# Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs

## FY 2021 Annual Report • July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021

2021 ANNUAL REPORT

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Army Veteran and current Minnesota National Guard Chaplain (Capt.) Stephanie Christoffels, embraces her three children during a deployment ceremony. Minnesota National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Blair Heusdens

Fellow Minnesotans:

On behalf of the more than 1,500 dedicated employees at the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA), I am pleased to provide this annual report of our agency's activities over the last year.

While Fiscal Year 2021 (July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021) required continued focus on the COVID-19 pandemic, I'm proud that our dedicated team allowed MDVA to remain "open for business" to serve Minnesota Veterans and their families. Areas of particular focus included providing 4,720 COVID grants totaling $6.2 million to Veterans in need and adopting increased safety protocols in our five Minnesota Veterans Homes to protect the health of both Residents and staff.

Reflecting on this last year, I believe resilience played a major role in our successes. We did not allow the pandemic to deter us from our mission of "serving Minnesota Veterans, their dependents and survivors by connecting them with the federal and state care and benefits they have earned."

As we share on the following pages, our work continued on many fronts, serving Veterans who have served from World War II to the Global War on Terrorism. From advocating on behalf of Veterans who have service-related health or disability impacts and supporting their education and employment goals to striving to end homelessness and prevent suicide among Minnesota Veterans, the MDVA has remained focused on our collective commitments.

Growth and progress also continued with expansions beginning in both our Minnesota Veterans Homes and State Veterans Cemeteries. These projects will allow us to better serve Veterans and their families across the entire state of Minnesota.

MDVA is also an employer and we strive to create a work environment that makes us among the best places to work. We believe there is nowhere more rewarding and fulfilling than a career serving our nation's heroes. We are hiring and welcome anyone interested in supporting our mission to learn more at MinnesotaVeteran.org/Careers.

Thank you for your unwavering support of Minnesota's Veterans.

In resilience,

Larry Herke,
Commissioner

# WHO WE ARE

## MISSION

Serving Minnesota Veterans, their dependents and survivors by connecting them with the federal and state care and benefits they have earned.

## VISION

Fulfilling the needs of Minnesota Veterans and their families by providing innovative programs and services to maximize quality of life.

## CORE VALUES

**V**eterans first in our hearts, minds and actions

**E**xcellence is our standard

**T**rust through results

**E**thics is our cornerstone

**R**espect for service (past and present)

**A**dvocacy for care and services

**N**ation-leading services

**S**tewardship of resources

Joyce Johnson, 100-year-old WWII Veteran, and Senior Airman Tyler Ahrendt, 133rd Airlift Wing, were honored as they raised the U.S. flag at the Minnesota Twins 18th annual Armed Forces Appreciation Day. Minnesota National Guard photo by Sgt. Luther C. Talks

The appearance of U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) visual information in this report does not imply or constitute DoD endorsement.

## BY THE NUMBERS

**3**
New Minnesota Veteran Homes under construction

**6**
The number of Continuums of Care (out of 10 total) that have effectively ended homelessness among Veterans in their communities

**20**
The goal percentage to reduce suicide among Minnesota Veterans by 2025

**1,468**
Veterans were connected to potential employers

**1,540**
MDVA employees

**4,720**
COVID-19 grants were approved

**22,000**
Plots to be available at the new State Veterans Cemetery in Redwood Falls

**312,843**
Minnesota Veterans

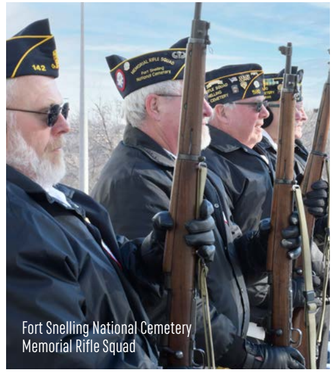
BY THE NUMBERS

# MINNESOTA'S VETERANS

## 312,843 STRONG

The Minnesota Department of Veteran Affairs partners with federal, state and local agencies; non-profits, corporations and Veterans Service Organizations to ensure the needs of Minnesota's Veterans and their families are met. In FY 2021, Minnesota had 312,843 Veterans.

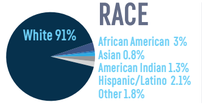
One of these partners, the County Veterans Service Officers (located in each of Minnesota's 87 counties) works directly with Veterans to assist them and their families in obtaining the benefits they have earned through their military service.



