

# LaSalle County Veterans Assistance Commission

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**Superintendent  
Christa Hammers**



**Assistant Superintendent  
Lissa Olson**

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Office of the Governor  
State Capital Room 207  
Springfield, IL 62706

December 20, 2022

Governor Pritzker,

As required by 330 ILCS 45 (The Military Veterans Assistance Act) I am submitting the Veterans Assistance Commission of LaSalle County Annual Report for the Fiscal Year ending November 30, 2022.

As of 1984 the LaSalle County Veterans Assistance Commission was created and located in the LaSalle County Courthouse. However, in August 2021, we relocated to just south of the LaSalle Veterans Clinic in Peru to be better situated for our Veterans and Families. We now have more space to hold events/functions, a computer lab for our Veterans who need one, a conference room that our groups use for privacy, and we use for our BVA appeal hearings as well as more office space for our Outreach personnel. We have also been able to house extra supplies that our Veterans may need, such as clothing, toiletries, household goods and donations.

The office has seen a change of Superintendent this past year. On December 1, 2016, Steven Kreitzer, took over this office from Martin Rue and on June 1, 2022, I, Christa Hammers was voted into the position. I have been with the office since February 2017 and continue to strive to do the best for our Veterans and Families and ensure our vision for the office carries on.

Over the past year, the office has provided many events for our clients. Some of which included: VA S.A.V.E training, Caregiver Support training, VA Home Loans, VR&E, Humana Healthcare, Hines Healthcare, a Health and Wellness Fair (with 8 different Vendors) and hosted as a site for the Women's Veterans Stand Down. We also put on a few large events: Annual Veterans Expo, Bowling for Veterans fundraiser and a Vietnam Veterans Pinning Ceremony. Our office was also able to be used for committees in the area that not only benefit Veterans, but other members of the community. We hosted both the Senior Resource Group and Human Service Transportation Planning (HSTP) committee. In total, our office had just under 700 Veterans attend our events and we continue to try and reach more Veterans by being active on both the local radio stations and social media.

Although the VA has an expanded wait time for claims to be processed of up to 12 months, I am extremely proud of our team and the work we put into helping our clients. I am honored to report that our submitted claims have brought in monetary benefits for Veterans and their families totaling \$5,824,918.45. This number is only for the calendar year of 2022. In 2023, we will begin again and make every effort to be as successful as last year.

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We continue to push further education with our staff so we can stay up to date with the new legislature and best practices for our clients. Our office has had one new Veterans Service Officer (VSO) complete the Basic Benefits Course and get accredited, one VSO take a course on Advanced Appeals training and one VSO complete and pass the Certified Veterans Advocate course taught by a Veterans Law Attorney. We also continue to attend annual training courses and meetings-both state and nation-wide. Our office has attended the Illinois Association of County Officials (IACO), Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA), Illinois Association of County Veterans Assistance Commissions (IACVAC), and National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO) conferences this past year and will continue to do so in the future.

Even though I am extremely proud of my team and the number of monetary benefits we were able to bring in, and the education we have received, I am even more proud of the Events and Programs that we have offered to our Veterans and Families. In 2022, we have connected with Sheridan Prison to reach Veteran inmates due to be released, participated in Operation Green light and handed out over 200 green light bulbs for Veterans day, created the Veterans Giving Tree Event – where we connected with the LaSalle Veterans Home and the community to be sure every Veteran had a gift this Christmas, decorated the windows at the LaSalle Veterans Home for the holiday season for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year in a row and brought Santa to our office for our Veterans with little ones. We have also built programs for assisting our Veterans with PTSD/physical disabilities. Our office facilitates a workout program with the help of local gyms, and we help in paying for Service Dog training. It is our hope to begin working with a local horse ranch and bring even more activities and programs to our Veterans in 2023.

Our office not only offers claims assistance, programs, and events- we also assist Veterans in their time of need. Whether it is a one-time event or monthly occurrence. In 2022, we have paid claims for direct financial assistance totaling \$13,608.85 via vouchers to vendors- for either rent or utilities payments. It is this office's aim to not only see these Veterans and make sure they are receiving every benefit they are eligible for, but also connect them with other community resources that may be able to further assist them.

The goal of the LaSalle County Veterans Assistance Commission has always been, and will continue to be, that of assisting our Veterans and their Families in every way possible. Our office has provided great benefits for the county and our Veterans this past year and we will continue to do so for years to come. It is our honor to serve our nations hero's and their families, and we will continue to expand our services in the hopes of filling needs of even a greater number of Veterans.

Respectfully submitted,

*Christa Hammers*

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Superintendent

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