



2021 Annual Report

GRAND TRAVERSE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
2650 LAFRANIER RD, TRAVERSE CITY, MICHIGAN 49686

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This 2021 annual report is a compilation of data from various sources to show the direct impact that Veterans and their families have on Grand Traverse County. Our office assists them in applying for compensation, pension, healthcare, education, and a wide variety of other benefits to which they are entitled. This, in turn, allows them to maintain their livelihood and take advantage of the many opportunities Grand Traverse County has to offer.

Veterans and their families are a cornerstone in this county and provide an invaluable economic impact. With the assistance of the various veterans' organizations here in Grand Traverse County and other outreach programs, we ensure Veterans are made aware and maximize all the benefits and resources available to them. We work diligently to enrich the lives of every Veteran and their dependents that call Northern Michigan home.

The staff here at Grand Traverse County Department of Veterans Affairs is proud of the many accomplishments over the last year and the growth that we continue to experience. We strive to provide the best services to the Veterans and their dependents of Grand Traverse County because of the many sacrifices they have made while serving our country.



OUR MISSION

The Grand Traverse County Veterans Affairs Office strives to provide professional assistance to veterans and their families with understanding and accessing available benefits through Federal, State of Michigan, and local government agencies.

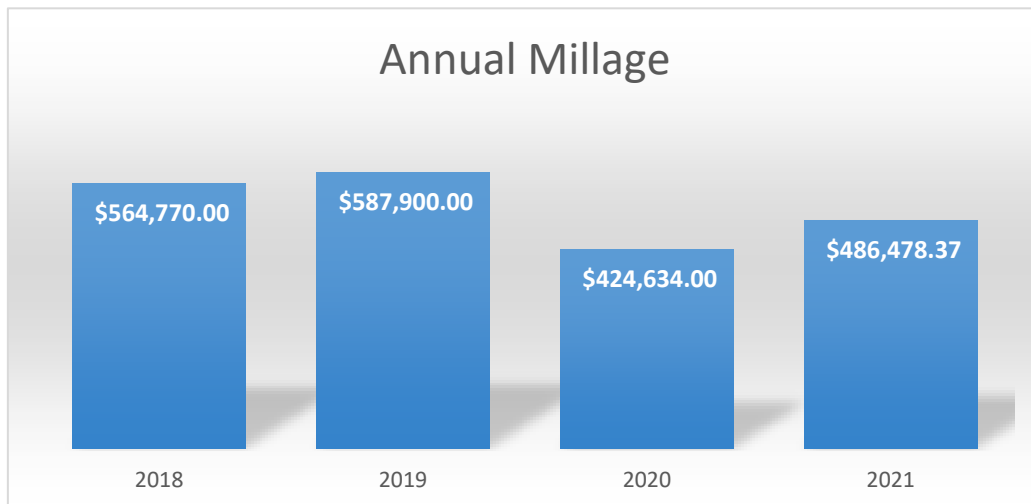
BACKGROUND

The Grand Traverse County Department of Veterans Affairs (GTCVA) was created November 27, 1991, by Grand Traverse County Commissioners resolution 277-91 of adoption of Michigan Act 192 of 1953 "An act to create a county department of veterans' affairs in certain counties, and to prescribe its powers and duties; to create the county veteran service fund and to provide for contributors to and expenditures from that fund; and to transfer the powers and duties of the soldier's relief commission in those counties."

The Grand Traverse County VA Committee is comprised of 7 veterans appointed by the Grand Traverse County Commissioners for 2-4 year terms. The office is comprised of a Director, an Office Specialist, and 3 Benefit Counselors (Veteran Service Officers).

The Grand Traverse County Board of Commissioners established a levy of .1185 mills in 2016. *In 2019, the office asked the Board of Commissioners to lower the millage to more closely mirror our expenses. Doing more with less!*

Our office has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Leelanau county to provide services for the veteran in their counties. During this MOU, GTCVA provides staff for their Administrator's office one day a week (Tuesday) in their county to visit and assist their veterans. The annual cost of the contract is \$46,618.



DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS

We all thought with the end of 2020, COVID-19 might be ending as well, boy were we wrong. Client counts continued to be lower than pre-pandemic even while offering Zoom appointments.

Our office has not been able to get back to normal in person outreach events and we continue to look for opportunities to connect with veterans.

Our FY21 Community Veterans Service Fund (CVSF) grant from Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency (MVAA) was \$58,702.60. Through the grant, we provided \$6,300 in Meijer vouchers to veterans for food assistance. The remainder of the grant was spent on advertising through television, radio, billboard, and social media management.



In April the VA committee approved the purchase of mCase software. This is a complete financial assistance program that allows better tracking and reporting of all assistance programs. The software gives total control over the process to create files, approve/deny, decision letters, and total reporting of all assistance.

The County Department of Veterans Affairs is the main office to assist many veterans, dependents, and surviving spouses who would have been otherwise lost with no guidance on their benefits. *Our office was instrumental in securing an estimated \$4.07 million in new benefits for Grand Traverse County Veterans, and their survivors from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).* This amount does not consider the money that we helped our Veterans save by assisting them in accessing VA healthcare, home loans, or educational benefits. Consequently, the office continues to be a significant and judicious governmental entity at the county level and continues to have an extremely positive impact on the economy of Grand Traverse County.

I look forward to the expansion of our office into a mobile service office in 2022. This will give our office a larger presence throughout the community.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael W. Roof".

Michael W. Roof
Director

GTC COUNTY VETERANS' AFFAIRS BY THE NUMBERS

Grand Traverse has the 22nd highest veteran population in the state of Michigan. Grand Traverse is 41st (\$4.61) in the state when it comes to per capita compensation and pension benefits. The data below is the scope of work done from FY 2021.

