



Get to Know Your County Veterans Service Officer

By: **Michael R. Jackson***

County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) have been employed in each of Wisconsin's 72 counties since World War II to serve veterans. CVSO's are a veterans local resource for dedicated and professional assistance in obtaining federal and state veterans' benefits. They provide the expertise and advocacy that veterans need to optimize their access to benefit programs.

CVSOs may interact with a veteran many times through the years. A newly-discharged veteran is given an overview of their benefits and perhaps assisted in obtaining educational benefits and filing a disability claim for service-related disabilities. Possibly a few years later that veteran may be seeking assistance with a veterans' home loan program or a personal loan. At another point, the CVSO may be assisting this veteran file for increased disability benefits because their service-related disability has worsened or assisting with a home improvement loan.

CVSOs handle inquiries and applications regarding veterans' health care benefits for veterans of all ages, but these become of special importance as they get older. Long-term care benefits can become of issue to a veteran later in life as well. Burial benefit assistance is provided to the survivors of veterans. The widows of veterans are eligible for many state benefits, and in limited cases, federal benefits. CVSOs are there to assist them as well.

Most of the programs veterans utilize are offered through the US Department of Veterans Affairs or the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs. Therefore, CVSOs are generally in contact with these agencies on a daily basis. They also work with the Service Officers of the various veterans' organizations when filing VA benefit claims. CVSOs interact with various other county government offices, such as Human Services, the Register of Deeds and the Clerk of Courts. Many federal and state agencies, such as Workforce Development, the local Housing Authority and the Social Security Administration are also resources of assistance to veterans, and CVSOs are knowledgeable of their programs as well.

The County Veterans Service Officer and staff are employees of their respective counties. It is generally the smallest department in county government. However, they assist their veterans obtain benefits that in the aggregate total in the millions of dollars that are spent in their local communities, and do have an economic impact.

***Michael R. Jackson** serves as the Dane County Veterans Service Officer in Madison. He received his undergraduate degree from Tennessee A & I State University and a Master's Degree in Social Services Administration from the University of Chicago. Over an 8-year period Mr. Jackson served as a Social Worker in the United States Department of Veterans Affairs Hospital system and as Regional Manager for the Great Lakes Region Readjustment Counseling Program (Vet Centers). He has served as the Dane County Veterans Service Officer for over 21 years. Mr. Jackson is a Vietnam veteran and the immediate past President of the CVSO Association of Wisconsin and a Certified Veterans Advocate.

Look under the county government listings of your local telephone directory or see the website www.wicvso.org.

All veterans are encouraged to at least have their discharge document on file with their county office so that assistance can be rendered in a timely manner when needed for themselves or their survivors. ■