed Veterans of America to achieve its mission.

Summary of activities: Since 1946 Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) has been Congressionally chartered to serve the needs of our servicemen and women who have suffered from spinal cord injury/disease, MS or ALS. I am very honored to have been elected to serve as President to the Wisconsin Chapter (PVA-WI). Our board and staff are committed to executing the mission all while ensuring sound financial stewardship. I am very proud that the PVA-WI holds the distinction of being the only veteran's organization, 501(c)(3), in our state with a 4-star Charity Navigator rating. Additionally, we now have the Platinum seal from Guide Star, a Great Non-Profit seal, as well as being a credited charity by the Better Business Bureau (BBB). The board of directors and I share the same vision and goals in creating a legacy. We believe in our mission so strongly that each of the board members has a personal fund- raising goal and augments that goal with personal donations if not met.

Additionally, some of our board members have volunteered over 1000 service hours. To ensure this legacy continues, we have now invested in professionally managed endowments that will provide continued support for our veterans now and in the future. These endowments support everything from Research and Education to Adaptive Sports. They benefit our members, their families, the dedicated Veterans Administration staff, and the supporting community. Together we survived an unprecedented pandemic this year. It's impact was felt throughout our state and we had to cancel many of our in-person events. We have adapted and modified how we deliver our programs. We have created safe, at-home experiences for our membership and our athletes competed in the first Virtual-National Veterans Wheelchair Games. We are always looking for new ways to encourage our members to get re-involved in activities outside of their home and discover the many programs and sporting events that we offer.

Additionally, we are also working to improve the information that is available to our many caregivers and plan on providing resources and training seminars for them as well. We will support our members and their communities and continue to advocate for higher quality of health care benefits and services for all veterans. We will make every attempt to educate our communities in the physical and legal barriers that our members deal with every day and promote accessibility for ALL.

Our Year in Review The Paralyzed Veterans of America – Wisconsin Chapter is a multifaceted organization. We work hard to develop programs and activities that have a meaningful impact on the lives of our members and on the communities in which they live. Each of these program areas is critical to helping us fulfill our mission. Below is the summary of our 2019-20 year.

Advocacy & Legislation This program is the very core of why the Wisconsin Chapter exists. It is often the behind-the-scenes program that works to ensure our Veterans and others with disabilities are able to live their lives free of barriers. Our annual trip to Washington focused on the issues of Equal Access to Transportation, Educational Opportunities, Job Training and Accessible Housing. We used the information gathered to inform and educate all ten (10) of our Senators and Representatives to ensure they are aware of this important legislation and requested their votes. Locally, we are here to support every member through challenges they experience. Whether it is van accessible parking at the post office or automatic doors to areas in a medical facility, we are here to be their voice. There is always work to be done with advocacy and legislation and the more voices we have the more powerful and affective we can be.

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Healthcare & Benefits This program is designed to assist members in applying for and obtaining benefits. Mr. Eric Gonzales is our National Service Officer. Ms. Linda Roberts supports Eric and fields most of the calls and questions when the benefits office is contacted. Our Chapter Hospital Liaison program allows us to have a presence at the Spinal Cord Injury Unit (SCI) to ensure that any issues our members have, with care, can be addressed. Mr. Ken Matthews, our hospital liaison, and he shares member perspectives, along with programs for our members.

Adaptive Sports & Recreation It has been a busy year for our Adaptive Sports and Recreation Program. Once again, we have supported a Wheelchair Lacrosse team and a fishing tournament in Port Washington. Our reimbursement program sent 10 Veterans to the 39th Annual National Veterans Wheelchair Games where the Gold Medals were plenty for PVA-Wisconsin! Members also traveled to the Winter Sports Clinic participating in some great ski training and other adaptive winter adventures. As always, we offered a robust shooting program. Our air rifle program is gaining traction and we are seeing a consistent number of shooters each month. The summer saw a slate of trap shooting events. In addition to the trap circuit, the Chapter furthered its partnership with Veterans Afield. Shoots included both trap and birds from stands and in the field on a specially designed trailer. We are very proud that both of these programs include Youth Shoots that give young people the opportunity to interact with and learn from disabled veterans.