OFFICE STATISTICS– FY 2021

Office Visits

Grand Traverse 1,143

New Clients

2019 450

2020 239

2021 243

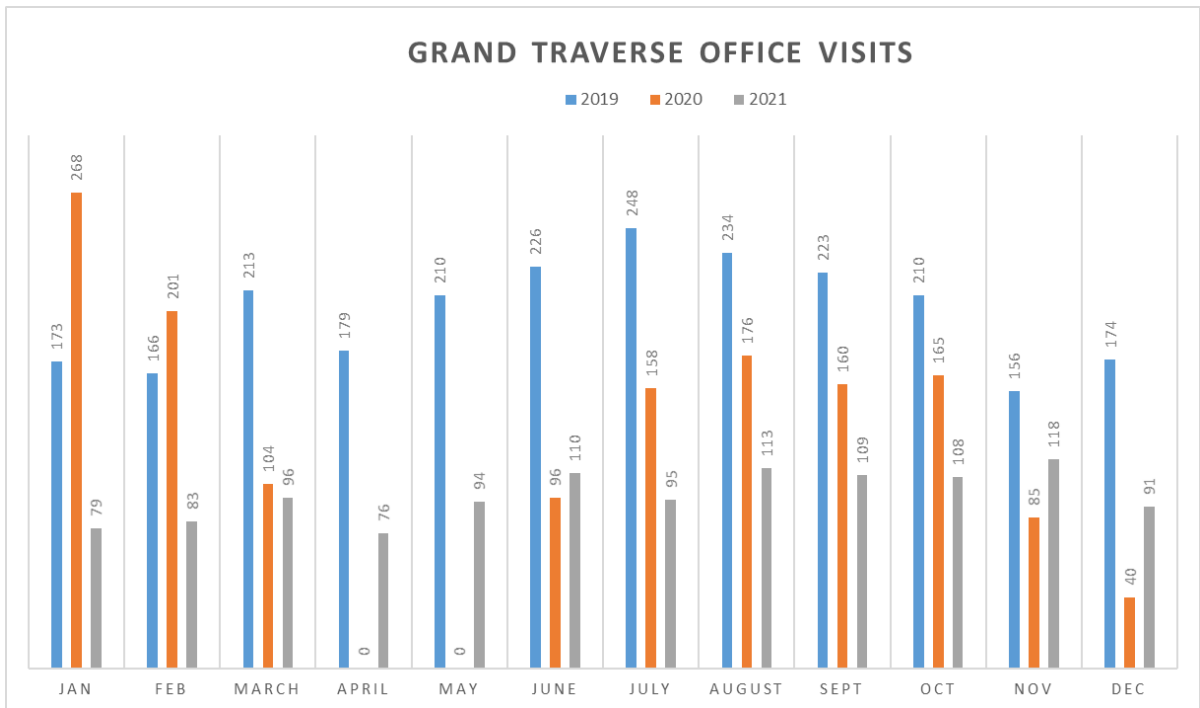
Phone Calls

Incoming 3,730

Outgoing 3,031

Outgoing Mail

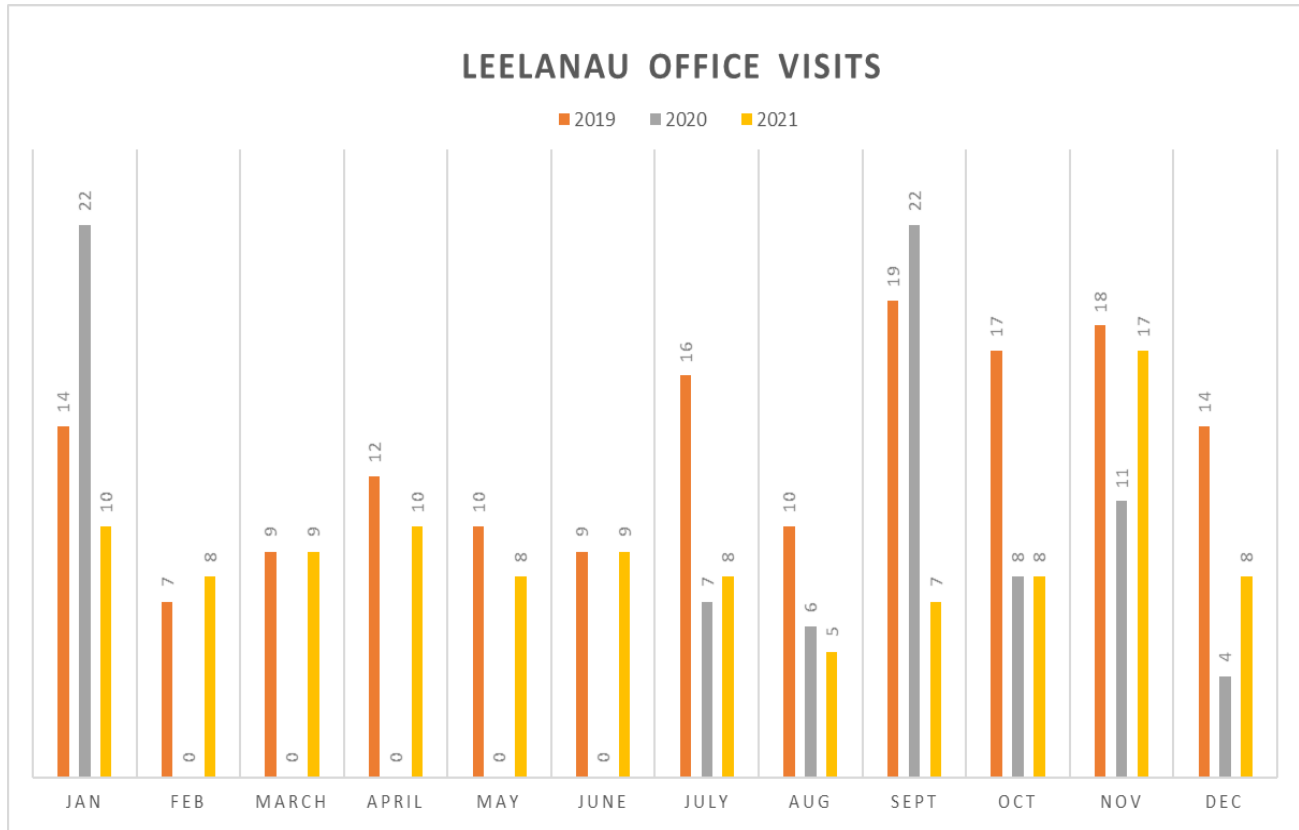
196



The number of office visits in 2021 is 281 less than in 2020. In 2019 the annual visits were 2,400, this shows approximately 50% fewer office visits since the start of the pandemic.

