



# 2022 ANNUAL REPORT



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This 2022 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.

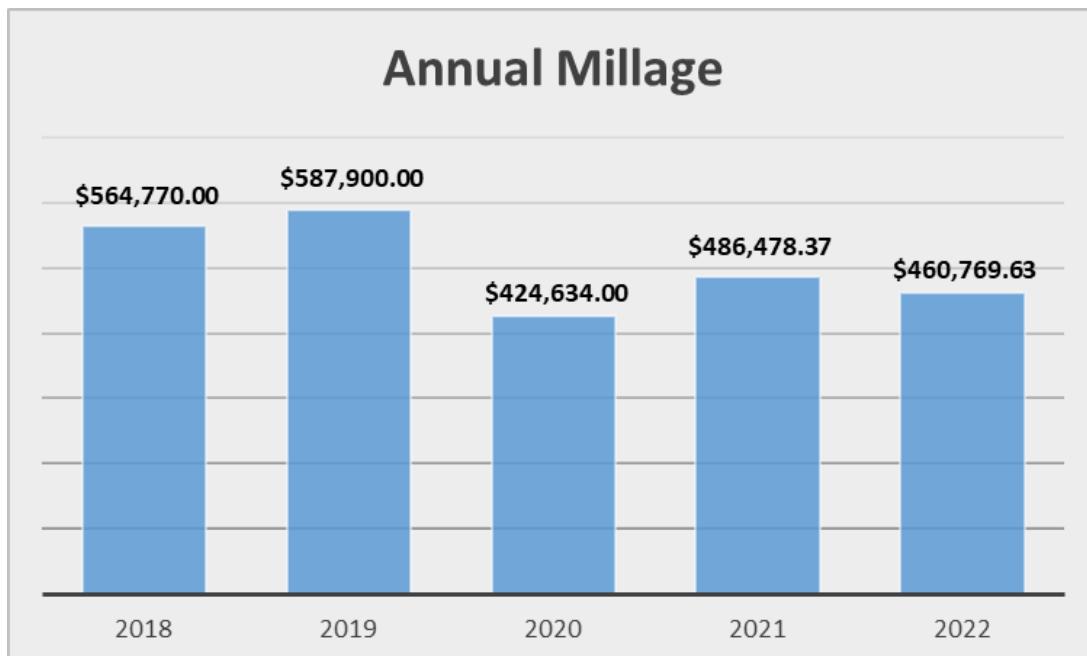
## BACKGROUND

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 Veteran Service Officers.

The Grand Traverse County Board of Commissioners established a levy of .1185 mills in 2016. *In 2019, the GTCVA asked the Board of Commissioners to lower the millage to more closely mirror our expenses. In 2022, the millage was renewed at .1135 for six years.*

Our office has a contract with Leelanau county to provide services for the veteran in their county. With this contract, GTCVA provides a Veteran Service Officer within the Leelanau Governmental Building one day a week (Tuesday) to visit and assist their veterans. The annual cost of the contract is \$46,618.



## **DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS**



When I started as Director in January 2018, I was given several key areas to improve the office. *The top two priorities were to lower the client wait times and increase advocacy of the office. This year's Annual Report will not only be a review of 2022 but highlights the results of those priorities over the past five years.*

Another year farther from COVID and a year of substantial growth for the office! With the return of a completely open office, it turned out to be the highest number of clients that came into the office since 2019.

The FY22 Community Veterans Service Fund (CVSF) grant from Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency (MVAA) was the highest award since it began (\$103,283.25). The larger grant award allowed the

office to host several new initiatives including the first-ever free Veterans Concert hosted at Turtle Creek Stadium, *Lunch and Learns* to educate clients on benefits and host the Northern Michigan Veterans Expo.

The Grand Traverse County Department of Veterans Affairs is a clearing house for veterans and social service agencies within the region. We substantiate every resource/agency we refer our veterans to for services. We don't pass the veteran on to someone else, we provide wrap-around services in hopes to resolve their situation.

**Our office was instrumental in securing an estimated \$2.5 million in new benefits for Grand Traverse County veterans, and their survivors from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).**

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.

Respectfully,

Michael W. Roof  
Director

## GTC COUNTY VETERANS' AFFAIRS BY THE NUMBERS

*Grand Traverse has the 20<sup>th</sup>-highest veteran population in the state of Michigan.*

