

LaSalle County Veterans Assistance Commission

MONTHLY REPORT

September 2023



Prepared By:
Christa Hammers
Superintendent

AGENDA

MEETING

9/27/2023

- I. Call to Order & Salute to the Colors
- II. Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag
- III. Chaplin's Prayer
- IV. Roll Call of Officers
- V. Reading & Approval of Meeting Minutes
- VI. Public Comment
- VII. Superintendent's Report
 - a. Office Activity
- VIII. Old Business
- IX. New Business
 - a. Budget Approval
- X. For the Good of the Commission
- XI. Closing Prayer
- XII. Adjournment

Meeting MINUTES

8/30/2023

Call to Order & Salute to the Colors

President Harold Olsen called the meeting to order at 5:00pm and lead us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Delegates & Alternates Present

Greg Stock - Am Legion- Marseilles / Bill Luther - VFW - Ottawa / John Duback - AmVets - Ottawa / Roscoe Mazur - Am Legion - Oglesby / Chuck Erb - VFW - Marseilles / Gary Graffis - AmVets - Ottawa / Tom Troutman - VFW - Mendota / Tom Shea - Am Legion - Ottawa / Lance Sires - Am Legion - Marseilles

Officers Present

President – Harold Olsen
Vice President – Dennis Znaniiecki-**EXCUSED**
Guard – Bill Paterson - **EXCUSED**
Chaplin – Andy Ruggerio

Employees Present

Christa Hammers – Superintendent
Lissa Olson - Assistant Superintendent
James Sturtevant- VSO- In-Training
Emily Hackler- VSO - In-Training-**EXCUSED**
Kelli Rietgraf - Administrative Assistant

Meeting MINUTES

Approval of Meeting minutes as presented:
Motion by Roscoe Mazur and seconded by Andy Ruggerio. Motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment - None

Superintendent's Report

Christa discussed that Emily is now just waiting on her PIV access card and has been shadowing Lissa at outreach locations for a smooth transition once she receives it.

Christa then discussed that the office is held a PACT Act intent day and Lissa and Christa saw a total of 14 Veterans in a span of 4 hours. It was a great event that allowed us to touch base with Veterans to get services they were not aware of.

Office also attended the Peru Moving Wall event. We were there for all four days and it was a honor to be able to attend. We were able to tell people of our services and just see others that wanted to thank us for what we do for our Veterans and Families.

Christa informed the office that we are holding an event with AllenForce at Cedar Creek Ranch on September 15. This is for Veterans only. MUST be able to sign waiver and ride horse. Only 4 spots left.
Sign up online.

Christa then discussed that Peru Public Library is looking for a Veteran to tell their story to honor them for Veterans Day on November 8th from 6-7:30pm. Our office will be there beforehand to brief attendees of what we do. Anyone interested- please reach out.

Christa then discussed that Hines Vocational will be in office the second Thursday of every month to assist Veterans with resumes, interview skills and applications. Anyone interested, please stop by!

Christa then discussed the office brought in over \$4.2 Million in payouts to our Veterans and Families through July 2023 and that the phone call number for June is corrected to 758.

Superintendent's report was motioned for approval by Chuck Erb and seconded by Lance Sires. Motion passed unanimously.

Old Business- NONE.

Meeting MINUTES

New Business

Christa informed the Commission Board that on August 15, she reached out to Josh Herman from Miller, Hall & Triggs, LLC out of Peoria. Lawyer that is well informed of MVAA rules and most IL County VAC's have him on "staff". Christa asked the Board if anyone had any objections after reading agreement- No objections were had.

Christa then went over the newly redone "Bonus Program" stating that the Board has always had the power to do what this states- but this way we have it in writing so the employees know what is expected and what is going to be recieved. Also so the Board knows when the employees present- what they have agreed to do for said employee. However, the Bonus is still not mandatory. It is the Boards decision.

Christa asked if anyone had any objections or questions to this.

Tom Shea had questions regarding the word choice of "Bonus"- upon clarifying that we can amend the word, and that the amount can be applied to yearly increase or given one time- he was ok with it.

No further questions.

Motion to accept the Bonus/Payraise Schedule as amended made by Chuck Erb, seconded by Bill Luther. Motion passed unanimously.

On to the Bonuses/Raises, Christa asked if the Board would like to go into closed session- Board stated no, keep it open. This again is regarding just Christa, Lissa and Kelli, as James and Emily both are on their one year and per job description will be raised \$5,000 for FY24 for passing testing and proving they are able to do the job with passion and commitment.

Board discussed again what they would like to do and Christa reminded them that not only did Lissa and herself learn new positions, excel at getting benefits for our Veterans and families by getting the highest this office ever had, but they hired and trained 3 new employees and created new opportunities for the office to expand for outreach, attended community events, held meetings, created needed documents and more. They not only "did the base line of the job", they worked many hours "after close" to make sure no claims suffered and the office continued forward. Christa stated how proud she was to be apart of this team and the team they have created- its a blessing to have so many people wanting to help and do everything to make things happen for our Veterans and Families.

The Board agreed and after debate stated that the staff would recieve their annual raise and in addition- Christa and Lissa would recieve \$5,000/ea on their annual salary and Kelli would recieve \$2,500. Board clarified that it was only due to Kelli's short time at the VAC that she did not recieve the full amount. They all are appreciative of her services.

Motion made for approval of annual increases for Christa, Lissa and Kelli made by Chuck Erb, seconded by Lance Sires. Motion passed unanimously.

On to budget:

Budget review for FY24 is done with “rough numbers”. Christa told the commission that the County Auditors office instructed that she should take last year and add 3% for her “this year” numbers. Going off of that and what we have now, we are still below our current budget and even with raises for next year-doing well for staying on target. Board instructed to look over budget and see if they had questions. None were had. Told that on 9/6/23 there would be a special meeting to go over it once more and accept it so Christa could stay on target with meetings to get it done through the County. Board understood.