Office Visits

Leelanau 104

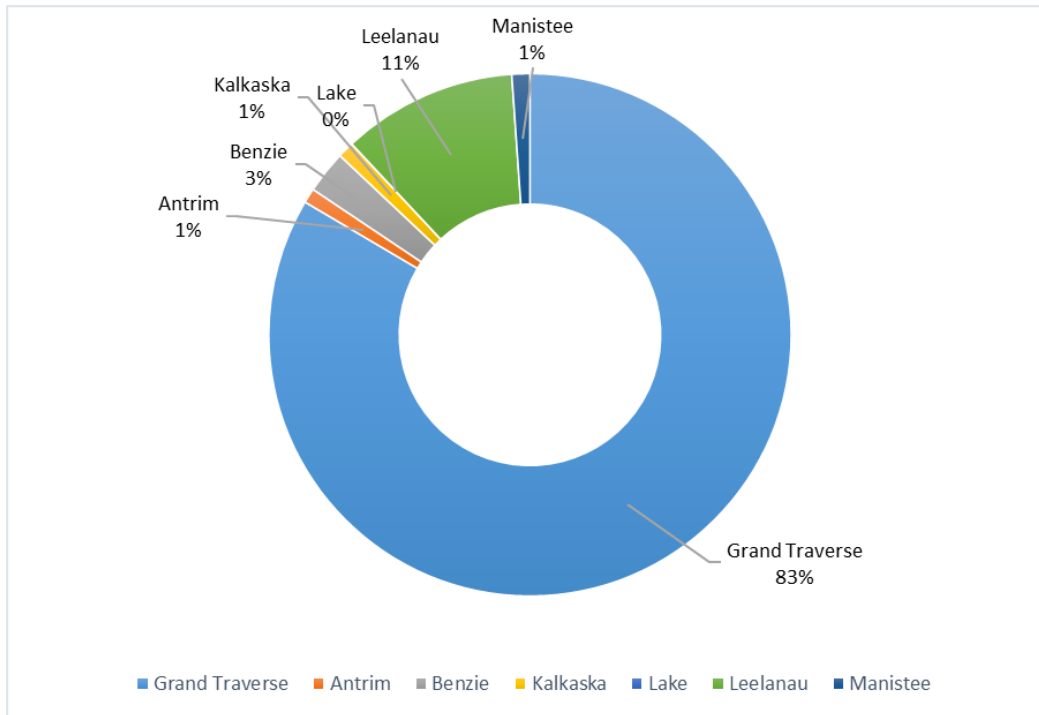


The Leelanau office is staffed only one day a week through set appointments and walk-ins.

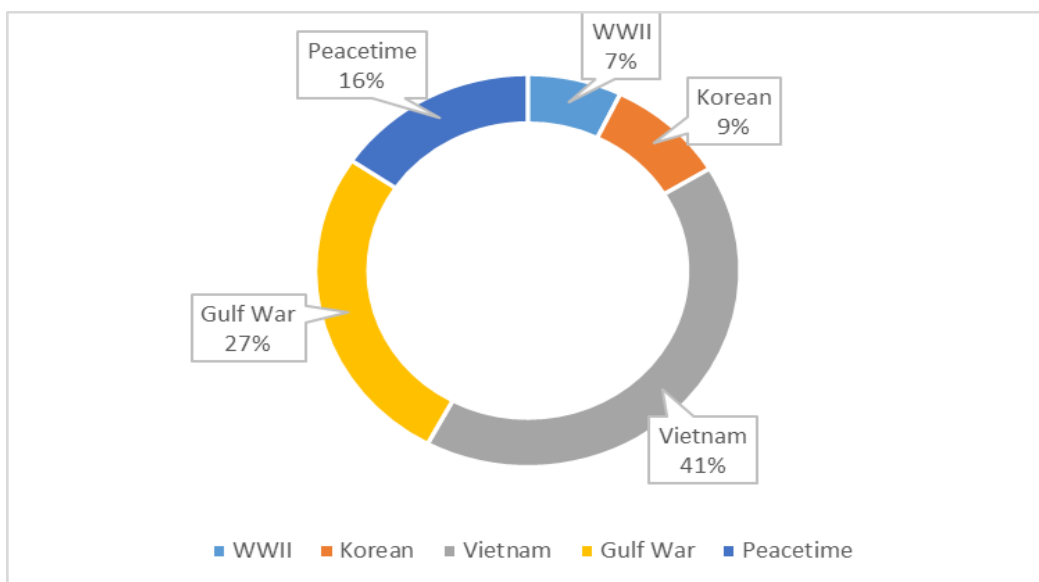
FY 2021 was the first time that Leelanau was approved for the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency County Veterans Service Fund grant. The grant was utilized for advertising in the local paper which is delivered to 87% of homes in Leelanau County. Soon after the ads came out in October, the office was packed with appointments every week.

OFFICE VISIT DEMOGRAPHICS

The Grand Traverse Veterans Affairs Committee believes that our office should assist any veteran or dependant that visits our office. However, our office is restricted to only assisting Grand Traverse County Veterans and dependants with financial assistance or the Michigan Veterans Trust Fund.

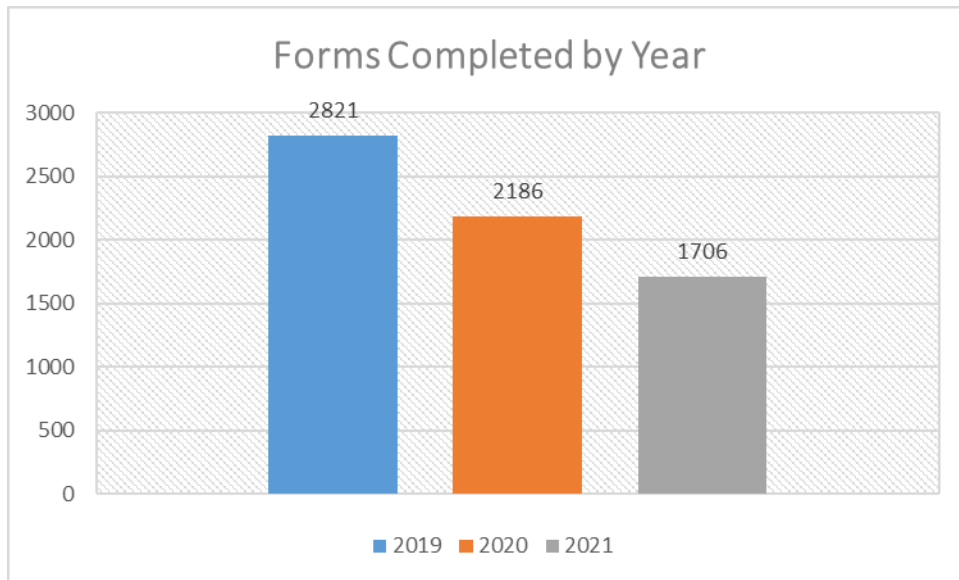


Below shows the breakout of the population of clients seen in the office.

