

MVAA Annual Report Fiscal Year 2024



**Michigan Veterans
Affairs Agency**

We Stand for Those Who Served



Director Brian L. Love

A MESSAGE FROM DIRECTOR LOVE

Since its creation in 2013, the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency (MVAA) has been committed to connecting Michigan's more than 516,000 veterans and their families to the services and support they earned while serving this great nation. As the Director of MVAA, I pledge to lead the agency toward the goals of ending veterans experiencing homelessness, ending veterans' suicide and improving access to mental healthcare, and making Michigan the state veterans choose to live, raise a family, work and retire.

MVAA continues to focus on increasing awareness and support for all veterans, and we want to connect Michigan veterans to the benefits and resources they have earned through their service. We aim to reach

all veterans including those traditionally underserved or underrepresented including women veterans, veterans experiencing homelessness, LGBTQIA+ veterans, aging veterans and veterans with behavioral health challenges. The demographics and geography of Michigan veterans pose a unique communication challenge, however MVAA is dedicated to finding new ways to reach and support veterans in every phase of their lives.

MVAA has the honor of serving all who have served, including Michigan National Guard members, Reservists and all those who call Michigan home. We do this by working to overcome obstacles veterans may face when pursuing employment, education, healthcare and quality of life benefits and services.

The agency also focuses on strengthening existing partnerships and developing new ones with federal, state and local government agencies, veteran service



organizations, and other organizations that serve Michigan veterans and their families.

MVAA is fortunate to have dedicated employees, many of whom have a connection to the armed forces. We strive to attract talent who share our passion for serving veterans and their families and take pride that our team feels respected, valued, and MVAA is a place where they can learn, grow and advance in their careers.

Sincerely,

Brian L. Love
Director, Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency

Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency at a Glance



61 full time employees



\$9,265,800
Fiscal Year
2024 Budget



516,000
Michigan veterans
(2024)

- Housed within the Michigan Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA)
- Agency Director Brian Love is a member of the Governor's Cabinet



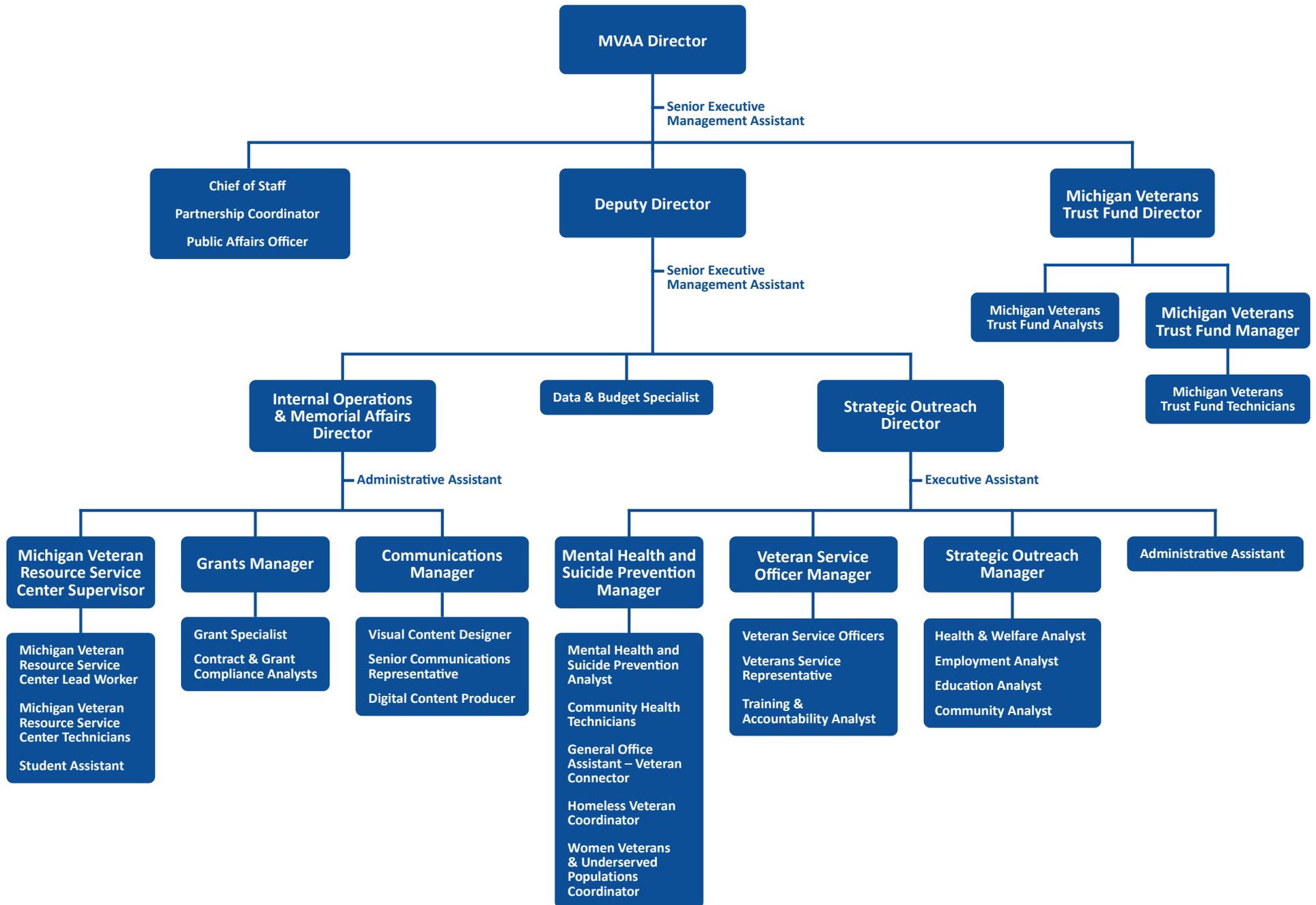
MVAA ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

MVAA resides within the Michigan Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA), along with the Michigan National Guard, the Michigan Veteran Homes, the Michigan Youth Challenge Academy and DMVA State Operations. MVAA adheres to the DMVA's cultural identity that guides our beliefs, behaviors and organizational direction. The DMVA is a:

- **Provider of Exceptional Service.** A team of devoted public servants committed to its mission, continuous improvement and solving future challenges.
- **The Cornerstone of Michigan Communities.** Dedicated Michigan citizens invested as lifelong partners in building thriving communities.

- **Leader in Innovative Solutions.** A thought leader, piloting future capabilities and providing unrivaled training opportunities that leverage Michigan's unique blend of geography, people and technology-based industry.
- **Workplace of Choice.** A department that values its team members, demonstrates a commitment to individual and organizational development, and generates loyalty and pride across the team.
- **Center of Performance Excellence.** DMVA is a collaborative organization that provides ever-improving value to its stakeholders and achieves sustained organizational effectiveness.