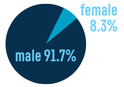
Fort Snelling National Cemetery Memorial Rifle Squad

## VETERANS BY ERA SERVED

## RACE

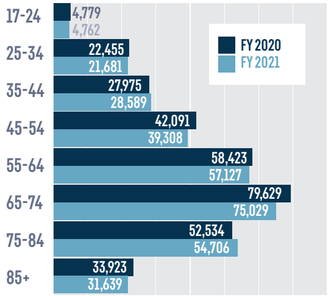



## MN MALE/FEMALE




TOTAL VETERANS:
U.S. 19,541,961
MN 312,843

## VETERANS AGES




## VETERANS BY COUNTY

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| AITKIN | 1,556 | ISANTI | 2,604 | PIPESTONE | 558 |
| ANOKA | 19,911 | ITASCA | 3,810 | POLK | 1,898 |
| BECKER | 2,755 | JACKSON | 660 | POPE | 844 |
| BELTRAMI | 2,967 | KANABEC | 1,341 | RAMSEY | 24,304 |
| BENTON | 2,682 | KANDIYOHI | 2,494 | RED LAKE | 237 |
| BIG STONE | 389 | KITTSON | 297 | REDWOOD | 1,001 |
| BLUE EARTH | 3,874 | KOOCHICHING | 974 | RENVILLE | 946 |
| BROWN | 1,657 | LAC QUI PARLE | 479 | RICE | 3,455 |
| CARLTON | 2,676 | LAKE | 937 | ROCK | 3,455 |
| CARVER | 4,555 | LAKE OF THE WOODS | 288 | ROSEAU | 966 |
| CASS | 2,806 | LE SUEUR | 1,711 | SAINT LOUIS | 15,614 |
| CHIPPEWA | 798 | LINCOLN | 411 | SCOTT | 5,991 |
| CHISAGO | 3,589 | LYON | 1,397 | SHERBURNE | 5,738 |
| CLAY | 3,438 | MAHNOMEN | 297 | SIBLEY | 888 |
| CLEARWATER | 690 | MARSHALL | 542 | STEARNS | 9,493 |
| COOK | 399 | MARTIN | 1,590 | STEELE | 2,214 |
| COTTONWOOD | 693 | MCLEOD | 2,416 | STEVENS | 479 |
| CROW WING | 5,324 | MEEKER | 1,536 | SWIFT | 638 |
| DAKOTA | 25,170 | MILLE LACS | 2,065 | TODD | 1,921 |
| DODGE | 1,164 | MORRISON | 2,556 | TRAVERSE | 248 |
| DOUGLAS | 2,707 | MOWER | 2,473 | WABASHA | 1,588 |
| FARIBAULT | 999 | MURRAY | 577 | WADENA | 1,047 |
| FILLMORE | 1,362 | NICOLLET | 1,751 | WASECA | 1,121 |
| FREEBORN | 2,142 | NOBLES | 979 | WASHINGTON | 13,968 |
| GOODHUE | 3,138 | NORMAN | 418 | WATONWAN | 634 |
| GRANT | 412 | OLMSTED | 8,774 | WILKIN | 341 |
| HENNEPIN | 53,917 | OTTER TAIL | 4,269 | WINONA | 2,800 |
| HOUSTON | 1,315 | PENNINGTON | 903 | WRIGHT | 7,041 |
| HUBBARD | 1,859 | PINE | 2,236 | YELLOW MEDICINE | 595 |

# ENDING VETERANS HOMELESSNESS

## MINNESOTA'S GOAL IS TO BECOME THE 4TH STATE TO END VETERAN HOMELESSNESS.

During FY 2021, MDVA advanced this mission by working with partners to develop effective solutions on an individual level for at-risk Veterans and their families experiencing a housing crisis.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, MDVA partnered with property managers to secure safe and affordable housing for Veterans on our Homeless Veteran Registry. Our staff educated property managers and owners about the Homes for Veterans program that includes the Incentive Fund, Risk Mitigation Fund and Vacancy Relief Fund that increased their interest and confidence in providing housing options.

The good news: by June 30, 2021, six of 10 Minnesota Continuums of Care had effectively ended homelessness among Veterans in their areas. The challenge: the number of individual Veterans experiencing homelessness, mostly in Hennepin and Ramsey Counties, had increased by nearly 10% from the year before. Together with our partners, MDVA remains committed to ending Veteran homelessness across the entire state.