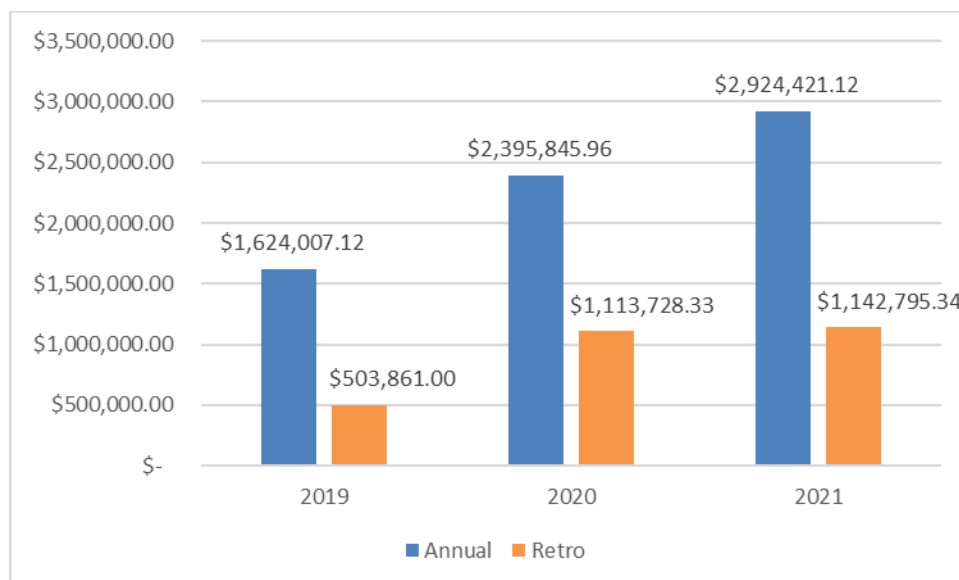


ADVOCATING FOR OUR VETERANS

Our advocacy work involves assisting in the filing of claims for compensation and pension, to local, state, and federal agencies which include the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Our Veteran Service Officers track every claim that they process from beginning to end. An interesting point in the chart below, 1,000 fewer forms were filed in 2021 than in 2019, while the amount of compensation and pension rose.



Due to the increase of outreach services and great work done by our staff, the amount of VA benefit payments has substantially increased over the previous year. The chart below shows the amount of new annual compensation that the office was responsible for bringing into the area.



BURIAL & MARKER EXPENSES – FY 2021

Michigan Public Act 235 of 1911 (MCL 35.801-35.804) mandates the payment by the county of \$300 towards the burial of eligible veterans and their spouses and to set government markers. It is the duty of the Veterans Affairs Committee to administer this program.

While we processed 31 applications for burial benefits in FY21, we were only able to approve 23 County Burial Allowance applications for a total expenditure of \$ 4,300.00

In 2019, a new application was created that held applicants to the statute guideline of having under \$40,000 in assets. Which has resulted in fewer approvals.