### **OFFICE STATISTICS– FY 2022**

#### ***Office Visits***

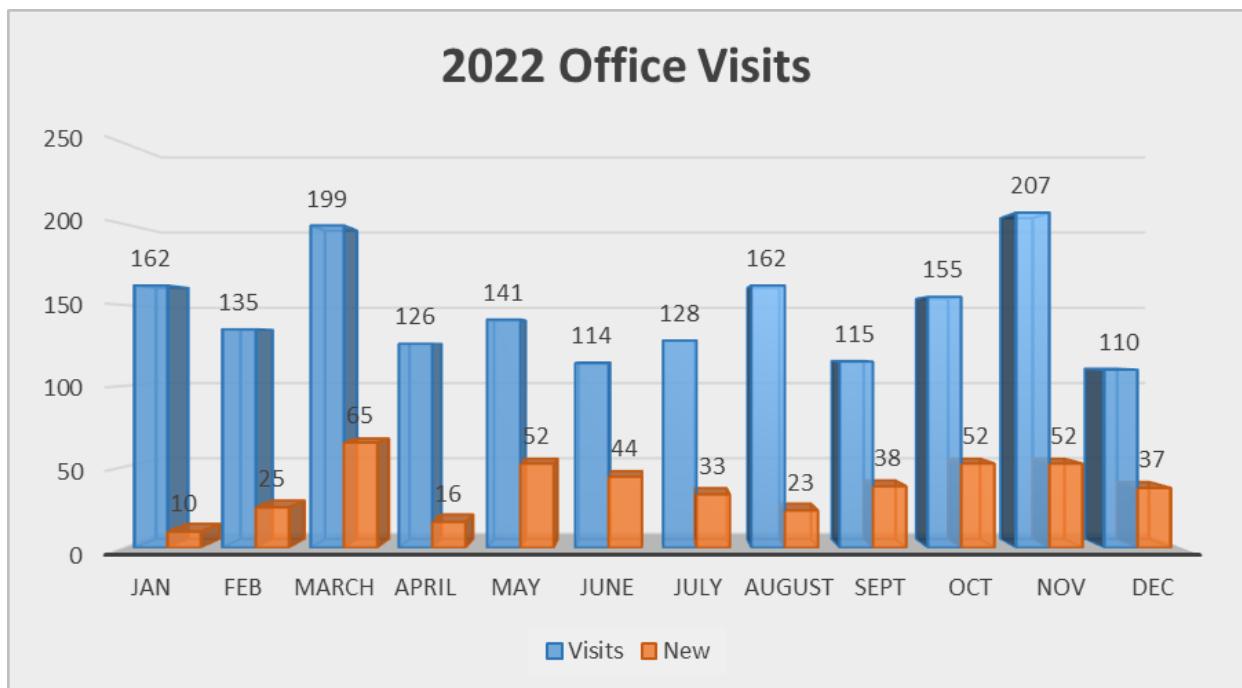
Grand Traverse 1,754

#### **New Clients**

2020 239

2021 250

2022 447



Not only was there an increase in office visits in 2022, but a substantial increase in new clients! This can be attributed to the amount of radio advertising and events done through the MVAA grant.

### **Office Visits**

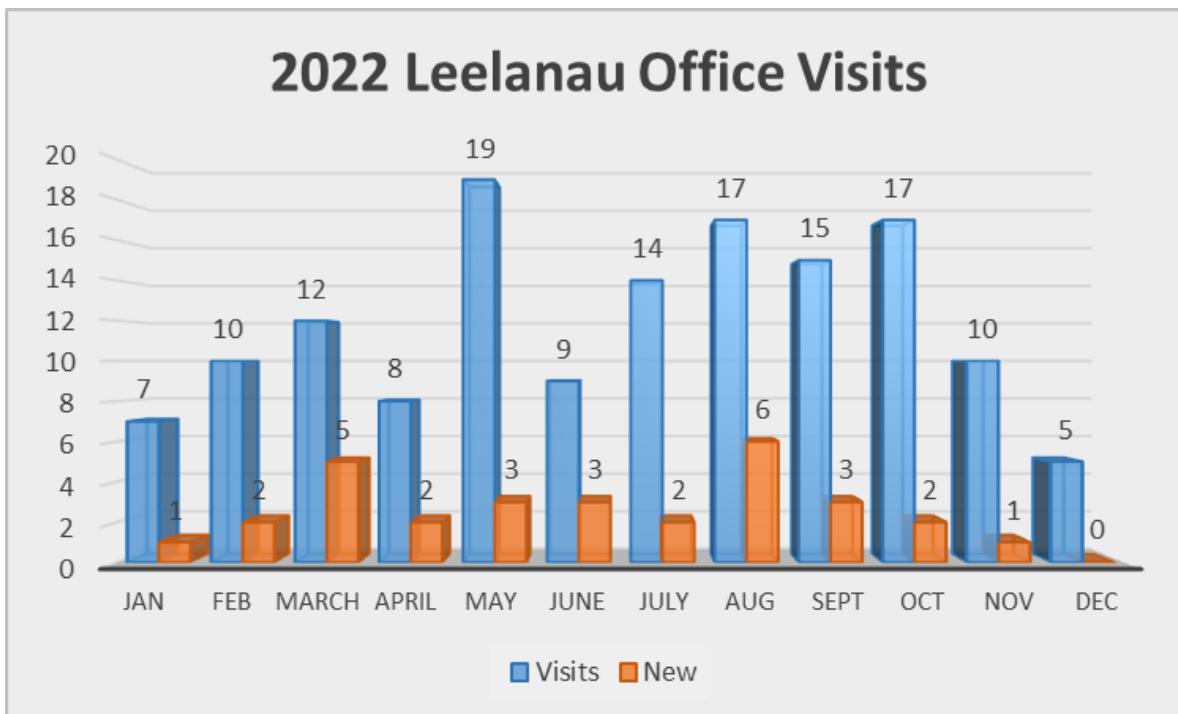
Leelanau 143

### **New Clients**

2021 15

2022 30

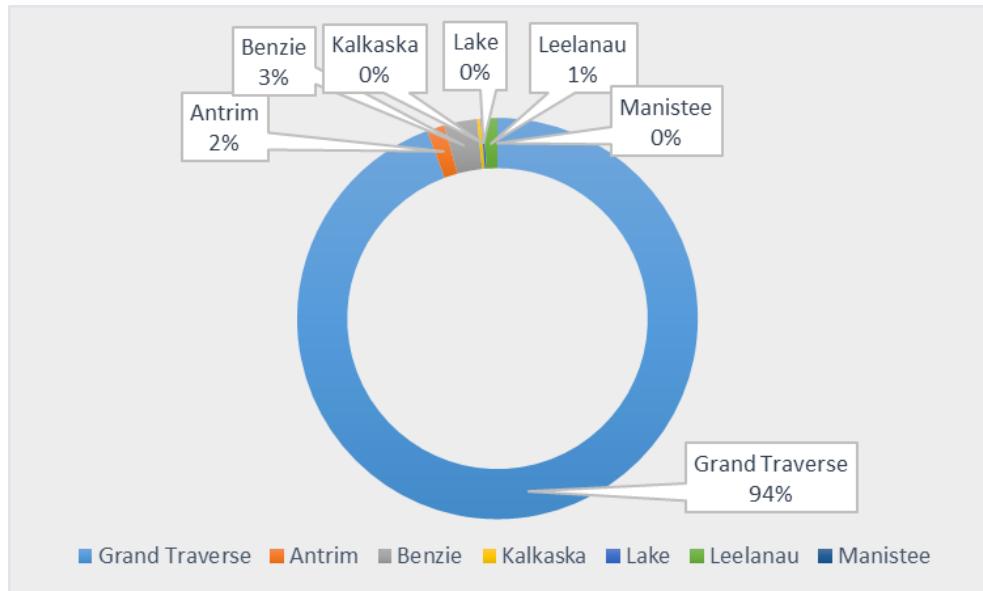
In 2022, Leelanau had the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest number of office visits since 2018. The level of outreach and quality of work being done all contribute to the growth being seen in the area.