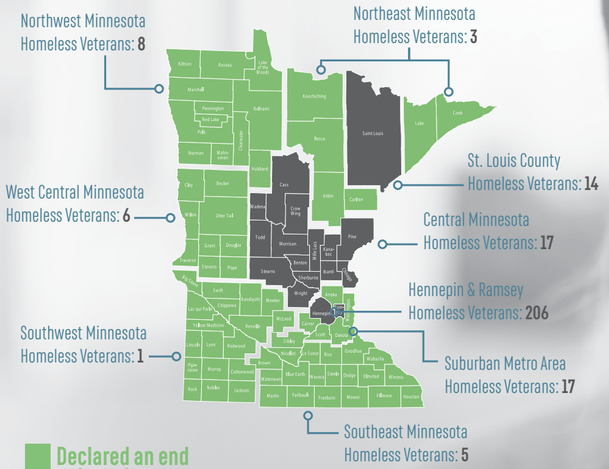
During its 2021 session, the Minnesota Legislature approved funding to support MDVA's efforts to decrease the homeless rate. This included $6.3 million to provide state-level resources, styled after the federal HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) vouchers, primarily to help Veterans and former service members experiencing homelessness who are not eligible for federal resources.

On November 11, 2020, Governor Tim Walz and Rochelle Washington from the Suburban Metro Area Continuum of Care (SMAC) Governing Board, announced that five suburban metro area counties had effectively ended homelessness among Veterans. SMAC includes Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Scott and Washington counties.

***By June 30, 2021, six of 10 Minnesota Continuums of Care had effectively ended homelessness among Veterans in their areas.***

**FY21 Homeless Veterans: 277 · Average Age: 57**

### MINNESOTA'S CONTINUUM OF CARE REGIONS

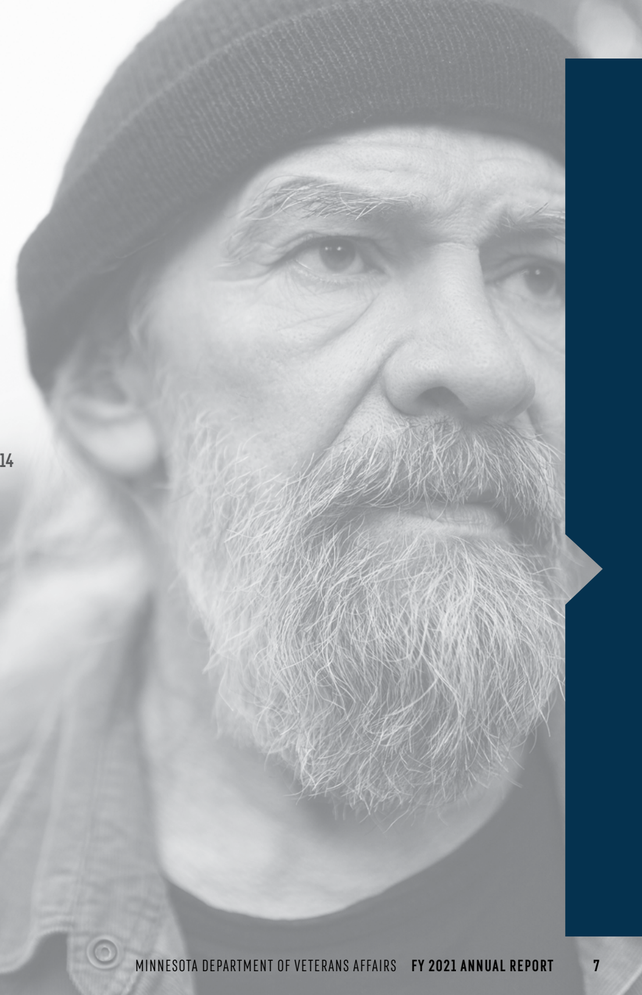



Declared an end to homelessness

Undeclared

(as of June 20, 2021)

*MinnesotaVeteran.org/HomelessRegistry*



# SUICIDE PREVENTION AND AWARENESS

Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among SMVF
Minnesota

## MDVA SEEKS TO REDUCE VETERAN SUICIDE BY **20%** NO LATER THAN 2025

While no agency, organization or group has been able to eliminate Veteran death by suicide, MDVA seeks to reduce Veteran suicide by 20% no later than 2025, while ultimately ending Veteran suicide by 2035.