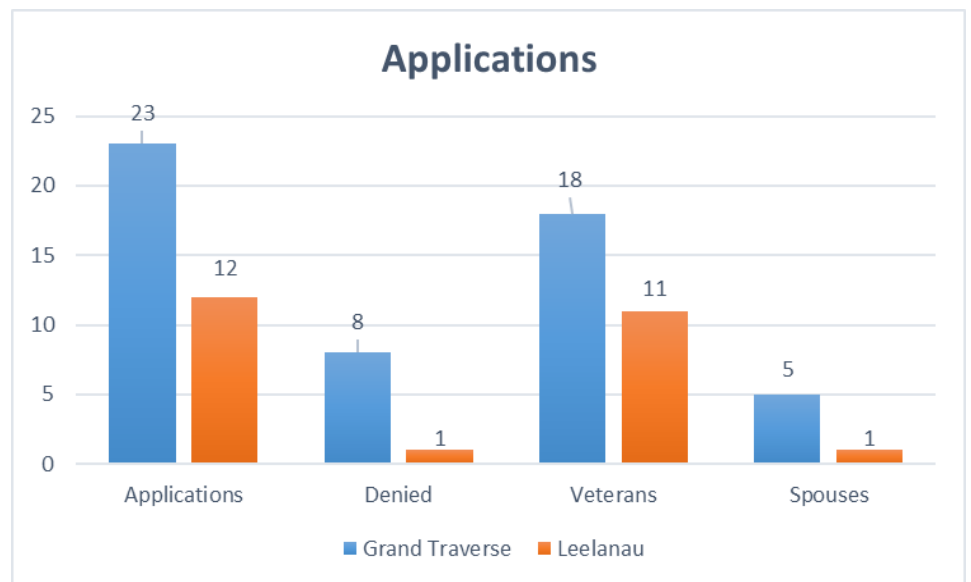
Burial Applications

Grand Traverse

2019	54
2020	43
2021	31

Leelanau

2019	24
2020	18
2021	13



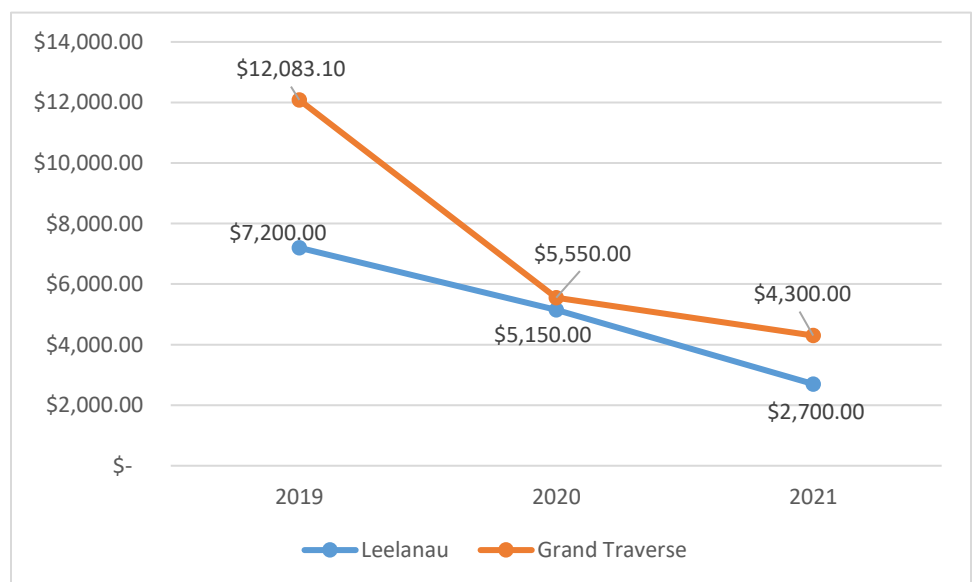
County Burial Expenditures

Grand Traverse

2019	\$12,083
2020	\$ 5,550
2021	\$ 4,300

Leelanau

2019	\$ 7,200
2020	\$ 5,100
2021	\$ 2,700



Burial Applications by Era

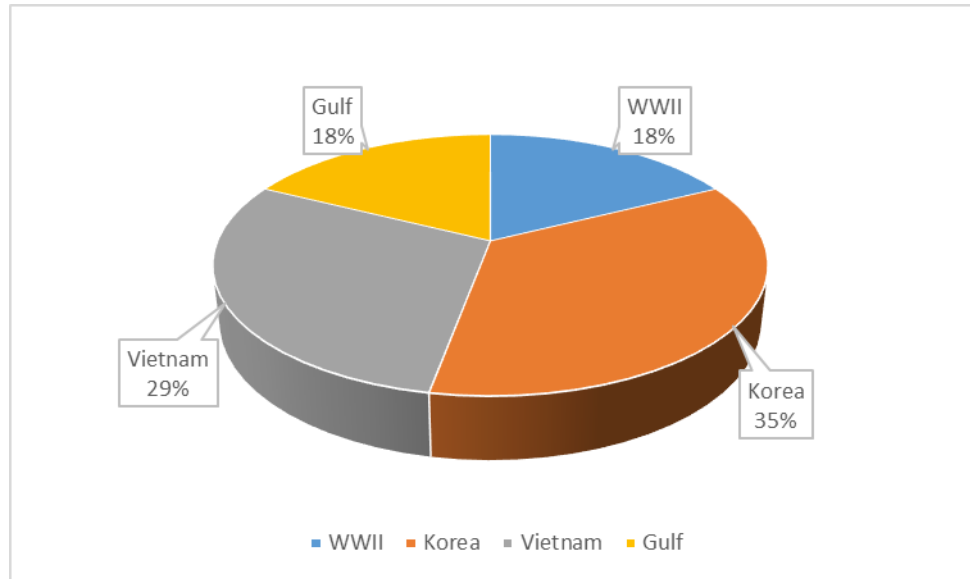
This year there was a significant shift of percentages of what era of veterans had passed. While Gulf and Korea war veterans did not change, WWII deaths decreased by 18% and Vietnam deaths increased by 25%.

Grand Traverse

WWII	3
Korea	6
Vietnam	5
Gulf	3

Leelanau

WWII	2
Korea	7
Vietnam	1
Gulf	2



RELIEF EXPENSES – FY 2021

Under Michigan Act 214 of 1899, the county board of commissioners of each county shall annually levy a tax, not exceeding 1/10 of a mill on each dollar, to be levied and collected as provided by law, upon the taxable property of each township and city, for their respective counties, for the *purpose of creating a fund for the relief of honorably discharged indigent members of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and women's auxiliaries and the indigent spouses, minor children, and parents of each indigent or deceased member who served during a period of war as described in 38 CFR 3.2.*

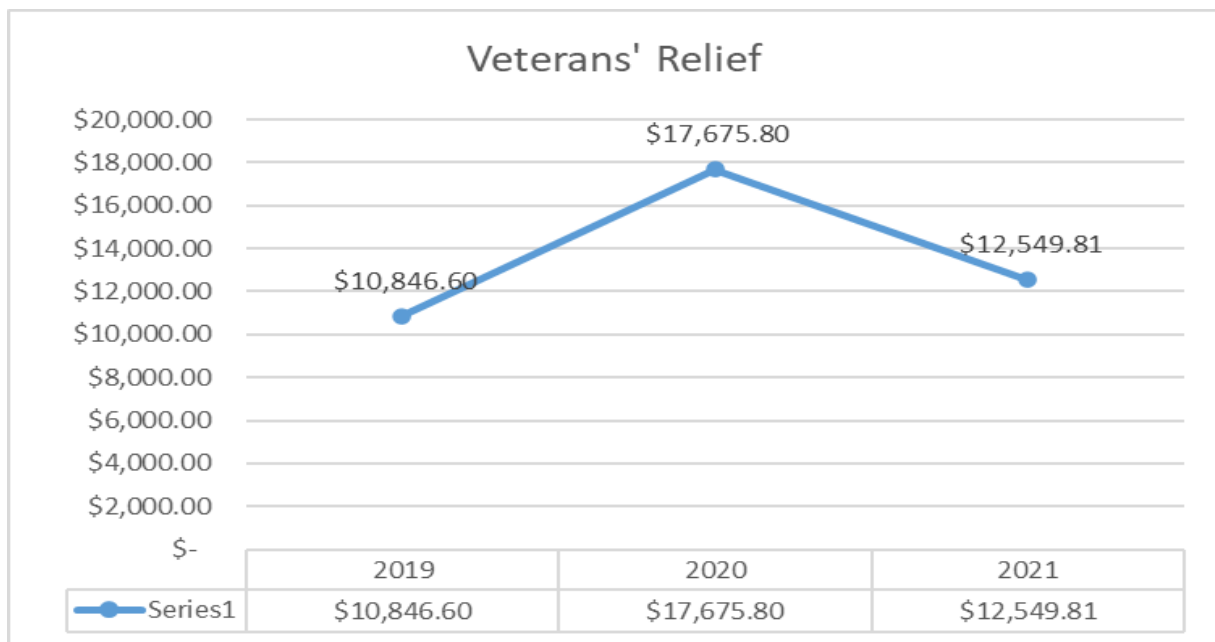
While the emergency relief budget for FY 2021 was \$20,000, only \$12,549.81 was spent.

