



2023

ANNUAL REPORT



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This 2023 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 3-7 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. The 2023 tax millage brought in \$698,192.61.

Our office has a contract with Leelanau County to provide services for their veteran residents every Tuesday at the Leelanau County government center.

2023 VA COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Chairman

Robert "Art" Eisner

Vice-Chairman

Ron Hofmeister

Secretary

Bob Johnson

Committee Members

Steven Chowen

Loyd Morris

Chris Brutzman

Natividad "Nati" Kolb

Leelanau Representative

Steve Stanton

Board of Commissioner Representative

Lauren Flynn

STAFF

Director

Michael W. Roof

Veteran Service Officers

Jennifer Albrecht

Lucas Clark

Chris Dailey

Office Specialist

Andrew Rosenberg

DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS



“Great things in business are never done by one person, they’re done by a team of people.” -Steve Jobs

Our office is blessed to have a great team of employees with big hearts for helping others! Somedays our appointments are as simple as assisting with changing a client’s address, but other days, it can be dealing with a veteran who has a terminal illness or a widow after the veteran’s passing. Our VSOs provide compassionate care to all clients.

The FY23 Community Veterans Service Fund (CVSF) grant from the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency (MVAA) was \$74,527. Since only veterans that are rated 100% disabled through the VA receive dental care, we focused on providing free dental care for veterans. This proved extremely helpful for senior veterans who are on a fixed income with only receive Social Security. With grant funding, thirty-three (33) veterans were provided restorative dental services for \$55,204 and the remaining \$24,525 was spent on marketing/advocacy for the office.

The need for dental services was greater than the grant funding, so at the end of 2023, the VA Committee and Board of Commissioners approved ongoing funding for the United Way’s *United We Smile* program. This program provides free dental care to veterans every Friday at their Copper Ridge location, regardless of their VA rating.

The office also found success in hosting monthly VA Benefit sessions. During these events, a lunch or dinner buffet was provided while a Veteran Service Officer educated attendees on all possible benefits to which they could be entitled.

Our office assists veterans within the region by providing wrap-around services in hopes of resolving their situation.

Our office was instrumental in securing an estimated \$4 million in new annual benefits for Grand Traverse County veterans, and their dependants from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

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 20th-highest veteran population in the state of Michigan.