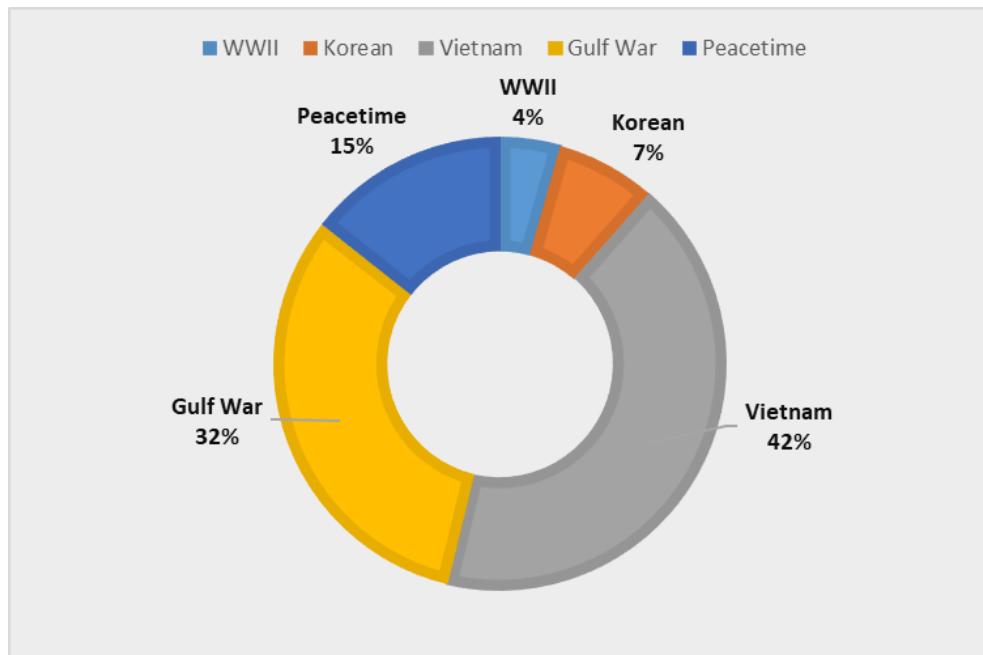
The Leelanau office is staffed only one day a week through set appointments and walk-ins.

## OFFICE VISIT DEMOGRAPHICS

The Grand Traverse Veterans Affairs Committee believes that our office should assist any client 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.