Membership & Communication This year many of our communication tools have undergone significant upgrades and our outreach efforts into the community have expanded considerably and become much more effective. Our newsletter and website continue to reach many people, and we are more active than ever on Facebook and Twitter and even have an Instagram account. This has allowed us to reach members in new ways; it has also allowed us to educate the general public about

who we are and what we do. Our outreach has grown to include a lunch program and “Grab n Go” bags for all individuals having their annual exam at the Milwaukee SCI center. We have been serving dinner once a month at the Fisher House too, supporting the caregivers of our members. We participated in the Veterans Day parade in Milwaukee and more!

Research & Education This program supports and promotes research related to spinal cord injury and disease as well as educating those who choose to dedicate their careers to individuals faced with these issues. Our chapter has fulfilled this program by providing funding for National Research and Education Foundations. Locally, we offer individuals employed at the SCI scholarships to continue their education.

Who We Serve PVA and its 33 individual chapters are member driven organizations. A qualifying Veteran may join any local chapter. As such, you will see in the map below that our Wisconsin Chapter has members from across the country. As a Chapter, we have elected to also have an Associate Member program. This provides an opportunity for those who love and care for a Member and/or those who are passionate about our mission, to become involved and informed in a more formal way. We are grateful for our Members and Associate Members; we are honored to serve them. At the close of 2020 we have a Membership of 259 Veterans and an Associate Membership of 127. We now have a virtual presence. On the left is a participant during the Virtual National Veterans Wheelchair Games. On the right is a patient on the in the SCI unit at the Milwaukee VA watching Netflix provided by PVA-WI.

Where We're Rolling As our world evolves and circumstances change, it is critical that our programs continue to evolve to meet the needs of our members. We are now in the third year of executing a 5-year strategic plan and we have adapted to a pandemic, COVID19. We have launched new programs based on survey feedback from our members. Below are brief descriptions of what is in store.

- Fielding Facebook Portals
 - Thanks to a generous donation from DVNF, we have purchased FaceBook portal devices to help our members stay connected to peers, family, and medical professionals. At-Home Entertainment & Fitness
- We are launching virtual content to educate, entertain, and engage our members in at-home exercise, cooking, Bingo, and providing real-time updates on current events. Caregiver Respite & Training
- Partnering with Xavier Home Healthcare, VA professionals, and other community partners we will be holding small group caregiver respite and training throughout Wisconsin. Support of our SCI Staff
- Our SCI professionals do a great job of taking care of our members. We will continue to thank them by providing scholarships, CEU training opportunities, and sponsorship of activities and lunches. In-Patient Lending closet & Entertainment
- Being in the hospital is not fun, but is a regular way of life for many of our members. To make their time a little more enjoyable, our Chapter will provide items they can borrow during their stay like cell phone chargers, earbuds/headphones, and other items that they may need during their stay. We also provide access to movies and premium TV shows.
- Virtual Gaming
 - Creating a fun, competitive outlet while staying safe at home, we are providing connectivity and resources for our members to interact and learn multi-player video games. Home Safety
- Learning from the pandemic, we will issue additional items for our emergency “Grab N Go Bag” to help make everyone stay a little safer and be better equipped to adapt to our changing culture/environment.

Financial Snapshot We could not do it without you..... We appreciate all of the individuals, and organizations that support our mission with their time, talent and treasure. We are honored to be their charity of choice and are grateful for the trust they have in us.

Wisconsin Council of Chapters Military Officers Association of America

Membership: 450

Mission: The purpose of the council shall be to promote the aims of MOAA to coordinate activities having common interest among chapters to serve their members, communities, and the nation. To further legislation and other objectives of MOAA; and to protect the rights and interests of service retirees, veterans, and active military in matters of state and national legislation.