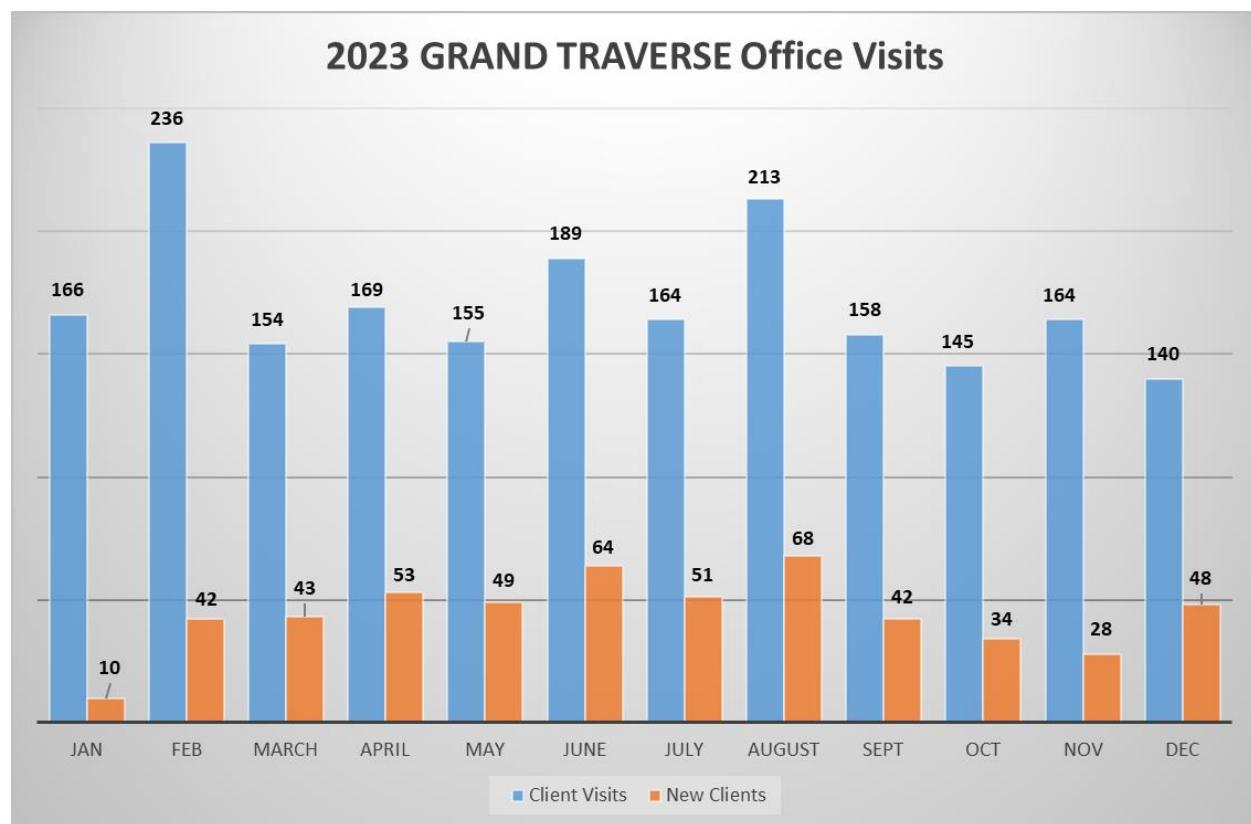
OFFICE STATISTICS– FY 2023

Office Visits

Grand Traverse 2,053 (17% ↑)

New Clients

2023 532 (19% ↑)



The large number of new clients coming to the office is driven by new legislation for expansion of VA Benefits.

A major part of outreach is done through radio advertising and events done with funds from the MVAA grant.

Office Visits

Leelanau 141

New Clients

2023 31

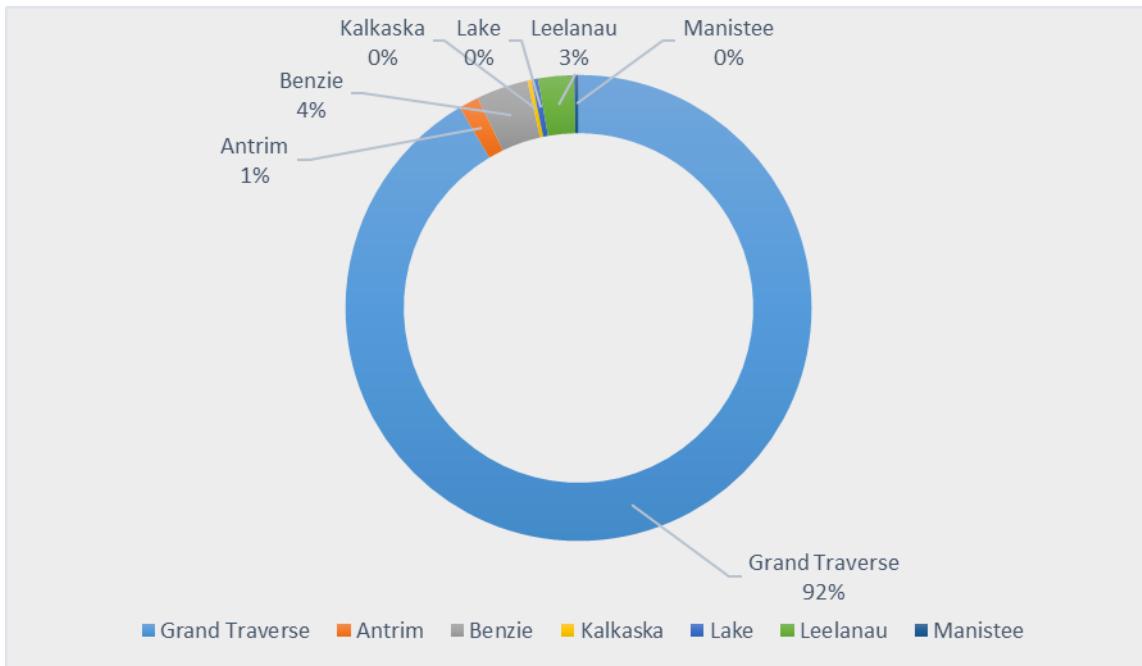


The number of Leelanau County clients coming into the office shows the significant need for representation for VA Benefits.