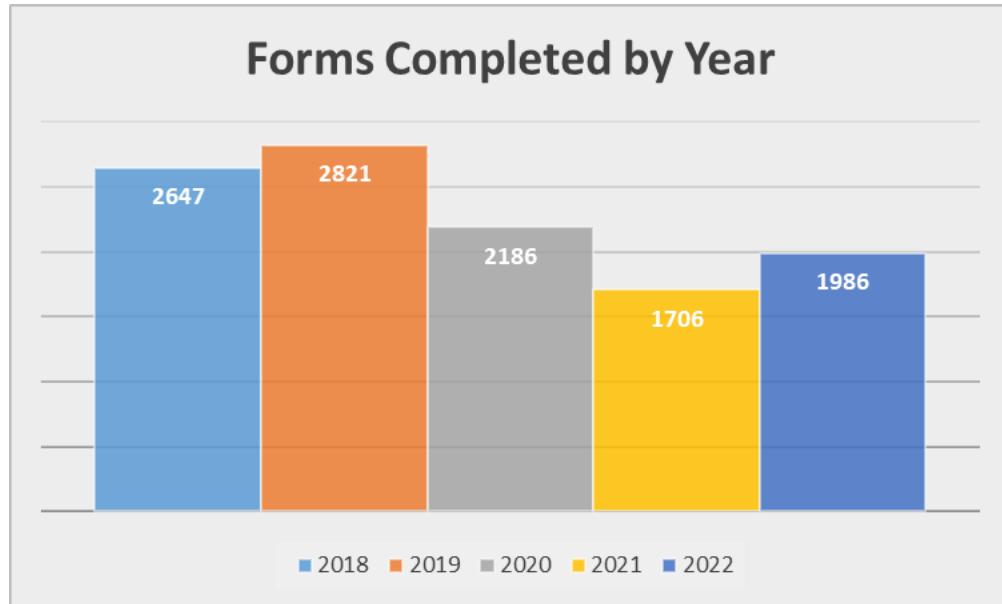


*Below shows the breakout of the population of clients seen in the office.*



## **ADVOCATING FOR OUR VETERANS**

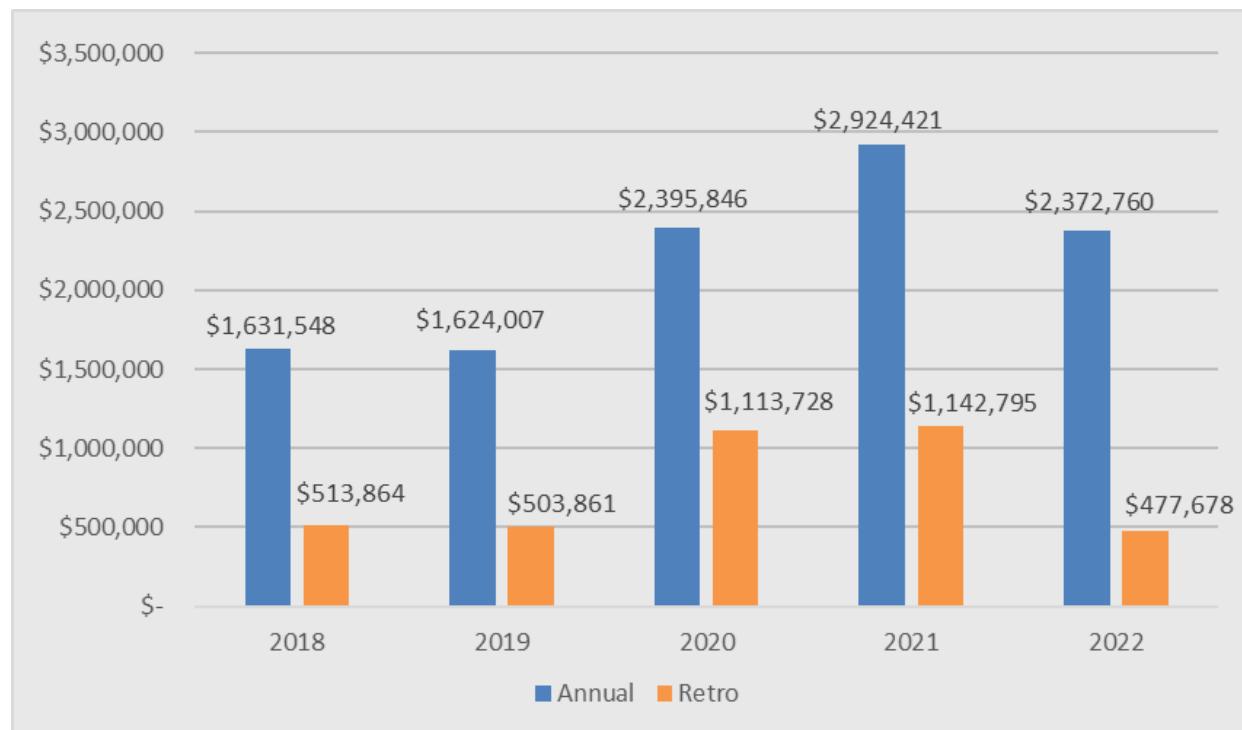
Our advocacy work involves assisting in the filing of claims for compensation and pension, to local, state, and federal agencies which include the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Our Veteran Service Officers track every claim that they process from beginning to end.



Due to the increase in outreach services and the great work done by our staff, the amount of VA benefit payments has substantially increased year over year since 2018.

VA Disability Compensation or Pension is a tax-free benefit paid to veterans or their dependents.

**The chart below shows the amount of new annual compensation/pension dollars won for our clients.**



## BURIAL & MARKER EXPENSES – FY 2022

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.

In 2019, a new application was created that held applicants to the statute guideline of having under \$40,000 in assets. *The office continues to take in considerably fewer applications for burial benefits which could be in part to peacetime-era veterans passing who are not eligible for the benefit.*