Summary of activities: Currently two of the states five chapters have resumed in person meetings. The Indianhead chapter based in Eau Claire continues to support the local university's ROTC programs at Eau Claire, Menomonie , River Falls, and Stevens Point. The chapter also serves on the Veterans Home Recreation Committee at the Chippewa Falls Veterans Home. The LaCrosse Chapter last met in person on 12/3/19 raising \$750 for scholarship purposes. In May 2021 they awarded a scholarship to an ROTC cadet attending UW LaCrosse. While all activities for 2020 were cancelled the board continues to meet to plan future activities. The Southeast chapter has continued to meet and to support a variety of veteran's organizations. In 2021 the chapter provided construction, manpower support, and \$3000 in member donations to the Camp for Hometown Heroes. They also contributed to MOAA scholarships and Foundation, UWM MAVRC/VetBall, Fisher house, War Memorial Center ,Memorial Day and Veterans Day Parades and Armed Forces Week activities. Chapter VP Tim Wendt and Board member Rusty Armstrong also teamed up for MOAA's virtual Congressional Outreach event , Advocacy in Action, this past spring. The chapter received a 5-Star chapter award from MOAA, publishes an excellent newsletter (The Lake Effect) and participates in the county veterans board. The Madison Chapter provided achievement certificates to five UW Madison cadets in 2021 but otherwise is not currently active. The Northeast chapter based in Green Bay has resumed in person meetings and resumed their annual Veterans Benefit golf outing in September 2021. In 2020, despite the pandemic cancelling the in person event, the chapter raised \$86,000 in donations and participation fees which go to support a wide variety of veterans programs in the Fox Valley area. The chapter is currently working on updating their website and developing a communications plan to enter serve their members in their 20 county service area. The state council board met in August to discuss a proposed biennial council meeting to be hosted by the La Crosse chapter and other issues. Roger Fetterly continues providing legislative reports to the council and chapters and serves on the Council of Veterans programs representing MOAA.

Wisconsin County Veteran Service Officer Association

Membership: 83

Mission: The County Veterans Service Officer Association of Wisconsin (CVSOAWI) is an organization of professional veterans advocates. In Wisconsin the County Veterans Service Officer plays a critical role in the veteran's advocacy system and is often the initial contact in the community for veterans services. Through the County Veterans Service Officer the CVSOAWI is committed to Wisconsin counties to provide a vital and efficient system of services and advocacy to veterans, their dependents, and survivors.

Summary of activities:

1. CVSOA-WI continues to work closely with WDVA in identifying ways to revamp the application and award process for ANV Grants to veterans in need.
2. CVSOA-WI continues to work with and support WDVA's successful push to make VORP permanent, funded resource for veterans.
3. CVSOA-WI meets monthly with VARO Milwaukee leadership to identify and resolve systemic benefits delivery issues.
4. CVSOA-WI continues to work with WDVA leadership to establish procedures for veterans with uncharacterized discharges to be considered (on a case by case basis) eligible for state veterans benefits.
5. CVSOA-WI established CVSOA-WI, Inc. as a non-profit in order to more effectively manage expenses and revenues in compliance with state laws and regulations.
6. Senior Accredited CVSOA-WI continue to assist the WDVA Claims Office in the initial accreditation training of new CVSO/TVSO and county staff. This training is required by Title 38 United States Code of Federal Regulations 14.629.2.
7. The CVSOA-WI is instrumental in assisting veterans accessing federal, state, and local benefits.
8. CVSOA-WI works with and has members that sit on the Governors Challenge to prevent veterans suicide.
9. Participation in the 5 VA Community Veteran Engagement Boards.
10. CVSOA-WI in coordination with the WDVA and the state and federal Legislatures work together to provide legislation and programs to further enhance benefits meaningful to veterans and their families.

Wisconsin American GI Forum

Membership: 60

Mission: To secure equal representation and participation of underserved veterans

Summary of activities: Outreach in the community, education, scholarship programs. Participation with our partners at patriotic events throughout the state. Representation on COVP, Milwaukee County veterans board, Latino Veterans Legacy of Valor Foundation board, War Memorial board of trustees. Northwestern Mutual ERG.

Wisconsin Vietnam Veterans, Inc.

Membership: 400

Mission: To keep the POW - MIA issue alive in the general community, explain the Vietnam experience to school age children and to the general population, assist fellow veterans, participate in community activities, and provide a social outlet for Vietnam veterans to gather.

Summary of activities:

- Support homeless veterans and their families through Standdowns
- Volunteer in VA Hospitals
- Support various veteran memorials/projects such as Washington DC Vietnam Veterans Memorial Washington DC, Womens Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Wisconsin Veterans Park in Neillsville, Green County Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Monticello, Milwaukee's War Memorial Museum and Park, Wisconsin Veterans Homes at King and Union Grove, Wisconsin Veterans Museum in Madison
- Offer speakers to elementary and high school classes on patriotism, proper care of the flag, and our Vietnam experience

- Participate in many local parades with Color Guards and Marching Units
 - Give support to families and servicemen during their military service by doing things such as: Support Our Troops rallies during Operation Iraqi Freedom and sending 'We Care' packages overseas to military personnel
 - Sponsor Veteran Reunions such as Winterfest in New Glarus
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The Retired Enlisted Association

Membership: 270

Mission: Promote love of God, our country, and the flag, support the honor and integrity of our country and constitution, advocate for military forces adequate to the defense of our country, promote the integrity and prestige of uniformed services, promote fraternal relations between all branches of the military services of the United States of America. Promote and support the education of children of service personnel, aide service members, veterans, and their families in need according to our principles and ability. The welfare of our members and the enlisted community comes first!