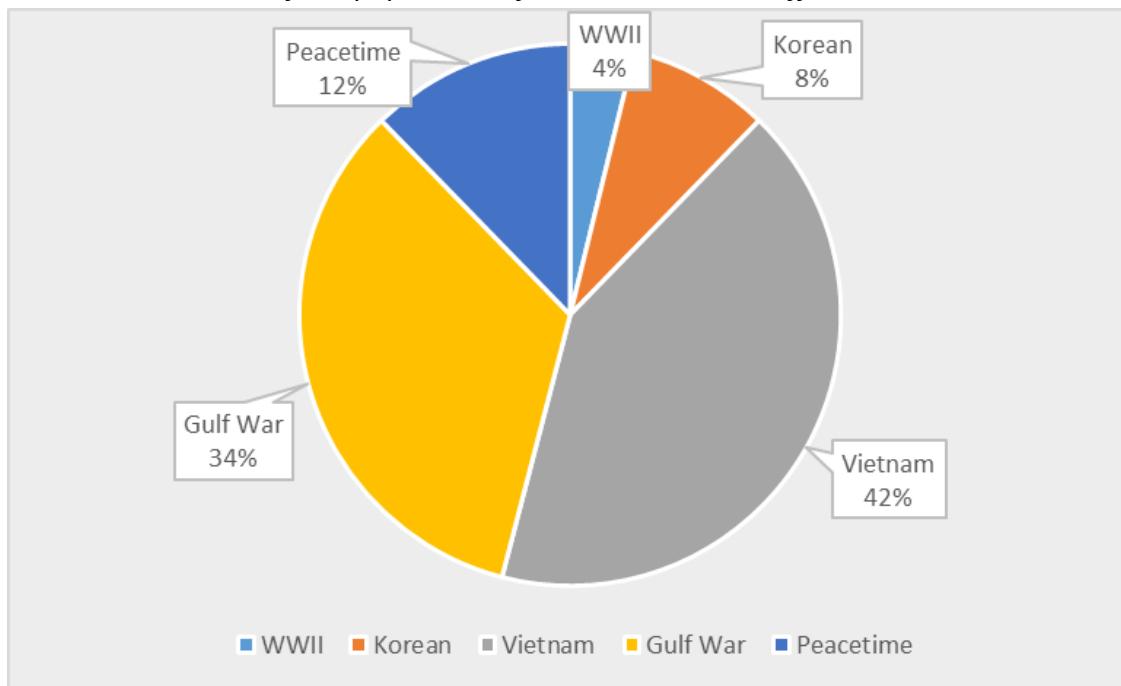
The Leelanau office is staffed only one day a week through set appointments and walk-ins.

OFFICE VISIT DEMOGRAPHICS

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

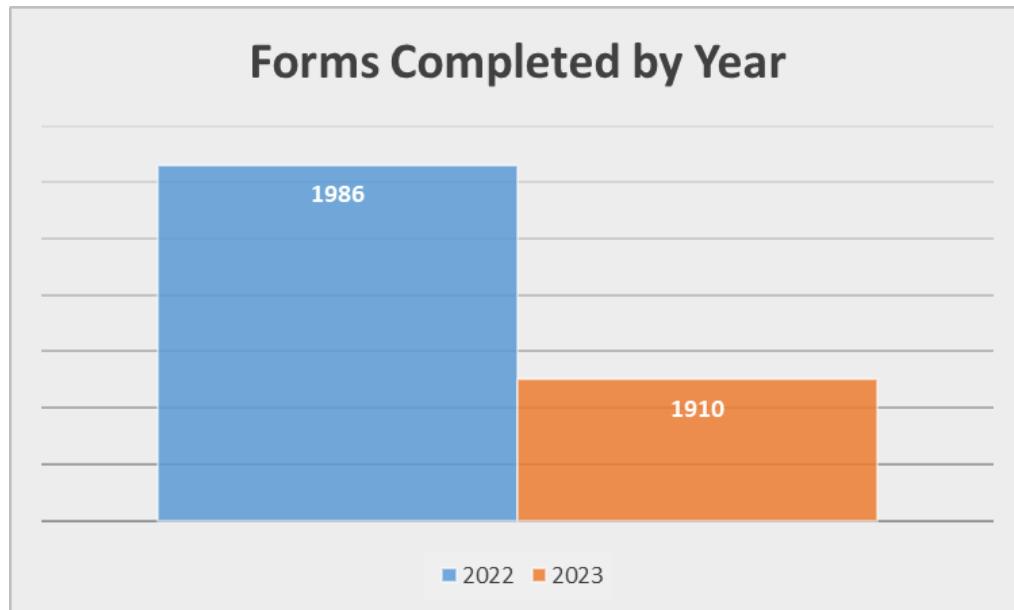


Below is the breakdown of the population of clients seen in the office.



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.