Emergency Relief Applications

37 Approved

Annual Relief Expenditures

\$12,549.81



While 2020 saw a huge increase due to the COVID pandemic, the 2021 Veterans' Relief fund decreased due to the fact Meijer vouchers were given out through the CVSF grant in place of our grocery cards

GRANTS / AWARDS

The Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency (MVAA) created the Community Veterans Service Fund (CVSF) to assist the County Department of Veterans Affairs throughout Michigan to raise public awareness about their services. Our office was awarded \$52,250.55 in FY21. The county received a \$50,000 direct payment and the additional \$2,250.55 was reimbursed at the end of the year.

Projects paid for by the CVSF grant are listed below:

- Veterans Wilderness Outing \$5,507.36
 - The Wilderness Outing was canceled due to high winds and the ferry service canceling the day and the day after the event. The facilitator of the event will use funds expended towards the 2022 outing.
- Social Media \$10,548
 - The office partnered with GATHER Media to manage all social media platforms to help raise awareness of our services. Social media management consisted of posting a minimum of 3 weekly posts to FB, LinkedIn, and Twitter accounts.
- Radio & TV Advertising \$ 33,000
 - The office contracted with Spectrum to provide television commercials and digital advertising.
 - Radio advertising was promoted over WCCW 107.5, WTCM 580 AM, WCM 103.5, and KLT 97.5 during strategic times and programs.
- Marketing \$3,198.19
 - Purchases office uniform polo shirts, hoodies, and winter coats to help advertise the office.
- Meijer Vouchers \$5,582.64
 - Meijer grocery vouchers were given out in addition to normal financial assistance to help applicants stretch their budget further.

Without the grant, none of these projects would have come to fruition. The impact of the MVAA CVSF grant has helped us reach veterans we might not have impacted without it.

In October, the office was awarded the FY 2022 CVSF grant of \$103,283.25

MICHIGAN VETERANS TRUST FUND



In 1946, the Michigan Veterans Trust Fund was created from \$50 million in post-World War II reserve funds. From utility bills to home repairs to medical costs, the Michigan Veterans Trust Fund (MVTF) offers combat-era veterans and their families a way to overcome unexpected expenses and get back on their feet financially.

The Grand Traverse County Department of Veterans Affairs has a Trust Fund Agent that assists veterans in applying for this financial assistance program. *The MVTF provides another avenue of financial assistance to veterans and their families at NO COST to Grand Traverse County taxpayers.*

Applications for assistance are reviewed and decided upon by a committee appointed by the Michigan Veterans Trust Fund Board of Trustees. Appeals and reviews are sent to the board for consideration at their monthly meeting.

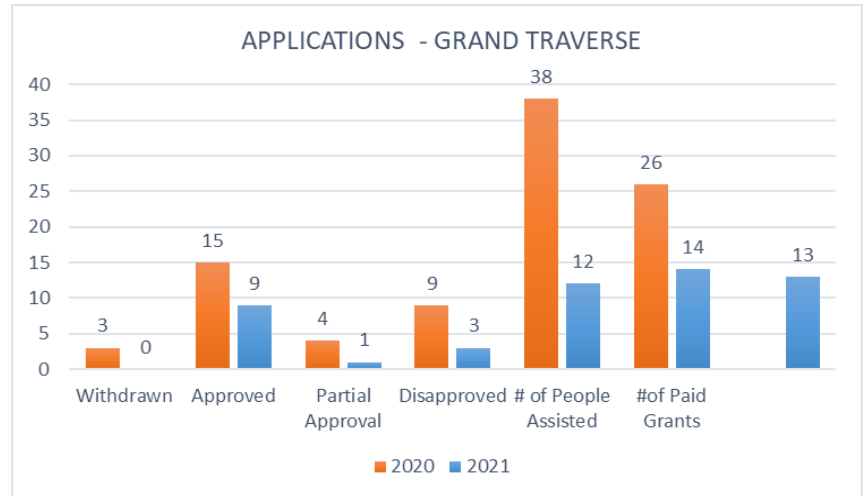
2021 MVTF County Committee Members

John Lefler
Ron Hofmeister
Brad Finkbeiner
John Kuhlman

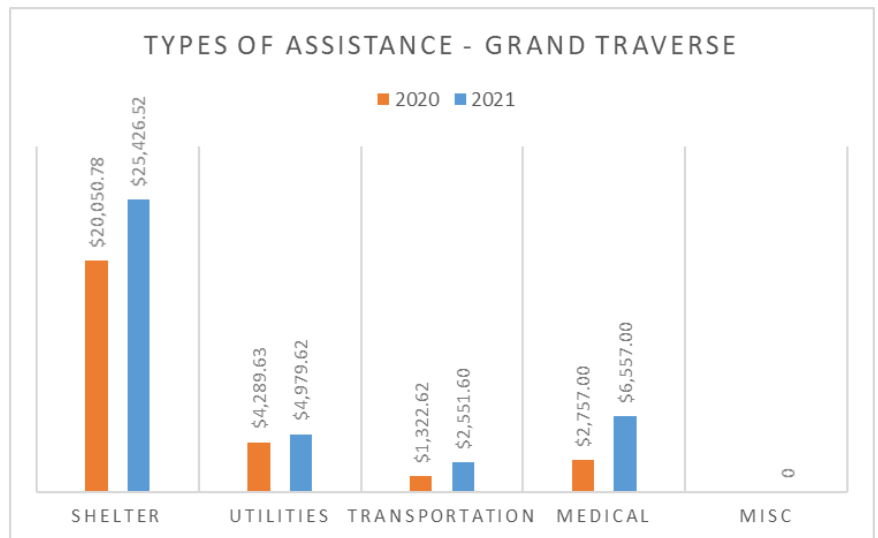
FY 2021 MVTF DETAILS

Grand Traverse County

Withdrawn	0
Approved	9
Partial Approval	1
Disapproved	3
# of People Assisted	12
# of Paid Grants	14
Total # of Apps	13