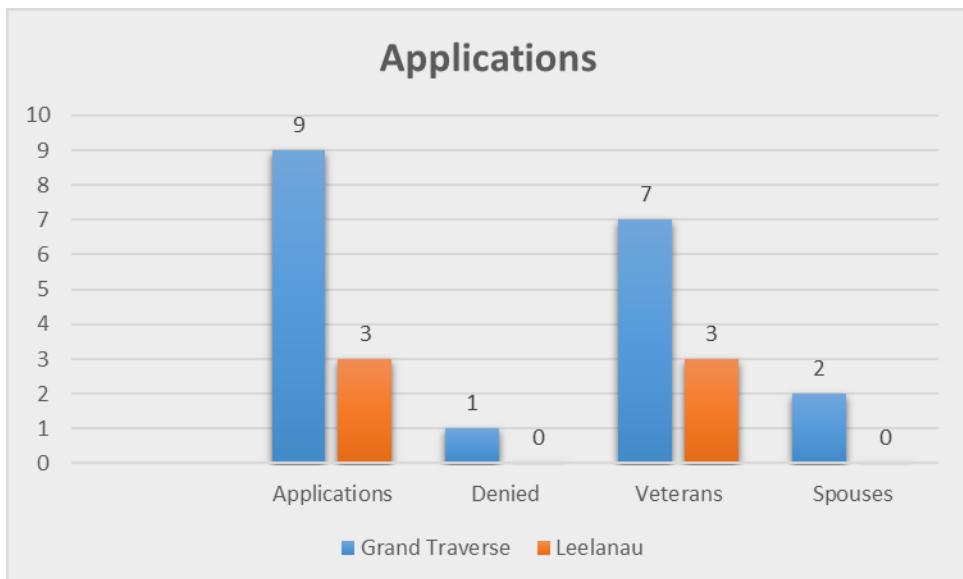
### ***Burial Applications***

#### Grand Traverse

2018	61
2018	54
2020	43
2021	31
2022	9

#### Leelanau

2018	22
2019	24
2020	18
2021	13
2022	3



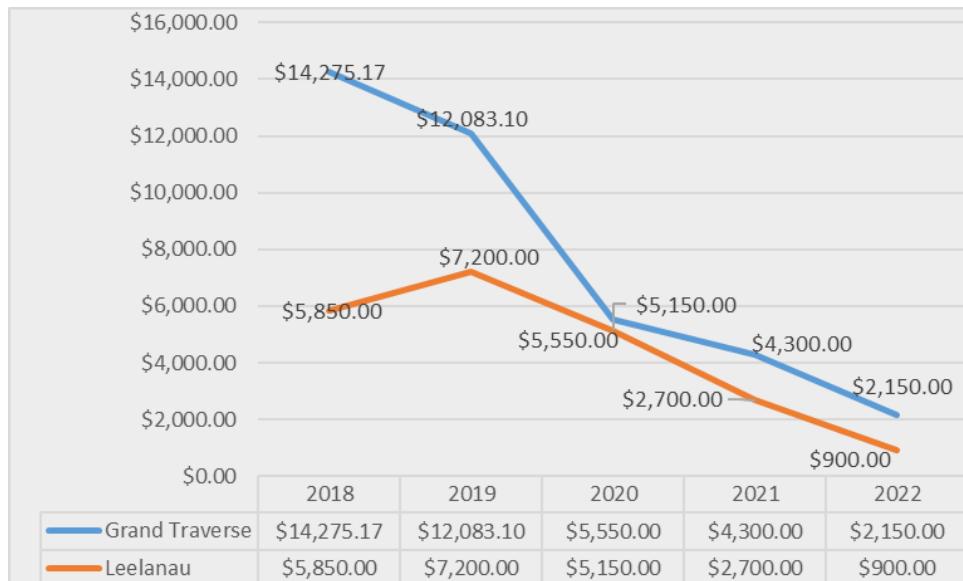
### ***Burial Expenditures***

#### Grand Traverse

2018	\$ 14,275
2019	\$ 12,083
2020	\$ 5,550
2021	\$ 4,300
2022	\$ 2,150

#### Leelanau

2018	\$ 5,850
2019	\$ 7,200
2020	\$ 5,100
2021	\$ 2,700
2022	\$ 900



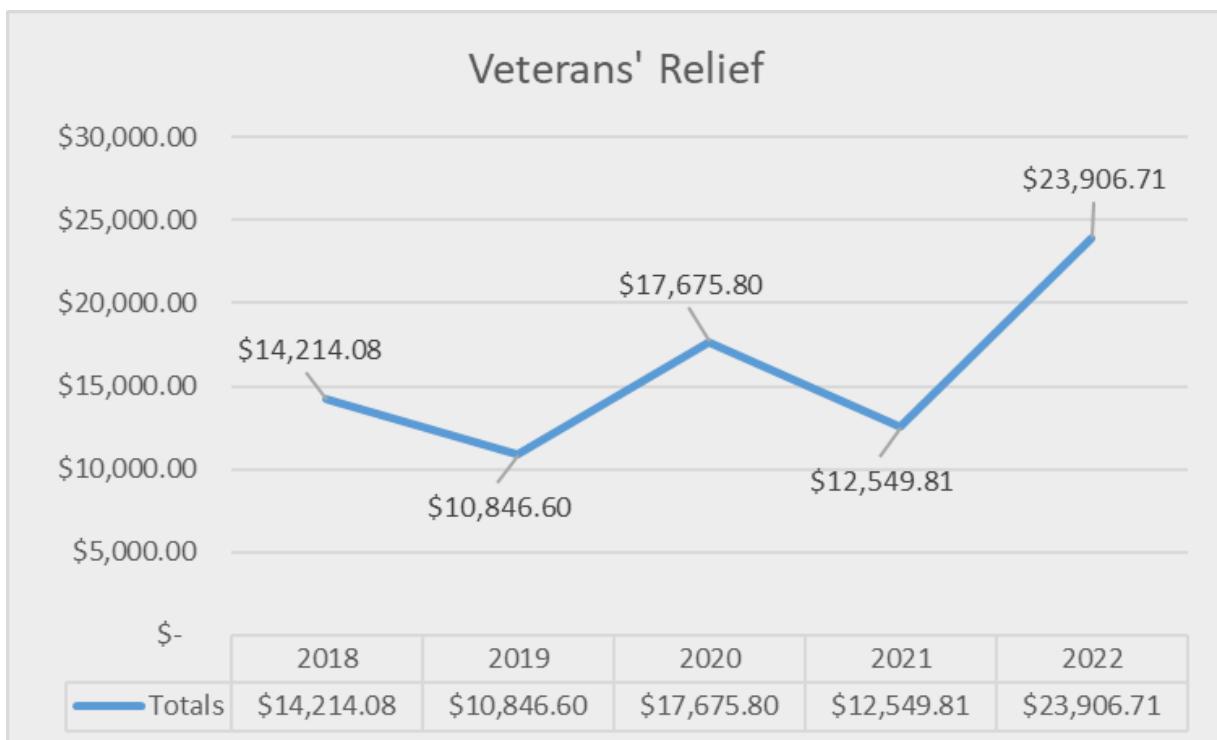
## **RELIEF EXPENSES – FY 2022**

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.*

In 2022, there was a large increase in Financial Assistance. Some clients are struggling to find gainful employment, while others are struggling to maintain their employment due to service-related issues.

### **Annual Relief Expenditures**

\$23,906.71



## **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 \$103,283.25 in FY22. The county received a \$50,000 direct payment and the additional \$53,283.25 was reimbursed at the end of the year.

Projects paid for by the CVSF grant are listed below:

- Lunch n Learns at NMC Hagerty Center during March, June, and September  
A free lunch buffet was provided to veterans during an informational presentation on advocacy and benefits.
- Free veteran's concert at Turtle Creek Stadium June 18, 2022  
The concert had performances by Creedence Revived and Amelia Airharts bands. Over 1,100 were in attendance. Passed out office literature.
- Northern Michigan Veterans Expo June 17 at GTC Civic Center  
A large expo with free booths for organizations and businesses that have something to share with veterans and their families.
- 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.
- Radio, TV, and newspaper advertising

Without the grant, none of these projects would have come to fruition. The MVAA CVSF grant has been beneficial in helping us reach veterans who do not know about the office or the benefits they are entitled to.

*In October, the office was awarded the FY 2023 CVSF grant of \$74,527.00 that will be used for advertising and dental services for veterans.*

**As of March 1, 2023, all \$50,000 from the dental services grant was expended.**

## **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. End of FY 22 there was \$64 million in the Trust Fund.

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.