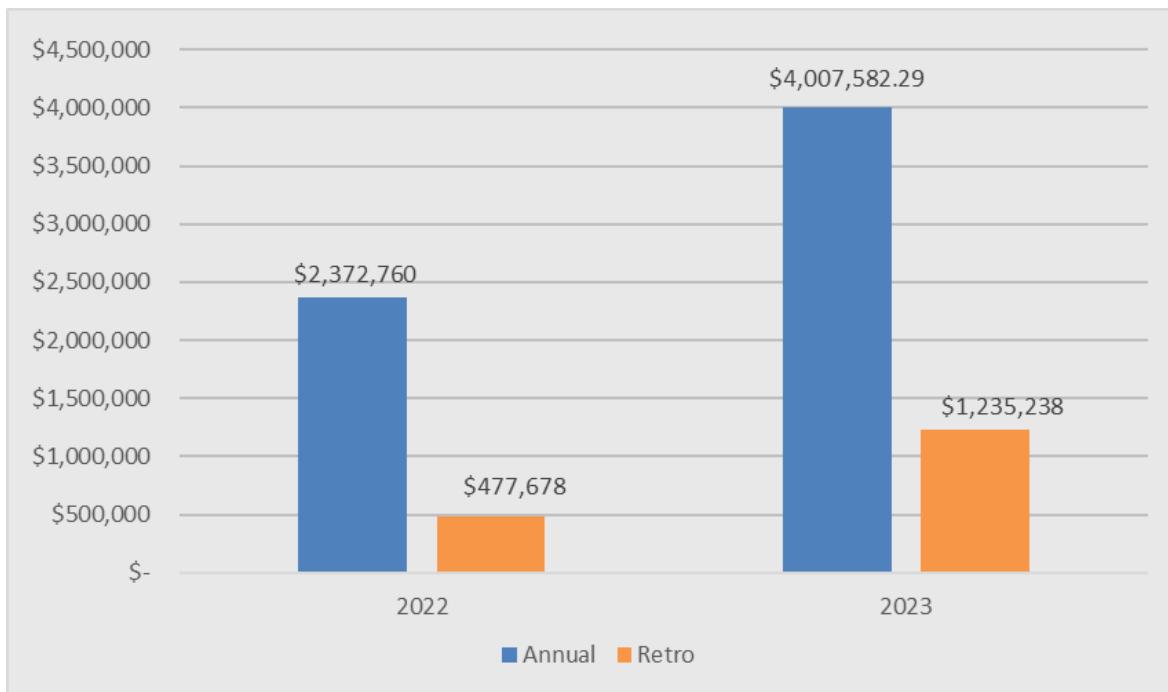


The amount of VA Benefits awarded in 2023 was an 83% increase over 2022!

This can be attributed to the largest COLA increase to VA Benefits (8.7%) in 2023 and the number of claims awarded with a higher percentage of disabilities.

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 2023

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 also be in part due to peacetime-era veterans passing who are not eligible for the benefit.*