MVAA Organizational Chart





THE PEOPLE WE MET THIS YEAR



MVAA STANDS FOR THOSE WHO SERVED

The heart of MVAA is our dedication to service for our state's veterans. The work the agency does every day leads to many success stories. Here are just a few from Fiscal Year 2024 that illustrate the lengths to which MVAA goes on behalf of our state's heroes:

- A Michigan veteran was determined to be 90% disabled but was unsure if he should request an increase for his knee condition. MVAA reviewed his claim and found that his determination was not complete. As a result of this review, an amended claim was filed with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). It was decided that the VA had made a clear and unmistakable error, and the veteran was awarded 100% permanent disability, with total benefits back dated to his record in 2020. This could not have come at a better time for the veteran as he was in the process of moving and a few weeks away from becoming a father. The veteran received a total of \$66,025 in back pay.
- A widowed single mother of a special needs adult son had severe challenges with obtaining clean water for herself and her son. The repair was estimated at approximately \$12,000. Unable to afford the repairs, she was discouraged and did not know where to turn. For three months, she used 5-gallon jugs to bring clean water into the house on a weekly basis and showered at the home of friends and acquaintances, while church friends helped her

with bottled water and laundry. Finally, someone that she spoke to asked whether her husband had been a veteran. She replied that, yes, he had served for two years in the U.S. Army at Fort Lewis in Washington. She was then urged to apply for an emergency grant from the Michigan Veterans Trust Fund (MVTF). She worked with a MVTF technician to complete her application and to submit the forms needed to accompany it. The tech was thrilled to give her the news when her application was approved by the Board of Trustees. She and her son are now connected to city water and are grateful for all that the MVTF did to help them when they needed it.

- A participant in MVAA's incarcerated veterans program recently received a favorable decision on appeal. This gained him a \$10,450.86 retro award and established him at an overall 70% disability rating. He is scheduled to be reviewed for release from prison in 2033, and this should help him to establish himself more successfully once he is released.
- A MVAA Veteran Service Officer (VSO) recently filed a claim for a homeless veteran at Patriot Place in Gaylord. The veteran was originally denied because he did not have the means to drive to required exams. As the veteran was deemed to be 10% disabled by the VA, he was being charged copays and the VA garnished his compensation due to unpaid copays. Since the veteran was homeless, he did not get the debt letter and his pay was garnished unexpectedly. The veteran was living off of social security disability insurance and 10% service connected for a combined total of

less than \$800 per month. The VSO submitted a supplemental claim on his behalf and explained the situation. The veteran got his exams rescheduled and he was increased from 10% to 80% disabled by the VA. The veteran now makes \$1,995 per month. He is no longer homeless and is in stable housing. Furthermore, the veteran is now in the highest priority group for VA health care and no longer has co-pays.

- A veteran single mother with four children contacted the MVAA for help. A MVAA VSO was able to help the family stay in their home and also helped keep their utilities turned on after a previous tenant failed to pay a bill. The veteran stated how important this help was to her family and that this type of help can change the entire course of someone's life.
- An MVAA-funded advertising campaign for a veteran resource fair in Houghton County resulted in a Vietnam veteran coming to the office to ask questions about the event. Office staff discovered the veteran had been awarded the Purple Heart for injuries in combat in Vietnam and had been medically retired in 1972, making him eligible for concurrent VA Compensation Pay and Combat Related Special Compensation (CRSC) pay. A CRSC application was submitted and the veteran is expected to receive six years of back pay, the maximum allowable under the program.

I Am a Veteran

Every Michigan veteran has a story, and MVAA is committed to documenting and sharing them through our I Am a Veteran campaign. This strategic communications effort seeks to motivate other veterans to identify as veterans, tell their stories and get connected to the benefits they earned for their service. Dependents of veterans are also encouraged to tell their loved one's story.

By directly addressing the issues our veterans face — such as PTSD, racism and sexism, difficult transitions to civilian life — MVAA is working to build a stronger community of veterans and end veteran suicide. If you'd like to submit your story, please visit Michigan.gov/IAMAVeteran, fill out the nomination form, and send it to MVAA-Newsroom@Michigan.gov.

These are the veteran stories MVAA documented during Fiscal Year 2024.

Brian Hines: Army veteran, two-time Purple Heart recipient searches for 'new mission' as a civilian

In 2003, 21-year-old Brian Hines was working towards becoming an electrician near his home in Toccoa, Georgia. He decided to follow in his brother's footsteps and joined the U.S. Army in September 2003.

"I got to my first duty station in Hawaii in January of 2004. At the reception, they told us they were leaving for deployment in a few days and asked if we wanted to go. We said 'Yeah, let's go. That's why we're here'."

Hines deployed to Iraq with the 25th Infantry Division from January 2004 to February 2005. He earned two Purple Heart medals for injuries sustained in combat on consecutive days.

In November 2004, a stolen Iraqi police truck sped towards Hines and exploded in front of him, instantly killing five Iraqi security guards and injuring Hines and other men in his vehicle. He and the other members of his team did not get medical treatment for six hours due to the fighting that followed the explosion. The very next day, Hines's vehicle struck an IED.

"I was up on the gun, saw the traffic circle and thought, 'That's a really great spot for an IED'. And



then, 'BOOM'. I took shrapnel in the body from that. We were fortunate that those were the only things that happened and that we didn't lose anybody."

Hines deployed to Iraq again from 2007 to 2009 and again from 2010 to 2011. He then deployed to Afghanistan in 2018 and on one final deployment to Thailand in 2022 before retiring.

"After 21 years and all of the work, the experience, the bouncing around and moving around, I decided I'd seen enough. I was tired of moving, tired of missing out watching the kids grow up. I was over not having stability and being told to go somewhere else every three years."

For Brian Hines, like many service members, the transition to civilian life hasn't been easy.

"It's a different mission. I'm trying to find something

now that gives me another purpose. After 21 years of service, it's hard. There's no sugarcoating it. The hardest part is navigating all of these resources. In a way you're just kind of left out there to figure it out. No one else is going to do the things for you. It's really up to you to navigate those resources."

"Despite all of that, I'm still proud to say I served," says Hines. "My commitment to serving my country and supporting fellow veterans will never waver."



Chelsey Demick: MVTF emergency grant ‘means everything’ to Navy vet, nursing student

Chelsey Demick’s passion lies in helping others. From her time in the military, which emphasizes “others before self,” to centering her life around her young daughter, to working as an advocate for cancer patients, the Wyandotte single mother is defined by her selflessness. But when Demick’s vehicle failed, she knew she was the one who needed help.

The engine on her 2015 Mazda CX-5 sport utility vehicle had to be replaced — a \$5,000 expense — and the 31-year-old nursing student was denied a loan to pay for it. So Demick, a Navy veteran, turned to the Michigan Veterans Trust Fund, which provides emergency assistance to eligible veterans. The Trust

Fund paid the bill, the dealership provided Demick a loaner vehicle while the engine was being replaced and soon the Mazda was back on the road.

“I would characterize the grant I received from the Trust Fund as a blessing,” said Demick, who still owes about \$12,000 on the Mazda. “This means everything to me and Ava.”

Demick, who grew up in a low-income family in Metro Detroit, joined the Navy to get money for college and to be part of something bigger.

“It’s almost built in me to put others before self,” she

said. “My passion has always been to help others.”

As a logistics specialist, Demick served for five years on both shore and sea, including a nearly yearlong deployment in 2011 in the waters around North Africa and Western Asia.

“The hardest part of serving was being away from my daughter when I deployed. It felt like half of my heart was gone,” she said. “The best part of serving was the cohesiveness and the adventure.”

After an honorable discharge, Demick used her military educational benefits to get a bachelor’s degree in health care administration and a master’s in business administration. She now works with cancer patients at the University of Michigan Hospital. She’s currently finishing up a microbiology course before starting Wayne State University’s Bachelor’s of Science in Nursing program for veterans in May.

Having her vehicle back will allow Demick to get her 11-year-old daughter to and from school and to attend nursing courses.

“I want to become a nurse because I enjoy helping others,” Demick said. “It fills my heart to see a patient’s relief or gratefulness.”