Summary of activities:

- Participate in placing flags on graves of veterans for Memorial Day
 - Participate in small community fundraising events
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Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America Department of Wisconsin

Membership: 125

Mission: The Jewish War Veterans (JWV) is the premier voice for Jewish uniformed service members and veterans in the United States. JWV affirms that Jewish men and women serve honorably and heroically in the military forces of the United States of America during peacetime and war. The JWV defends the rights and benefits of all service members and veterans, fights antisemitism and supports the State of Israel.

Summary of activities: Over 500 hours of volunteer time at various VA facilities. Raised funds to support various Veterans activities throughout the State of Wisconsin. Participated in numerous Veterans events throughout the State.

Marine Corps League

Membership: 1,167

Mission: The mission of the Marine Corps League is to promote the interest and to preserve traditions of the United States Marine Corps; strengthen the fraternity of Marines and their families; serve Marines, FMF Corpsmen, and FMF Chaplains who wear or who have worn the Eagle, Globe and Anchor; and foster the ideals of Americanism and patriotic volunteerism.

Summary of activities: Throughout the state our detachments do fundraisers such as raffles, brat fry, rose program, etc. They also have color guards in parades, do honor guards for funerals, assist with parking at large events, etc. With our funds we support Honor Flight, Semper Fi Fund, Scholarships, Veteran Programs and Marines and their families in need.

Navy Club Wisconsin Squadron NCUSA

Membership: 150

Mission: The objects of this Association are to further, encourage, promote and maintain comradeship among our members; to revere, honor and perpetuate the memory of our departed shipmates; and to promote and encourage further public interest in the United States Navy and its history, and to uphold the spirit and ideals of our Navy.

Summary of activities: The Squadron Ships are active with membership activities and meetings monthly. Continuously fundraising to then support local Veterans when needed. Our activities range from chili cookoffs to bratfrys to garage sales. We actively invest our volunteer time with veterans in need of a little assistance. We involve ourselves in Ceremonies and celebrations during the year.

Military Order of the Purple Heart

Membership: 1,000

Mission: Support veterans and families

Summary of activities: Buying and placing signs for Richland Center, first Purple Heart City in the United States. Food stands to raise money, for signs. Color Guard for members that have passed. Participate in Veterans Day ,Memorial Day remembrances.

American Red Cross

Membership: 2,228

Mission: The American Red Cross prevents and alleviates human suffering in the face of emergencies by mobilizing the power of volunteers and the generosity of donors.

Summary of activities: The following programs are available to the Wisconsin Military, veterans, and their families: Emergency Communications, Financial Assistance, Get To Know Us Before You Need Us Briefings, Resiliency Workshops, Yellow Ribbon Events/Honor Flights/Special Events, Information and Referral, and VA Hospitals and Homes support. The American Red Cross: Service to the Armed Forces (SAF) program continues to support the military community during these challenging times. While many of our in-person programs are on hold, we have transitioned our Resiliency Workshops and Get to Know Us Briefings to a virtual platform. Since March 2020, our Here Care Center Casework team has seen an increase in financial assistance requests. Lastly, we continue to support the VA's and State Veterans Homes with donations such as art supplies, gardening supplies and robotic companion pets.

Vietnam Veterans of America, WI State Council

Membership: 2,500

Mission: To keep veterans advised of programs and situations that concern veterans.

Summary of organization's activities: Remain active in Veteran Affairs. Opening the Veteran Cemetery in Northern Wisconsin. Attend the WDVA meetings in person and electronically. Attend veteran events that were possible.

Disabled American Veterans (DAV)

Membership: 13,745

Mission: DAV is dedicated to a single purpose: Keeping our promise to America's veterans. We accomplish this by ensuring that veterans and their families can access the full range of benefits available to them, fighting for interests of America's injured heroes on Capitol Hill, providing employment resources to veterans and their families, and educating the public about the great sacrifices and needs of veterans transitioning back to civilian life.