For the Good of the Commission

John Duback stated that there is a group out of Dixon that is doing an Honor Flight on Sept 19 and they are having a “Welcome Home” in Springfield for anyone that wants to attend. Asked Christa to reach out to Pat and see what we could do for working together.

Andy Ruggiero wanted to thank the VAC employees for coming out to the Moving Wall and thank Lissa for getting Hines out there for those that may have struggled with the event.

Roscoe Mazur stated that Oglesby AmLegion was having a fish fry Sept 1st.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn was made by Andy Ruggiero and seconded by Roscoe Mazur.

Motion passed unanimously at 5:41pm.

AUGUST**Office Activity:**

The LaSalle VAC joined with AllenForce and held an event at Cedar Creek Ranch on 9/16/23 and the turnout was fantastic. We had roughly 20 Veterans come out to the event. They enjoyed a trailride, petting zoo, lunch and some yoga! We look forward to working more with both and seeing what we can put together for a program for our Veterans/Families.

Christa, Lissa and Emily had IACVAC (state) Training in Peoria. There we heard from IDVA, BVA Law Judge- Teresa Raymond, Social Security Administration, VA Medical Examination Office (C&P Exams), Pension Group, Fiduciary Group, CHAMPVA Benefits and more.

Our office has now partnered with Ottawa Food Pantry - ran by a Army Veteran- and now offers our Veterans on our assistance program the opportunity to pick up goods from our office when they come in to verify assistance needs. We are happy to not only partner with MidWest Shelter on providing home goods, but the pantry to provide some dry food goods as well.

The office is also putting together an event for State Education Resources, this will be any school that works with the GI Bill, offers scholarships or any benefits for Veterans/Families to come together. This will be set up as a booth/walk-through event in our office. The date we have set is Saturday, October 28th from 9am-Noon.

AUGUST Office Activity			
Office Visits	159	Initial Claims	52
Phone	745	Appeals	15
Outstation	27	Board Appeals	0
Mendota	9	VA Healthcare	12
Streator	18	Pension/DIC	11
Intent to File	67	Other	217

Group Numbers:

PTSD: 12 Flutes for Vets: 5 VA Outreach: 1 Senior Resource: 14

WALK-INS:

Appts Made: 25 Questions Only: 35 TOTAL: 60

Our Office

OVERVIEW

AUGUST Claims Summary				
Total Percentage	Month Submitted	Through	2023 Amount	Monthly Amount
40%	5/16/2023	Dec-23	\$ 12,737.37	\$ 940.48
70%	1/11/2023	Dec-23	\$ 27,334.17	\$ 1,907.06
60%	4/25/2023	Dec-23	\$ 19,082.20	\$ 1,319.65
10%	5/5/2023	Dec-23	\$ 2,488.80	\$ 165.92
10%	5/25/2023	Dec-23	\$ 2,322.88	\$ 165.92
90%	12/27/2022	Dec-23	\$ 40,310.45	\$ 2,353.39
100%	2/28/2023	Dec-23	\$ 47,430.12	\$ 3,952.51
70%	9/11/2023	Dec-23	\$ 22,413.54	\$ 1,663.06
dependent	2/1/2022	Dec-23	\$ 1,380.00	\$ -
10%	9/30/2022	Dec-23	\$ 3,623.96	\$ 165.92
70%	8/10/2022	Dec-23	\$ 21,648.72	\$ 1,804.06
100%	3/29/2023	Dec-23	\$ 60,009.12	\$ 3,750.57
10%	4/26/2023	Dec-23	\$ 248,808.00	\$ 165.92
30%	9/6/2022	Dec-23	\$ 11,095.78	\$ 508.05
MOD	2/1/2023	Dec-23	\$ 9,823.89	\$ 3,823.89
DIC	2/1/2023	Dec-23	\$ 59,190.10	\$ 1,562.74
Sub.claimant	2/8/2023	Dec-23	\$ 6,420.90	\$ -
DIC	9/1/2022	Dec-23	\$ 37,005.44	\$ 1,562.74
60%	5/31/2023	Dec-23	\$ 17,885.46	\$ 1,440.65
clothing		Dec-23	\$ 968.52	\$ 968.52
80%	9/30/2022	Dec-23	\$ 46,234.68	\$ 3,823.89
60%	6/30/2023	Dec-23	\$ 17,287.80	\$ 1,440.65
40%	8/10/2022	Dec-23	\$ 11,285.76	\$ 940.48
40%	6/16/2023	Dec-23	\$ 10,229.94	\$ 811.86
30%	8/10/2022	Dec-23	\$ 15,254.22	\$ 642.05
80%	1/5/2022	Dec-23	\$ 8,156.81	\$ 270.10
Dependent	4/12/2023	Dec-23	\$ 9,430.32	\$ 785.86
80%	5/3/2023	Dec-23	\$ 50,022.06	\$ 2,061.77
Dependent	5/9/2023	Dec-23	\$ 19,264.80	\$ 1,440.65
90%	5/4/2023	Dec-23	\$ 31,830.80	\$ 2,172.39
		Total	\$870,976.61	\$42,610.75
		Year to Date Total	\$5,102,265.19	\$514,530.20

OFFICE OVERALL TOTALS:

We have continued getting grants for submitted claims, bringing our total for FY23 to just over \$5.1 million so far. We have had many intents put in this past month and are working diligently to get our Veterans/Families in to file claims. We are currently booking into late October with the hope of shortening wait times even more soon- Emily is still just waiting on PIV and continues to attend outreach locations with Lissa.

We continue to strive to do all that we can for our Veterans & Families.

Our Office
OVERVIEW