Doug Brinker: Navy, National Guard veteran finds new mission helping other veterans transition to civilian life

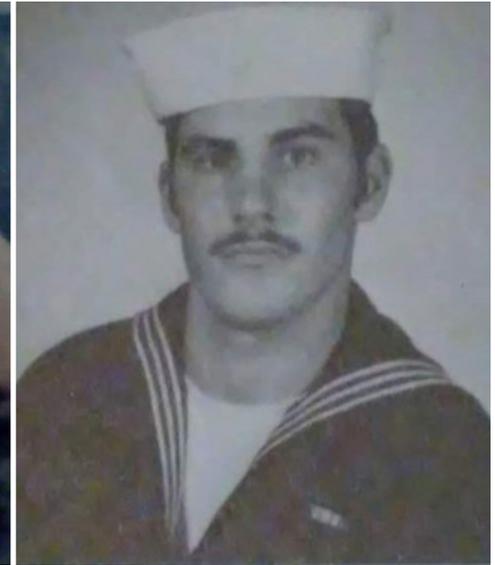
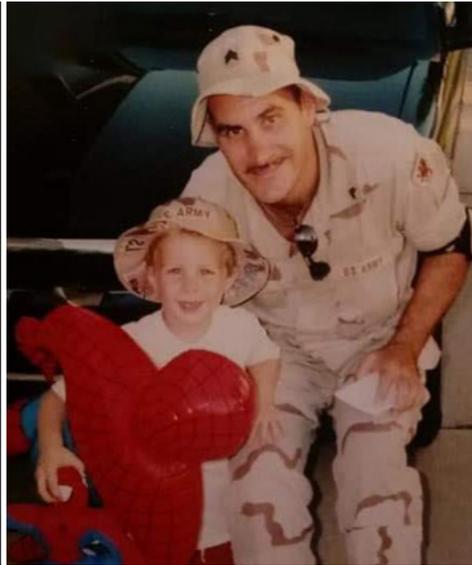
Douglas Brinker’s military service began when he joined the U.S. Navy in 1981 as a boatswain’s mate. He served overseas in Beirut, Lebanon before ending his active duty in 1984. After time in the Reserves, he joined the Michigan Army National Guard and deployed to Iraq in 2004.

After a difficult transition to civilian life, Douglas survived two suicide attempts before reaching in to find the help he needed to recover and the strength to help others do the same.

“It’s okay not to be okay. And more importantly, you need to ask for help when you don’t feel right because there are people willing to listen. Know that you are worth it. That you always matter. And more importantly, you are the future. And if you’re older, you have a purpose in life to help the younger generation know that they have a purpose.”

Douglas also shares these powerful words directly with veterans through his advocacy work with the Jackson County Military Coalition.

“The Coalition started two years ago. We don’t focus



just on suicide prevention. We focus on bringing hope to veterans and their families by a variety of services. The mission is to be there for the veteran and their family. They may not deploy physically, but they do it mentally. And there are organizations like the Jackson County Military Coalition, and other Michigan Veterans Coalitions, that are there to be another resource.”

“Help one person every day,” continued Brinker. “That’s what we mean when we say be a Beacon of Hope. I proudly have that sticker on my Jeep, and it has sparked many conversations with both veterans and family members of veterans.”

On the importance of the Veterans Crisis Line, available by dialing 988 and then pressing 1, Brinker said:

“When you dial 988 and then press 1, you will find people have who have been where you are. They have

individuals who have lost a family member to suicide. You’re going to be connected to a crisis specialist who is going to sit and take the time to listen and care and give you resources and hope.”

Douglas closed by saying:

“As a two-time survivor, as somebody who has been rewarded for the past 20 years with so much success, I still learn from other people’s struggles how to strengthen my own recovery. And if I could say just one thing, you matter always.”

Kate Preston: ‘My way of giving back:’ MVAA employee honors late husband, Iraq War veteran through her work

Kate Preston has two words tattooed on the inside of her wrist: “Love, Darren.”

“It’s in his handwriting,” Preston says. “It was from the first letter he wrote me when he went to bootcamp.”

She touches the ink, recalling memories of her husband who passed away in October 2015. Army Sgt. Darren Preston was a carpenter in the 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) out of Fort Carson, Colorado. He joined the Army in 2005, a few years after high school.

“We were high school sweethearts,” Preston says, smiling. “We met at Eaton Rapids High School.”

Darren would deploy twice to Iraq, in 2006 and 2007—a time of violent conflict and heavy U.S. casualties in the war-torn country. He was then sent to Germany in 2008.

“We got married in Vegas right before he left for Germany,” Preston says. “He got back two days before our son Trevor was born.”

The family grew in 2013 with the birth of their daughter, Taylor. While life appeared great on the



outside, on the inside Darren was struggling.

“I remember it being a hard transition,” Preston explains. “I’d have to be super careful about how I woke him up because it would startle him. There were times he would have night terrors that would wake him up in the night. I remember specifically one time he woke up in the middle of the night and ran straight out the front door,” she continues. “He was having a nightmare, like maybe he was back over there and trying to get away or something.”

Darren would deal with physical pain from his deployments, injuries to his back and ankle, along with PTSD. He sought treatment from a VA doctor, who would often switch medications and dosages to try to find something that would work.

But ultimately, the combination of medications led to his death. In 2015, on the morning of the day the family was set to move into their new home, Kate found her husband unresponsive in the living room. It was the day before her birthday.

“He and my son were camping out in the living room, and my daughter and I were sleeping in the bedroom,” Preston recalls. “I got up to make coffee and Darren was sleeping with his back to me. When I walked around to wake him up, I noticed right away that he had blood coming out of his nose and I grabbed a hold of him. And he was cold. I screamed because I knew something was wrong. I knew he was dead.”

Months later, an autopsy determined it was an accidental overdose due to a combination of Zoloft and extended-release morphine.

“I struggled with that for a long time and didn’t tell people because I didn’t want them to think he was an addict,” Preston says. “I knew he struggled with PTSD, but a lot of people didn’t. On the outside he seemed totally normal and happy.”

It took Kate and her family a long time to cope with Darren’s death. The family sought help from Ele’s Place in Lansing, a healing center for grieving children and their families. At Ele’s Place, Kate met with other widows, one of whom is her best friend today.

“Eight years later, I’m a lot better,” Preston says. “It never goes away, there’s always days where something will trigger you and set you back, but it’s very few and far between now. In the beginning, I couldn’t see past the day ahead of me. My 7-year-old would be getting

me up to go to work. Now on the 8-year anniversary, I see how far we’ve come.”

As Kate and her family healed, she started to look for ways she could honor her late husband and give back to veterans. She started working at the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency (MVAA) in 2022 as a grants specialist. In 2024, Kate was promoted to grants manager. In this role, she leads the grants team, manages programming and monitors grant compliance for the agency.

“It wasn’t until I came to the MVAA that I felt like I was among people that understood what I’ve been through and wouldn’t judge me for telling my story,” Preston says.

“When you’re on the outside, you think no one cares, but then being here and seeing how much we do and how involved everyone in our agency is in their work and the passion behind it, that helped me let go of that anger to see people do care. I want veterans to know that there are people within our agency that have stories similar to theirs and want to help them.”

As Kate learned with her husband, she knows veterans want to seek out other veterans or someone who understands what they’ve been through. She hopes veterans will read her story and be able to connect with what she’s experienced.