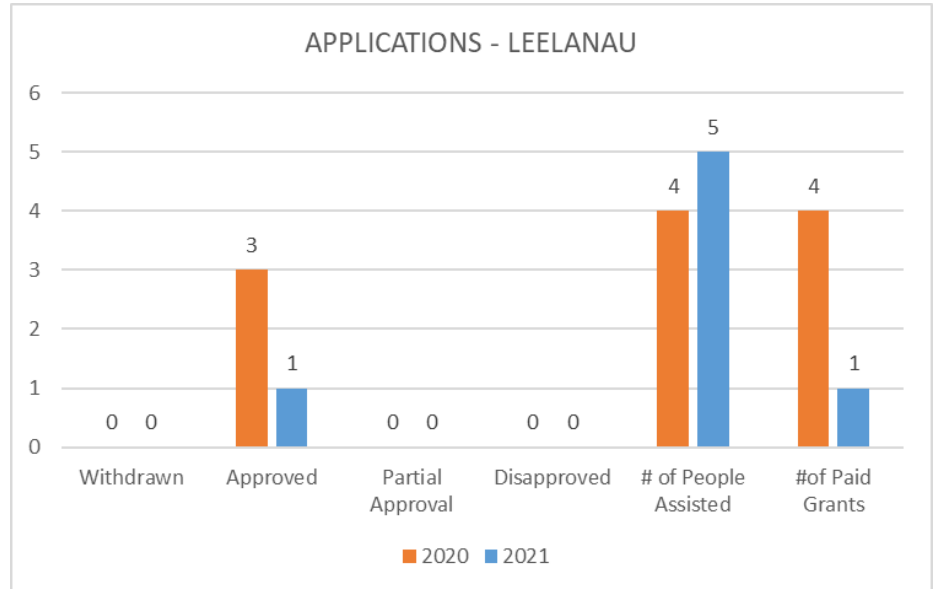


Shelter	\$ 25,426.52
Utilities	\$ 4,979.62
Transportation	\$ 2,551.60
Medical	\$ 6,557.00
Total	\$ 39,514.74

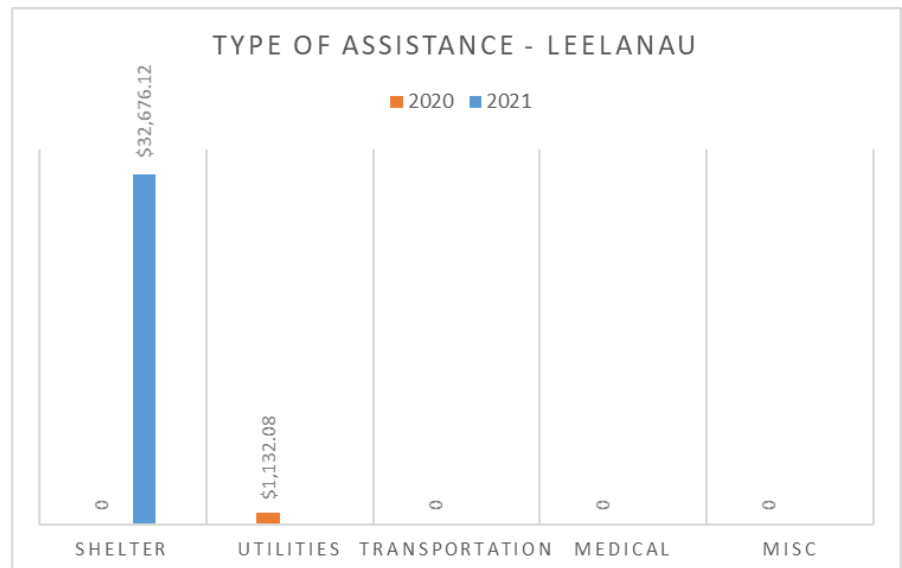


Leelanau County

Withdrawn	0
Approved	1
Partial Approved	0
Disapproved	0
# of People Assisted	5
# of Paid Grants	1
Total # of Apps	1



Shelter	\$ 32,676.12
Utilities	\$ 1,132.08
Transportation	0
Medical	0



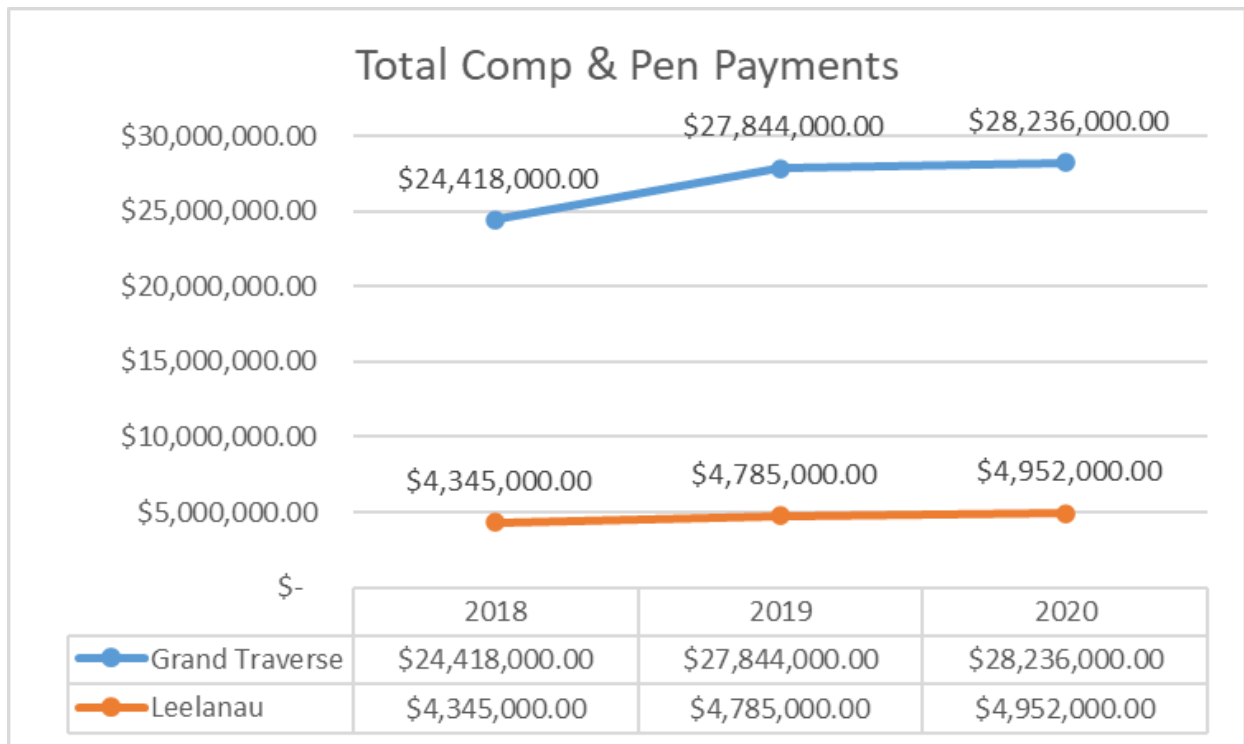
US DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS EXPENDITURES