MDVA is adding two full-time Veteran Suicide Prevention positions who will partner with the Minnesota Department of Health on the upcoming 2023 Minnesota Suicide Prevention Plan. MDVA also leads the Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families by focusing on three priority areas:

1. Identifying service members, Veterans and families and screening them for suicide risk
2. Promoting connectedness and improving care transitions
3. Providing "lethal means" safety through initiatives like gun locks, safety planning and promotion of the Veteran Crisis Line

Veterans Crisis Line
1-800-273-8255 PRESS 1

"Have you or a loved one ever served in the military?" MDVA is working with partners to develop a pilot program in non-Veteran hospitals to implement a new "Ask the Question" initiative. This will help to better identify service members, Veterans and family members with risk factors while connecting them with appropriate benefits and services.

Another priority of the last year was training staff and community stakeholders who serve Veterans. These partners include LinkVet, DEED, law enforcement, community Social Workers, Case Managers and Counselors. Key trainings included "SAVE" (signs of suicide, asking about suicide, validation of feelings, and encouraging help) and "Mental Health First Aid" classes. In collaboration with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), MDVA also assisted with CALM (Counseling on Access to Lethal Means) training for providers who support service members, Veterans and families.

MDVA encourages all to explore resilience, military culture, suicide awareness and prevention educational opportunities through the training program PsychArmor.

*PsychArmor Training*

### Paul Jedlicka learned that it's OK to ask for help when you need it.

After serving in the U.S. Navy as an operations specialist in the 1980s, Paul Jedlicka was medically discharged after an accident crushed his left elbow.

Over time, Paul began to struggle. A lack of care for his mental illness and not knowing where to get help, he became homeless from 2003 to 2009.

By 2010, he began medical treatment to improve his mental health, but he had also started drinking alcohol excessively, and the combination was not good. He attempted suicide twice.

Concerned for his welfare, his family brought him to the Minnesota Veterans Home in Hastings in April 2019.

Paul has experienced many improvements. His shaking has stopped, mental health symptoms decreased and his vision improved. He is now 11 years sober and credits this intervention and his faith in God for helping him adopt a mindset of motivation and resilience.

"If you can find things to focus on, you will get better," he says.

At the Veterans Home, he participates in the work therapy program, helping in the kitchen and supporting the housekeeping team and is active as the commander of the Home's 28-member AMVETS chapter.

"Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem," said Paul. "It may be humbling, but it's important to ask for help."

***"If you can find things to focus on, you will get better."***

*– Paul Jedlicka*

***MinnesotaVeteran.org/EndVetSuicide***

# COVID-19 GRANTS

Total COVID-19 RELIEF:
**$6,235,264**

When the pandemic began, MDVA assisted Veterans by delivering fast and effective COVID-19 financial relief. **In just a few months, MDVA staff processed nearly 7,500 COVID-19-related grant applications.** More than $6.2 million dollars was awarded to Minnesota Veterans and their families.

The initiative offered three different grants:

- The COVID-19 Disaster Relief Grant provided a one-time $1,000 grant to individuals who experience negative financial impact from COVID-19.
- The COVID-19 Special Needs Grant provided up to $3,000 in financial assistance to cover expenses like utility bills, auto insurance, rent/mortgage and medical bills.
- The COVID-19 Distance Learning Support Grant provided a $3,000 grant to individuals with a negative financial impact from implementing or responding to their school district's implementation of distance learning or hybrid model programs.

Air Force Tech Sgt. (retired) Jeff Sommerfield and his partner Ruth Cyphers.

## Grant recipient

In June 2020, Minnesota Veteran Jeff Sommerfield received a call from his employer informing him that his position had been terminated due to "unforeseeable business circumstances related to COVID-19."

He turned to his County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO) in Wabasha County, who helped him determine the grants he was eligible for and start the application process. Initially he qualified for and received the COVID-19 Disaster Relief Grant.

As luck would have it, his septic system needed to be repaired.

Jeff turned to his CVSO again, who helped him apply for the COVID-19 Special Needs Grant. He was approved and received this one-time financial assistance grant, which went directly to multiple vendors helping him pay one month's mortgage, one month's electric, vehicle insurance premiums and the second half of his property taxes.

To pay it forward, Jeff volunteered as a volunteer driver for Wabasha County Veteran Services, driving Veterans to medical appointments at the Minneapolis VA Health Care System.