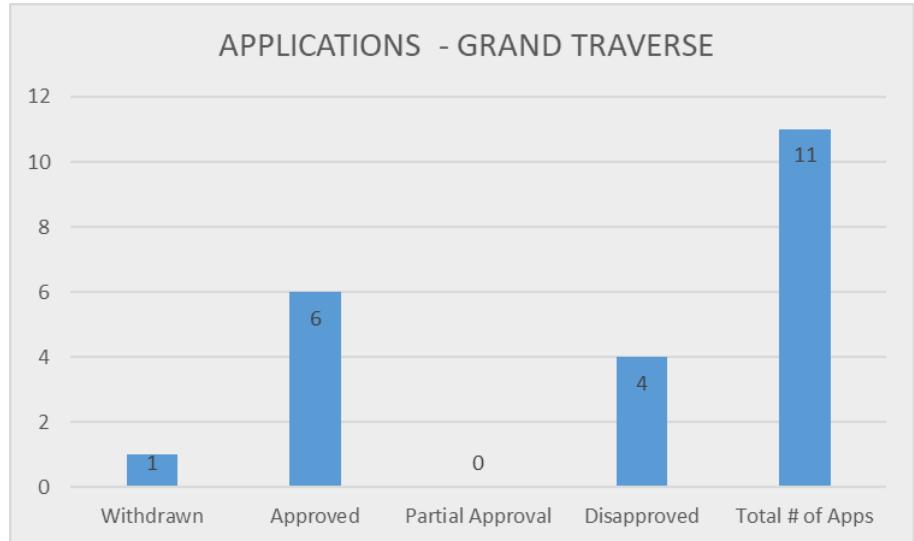
### **2022 MVTF County Committee Members**

John Lefler  
Ron Hofmeister  
Brad Finkbeiner  
John Kuhlman

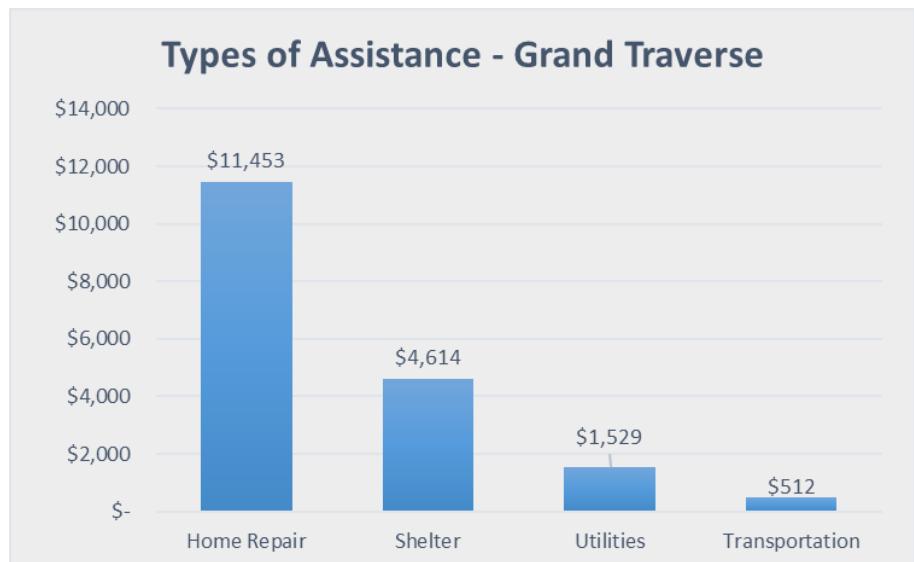
## **FY 2022 MVTF DETAILS**

### **Grand Traverse County**

<b>Withdrawn</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Approved</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Partial Approval</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Disapproved</b>	<b>4</b>
<b># of Paid Grants</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Total # of Apps</b>	<b>11</b>

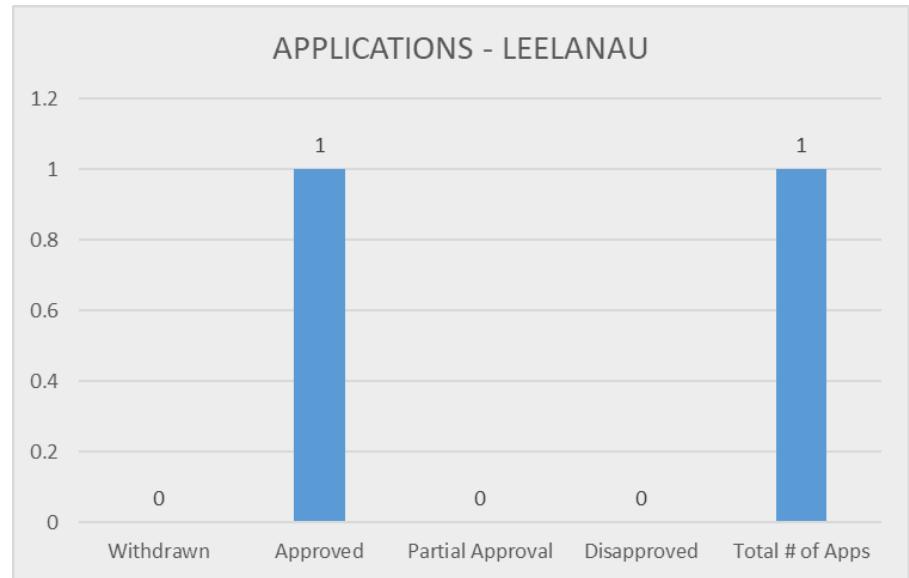


<b>Home Repair</b>	<b>\$ 11,453</b>
<b>Shelter</b>	<b>\$ 4,614</b>
<b>Utilities</b>	<b>\$ 1,529</b>
<b>Transportation</b>	<b>\$ 512</b>