“I can’t do it alone,” Preston says. “This job is just my way of feeling like I’m doing something to give back to or to help other families, so Darren’s death wasn’t in vain.”



Linda Woods: First woman veteran to carry an Eagle Staff

An Eagle Staff is a sacred symbol in Native American culture. For the tribal member who carries it, it represents tradition and the flag of their nation. For Linda Woods, a member of the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, it symbolizes her time as a woman veteran, her journey to recovery and her role in helping others in her community.

Woods was born in Detroit in 1943 and grew up in a household marred by poverty, alcoholism and abuse. She would eventually move in with her grandmother, who would raise her in what Woods calls “an act of love.”

“My mother and stepfather were both alcoholics,” said Woods, who now lives in Traverse City. “But they had

a friend who served in the Army Air Corps, and I really liked and respected her. She inspired me to join the Air Force.”

After high school, Woods delayed joining the Air Force for a year out of fear of being medically examined. “I was embarrassed to let anyone examine me,” she said. “I thought they would know I was abused.”

Woods would eventually join when she was 19 and served honorably from 1962 to 1966. But in the military, she would once again experience sexual abuse. After struggles with alcohol addiction, she ended up in California with her two sons, eventually going on to earn her master’s degree in social work from San Jose State University. Woods wanted to

help others in her tribe who were dealing with substance abuse.

Woods served in that role for many years before retiring in 2008. A few years later, she received a call from a friend that would change her life.

“My friend Bill called me and said ‘I have this eagle head I’ve been asked to take care of. I was told to give it to a veteran, and I’d like to give it to you.’”

Woods is the first woman veteran in the United States to have an Eagle Staff, a prominent symbol in her culture. Named “Migizi,” it has 62 feathers, each with its own meaning. Woods frequently visits the graves of fallen service members and brings Migizi to powwows and to events like the MVAA Women Veterans Conference.

“It brings me tremendous joy and healing to know that I’m doing what I’m supposed to be doing,” she said. “I know it’s hard sometimes, but I hope these women will continue to talk to each other and share their stories. It’s the only way to find healing.”

WWII Navy veteran Maurice "Bud" Prottengeier: Still going strong at 100

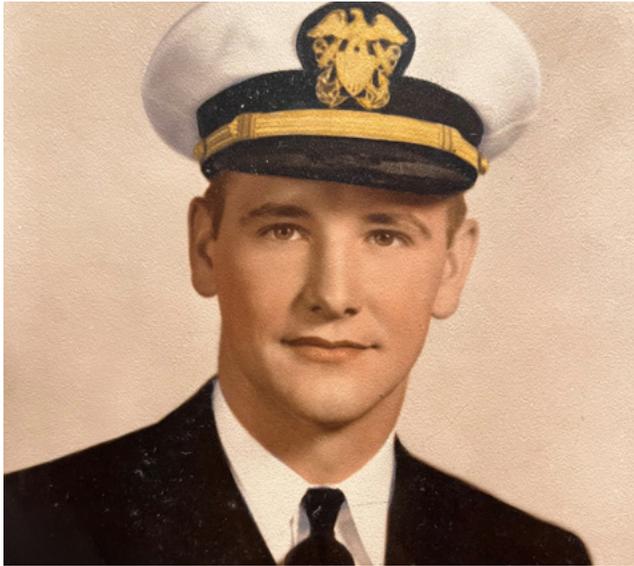
In 1942, Maurice “Bud” Prottengeier, an 18-year-old college student, decided to enlist in the Navy along with his friends before they were drafted into World War II. After more than 80 years, the Flint native has no problem recalling the details. He can still recite the names of his fellow sailors and tell you how much he made in the Navy more than eight decades ago.

“At the time, I was in my second year of junior college at Northport College in Chicago,” Prottengier says. “We all knew that we were probably going to have to go somewhere. We went and joined the Navy that day.”

Because Prottengeier was in college, he was eligible to join the Navy College Training Program as an apprentice seaman. Candidates were not subject to the recently-instituted draft if they retained their enlisted ranking and kept up with their schoolwork.

“They sent me to Northwestern University in Chicago, and I was making 21 bucks a month,” Prottengeier says. “They waived bootcamp for us but if we flunked out of school that’s where they would’ve sent us.”

After 16 months at Northwestern, Prottengeier earned



enough credits for a degree in civil engineering. He was then called for Midshipmen School in Camp Endicott, Rhode Island for the Civil Engineer Corps. Prottengeier was then selected to be a platoon officer for the next class of midshipmen before receiving orders to go to the Pacific.

“It was August 1945, just before we dropped the bomb,” said Prottengeier. “They prepared my midshipman class to do whatever we were supposed to do. Seabees followed the invasion force. I lucked out, I never had to face bullets.”

Prottengeier spent 11 months at Nakagusuku, Okinawa as an ensign with a construction and maintenance battalion. The unit built and maintained barracks and facilities such as power plants and water treatment plants.

After his discharge in June 1946, Prottengeier

returned home to Flint. Six months later, he met his wife Marian at a holiday party. The couple was married for 73 years and had three children and two grandchildren before Marian passed in 2020 at 93-years-old.

Today, Prottengeier lives in Burton, just east of Flint. He volunteers at Bendle Schools in Burton, swims and does yoga three times a week at University of Michigan-Flint, and walks around his neighborhood when the weather permits.



Cpl. Robert Holt battled fascism and racism. At 105, he's still laughing.

Drafted into World War II as a 23-year-old college student, Cpl. Robert Holt was sent to Germany in the mid-1940s. He served in an all-Black unit as part of a segregated Army. The German citizens treated him fine, he explains, but many of his fellow U.S. soldiers were openly hostile, kicking him out of bars and hurling racial slurs.

On his first day of combat, he was driving a truck on the outskirts of Berlin when he hit a landmine. The vehicle was destroyed but Holt escaped unharmed.

“They all shouted, ‘Uh-oh! They got Holt! They got Holt!’ They came running back, but then they saw that I was

up and walking around.” At this point, he pauses for several moments, eyes clenched, shoulders shaking with laughter. Then: “Heck, they didn’t want to help me. They wanted to get my money and my wife’s address and go through what I had!”

Looking back, he’s rightfully proud of his service.

“I wouldn’t trade nothing for that experience,” he says. “But I sure wouldn’t go through it again,”

Holt was born on his family’s farm in central Missouri in 1918. Some days, Holt worked in the fields from sunup until sundown for a dollar a day. He graduated

from high school and attended college in Missouri for several years, hoping to be an architect. On the advice of a friend, Holt moved to Albion in south central Michigan to work at Albion Malleable Iron Co. Holt worked there for 35 years, his tenure interrupted only by his military service.

Holt and his wife LaVerne had seven children during their 54-year marriage. After LaVerne passed away, he married his second wife, Ethel, in 1998, and together they live in the Albion home Holt bought in 1949 for \$7,000.

While Holt liked to fish and hunt when he was younger, these days he enjoys watching sports, playing online solitaire and taking well-earned naps.

“I meditate a lot while I’m playing solitaire,” Holt says. “And a lot of things run through my mind while I mediate: Army, school, all those things.” He pauses, his ever-present smile widening. “And then,” he says, “I go to sleep.”

He’s also a man of faith. He and Ethel attend church regularly.

“I tell everyone that I’ve tried to live by God’s commandments,” he says. “And it’s gotten me this far.”



EDITOR’S NOTE: Robert Holt passed away Aug. 31, 2024 at the age of 106.