## STATE SOLDIERS COVID ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

| COVID-19 DISASTER RELIEF GRANT | | COVID-19 DISASTER SPECIAL NEEDS GRANT | | COVID-19 DISTANCE LEARNING SUPPORT GRANT | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total Households: | 6,280 | Total Households: | 274 | Total Households: | 802 |
| Total Veterans: | 6,134 | Total Veterans: | 260 | Total Veterans: | 799 |
| Total Clients Served: | 6,282 | Total Clients Served: | 274 | Total Clients Served: | 802 |
| Total New Applicants: | 5,737 | Total New Applicants: | 212 | Total New Applicants: | 730 |
| Total Dependents Served: | 147 | Total Dependents Served: | 14 | Total Dependents Served: | 3 |
| **Dollars Spent:** | **$3,984,000** | **Dollars Spent:** | **$247,263** | **Dollars Spent:** | **$2,004,000** |

# COVID-19 RESPONSE

The COVID-19 pandemic created unique challenges to all areas of MDVA. Without exception, staff demonstrated resilience and put the Veterans they serve first and ensured that they and loved ones were well informed and not isolated.

The Minnesota Veteran Homes thoughtfully responded to the COVID-19 pandemic to protect both Residents and staff. The Homes attained some of the highest vaccination rates among long-term care facilities in the state. A proactive effort led to vaccination rates of 98% for Residents and 84% for staff at the Minneapolis Veterans Home, and an average of 60% in greater Minnesota Homes.

Critical to the Homes' success in battling the pandemic was the collaboration among the agency's infection preventionist, medical director, quality director and clinical director. The team went above and beyond to ensure that the response to community transmission and outbreak was closely monitored. Swift action was taken to reduce the risk of spread and the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) was in place. Residents, families and staff were educated on infection control protocols on a regular basis. This knowledge was reflected in the positive results and compliments from dozens of regulatory agency surveys that were completed throughout the pandemic.

The last two years have required tenacity, flexibility and creativity. The Minnesota Veterans Homes experienced three distinct outbreaks amongst Residents and staff within the five communities that resulted in high number of staff required to quarantine, all of which required the support of others in the agency. MDVA utilized a model of reassignments from Programs and Services, Central Office and other Homes to ensure Resident care needs were met and operations continued during periods of challenge. **These staff demonstrated the total commitment that all staff in Minnesota Veterans Homes have to the mission of caring for Residents.**

Their efforts did not go unnoticed. An April 2021 visit by Senator Amy Klobuchar to the Minneapolis Veterans Home called attention to the high quality of care in Veterans Homes.

***MinnesotaVeteran.org/COVID***

Minnesota Veterans Home employees were ready to serve during the pandemic.

# NEW HOMES

**MDVA is building three new State Veterans Homes in the communities of Bemidji, Montevideo and Preston.**

MDVA is building three new State Veterans Homes in the communities of Bemidji, Montevideo and Preston. Additional facilities around the Minnesota will help meet the growing need for long-term care while keeping Veterans closer to loved ones. Construction began in fall 2021 with an anticipated 18 -24 month schedule at each location.

The projects were funded from federal (65%) and state and local sources (35%). The three new Homes are receiving more than $80 million in U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) State Home Construction Grants. In 2018, the Minnesota Legislature allocated $33 million toward the cost of the projects.

**MDVA leaders have worked closely with local officials and Veterans' stakeholders.** All three communities have been very engaged, donating land for the building sites and raising additional funds to support amenities for the new Homes.

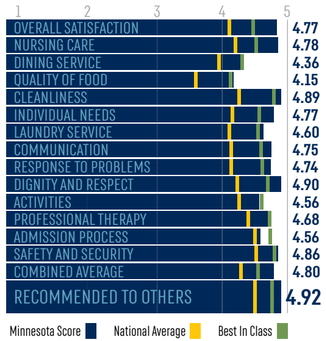
In Bemidji, the proposed facility reflects a cozy, north woods cabin design for the public spaces and 72 Residential rooms. The Montevideo facility will blend into the local prairie style environment with 72 Residential units and a large community meeting room.

In Preston, the facility will enjoy panoramic views from its hilltop location that includes 54 Residential units.

Hiring for the new Homes will begin in late 2022 in preparation for an anticipated late 2023 opening.

