



## **2020 VETERANS' SERVICE AGENCY ANNUAL REPORT**

### ***“Serving Those Who Served For Us”***

2020 was an interesting year to say the least for our little agency! We hired Bonnie Hand to replace Michael Middaugh as our Veteran Service Officer, as Michael was promoted to Director with the retirement of John Holton Sr. in October 2019. The pandemic brought all services at the local, state and federal levels to a halt on March 18<sup>th</sup>; but we began to slowly figure out how to keep our work and efforts to aid veterans and their families moving forward, and as in all wars the battles get us mired down and things seem stalemated but we find the ways to press our advantages and move forward.....**Never** giving up and **Never** retreating!

Our office remained open at half hours from March to June but we were unable to meet anyone in person. Our calls and emails went thru the roof as there were many questions and very little answers and at the state and federal levels all veteran service offices were totally closed with employees working remotely, which getting anyone to contact you back became next to impossible. Social media became our best friend and finding ways to connect thru technology that enabled us to find solutions for our vets and their families as well as advertising on the radio and in newspapers. In June, we opened but were and continue to be restricted to in-person contacts by appointment only and no more than 7 persons in a day.

Our outreach efforts were greatly curtailed by either having to be canceled, postponed or figure out how to continue them in some form under the lockdown restrictions. Well we got crazy and creative – we took our coffee hours and held them outdoors in parks, we formed new on-line partnerships with neighboring counties and began holding virtual mental health Battle Buddy checks and get togethers where veterans could talk and see each other and not feel so isolated or unconnected from services and society and each other most of all, we modified some outreach and added new ones for veteran suicide awareness to raise this issue up in the county given that there has been a rise in suicide rates since pandemic began – our 5K Ruck March/Band Jam was huge success and we hope to make it bigger and better next year! We sponsored radio broadcasts on WEBO to provide up-to-date information to our veterans and PSA's that talked about help and care during pandemic for mental health and substance use disorder issues in the late fall and early winter. We increased our social media presence and made the effort to ensure no veteran was left behind!

# Veterans' Service Agency

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Our statistics bear out that even though we had a pandemic and places were shut down entirely and in some cases are still shut down at the time of this report, we still proudly served over 1,500 veterans and their families: specifically we provide 2,811 services to 514 family members of veterans, 1,057 veterans and of those 303 were first time users of our services. We were able, with the help of many community partners; provide food, gas cards and meals to many of our veterans who faced dire financial circumstances and many still are.

It is with heavy and sad hearts that we report losing many American Heroes to this awful pandemic, many who have come through our doors over the last five years as veterans struggling but who became and left as our friends. There are two in particular from the Greatest Generation that I want to take a moment to recognize here and say thank you to them for the privilege of knowing them and serving as their veteran representative:

John “Jake” Evans, winner of the Bronze Star and the Combat Infantry Badge for combat at the Battle of the Bulge – Ardennes Forest and the Rhineland offensive;

Wilbur Murray, winner of three Bronze Stars, Purple Heart, Combat Infantry Badge for combat at D-Day, Battle of Bastogne, Battle of the Bulge – Ardennes Forest and the Rhineland offensive;

May you both rest in peace and thank you for your service and sacrifice for a cause bigger than your own! And especially thank you for allowing me to call you friends!

2020 was tough, but we made do with what we had to work with and found ways to continue our mission of “Serving Those Who Served For Us”! 2021 will be even better and bigger as we continue expanding and growing the new things we started and making things better on the old!

Very respectfully Submitted,

Michael F. Middaugh  
Director