



Veterans Service Agency 2024 Annual Report

2024 has come and gone, but the work that the dedicated team at Tioga County Veterans Service Agency does each day continues to move forward and grow. We are so humbled to be part of these veterans, military and their families' lives; and truly are privileged and honored to serve them in any we possibly can!

Let's discuss the growth, opportunities and efforts made in 2024 by our Agency:

OUTREACH

Outreach is the essential and most vital part of what we do, today our veterans and military are more introverted and isolated than ever before, they tend to silo and stayed contained in their small and ever shrinking spheres of influence and connection. The days of solely being reactive to their needs and waiting for them to ask for assistance or help is long past, we must, and our Agency has and will continue to be proactive and engage our veterans, military and their families where they are at.

We changed gears this past year and decided to focus on more information and events that produced more engagement and variety in what we offered. A total of 97 events, attended by 8,175 veterans, military and their service-connected families – this set another new high for us.

We participated in the Strawberry Festival, Tioga County Fair, Tioga County Expo, Shady Strong ALS Awareness and other community events to table and provide information. We held monthly coffee get togethers, gave away free tickets to baseball games and the county fair, sponsored PGA HOPE events for veterans with or without disabilities to learn to play golf and have fun, dinners, outdoor activities, recognitions of specific categories of veterans: Vietnam Era, Korean War, women and caregivers, picnics and informational fairs around the issues of TBI, PTSD, veteran suicide, lack of housing, access to care, and transportation, grocery giveaways with help from our community partners – Elks Lodge and Owego Rotary to address food insecurities, we conducted training on Mental Health First Aid for Veterans and Military and those providing service to them, special recognition and services to our local Army Reservists and their families, FreshConnects For Vets checks in the amount of \$5,000 for 100 hundred veterans and families to be able to buy fresh foods and goods from local

Veterans' Service Agency

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Farmer's Markets, and Onward Ops for servicemembers transitioning out to civilian life was expanded across 32 county's veteran service agencies in the Southern Tier, Central NY, North Country, Mohawk Valley and part of the Capital Region – this program served over 1,000 transitioning servicemembers and their families with assistance, information and services to help guide them on the next journey of their lives.

BENEFITS & SERVICES

I started off by saying that the most vital part of what we do is outreach, which goes together with addressing the quality of life needs of all of those we serve being first and foremost. Why, is always the question we get asked, my response is simple – if veterans and their families are struggling with homelessness, food insecurities, unemployment or underemployment, paying bills, etc.; they cannot focus on the benefits to which they may be entitled and earned by honorable service to their country until these issues are addressed.

As a direct result of reaching out to those in our community who served for us, we were able to assist 2,603 veterans and 796 family members of veterans in filing claims for benefits to which they were entitled, we also saw 369 new veterans last year, a record number! In addition to filing those benefits claims, we provide additional services and assistance to 7,850 veterans, servicemembers and their families.

A new partnership was formed in the fall in conjunction with the Tioga County Public Health, Tioga Smiles Mobile Dental Program. Through a voucher system, veterans can receive the following services, by appointment, that include dental prophylaxis, dental radiographs, anterior (front) and posterior (back) restorations (fillings), as well as anterior and posterior extractions for a simple flat fee of \$30 per visit. This new service is huge for our veterans, many of whom have no dental care coverage, and is simple to utilize – they come to the Agency where we screen them and verify that they are eligible by being a Tioga County resident, they have an honorable discharge and issuing them an eligibility voucher that they show when they go for their appointments.



WHAT'S NEXT

Much was accomplished in 2024 and much still needs to be done. In 2025, we will again tackle two important issues in Tioga County – lack of public transportation and transportation needs that prevent so many from getting access to services they desperately need, and access to safe and affordable housing for veterans struggling to keep roofs over their heads.

The end of 2024 also saw changes coming for the Agency in 2025. After many years of service to those who served, are serving and their families; it was time for me to step down and pursue another path working with this special community of which I am a part and have a deep connection – I resigned as Director of the Agency effective January 15, 2025 and will continue to serve those who have served us through my new work at the New York State Department of Veterans' Services. I have been humbled to do what I have done at the County for over 9 years, it has been my honor to see lives improved and made better by the work that this little Agency has done – the Team is phenomenal, their dedication and care for every person they interact with is second to none! I have no doubt that they, and the next Director, will do better, bigger and greater things for OUR community and the veteran/military families that call Tioga County home.

Submitted Respectfully,

Michael F. Middaugh
(Former) Director