*MinnesotaVeteran.org/FutureHomes*

## Current Minnesota Facilities Satisfaction Survey: ★★★★★




> *"We appreciate the Minnesota Legislature's past support of our Veterans and these projects. The approval of the state and federal funds has allowed us to move forward with construction."*
>
> *- MDVA Commissioner, Larry Herke*

Minnesota Veteran Home – Bemidji ground breaking

Minnesota Veteran Home – Preston ground breaking

Minnesota Veteran Home – Montevideo ground breaking



## MINNESOTA VETERANS HOME

# FERGUS FALLS

> *"All I can say is that after investigating several nursing homes around the state, I was told this was the best in the nation. My uncle was a Regional Commander for the American Legion and he told me to bring him here. When we walked in the door that first day in January 2017, I knew it was the best decision. The staff have always given him the best possible care. I personally witnessed the staff caring for him during a difficult situation and they took me aside and reassured me that he was okay and said I didn't need to worry. When I went home, I knew he would be safe. Even during COVID, when I couldn't visit, I was always informed and didn't worry because he was at the Veterans Home, where I knew he was being cared for."*
>
> *- Kathy Rosendahl, daughter of James Netland, an Army Veteran of the Korean War and a Purple Heart Recipient*

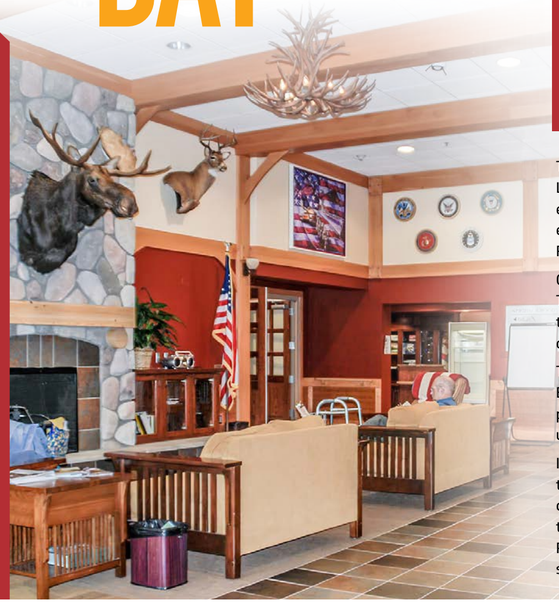
The Minnesota Veterans Home - Fergus Falls is a beautiful 106-bed skilled care facility located in Minnesota's lake country. One area of the facility is fashioned as a Veterans Village that features an Old Town Main Street, and Resident rooms are stylized like individual homes. The Home is co-located with a VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic.

The long-tenured staff includes 55 employees who received Achievement Awards in FY 21 for their hard work during the COVID-19 pandemic. That dedication and commitment is reflected in customer survey results, including earning 15 out of 15 Pinnacle Customer Experience Awards.

During the last year the Home's quality program focused on improvements that allowed staff to **better listen and respond to the needs of Veterans and their families**. Recent updates to Resident rooms and the facility have included the installation of new LED lights, handrails, and digital controls for the heating, ventilation and air conditioning system. The long-awaited greenhouse for Residents was funded with state and local funding, allowing Veterans an opportunity to grow their own produce.

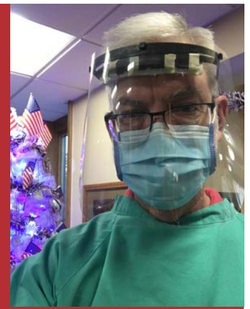
Despite COVID-19, the staff was resilient and hosted fun activities like a Veterans Day and Memorial Day program as well as the annual Safety Fair.

# MINNESOTA VETERANS HOME SILVER BAY



*"The Silver Bay Home staff welcomed me with – socially-distanced open arms – and put me right to work. My primary duties were to assist in the dietary and food services team in the Maple neighborhood. Normally, meals are taken in a shared common room. Due to the pandemic, meals were delivered to the Residents' rooms directly from the kitchenette. The Silver Bay Home staff have the utmost respect and care for their Residents. I wish more people could see what the Homes staff do for our Veterans, both in life, and as they leave this life."*

*– Frank Stever*



Frank Stever is a U.S. Navy Veteran and MDVA Veterans Programs Specialist who volunteered to assist at Silver Bay when help was needed.

The Minnesota Veterans Home - Silver Bay offers a homelike environment with a view of Lake Superior. Four households in a lodge-like setting focus on the individual needs of each Resident. The Home has 83 beds, including two Memory Care households with life enrichment programs that focus on engagement techniques and interventions through Resident programming.

One thing COVID-19 did not impact was customer satisfaction and program expansions. The Home earned numerous Pinnacle Customer Experience Awards. They are improving the HVAC system, which will make individual rooms more comfortable while reducing operating costs, ultimately keeping family costs of care contributions from increasing.