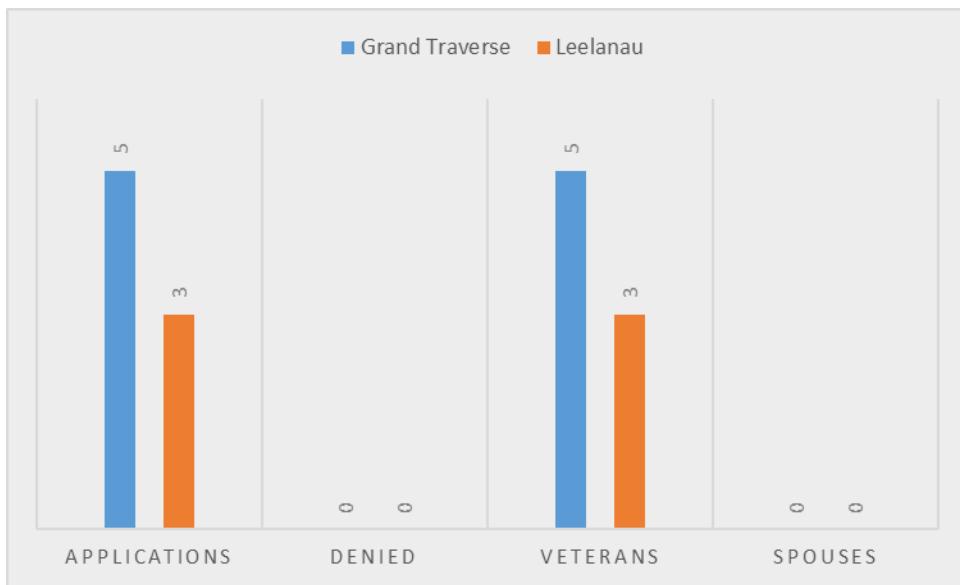
Burial Applications

Grand Traverse

5

Leelanau

3



Burial Expenditures

Grand Traverse

\$ 1,500

Leelanau

\$ 350



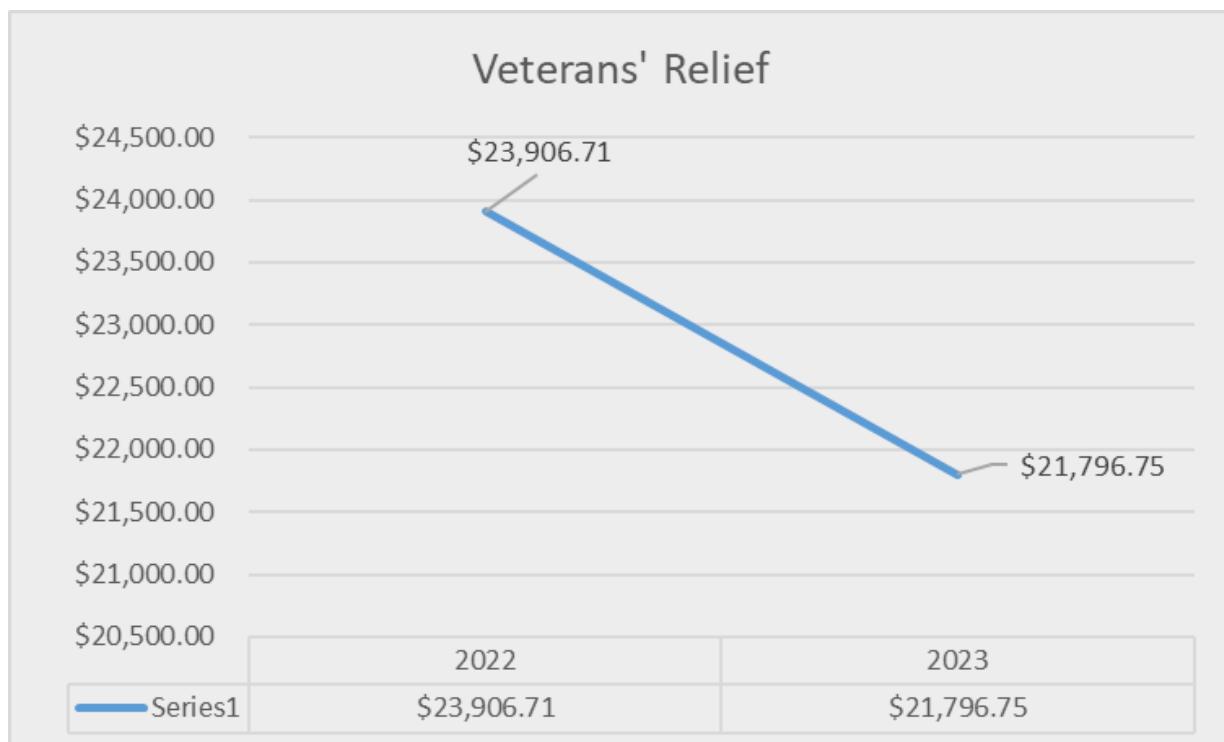
RELIEF EXPENSES – FY 2023

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 there was a slight decrease in the usage of financial assistance through the Veterans' Relief Fund, the Michigan Trust Fund had spent approximately the same amount as the year prior.

Annual Relief Expenditures

\$ 21,796.75



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 in raising public awareness about their services.

The FY23 CVSF grant total for our office was \$74,527. The county received a \$50,000 direct payment up front and the additional \$24,527 was reimbursed at the end of the year.

Projects paid for by the CVSF grant are listed below:

Grand Traverse County

- Dental services for veterans (cleaning, fillings, etc)
The program was so desperately needed that the program was full, and all money was appropriated by March 2023. The program provided complete dental care for 35 veterans.
- Radio, TV, and newspaper advertising

Our office utilizes the MVAA CVSF grant to reach more veterans through various outlets. Many veterans and dependents do not know about the office or the benefits they are entitled to.

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.