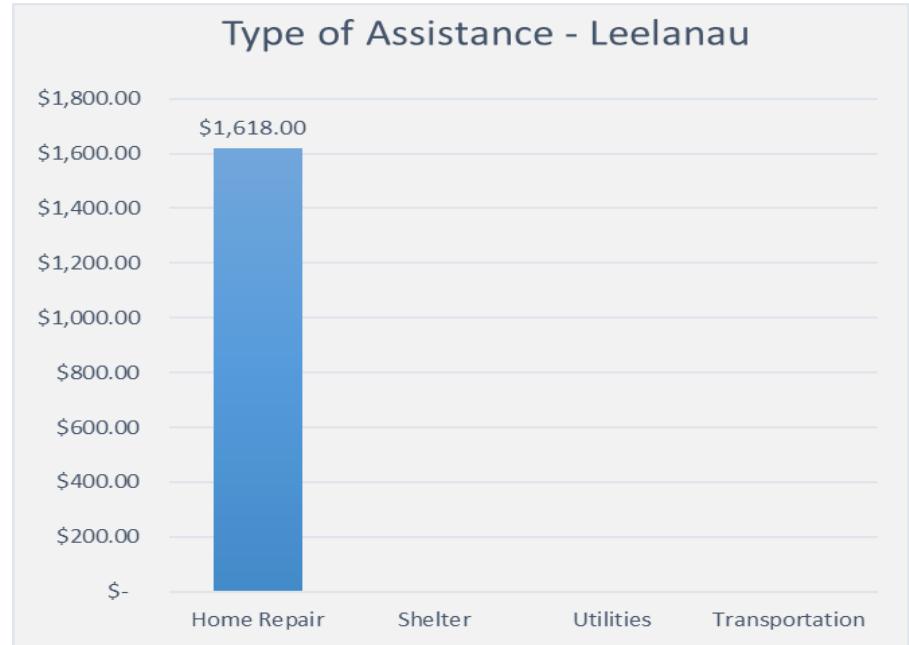


## Leelanau County

<b>Withdrawn</b>	0
<b>Approved</b>	1
<b>Partial Approved</b>	0
<b>Disapproved</b>	0
<b># of Paid Grants</b>	1
<b>Total # of Apps</b>	1



<b>Home Repair</b>	<b>\$ 1,618</b>
<b>Shelter</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Transportation</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Utilities</b>	<b>0</b>



## US DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS EXPENDITURES

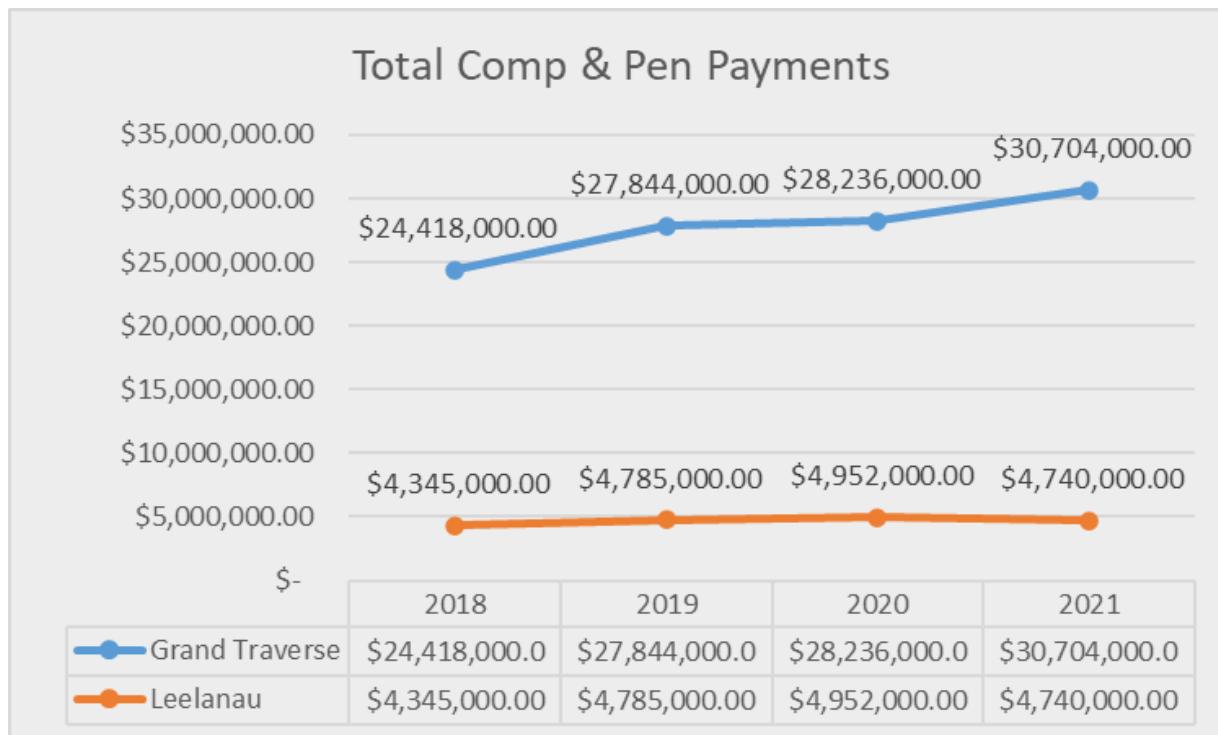


**U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs**

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.