The staff also added "Buddies Forever" Dementia education, a "Buddies Forever" Bathing class, a fall prevention initiative and a fit testing respiratory program. The Home also contracted with Lakeview Rehab for back-up therapy services, Moments Hospice and increased Telehealth.

In late 2020, after a high number of Silver Bay staff and Residents tested positive for COVID-19, MDVA staff were reassigned to provide clinical care to Residents. Thirty staff members responded from across MDVA's team to assist at the Home. In an example of commitment and selflessness, one Licensed Practical Nurse left an evening shift at the Minneapolis Veterans Home and drove straight to Silver Bay to work the night shift.



# MINNESOTA VETERANS HOME LUVERNE

The Minnesota Veterans Home - Luverne is an 85-bed skilled nursing facility, including a 17-bed Memory Care Unit. The long-tenured staff of 190 is made up of full-time, part-time and intermittent employees who all share a passion for caring for Veterans.

The Luverne Veterans Home boasts a 5-star overall staffing rating and a 5-star registered nurse staffing rating by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). The Home also received "Best in Class" customer ratings from the Pinnacle Customer Experience Surveys in all 16 categories.

During the last year, a fall reduction program successfully reduced total falls across the Home. Lighting and painting updates were completed in Resident rooms and community areas, making these spaces more efficient and comfortable.

*"The staff are the best, the food is great and the facility is clean. The staff treat the Veterans with respect, you couldn't find a better place."*

*–Pamela Mueller, Daughter of Veteran, Thomas St. Martin who served as a U.S. Navy Coxswain in WWII*

Resident Dennis Olson, U.S. Air Force Vietnam Veteran who held the rank of Sgt., and Randy Berning, Minnesota Veterans Home - Luverne maintenance worker, making their annual hot sauce.

MINNESOTA VETERANS HOME

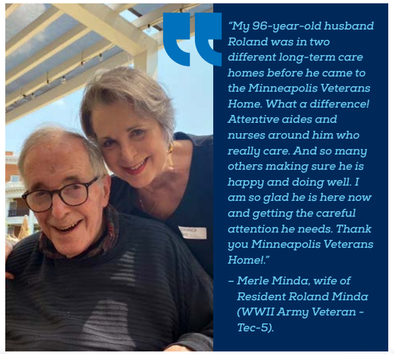
# MINNEAPOLIS

The Minnesota Veterans Home – Minneapolis is situated on 53 acres overlooking the Mississippi River, adjacent to Wabon Park. Three skilled nursing buildings house 100 beds each, all with private rooms and bathrooms.

With 606 staff in 27 departments, Minneapolis is the largest among the Minnesota Veterans Homes. The COVID-19 response included attaining some of the highest Resident and staff vaccination rates among skilled nursing facilities in the state, with 98% for Residents and 84% for staff.

Staff adapted to changes that helped the Home be a supportive place to live and work. The Home was recognized as a 2020 Employer of the Year by Veterans Administration Rehab group and earned numerous Pinnacle Customer Experience Awards. The Minneapolis Veterans Home has also continued to be recognized as a 5-star rated Home by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

Over the last year, the Minnesota Veterans Home - Minneapolis invested in redecorating, painting and installing new flooring in all the Resident rooms in building 21. To honor the legacy of service of Residents, a Branch of Service Medallion wall was also added at the campus North entrance.



*"My 96-year-old husband Roland was in two different long-term care homes before he came to the Minneapolis Veterans Home. What a difference! Attentive aides and nurses around him who really care. And so many others making sure he is happy and doing well. I am so glad he is here now and getting the careful attention he needs. Thank you Minneapolis Veterans Home!"*

*– Merle Minda, wife of Resident Roland Minda (WWII Army Veteran - Tec-5).*

# ADULT DAY CENTER

MDVA manages one of only two Veteran Adult Day Centers in the nation, offering services for Veterans, spouses and Gold Star parents, to provide respite for caregivers. They received a perfect Federal VA clinical survey in 2021 and offer a highly dedicated professional staff specially trained in Dementia/Alzheimer's.

Affectionately called the "Vet's Club," the Minnesota Veterans Home Adult Day Center re-opened in February 2021 after an 11-month closure due to the pandemic. During the closure, the staff created a "Vet's Club on the road!" program to ensure Veterans' needs were met both socially and mentally. They also hosted themed drive-through events for Veterans and their caregivers. Since re-opening the Adult Day program, MDVA now covers the full transportation cost of Metro Mobility to Veterans who need a ride.