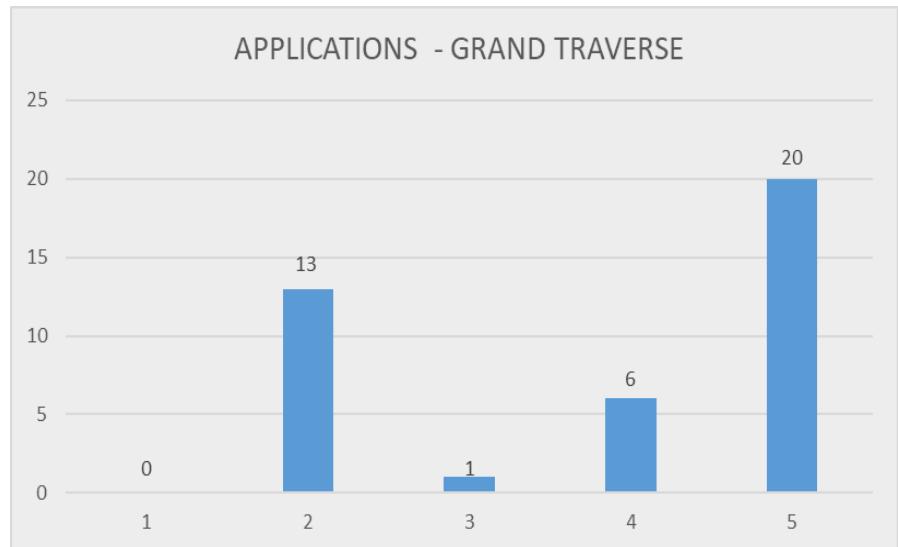
2023 MVTF County Committee Members

John Lefler
Ron Hofmeister
Brad Finkbeiner
John Kuhlman

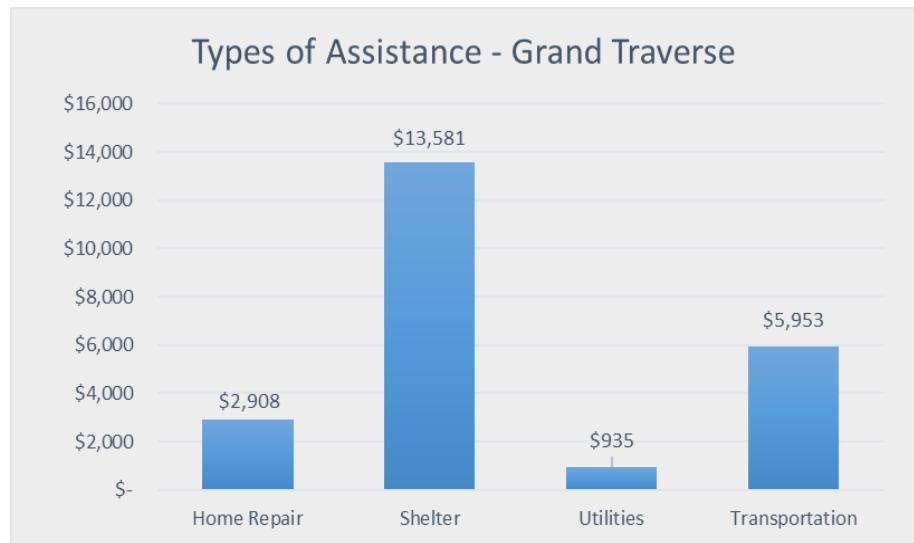
FY 2023 MVTF DETAILS

Grand Traverse County

| | |
|-------------------------|----|
| Withdrawn | 0 |
| Approved | 13 |
| Partial Approval | 1 |
| Disapproved | 6 |
| Total # of Apps | 20 |

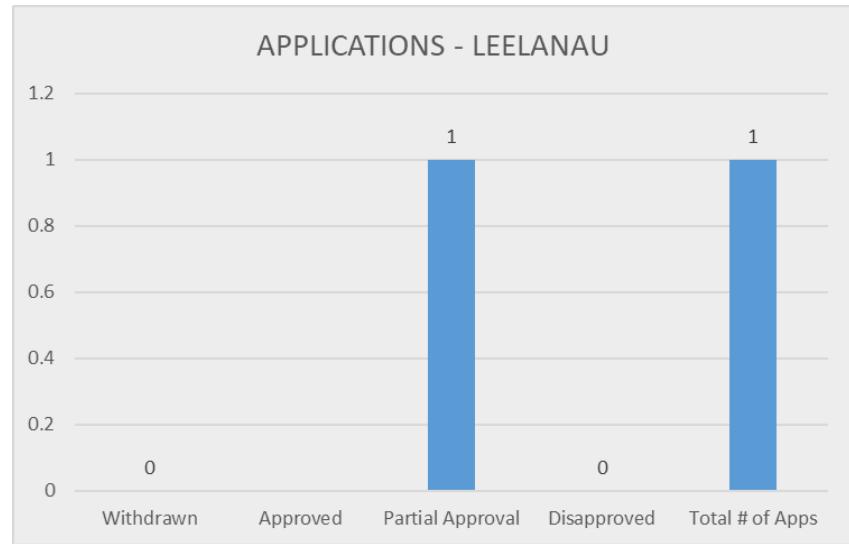


| | |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| Home Repair | \$ 2,908 |
| Shelter | \$ 13,581 |
| Utilities | \$ 935 |
| Transportation | \$ 5,953 |
| Overall Total | \$ 23,377 |

