



## **2023 Veterans Service Agency Annual Report**

2023 was an outstanding year for our office and the veteran and military communities we serve! It is truly an honor and privilege to provide help, opportunities, and services to veterans, military, and their families; and to see the success of our outreach directly translated into benefit services being provided through our office.

Let's talk about outreach first: our office conducted 124 outreach events that were attended by 7,871 veterans, military, and their family members. Why are these numbers so important? We know that many veterans feel disconnected from society and the camaraderie they had when they served and tend to isolate and shut themselves off, and they are a proud group and would rather struggle in silence than ask for help with quality-of-life issues that impact them. So why is it important to connect them? By engaging them where they are at, we allow them a safe space to talk, have fun, find camaraderie, and re-engage for their needs. Here's the impact our outreach has had: 3,604 veterans and their families contacted us for benefits issues which resulted in us providing 6,674 services to them, of that number 276 were brand new veterans in our office! Both the outreach numbers, and those provide with benefits and services were records for our office in 2023!

What does our outreach look like? Here are some of the exciting ways we engaged those we serve in 2023:

- Fresh Connects Checks for Vets – gave out \$5,000 in food vouchers that could be used at local farmers markets and farm stands across NY State to give veterans access to fresh food and overcome food insecurity
- Monthly veteran's breakfasts for conversation and information
- Special recognition events for women veterans, Vietnam vets, and caregivers
- Special fun days for our local Army Reserve Center – appreciation day for the servicemembers, then BBQ and information fair for them and their families
- Family friendly and fun events throughout the year that included – movie and pizza nights, bowling, wreath making, cookie decorating, jewelry making workshops, informational lunch and learns, tickets to baseball games, kayaking adventures, and tickets to the County Fair to name a few
- Grocery Giveaways in partnership with the Owego Elks Veterans Committee was a new venture for us in 2023. Many of our veterans, military

# Veterans' Service Agency

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and their families struggle with food insecurity issues, and we know that they very rarely utilize food pantries for a variety of reasons. Through this joint venture with funding the Elks received and our Dwyer Program we feed 115 military-connected families in Tioga County, 90% of whom had never had contact with our office before

- Another first was an informational booth at the County Fair, this afforded us an opportunity to engage with over 500 veterans and/or family members of veterans during the 5 days of the fair. We also had booths at many local festivals and events to engage more folks
- Shady Strong ALS Awareness event in Richford, allowed us an opportunity to work with and recognize veterans here in Tioga County who suffer from ALS due to their service and the family of Bob Shady, a Tioga County veteran with ALS that our agency helped when he was diagnosed in 2018, and whose memory lives on through the family's effort to help others facing the same struggle.
- Our Onward Ops Military Transition Assistance Program continues to grow and expand, and our efforts at Ft. Drum were recognized by the Commanding General's Office and the Pentagon and is now an integral part of the TAP program there; becoming mandatory to enroll in as they leave military service in December. Our efforts there enabled us to enroll more than 226 servicemembers in the program, with 115 opting to stay in NY State for the opportunities and supports we offered them.

2023 showed us how much we can and do make a difference in the lives of our veterans, military, and their military-connected families. We look forward to an even better 2024 and more growth and fulfilling our mission of **"Serving Those Who Served For Us"**.

Respectfully Submitted,

Michael F. Middaugh, Director