Summary of activities: For our transportation network in Wisconsin we have 50 vehicles in 21 locations that serve 43 of the States 72 counties. During the last two years (2019-2020) we transported 86,992 veterans to VA medical appointments free of charge to them. Our volunteer drivers drove 1,683,866 miles for a total of 93,813 hours.

Our National Service Office (NSO) during the last two years filed in excess of 1,300 reported claims. Some of those claims were provided to the NSO by our Chapter Service Officer's from the 41 chapters in the Department. This also included taking in excess of 850 new powers of attorney, conducting over 6,000 interviews, and conducted over 10,00 VA file reviews and the majority being new recipients. The NSO office in Milwaukee was credited over 20,000 award actions.

Over the last two years we provided testimony in support of ten different legislative bills. In 2019 it was for SB 116, AB 425, and SB446. In 2020 it was SB 654, AB 731, SB 587, AB 673, SB 243, SB 176, and AB 401. Also our Benefits Protection Team Leader (BPTL), Al Labelle in the Chair for the interim National Legislative Committee. Al Labelle has also won the National DAV Outstanding Performance Award for Advocacy (OPA) the past two years. Our National Legislative Office as a Commander's Action Network (CAN). The CAN provides prepared letters that can be submitted to our State legislators in Congress in support of Veterans legislative initiatives. We have many of our Department members that participate in the CAN and routinely respond to requests.

In the area of Voluntary Service performed by the Department the last two years, we have accumulated a total of 126,823 hours reported to our National Headquarters. This includes all hours in support of veterans service. Hours at the VA Hospital's and Soldiers Homes have been greatly reduced due to COVID. In fact as of this report the VA Hospital's still have limited opportunities, other than our Volunteer Drivers.

Wisconsin Association of Concerned Veterans

Membership: 120

Mission: Caring for Veterans & their loved ones

Summary of activities:

- Communicate with Veterans and loved ones, help obtain needed information
 - Help attain resources, writing support summary letters.
 - Catalyst and facilitator in major projects with VFW & Wheels of Liberty
 - Participate with Armed forces and Veterans Day Tours May and November, Vietnam Veterans Day, Pearl Harbor Day, Patriot's Day and 9/11
 - Serve on several dozen committees, councils & boards
 - Helping when asked - where needed
-

Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of Wisconsin

Membership: 25,848

Mission: To serve Veterans, military and their families in communities across Wisconsin. The objectives of this association are fraternal, patriotic, historical and educational; to preserve and strengthen comradeship among its members; to maintain true allegiance to the Government of the United States of America, and fidelity to its Constitution and laws; to foster true patriotism, to maintain and extend the institutions of American freedom; and to preserve and defend the United States from all her enemies, whomsoever.

Summary of activities:

Posts and Membership The Veterans of Foreign Wars, Department of Wisconsin was instituted on the 6th day of June, 1921. In the State of Wisconsin, the VFW is comprised of 249 Posts in 10 Districts with a total membership of 25,848 as of September 22, 2021. The Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign Wars has a membership of 8,555 in 117 units. (VFWWI website/Aux)

Community Programs This organization is very active in Community Services throughout the State. During the past two years, our Department had over 282,907 hours of logged time donated. We are very confident that there are many more hours of dedicated service, unlogged. The pandemic restricted in-person service to Veterans over this last 2 years. (VFW website)

Over the past 2 subject years, Wisconsin VFW donations totaled \$2.13 million to our programs. 86.8% of our funds are used specifically for our programs. The following is a list of programs organized for beautification, renovation, health care and environmental concerns. Cooperation includes projects with schools, churches and other community organizations. Aid to others extends the helping hands of Post and Auxiliary members to local hospitals, the needy, the handicapped and senior citizens. In addition to these, there are programs organized by Posts and Auxiliaries to meet the needs of their individual communities. (VFW year end budget)

The VFW promotes Safety programs, which provides education and assistance in the areas of driver education, bicycle safety, fire prevention, home security, and hunter safety. It also recognizes outstanding contributions of firefighters, law enforcement personnel and emergency medical technicians with local, state and National Public Servant Awards.