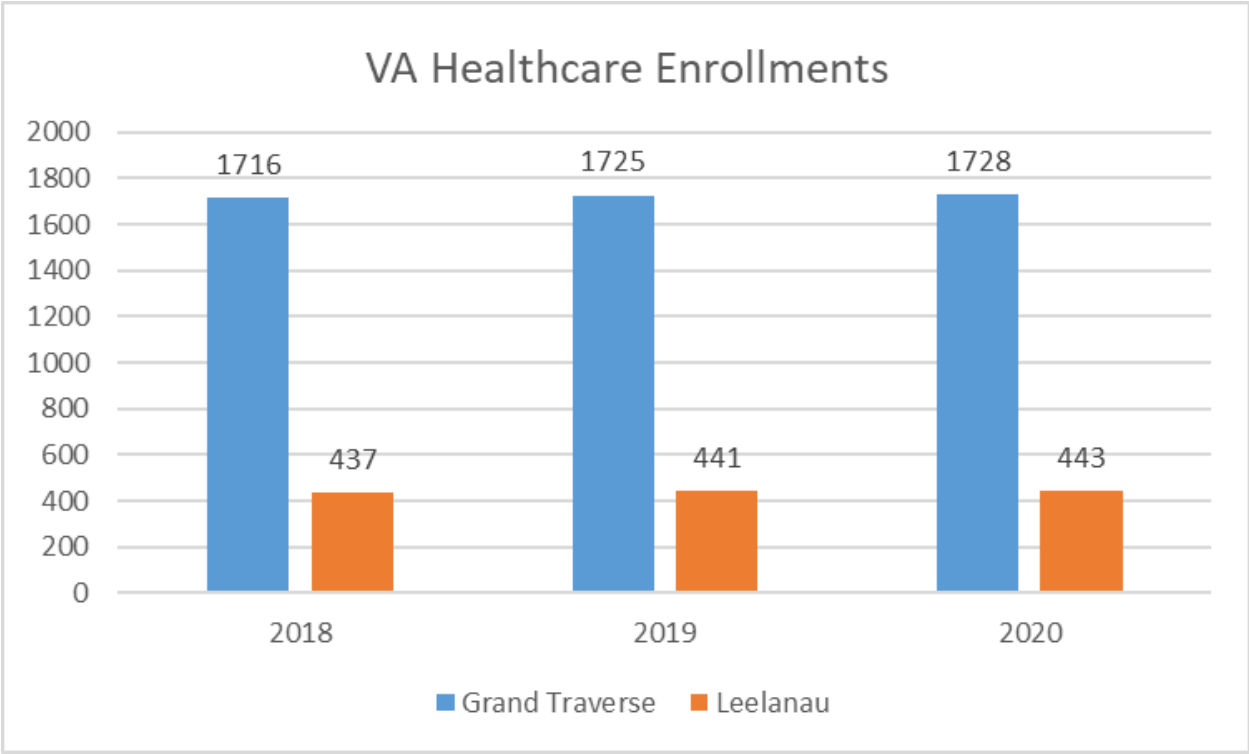
The chart below summarizes the monetary benefits disbursed to Grand Traverse and Leelanau County veterans as well as their dependents for Federal Benefits. The GDX report is always a year behind due to the amount of data necessary to compile these reports, but this gives our office a baseline to start from for reporting purposes.



While Grand Traverse County is 25th for the amount of VA dollars spent within the state, we are ranked 22nd when it comes to Compensation & Pension.

The graphs below help shed light on the veteran demographics for our service areas for the total population of veterans within our county to the number of veterans receiving compensation or pension benefits.





2021 OVERVIEW

Offices Open

The county moved all offices to be fully open without restrictions. While the office had not seen a complete comeback of clients by the year's end, we had the opportunity to be completely open without restrictions.

Mobile Unit

The office purchased a Mobile Unit for \$148,449 to serve Grand Traverse and Leelanau counties. The mobile unit will be going out to set up in various public locations to see veterans on the spot. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic and supply chain issues, it is not scheduled to be delivered until on or after February 1, 2022.



Receptionist

The office transitioned to a check-in tablet in September as there had been a frequent turnover in the Office Specialist position. We wanted to try this during the winter when it is a bit slower to see how it would work. Many veterans going to the VA Clinic are used to checking in with a tablet. The feedback from everyone is that it is super easy and cuts down on miscommunication from the front window to VSOs.



Virtual Veterans Experience Action Center (V-VEAC)

The office took part in a VA program in partnership with Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency. It took place over three days where veterans were scheduled to be called by volunteer VSOs and help them through whatever issue they were experiencing. During the call, the VSO could assist with various things such as filing a claim, checking claim status, enrolling in VA healthcare, passing along to the VA claim center to finish a claim, etc. Overall, 558 veterans were helped during those three days.

LOOKING INTO 2022

Mobile Service Office

With the MSO arriving mid-February, the goal is to have it wrapped and, on the road in March. The MSO will be at various locations at least 3 days a week in Grand Traverse, Leelanau, and Peshawbestown. This will give greater visibility to veterans in the public. The MSO will also be visiting senior facilities, fairs, township office, and more

Veteran Events

With funds from the CVSF grant, the office is planning several events:

- Lunch n Learns at NMC Hagerty Center during March, June, and September
A free lunch buffet will be provided to veterans during an informational presentation on advocacy and benefits.
- Free veteran's concert at Turtle Creek Stadium June 18, 2022
The concert will be performed by Creedence Revived and Amelia Airharts.
- Northern Michigan Veterans Expo June 17 at GTC Civic Center
A large expo with free booths to organizations and businesses that have something to share with veterans and their families.
- Direct mailing to all veterans in Grand Traverse County
Utilizing a United States Parcel Service program where we can pick houses within a zip code and direct mail postcards asking them to contact our office.
- Veterans Wilderness Outing on North Manitou Island
This was canceled in the previous grant year and is being rescheduled this year, but with a 6-hour sailboat ride around the island.

STAFF

Director

Michael W. Roof

Veteran Service Officers

Lucas Clark

Jennifer Albrecht

Chris Dailey

2021 VA COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Chairman

Robert “Art” Eisner

Vice-Chairman

Ron Hofmeister

Secretary

Bob Johnson

Committee Members

Racheal Sherman

Steven Chowen

Neal Horning

Chris Brutzman