

Veterans Assistance Commission of Iroquois County

1001 East Grant Street

Watseka, IL 60970



Phone: 815-432-2721 Fax 815-432-0485

*Jennifer Ingram, Superintendent*

The Honorable JB Pritzker

Governor of Illinois

Capitol Room 107

Springfield, IL 62706

December 9, 2024

Dear Governor Pritzker,

The Year 2024 has brought new and exciting things in the lives of veterans in Iroquois County.

The Veterans Assistance Commission of Iroquois County (VACIC) has continued to serve Iroquois County veterans, spouses/widows, and children of veterans.

As it has in years past, the VACIC continues to see significant growth and progress. The growth and progress we have experienced has provided the VACIC to post a job listing and potentially hire an administrative Assistant starting in January 2025. The job will be posted after the first of the year and holidays. Also, the Veterans Assistance Commission continues to have Mr. Lester Williams in as a volunteer. Mr. Williams has been very helpful in assisting in the VACIC's mission. Mr. Williams answers the phone and greets veterans as they arrive for his/her appointments. Mr. Williams volunteers 2 days a week.

I, Jennifer Ingram, have been the superintendent of the Veterans Assistance Commission of Iroquois County for 11 years. I still look forward to coming into work every day. I love the fact that I can help veterans and talk to them as a career.

Fiscal year 2024 has been another banner year for the VACIC. Listed below are the services that we continue to provide for the Veterans of Iroquois County.

The VACIC, has seen significant increase in the number of claims filed for service connection and pension. In 2024, the VACIC has filed 266 new claims. This is addition to the claims that were carried

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over from the previous years for a total of 446 claims the VACIC is managing and maintaining. The PACT act is still playing a huge role in the amount of claims that are being submitted to the VA for consideration. The VACIC is also being referred to by several outside organizations to include 2 VA medical centers, funeral directors, and advertisement, there continues to be a lack of accredited veteran service officers in our area.

Decisions on claims being filed with the Department of Veterans Affairs has been very positive. There have been 172 Claims that have been met with a positive award. There have been 30 claims that have been denied. The rest are still open and/or are active claims. There are also 195 claims that are in the appeals process (higher level review, supplemental claim, or at the board of veteran appeals). There are 100 supplemental claims, 90 higher level reviews, and 5 at the Board of Veteran Appeals.

There has been a substantial increase in monetary awards this year compared to previous years. The 2024 annual awards for retroactive pay were 1,750,909.24 dollars up from 969,842.97 in 2023. There was a total amount of annual pay for 2024 at 3,300,010.25 in annual pay up from 2,136,004.23 in 2023. There was a combined award amount of 5,050,919.49 dollars for fiscal year 2024. This continues to be done with just one sole employee of the VACIC. Since starting keeping track of awards in 2015, there has been a total of 15,682,347.27 dollars awarded for the veterans of Iroquois County.

The VACIC has been able to provide financial assistance to 5 Iroquois Veterans. We were able to provide 3500.00 in financial assistance. Our financial assistance program provides an annual 250.00 award to veterans that meet the criteria. Additionally, the Elks lodge of Watseka provided gift cards to Berkots (local grocery store 10 50-dollar gift cards totaling 500.00 dollars) and Casey's (gas station 10 50-dollar gift card totaling 500.00 dollars) to five to veterans at my discretion. Also, the Chebanse American Legion post continues to donate 500 dollars annually at Christmas time to help area veterans. Also, many veterans that have been happy with the results of the services they have received often donate gift cards. These gift cards are put in a desk drawer and are given to veterans in need. Often times these gift cards are for gas stations, Walmart, or grocery store. These are also given at my discretion. These are helpful to have on hand in case there is a veteran or family that is in need that may not meet the criteria for financial assistance. Finally, State Line Riders, a local motorcycle club, has stepped up again this year to help make Christmas and the holidays a bit brighter for area veterans that may not have much. Those that have inquired about financial have been offered "wrap around" services, such as helping with job

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searches, finding gainful employments and housing, social work, healthcare, and filing claims for service connection with the Department of Veterans Affairs. The VACIC firmly believes that financial assistance is a hand up not a handout. WE strive to help veterans become more financially stable with filing claims for service connection and pension.

The VACIC continues to do outreach. In September, I was asked to do an outreach event in Kankakee at the CBOC. That event was very successful. Also, have been asked to present a flag etiquette presentation at Clifton Central Highschool civics class. I really enjoyed doing that!

In September, I attended the VA required Continuing education class. My organization, Illinois Association of County Veteran Service Officers (IACVAC) put on the Continuing Education program. I always enjoy going to these classes. During the week of training, there is a banquet. At this banquet, people are recognized for his or her hard work and efforts in helping veterans. I was awarded the Allen J. Lynch Foundation's Veteran Service Officer of the year award. This is for the whole state of Illinois. Allen J. Lynch is a Vietnam War veteran whom is a Congressional Medal of Honor Recipient. I was dumbfounded to say the least. This award makes me want to work that much harder to get veterans they so deserve.

The Fiscal year budget for the VACIC was passed> The FY 2025 budget allows for the VACIC to hire an administrative assistant. The administrative assistant will have the potential to grow into a Veteran service officer. The Administrative assistant will be a salaried position. The job will be posted after January 1, 2025.

The year 2024, has been very fruitful and positive for the veterans of Iroquois County

Respectfully,

Jennifer Ingram

Superintendent

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