Americanism and Loyalty Day projects stress the understanding and appreciation of the American way of life and celebrate its history and honors its heroes that have defended our country. Under this program, honor guards are provided for military funerals and for patriotic celebrations. Flags are presented to community organizations and flag appreciation programs teach people how to present and care for the American flag. Wisconsin VFW donates flags to the Department of Transportation to fly at rest stops throughout the state.

VFW, through all the echelons of the organization, promotes youth activities. Scouting, baseball, soccer, bowling and junior rifle teams are some of the areas served by this program. Realizing that the youth are the future of this nation, the VFW stresses programs, which develop an appreciation of the American way of life, a sense of individual accomplishment and fulfillment, team effort and patriotism.

We have a Teacher of the Year program to honor Wisconsin teachers and their schools who make worthwhile contributions to their communities. Wisconsin VFW has given \$3,600 in awards to our Teachers of the Year over the 2 years. (VFW Year end budget)

Service To Veterans The Veterans of Foreign Wars, Department of Wisconsin continues to answer the clarion call "No One Does More For Veterans" through its commitment of service to Wisconsin Veterans, their dependents, and survivors. This mission is accomplished through the selfless dedication of the men and women who serve as Post Service Officers. As such, these individuals comprise the most important link in our service network, which includes the District, Department Service Officer, and the support staff at the National Veterans Service in Washington, DC.

Over the past 2 years, the VFW Department Service Office has assisted on average 2600 Veterans per year with claims and entitled benefits. In addition, we have an important working relationship with 72 County Veterans Service Officers and are available to the 11 Tribal Veteran Service Officers and the WDVA VORP in 11 Regions throughout this State. (DSO)

Veterans Assistance Program This Program helps the homeless Veterans or those at risk of becoming homeless and needy veterans to get services they need to obtain steady employment and affordable housing. Veterans who are not able to work because of physical or mental disabilities will receive help in obtaining long-term housing and other services they need to re-enter the mainstream of society.

Buddy Poppy Program The Buddy Poppy Program is specifically designed to assist worthy Comrades, to perpetuate the memory and history of our dead, and to assist their widows/widowers and surviving children. In the last two years, 401,500 Buddy Poppies were ordered by Wisconsin Post and Auxiliaries to use for favors to hospital patients, nursing home residents and to distribute for monetary donations to help our Veterans in need. (National Programs)

Legislation Every year but 2020 (COVID), the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Department of Wisconsin researches and supports many worthy resolutions put on the State VFW Convention floor in June of every year. This legislative action is to support the veterans and their families. Much time is devoted to attending public hearings on bills and resolutions that affect veterans. Our legislative efforts reach the Nation's capital every year to direct our state representatives to vote for specific federal bills that support Veterans. A team of 10 select Wisconsin VFW members storms the hill with all other VFW Departments to ensure our legislators know our National VFW legislative priorities.

Voice of Democracy The VOD program is conducted during the fall terms of each year. This allows high school students in grades 9, 10, 11 and 12 the opportunity to win valuable scholarships and awards while expressing their patriotic beliefs. A total of \$3.9 million in National scholarships, \$6,600 in State Scholarships plus \$79,134 from local Posts is awarded. (Year-end budget).

Patriot's Pen This is a scholarship program available to 6th, 7th and 8th graders. The VFW has made a longstanding commitment to foster patriotism, promote Americanism and support our national youth within our local communities. A total of \$2.6 million in checks were awarded from National, \$4,800 from State and \$76,928 at the local Post level. (Year-end budget)

Wisconsin Veterans Homes The Veterans of Foreign Wars, Department of Wisconsin, has a special relationship with the Wisconsin Veterans Home at King, Union Grove and Chippewa Falls. We plan a yearly picnic (or indoor meal under COVID) for the residents of the Homes, plus many other visitations and monetary donations of \$16,519 over the past 2 years in person or just dropping off. (Year-end budget)

Military Assistance Program From adopting military units to providing emergency financial assistance, the Veterans of Foreign Wars is continuing in its benevolence to others by providing moral and financial support to military service members in Wisconsin and those deployed worldwide.