William “Bill” Wisney: Korean War vet dedicates life to service

William “Bill” Wisney was born Oct. 18, 1929, in Cleveland. His father moved the family to Adrian in southern Michigan for a new job just prior to World War II.

When Wisney was 18, he and three friends decided to enlist in the Navy, knowing they would likely be drafted. Bill was one of the more than 1.5 million men who joined the armed services during the Korean War.

“There were four of us that joined,” says Wisney. “We were going to get drafted and I didn’t want to sleep in a mudhole. I wanted to go in the Air Force, but the other three guys were like, ‘Oh you got to go in the Navy! You’ll go to all these different places! It’s going to be so great!’ But I’d get seasick in a rowboat.”

“We had to stay together, so we signed up together and we all went into the Navy,” Wisney continues. “When we got to the Great Lakes Training Center, they all went to one side, and I went to the other side by myself. When we graduated, two became corpsman, I became a yeoman striker. That’s a typist. I knew how to type; I learned in high school.”

After bootcamp, Wisney was sent to Little Creek, Virginia. In June 1950, Wisney was ordered to South Korea on the USS Eldorado, the flagship for Rear



Admiral Lyman A. Thackrey. It acted as standby for the USS Mount McKinley during the invasion of Inchon, where the United Nations (UN) Command successfully recaptured the South Korean capital of Seoul.

“Being in the amphibious group, we’d land troops at different places and then pick them up at different places,” says Wisney. “We landed the guys and supplies at Iwon in these small boats.”

Wisney recalls seeing the Navy’s only active-duty battleship, the USS Missouri, as it provided shore bombardment support for UN forces ashore.

“I did watch the Missouri, a big battleship,” says Wisney. “They had their big guns like 16-inches in diameter, they were a mile or two from us, and at Inchon, they were doing some firing of those big guns. If you stayed on deck, you’d see the smoke and then you’d hear the boom and then your pants would flutter.”

Wisney was honorably discharged from the Navy in September 1952 and returned home to Adrian where he eventually met his wife, Patricia. They’ve been married 69 years and eventually would go on to have five children, 11 grandchildren, 12 great-grandchildren and one great-great-grandchild.

“We had our first date, and I knew that she was the one,” says Wisney. “We got married in 1955.”

Shortly after, a friend of his who was a Michigan State Police trooper convinced him to apply for the police academy. Wisney went to recruit school in Lansing and then went to his first post in Detroit in April 1956. He started as a trooper and worked his way up to detective.

“I was in the intelligence unit, we worked undercover, and we worked with Detroit Police Department during the Detroit race riots.”

Wisney served 25 years with the Michigan State Police, retiring in 1981. He never got connected to any of the veteran benefits he earned for his service because he says he has too much pride.

It wasn't until 2024 when the well at his home in Rosebush stopped working that he knew he'd need help.

"We had money saved up, but we didn't plan on needing a new well," says Wisney. He got connected to the Michigan Veterans Trust Fund, who was able to fully cover the cost of a new well, valued at more than \$10,000.

"It feels really good, to know there's people out there who care and want to help," says Wisney.

Testimonials from People MVAA Helped in Fiscal Year 2024:

"My questions were answered promptly and the documents and support I needed was supplied quicker than I anticipated. The man helping me personally reached out to me to follow up, which was appreciated." — Dallas L.

"Both gentlemen I spoke with were more than just helpful. I felt they cared to see me through the process. They went above and beyond. One technician emailed me information I needed to file for spouses benefits at my local VA office. He made sure I was aware of the possibility that I may qualify for a number of resources I had not been aware even existed. These men helped me manage through a time I was totally lost, and their compassion will not be forgotten. Thank you both!" — Rebecca G.

"I sent an email requesting guidance after the death of my brother. The representative that responded was very compassionate and helpful and provided direction when my family felt a bit lost and confused. They were able to pull the record that my family needed to get my brother buried." — Marie S.

"We can't thank the MVAA Veteran Service Officer enough for the work he does because it isn't just work or a job. It really is finding and helping with services and resources to people who sometimes don't even know they exist. It can completely change someone's trajectory and ability to move forward in life, simply because someone helped." — Sarah A.



THE TEAMS WITHIN MVAA



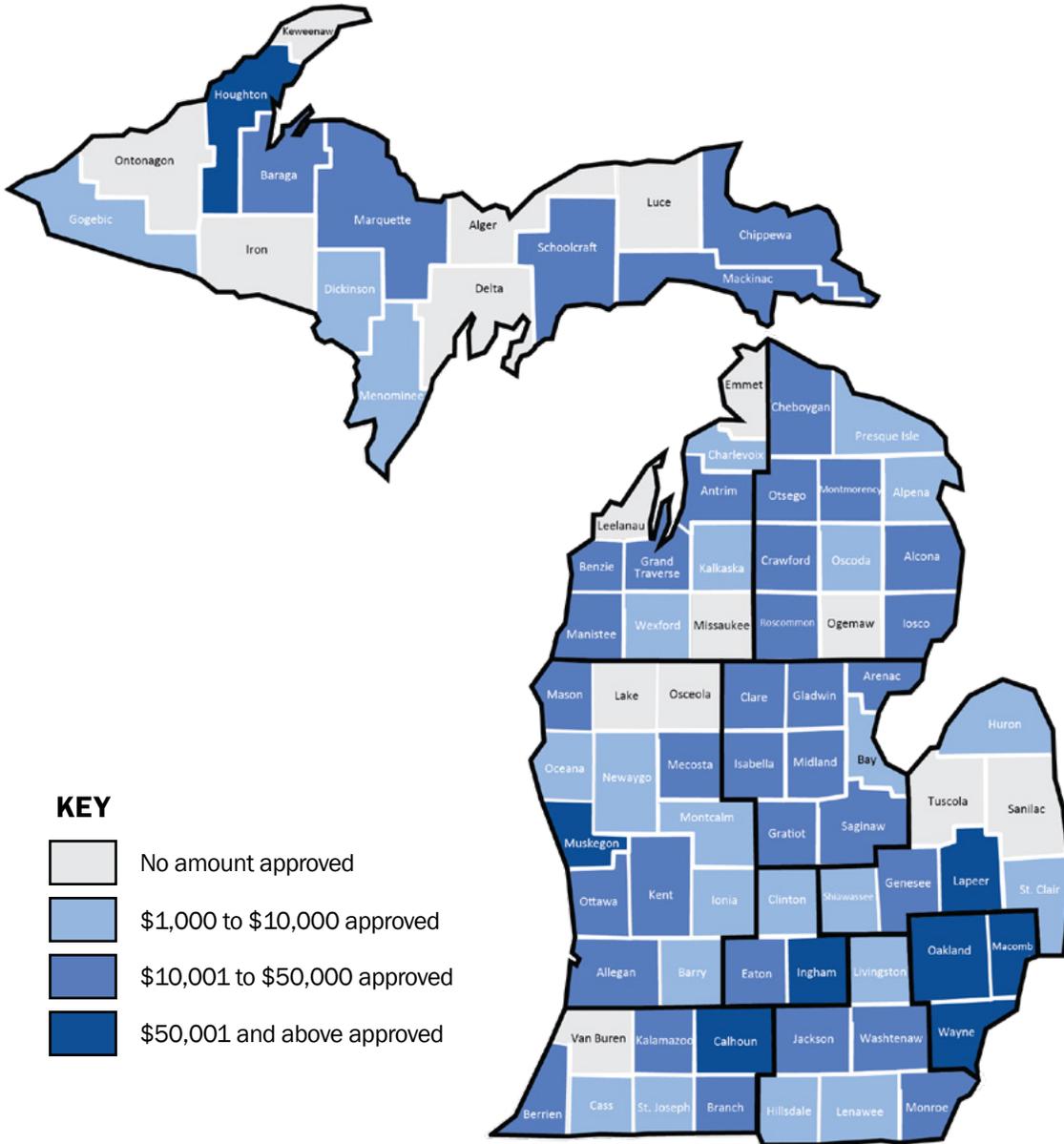
There are seven operational units within MVAA. Though they work together very closely to achieve MVAA's goals and execute the mission, vision and values of the agency, it is important to highlight the accomplishments that tell the story of each individual team.