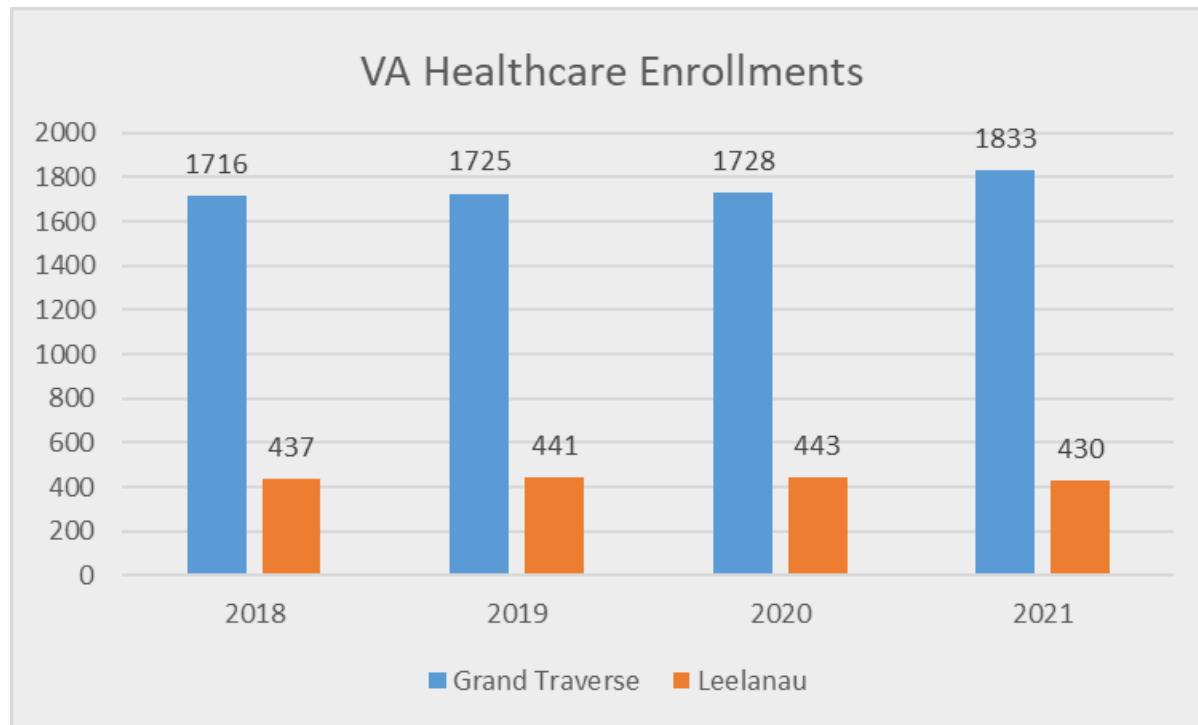
***Within Michigan, Grand Traverse County has the 20<sup>th</sup> highest veteran population and changed from 22nd to 21st highest payout in total Compensation & Pension dollars.***

The graphs below help shed light on the veteran demographics for our service areas from the total population of veterans within our county to the number of veterans receiving compensation or pension benefits. (Federal VA reports are always a year behind)



The two previous charts show the close relationship between compensation/ pension paid benefits and VA Healthcare.

Unfortunately, VA Healthcare is not available to all veterans. VA healthcare is either tied to income limits or a VA service-connected disability. When veterans receive a compensation award, many times it is their first opportunity to apply for VA Healthcare.



## **PREVIEW INTO 2023**

### ***Mobile Service Office***

The office will continue to build relationships to have the MSO located at senior centers, public events, and townships throughout Grand Traverse and Leelanau counties.

### **Dental Partnership**

The majority of veterans are not eligible for VA dental care as it is only for veterans who have a 100% VA rating. While using the MVAA's grant to pay for dental care at Dental Clinics North, it became apparent that the need was larger than what the grant could cover. The VA Committee voted to pursue an annual contract with a community partner who will assist in providing dental services for veterans. The program will provide free dental services to veterans every Friday starting in June 2023. Our office will also have a regular VSO located at their offices to assist with veterans' benefits.

### **Mental Health Summit**

The office will be hosting a Mental Health Summit on June 24 at the NMC Hagerty Center. Bringing VA Clinical professionals and community partners to help educate and empower attendees.

### **Lunch N Learns**

In 2022, the VA Committee approved using funds to host Lunch n Learn sessions regularly. These were well attended in 2022 and funded through the MVAA grant. A buffet-style lunch is provided and a full presentation on VA Benefits. These will be held at various locations throughout Grand Traverse and Leelanau counties.

## **FIVE-YEAR HIGHLIGHTS**

**2018** Reorganized Office staff - *Appointment times down to one week*

Established first-ever Bylaws for VA Committee

Moved to State Solution software saving \$2,500 annually

Initiated veteran inmate visits at the GTC jail

Purchased new Department vehicle -Dodge Durango

**2019** Fully staffed – *Walk-in clients could be seen within the same day*

Partnership with Benzie County ended

Worked with the county to lower millage request

Partnered with GATHER in creating *GATHER Veterans Magazine*

Created *Veterans Only Coupon Program* with Senior Center

VSO on-site in VET Center on Fridays

**2020** COVID - shutdown to the public for most of 2020

Limited interactions -Staff worked split shift/ remote

**2021** Hosted Veterans Wilderness Retreat

Purchased Mobile Service Office – Mercedes Benz Sprinter

Office transitioned to Check-in Tablet

**2022** Worked with County Admin/ BOC to renew the millage

Put on FREE Veterans concert at Turtle Creek Stadium

Hosted FREE Lunch n Learn sessions at Hagerty Center (3)

Hosted Northern Michigan Veterans EXPO

Contracted with Traverse VA CBOC to have MSO on location weekly

## **STAFF**

### **Director**

Michael W. Roof

### **Veteran Service Officers**

Lucas Clark

Jennifer Albrecht

Chris Dailey

### **Office Specialist**

Andrew Rosenberg

## **2022 VA COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

### **Chairman**

Robert "Art" Eisner

### **Vice-Chairman**

Ron Hofmeister

### **Secretary**

Bob Johnson

### **Committee Members**

Racheal Sherman

Steven Chown

Neal Horning

Chris Brutzman