VA Hospitals The Veterans of Foreign Wars has volunteer representation at all VA Medical Centers in Wisconsin, Minneapolis, Iron Mountain and North Chicago. These representatives are responsible for 10,000 hours of volunteer work during non-covid years. Wisconsin VFW contributed \$56,750 in 2019-21. (Hospital Director)

Unmet Needs Quick Relief Fund VFW receives donations from generous people in and around Wisconsin to take care of Veterans who need a hand up. The Department helped 71 veterans spending \$72,344.62 during the 2019-21 command years. (Unmet Needs Chair)

Disaster Relief Fund The Wisconsin VFW assists VFW and Auxiliary members affected by disasters expending \$13,795 to help with instant grants of \$750.

Communication Technology affords us the ability to communicate over several platforms, instant messaging and conference calling. VFW uses MS Teams as a platform for robust capability to

discuss important Council business instantaneously. We have increased our presence over the past year on social media and our VFW website. All Posts throughout the nation can have free websites through that same administrator.

Though we can put our newspaper completely online, we have a circulation of just under 30,000 that receives 6 editions per year. Our newspaper competes against all other VFW Departments worldwide and has been first place for 7 years running.

Summary Wisconsin VFW is a powerhouse serving Veterans in this state from Beloit to Ashland, from La Crosse to Green Bay and all places in between. We have reached out to our current generation of Veterans that served in Afghanistan, Iraq and other places of conflict. We conducted a Webinar Symposium to provide referral services for Veterans of the Afghanistan War and will offer a similar in-person and online event during our 2022 State Convention but with Veterans of the Iraq War as well. We honor our fallen providing military (Veteran) honors at funerals across the state. We perpetuate the memory of those 1500 service members from Wisconsin still Missing in Action by partnering with Rolling Thunder and funding, building and emplacing a POW/MIA Chair of Honor in the State Capitol.

Wisconsin VFW offers scholarships across the state at the Post and Department levels providing opportunity for National Recognition and scholarships for future leaders. We partnered with Center for Veterans Issues in bringing services to Veterans from education to meals with 2 taps of the phone using the CVI Help App.

Our assistance to Veterans, Military and their families has no defined end. Our VAMCs have many dedicated volunteers and we have a popular presence in all the Wisconsin Veterans Homes. We have a robust legislative capability that has locked arms with the DAV and Legion in Wisconsin influencing our lawmakers to ensure Veterans that are affected by their service get their due benefits. We have a capable and respected presence for Veterans to apply for and track those deserved benefits. We will do whatever it takes to provide camaraderie to Veterans that find difficulties upon discharge from service. We do this "All the Way Together."

United Women Veterans

Membership: 20

Mission: Sec 501.C.19 Veterans Service Organization chartered by the State of Wisconsin in 1986. Our mission is to increase public awareness of the contributions, accomplishments, and sacrifices unique to women veterans; to record the history of all Wisconsin women veterans, working with the Wisconsin Veterans Museum; to provide outreach, support and information to women veterans, especially in regard to benefits earned through military service; to work for equity in veterans benefits; to provide opportunities for networking and camaraderie among women veterans; and to engage in lawful activities authorized by Chapter 181, Wisconsin Statutes.

Summary of activities: As with many VSO, we are experiencing a decline in membership and finding it difficult to balance the way things have always been and moving forward. In January 2020 we celebrated the 100th birthday of our last standing founding member, Connie Allord, USMC. And then came the pandemic, adding further troubles to membership and activities. We were able to host two fundraisers with Wines for Humanity and their consultant, Navy Veteran Lisa Kromanacher, in August and November 2020, which allowed for a small gathering of women veterans.

Our search for new leadership continues, along with it a repositioning of our goals and activities. We hope to move away from monthly luncheons and meetings, placing focus on outings for women veterans such as bicycling, hiking, paddling and similar activities. We hope to build alliances with organizations such as Team Red, White & Blue, and Sierra Club Military Outdoors, in an effort to get

women veterans together for healthy outings. Studies have shown that outdoor recreation is beneficial to both physical and mental well being.

Our Northwest Chapter continues to host outings on the Namekagon River and at Horse Spirit & Pine Brook Farm, in Spooner.

Our plans to assist with a women only Badger Honor Flight are on hold as veterans displaced by the pandemic have priority over new applicants for the flight to DC. We continue to address the VSO membership of the state Council on Veterans Programs and the positions that have been vacant for several years. We would like to see organizations that are working directly with veterans added to the Council - including the Farmer Veteran Coalition and a few others. Again, this is an area where change is needed but difficult to accomplish.

We look forward to restructuring our organization and resuming activities as the pandemic and CDC guidance allows.