Michigan Veterans Trust Fund

Fiscal Year 2024 Successes

Over the years, generations of veterans have turned to the Michigan Veterans Trust Fund (MVTF) when faced with financial emergencies and 2024 was no different. Veterans and dependents from every war era and peacetime veterans aged 65 and older received assistance for emergent needs. More than \$1.7 million in mortgage and rent payments, utility payments, furnaces and other emergency repairs were made to support 1,180 veterans and their dependents in desperate need in Fiscal Year 2024.

The MVTF was established by the legislature using post-war reserve funds in the wake of World War II to create a \$50 million trust to fund the emergency grant program intended to meet the emergent needs of those veterans returning from the war. Eligibility has since been expanded to include veterans of all wars and additional measures have been taken to address the emergent needs of peacetime veterans aged 65 and older. The fund is now valued at just under \$75 million and its careful management by the Board of Trustees ensures its place as a high impact resource



Trust Fund Amounts Approved Per County in Fiscal Year 2024

Counties with the Most MVTF Applications Submitted in FY 2024



Wayne	89 applications
Macomb	86 applications
Oakland	73 applications
Ingham	56 applications
Calhoun	55 applications

Top 5 Counties Where MVTF Grants Were Distributed in FY 2024



Wayne	\$164,841.59
Ingham	\$161,392.49
Macomb	\$144,120.46
Oakland	\$142,597.92
Calhoun	\$80,548.49

Focus on Fiscal Year 2025

- The MVTF is collaborating with Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Home to pilot a regenerative agriculture demonstration farm that will educate and facilitate veterans to get into the agriculture industry.
- The MVTF will be exploring new opportunities to assist veterans to realize home ownership.
- The MVTF will work with the Michigan Department of Technology, Management & Budget on additional features to the online application and improve the user's experience with the platform.

Michigan Veteran Resource Service Center

The Michigan Veteran Resource Service Center (MVRSC) helps veterans and their families access discharge documents, get connected to Veteran Service Officers and find services to assist in their needs. DD-214s were the most requested item in Fiscal Year 2024 with 4,595 requests in the last six months alone. Other top categories were VA/VSO, housing, utilities, transportation and housing maintenance.

Fiscal Year 2024 Stats



28,154

MVRSC cases

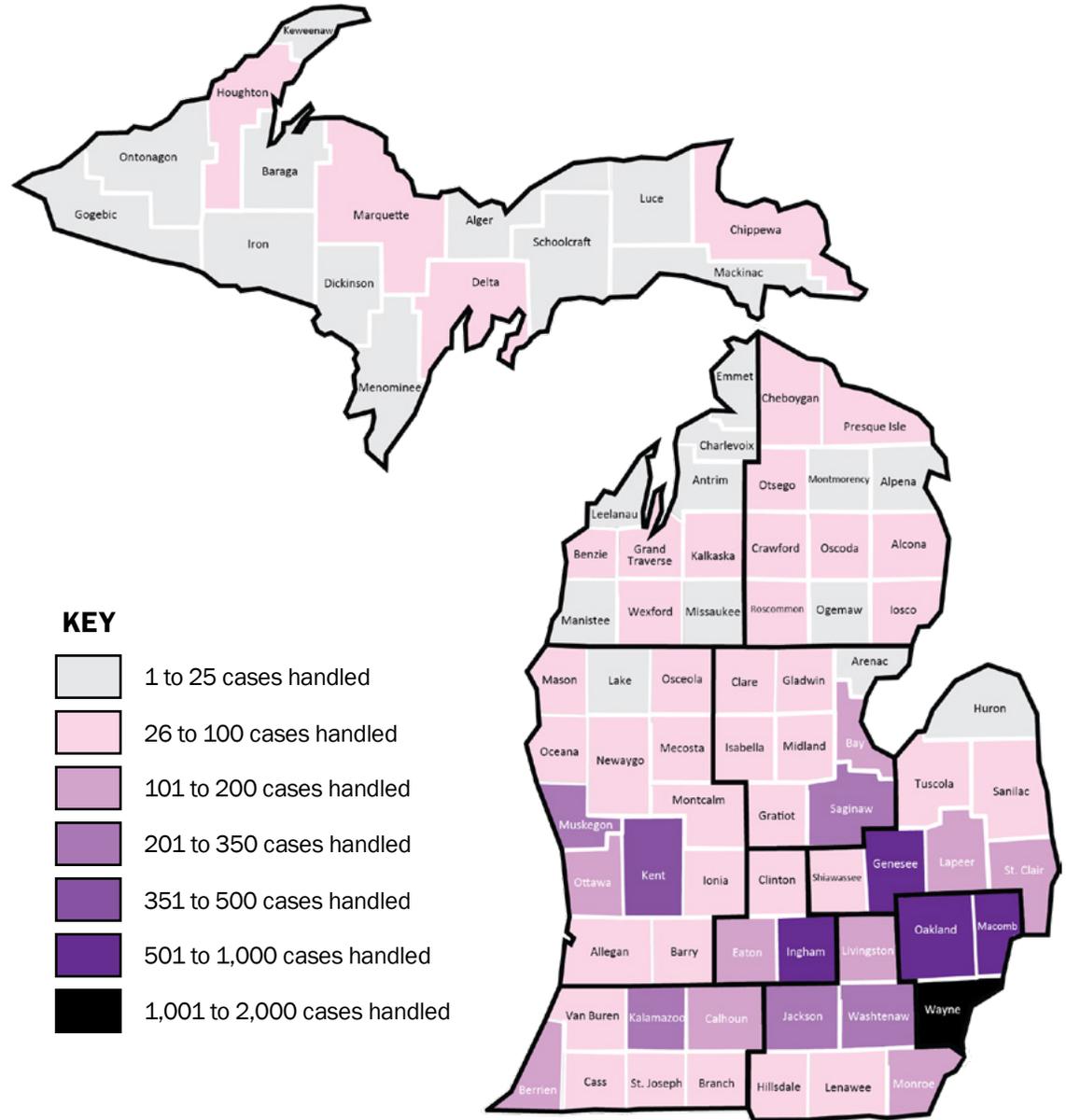


2,072 hours

of MVRSC phone calls

Focus on Fiscal Year 2025

- Streamline the referral process for Unite Michigan platform.
- Continue to develop a standardized record-uploading protocol for county records.



MVRSC Cases Handled Per County in Fiscal Year 2024

Grants

Fiscal Year 2024 Successes

The MVAA administered \$13.8 million in grant funding to various stakeholders serving veterans and their families in Fiscal Year 2024.