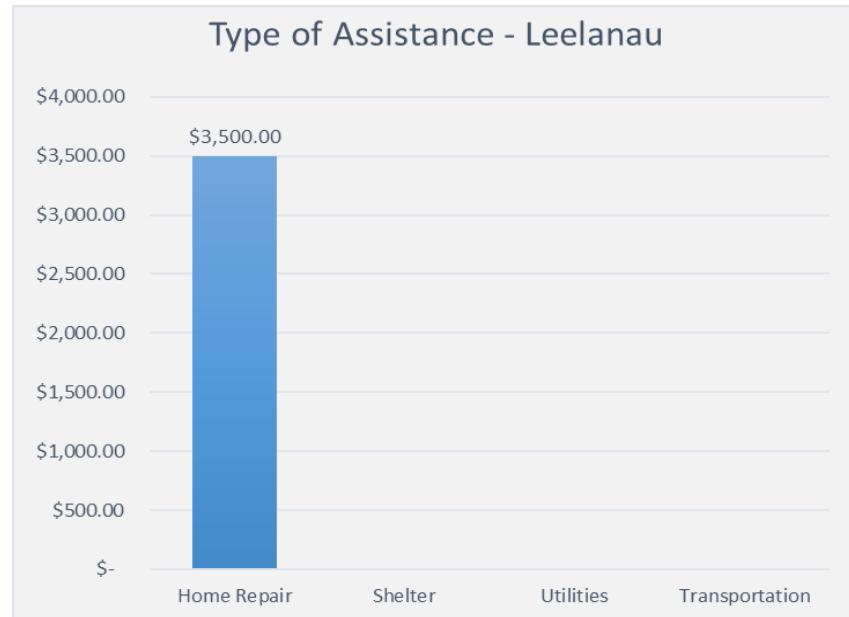


Leelanau County

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Withdrawn | 0 |
| Approved | 1 |
| Partial Approved | 0 |
| Disapproved | 0 |
| Total # of Apps | 1 |



| | |
|-----------------------|----------|
| Home Repair | \$ 3,500 |
| Shelter | 0 |
| Transportation | 0 |
| Utilities | 0 |
| Overall Total | \$ 3,500 |



US DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS EXPENDITURES

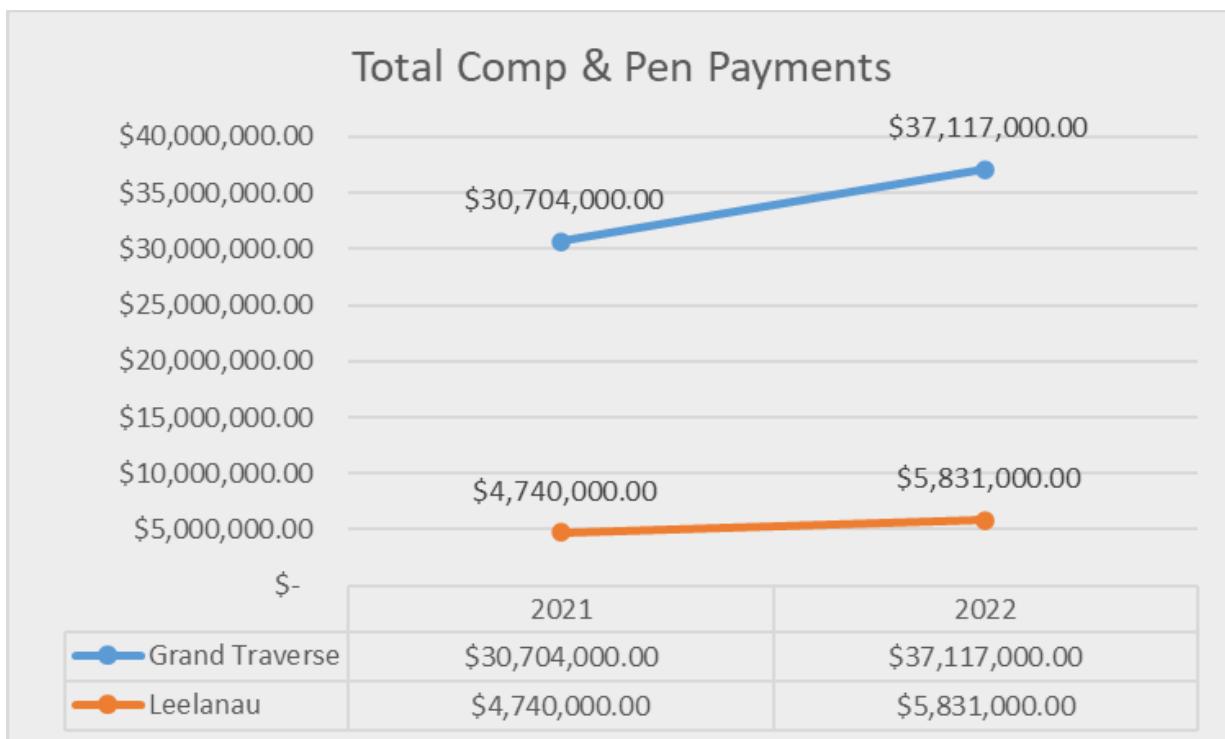


**U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs**

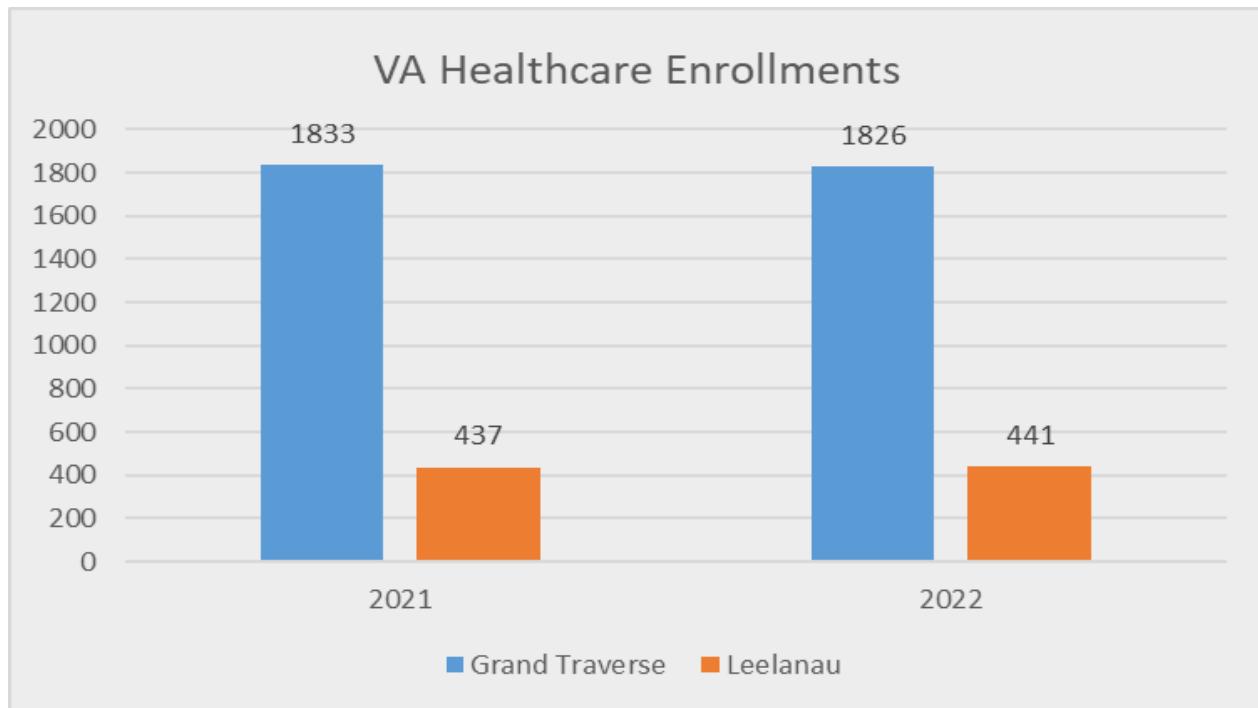
The chart below summarizes the monetary benefits disbursed to Grand Traverse and Leelanau County veterans as well as their dependents for Federal Benefits.

Within Michigan, Grand Traverse County has the 20th-highest veteran population and the 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)*



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.



MOVING FORWARD IN 2024

Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency (CVSF Grant)

Grand Traverse - The FY 24 CVSF grant focuses on Mental Health activities and partnerships with organizations that can bridge the gap. We are putting together outdoor retreats, female veteran spa days, family movie / bowling nights and small (200 or fewer people) music events.

Leelanau - The FY 24 CVSF grant focuses on advertising for the office, benefit sessions with meals, and updating the Veterans Memorial Park flags.

Lunch / Dinner Benefit Sessions

In 2022, the VA Committee approved \$10,000 to make Benefit Sessions a regular thing in 2023. The sessions went so well that the VA Committee has approved an annual budget of \$10,000 do them continually moving forward. During the Benefit Sessions, buffet-style meals are provided while an informational presentation is given on VA benefits.