The funding came from five grants and included \$13.5 million from state appropriations and \$602,000 from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). Funding breakdown:

- **County Veteran Service Fund Grant (CVSF):** MVAA administered \$7.5 million in state-appropriated CVSF grant funding to 71 county veteran service offices – the largest number of counties to be awarded the grant since the CVSF was created in Fiscal Year 2019. Grant-funded veteran services ranged from food assistance, transportation to and from VA hospitals, emergency assistance, dental services, to veteran service officer continuing education.
- **County Innovation Grant (CIG):** The MEDC provided another \$227,000 that was distributed across four counties for innovative initiatives such as the Modern Warrior Live Production in Marquette and the Master’s Outreach Event.
- **Statewide Veteran Service Provision Grant (SVSPG):** This state-appropriated grant funding of \$4 million was awarded to the Michigan Veterans Coalition, comprised of Veteran Service Organizations that coordinated providing over

130,000+ hours of direct veteran service provision, far exceeding the grant requirement of 96,000 hours. MEDC provided another \$375,000 in funding.

- **Michigan Veteran Homelessness Prevention Grant (MiVHPG):** In the first year of this state-appropriated grant, the MVAA administered \$1.9 million to 13 nonprofit agencies to prevent veteran homelessness. The grant was used to build a new home for a veteran, to renovate a house and move a single-mom Army veteran out of a shelter and into a permanent home, and for immediate relief and emergency shelter such as hotel stays and rental or mortgage assistance.
- **Michigan Veteran Service Organizations Networking Grant (MiVSONG):** Through MiVSONG state-appropriated funding, \$15,000 was awarded to Michigan Community Action Teams to be used for professional networking opportunities for veteran service providers and advocates.

Focus on Fiscal Year 2025

- Process improvement, to better administer our grants and serve our grantees and veterans.
- Grant evaluation and monitoring, to reduce risk and ensure our programming is meeting legislative intent, and helping connect veterans to their earned benefits.

Communications

Fiscal Year 2024 Successes

- In Fiscal Year 2024, MVAA Communications team led the following strategic campaigns:
 - Military Makeover: Operation Career broadcast on Lifetime
 - MVAA outreach promotion videos
 - Director Love videos
 - Why We Serve videos featuring MVAA staff
 - I Am a Veteran marketing campaign
- Sent branded postcards to veterans: Veteran's Day, holiday card and Vietnam Veterans Day.
- Communications also supported the following agency-wide programs and initiatives:
 - Staff Sgt. Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program
 - Unite Michigan
 - Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans and Their Families
 - Vietnam Veteran Recognition Certificates
- Created an all-new Strategic Communications Plan.
 - Early in Fiscal Year 2024, there was a lengthy leadership transition within the Communications team. Workshops were held by senior leadership and MVAA staff to improve key messaging, stakeholder engagement and audience outreach to be used as a roadmap for building a communication plan for Fiscal Year 2025.

Focus on Fiscal Year 2025

- Ensure that all internal and external communications reflect the mission, vision and values of MVAA and support MVAA's overall Strategic Plan.
- Establish a shared understanding of strategic priorities to enable MVAA staff to effectively expand, organize and communicate with our audiences.
- Enable Communications staff to be innovative and creative when identifying and utilize new opportunities for marketing the agency and promoting the services MVAA provides.
- Prioritize consistency and longevity in messaging and campaigns.

Fiscal Year 2024 Website Stats



406,426
total page views

▲ 8.9% increase
over FY 2023

Top 5 most visited pages:

1. MVAA homepage: 76,805 views
2. Benefits for 100 Percent Disabled Veterans: 46,398 views
3. Find a Veteran Service Officer: 33,388 views
4. DD-214 Form: 14,210 views
5. I Am a Veteran Campaign: 12,591 views

Fiscal Year 2024 Social Media Stats



1.2 million
social media impressions

Facebook:

Reach (impressions): 841,405
▲ 9.1% increase over FY23
Followers: 12,742
▲ 4.8% increase

LinkedIn:

Impressions: 187,826
Subscribers: 2,519
Clicks: 15,544
Engagement rate: 11.8%

X:

Impressions: More than 136,000
Followers: 3,385
▲ 10.1% increase
Engagement rate: 1.8%

YouTube:

Views: 1.3 million
Subscribers: 728
▲ 17.8% increase
Watch time: 11,900+ hours
Click Through Rate: 9.3%

Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

Fiscal Year 2024 Successes

- Partnered with Psych Armor and co-sponsored with Humana to create a nationwide educational public health campaign to inform the public about challenges that LGBTQIA+ veterans face. Next steps will be a training platform for service providers.
- Mental Health First Aid in May 2024: all MVAA staff trained on ways to address suicide prevention, recognizing signs and symptoms, and connecting folks experiencing suicidal ideations to the right care and resources.
- Partnership with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR):
 - Printing 988 Crisis Line on all Michigan veterans hunting and fishing licenses.
 - Sponsored Michigan DNR Digest for Hunting Season 2025 with a full-page advertisement focused on 988 Crisis Line awareness expansion, as well as benefits connectivity via 1-800-MICH-VET.
- The Mental Health & Suicide Prevention team created in January 2024 allows for intersectional approach by integrating the Staff Sgt. Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program staff, mental health & suicide prevention analyst, Governor's Challenge, veteran homelessness coordinator, and women veterans & underserved populations coordinator.



Fiscal Year 2024 Stats



\$750,000
toward
veteran suicide prevention*

*through the
Staff Sgt.
Parker Gordon
Fox Suicide
Prevention
Grant Program



25 SSG Fox Cases
55 Homelessness
Cases
77 Community Health
Technician callback
requests/referrals



1,482
Vietnam Veteran
Certificates
mailed



LEO (LVER) / Veteran
Connector Partnership
resulted in:
- 656 referrals
- Briefings to over
100 organizations
- 26 new Veteran Connectors

- Psychotropic Safety – Exploring the link between medication and veteran suicide:
 - MVAA partnered with Grunt Style Foundation and assisted in sponsorship of Michigan’s first-ever “Michigan Veterans Harm Reduction Summit,” which was attended by nearly 100 people. The summit was held in Eaton Rapids and is expected to be followed by 12 more events across the country in 2025.
- Completed production of two Veteran Connector videos to better promote the initiative “Become a Veteran Connector” which serves as a marketing tool to express to audiences the program and to generate interest.
- 2nd Annual Women Veterans Conference in October 2023: Held at the UAW Black Lake Conference Center in Onaway, the retreat-style conference brought together 145 women veterans to hear from a collection of speakers, share their personal stories, and enjoy art and recreational activities.
- Successfully administered the Homelessness Prevention Grant, achieving both a \$500,000 increase in available funding and increased operational flexibility for organizations that provide housing resources.

Focus on Fiscal Year 2025

- Building strategic partnerships with organizations that serve veterans and their families to end and prevent suicide.
- Collect, compile and utilize available data to better understand Michigan service members, veterans and families to tailor outreach and resources to underserved populations in communities at highest risk.
- Utilize the Staff Sgt. Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program to serve Michigan’s veterans and families to access mental health, suicide prevention and homelessness resources.



Veteran Service Officers

Fiscal Year 2024 Successes

- First MVAAs Veteran Service Officer (VSO) placed at a university campus, University of Michigan-Dearborn.
- MVAAs VSOs submitted 147 applications for veterans' benefits, realizing more than \$2 million in recoveries for veterans and their families.

Focus on Fiscal Year 2025

- Host the third Michigan VSO Training Conference in February in Traverse City.
- Working with the Michigan National Guard to place MVAAs VSOs in armories.

Strategic Outreach

Fiscal Year 2024 Successes

- Created partnership with Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), growing opportunities for Michigan employers to reach veterans nationally.
- Health and Wellness is currently building employee resource groups to help bring the team together to discuss agency events, promote cross communication and build healthy team relationships within departments.
- The MVAAs has partnered with the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services' (MDHHS) Older Adult Veteran Liaison to develop Military Cultural Awareness Training.
- The agency's health and welfare analyst along with the Upper Peninsula Veterans Community Action Team has developed partnerships with Delta Dental and My Community Dental Clinics of Michigan. This partnership along with community support has assisted in acquiring veteran dental grants.
- Successful campaign to expand the staffing of MVAAs Veteran Engagement Officers contractors from 6 to 11.
- A one-week, three segment series of conferences:
 - Veteran-Friendly Schools (VFS): Attended by 34 universities and highlighted by 19 professionals speaking on up-to-date and relevant issues

affecting military-connected learners in Michigan.

- Veteran-Friendly Employers (VFE): With about 80 attendees, including more than 70 employers, it was a successful two days of sharing best practices, learning from one another and discovering opportunities to attract, hire and retain veterans for Michigan.
- Inaugural Community Outreach and Regional Engagement (CORE) Symposium: About 50 participants, including Veteran Community Action Team and Coalition Leaders, state and federal partners, and numerous other veteran-serving organizations and individuals attended the inaugural Symposium to discuss best practices and guidance for serving diverse populations of Michigan veterans in our communities across the state.

Focus on Fiscal Year 2025

- Increase collaboration both amongst our internal teams to improve outreach efforts but also our external stakeholders and partners at the local, state and national levels.
- Continue to strengthen the VFE program, working to regain communication with old employers, whilst adding new employers.
- Launch of MEDC initiative with VFE employers and MVAA to attract transitioning service members to Michigan employers.
- Looking into the creation of a "veteran-owned business" entrepreneurship program

to attract transitioning service members with entrepreneurship goals to Michigan.

- Identifying future issues affecting military-connected learners and innovating the solutions that make their lives better, while retaining members in the VFS network and identifying additional eligible schools to recruit into the program.



302 Tracked Events that MVAA Staff Members Were Scheduled to Attend

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Total
Region 1	8	3	8	5	24
Region 2	1	1	3	5	10
Region 3	13	1	5	7	26
Region 4	5	5	6	7	23
Region 5	4	3	6	5	18
Region 6	2	2	4	4	12
Region 7	11	5	18	9	43
Region 8	3	2	9	2	16
Region 9	6	4	5	6	21
Region 10	16	29	31	19	95
Virtual	2	2	1	1	6
Out-of-State	0	1	2	5	8

EDITOR'S NOTE: See State of Michigan Prosperity Regions map on page 35.



HOW YOU CAN HELP



The Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency helps a population of more than 516,000 veterans and their families. With only 61 full-time employees and a budget of just \$9.2 million, we cannot possibly complete this mission alone. If you would like to get involved, here are a few ways you can support MVA in our mission:

- Share our social media content on LinkedIn, X and Facebook.
- Sign up to receive our newsletters and press releases at bit.ly/MVAANewsletter.
- Share 1-800-MICH-VET with everyone in your community and network.
- Sign up to participate in the MVA Buddy to Buddy program. To learn more, visit Michigan.gov/MVAAB2B.
- Encourage your employer to become a Veteran Connector or Veteran-Friendly Employer.
- Become active in your Veterans Community Action Team (VCAT).



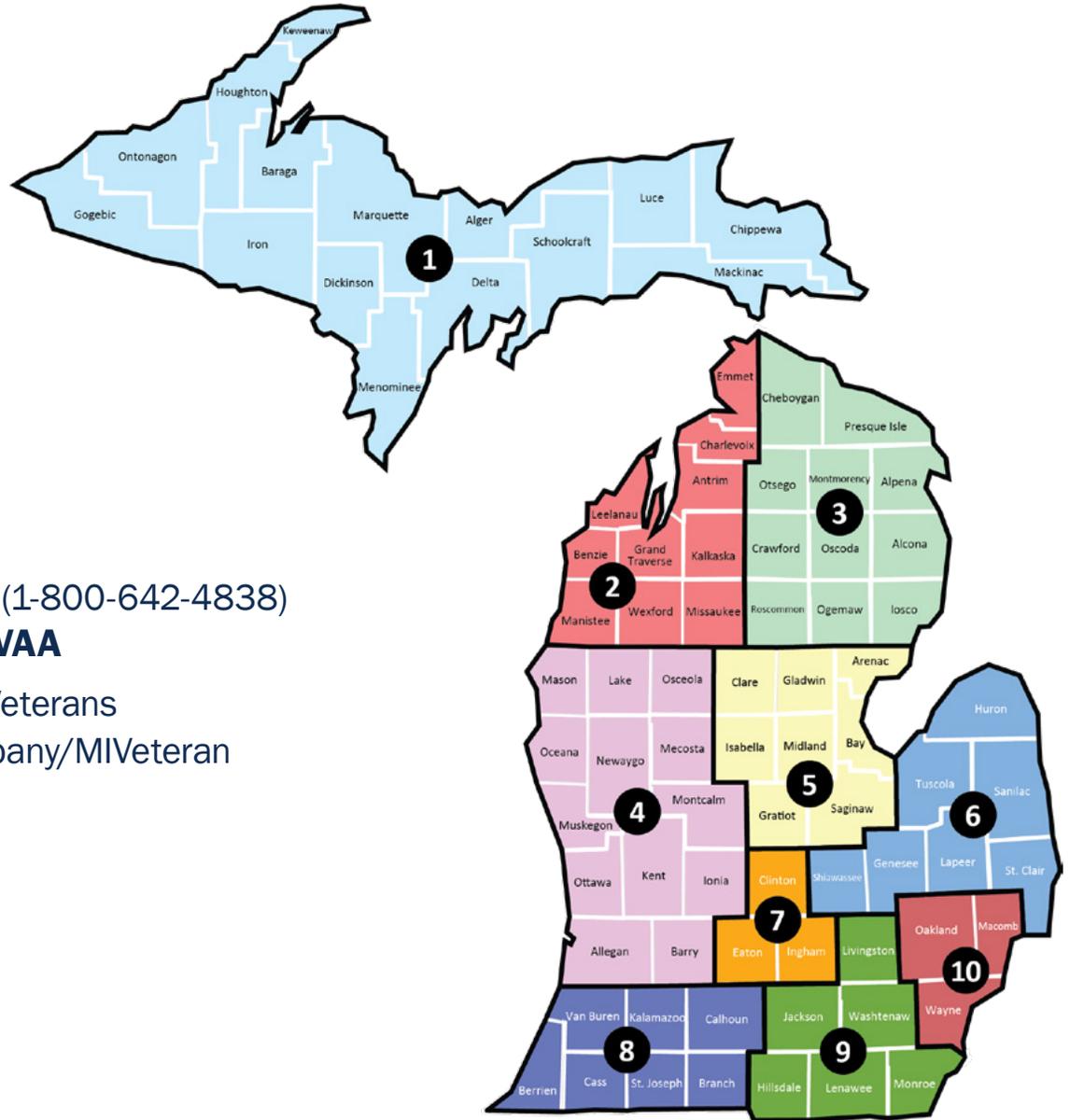
1-800-MICH-VET (1-800-642-4838)

Michigan.gov/MVAA

Facebook.com/MIVeterans

Linkedin.com/company/MIVeteran

X.com/MIVeteran



State of Michigan Prosperity Regions



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Michigan.gov/MVAA