Jodi Kritzeck made the "Vet's Club" an amazing therapeutic program. Her tireless dedication to Veterans led to a one-of-a-kind program that has enriched the lives of over 200 Veterans.

## Setting New Goals

Army Veteran Marcus Johnson takes part in the "Work Therapy" program at Minnesota Veterans Home - Domiciliary Program in Minneapolis. He's also one of the first faces for new Residents, as he serves as a Buddy for them.

"It's a place to hang my hat. I don't know where I would be if I hadn't come here," said Marcus.

From 1983 to 1987, this Minnesota native met every one of his goals in the Army. He gained a lot of experience, learned new skills and was able to travel.

After service, he moved around to different jobs; he worked in a machine shop, at the airport, in landscaping and more, but he felt isolated. At one point his elderly parents needed assistance, he moved in with them, but family members noticed his drinking issue and he was told to leave. He moved from place to place, began losing his eyesight and was not able to work. Eventually he went through Rehabilitation at the St. Cloud VA.

Living at the Domiciliary Program, Marcus has grown resilient and developed a stronger bond with his family. He maintains his sobriety by connecting with other Veterans, participating in sobriety networks and attending AA Meetings. His current goal is to regain his independence, with or without eyesight.

# DOMICILIARY PROGRAM

The Domiciliary Program is a supportive program that helps foster a meaningful life for Veterans in a stable, healthy environment. Surrounded by natural beauty at both the Hastings and Minneapolis Veterans Homes, the program offers a full continuum of high-quality care and service focusing on rehabilitation, reintegration into the community and supportive care for optimal enrichment of Residents' lives. The two locations combined offer 195 beds with a dedicated professional staff who provide medical care, mental health care, chemical health care, social services, recreation, vocational support and benefit assistance. A renewed focus on caring for Veterans' sobriety needs has greatly reduced the number of alcohol-related relapses.

# ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Pursuing sustainability goals often aligns with cost avoidance and quality of life improvements for Veterans and their families.

**Sustainability efforts are supported by a collaborative team across the agency.** MDVA's goals align with the overall State of Minnesota Enterprise Sustainability objectives. They are measured regularly as they strive to increase awareness, heighten participation and improve efforts throughout the organization.

During FY 2021, each Minnesota Veterans Home took steps toward their own unique sustainability. Fergus Falls is building a greenhouse for Residents for a "garden to table" nutrition program. In Luverne, corn-based ice melt was used over the winter months to keep entrances clear. Minneapolis initiated a new paper recycling program. The Minneapolis Home has also started a conversion to electric and hybrid vehicles. Meanwhile, Silver Bay purchased an electric club car and electric side-by-side vehicle. The Domiciliary Program also started a HomeGrown Program where Residents are growing vegetables that are served at meals.

MDVA competitively applied for and was awarded a Minnesota Pollution Control Agency grant to further support the healthcare initiative and improve the dining experience for Residents. The MPCA pushes forward this initiative by supporting an integration of technology into the dining experience – allowing the purchase of iPads for a paperless menu system. Residents electronically review the menu and select their meals each day. This also allows the kitchen staff to produce more precise food quantities, resulting in reduced food waste. Dining and meals are an important aspect of a Resident's quality of life and this grant and program supports the drive for higher quality care in Veteran Homes.

Tom Bates, Navy Veteran, tends to the garden at the Hastings Veterans Home.

## MDVA Sustainability Goals:

**Procurement**

**GOAL: Achieve 25%** of total spending on priority contracts is sustainably purchased by 2025.

**Energy**

**86%** OF GOAL

**GOAL:** A 30% reduction of energy consumption per square foot by 2027 relative to a 2013 baseline.

**Water Consumption**

**40%** OF GOAL

**GOAL:** A 15% reduction in water use by 2025 relative to a 2017 baseline.

**Fleet**

**115%** OF GOAL

**GOAL:** A 30% reduction in fleet fossil fuel consumption by 2027 relative to a 2018 baseline.

**Solid Waste**

**31%** OF GOAL

**GOAL:** A 75% combined recycling and composting rate of solid waste by 2030.

**Greenhouse Gas**

**15%** OF GOAL

**GOAL:** A 30% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2025 relative to a 2005 baseline.



# MEMORIAL AFFAIRS AND CEMETERIES

MDVA currently offers three State Veteran Cemeteries for Veterans, spouses and eligible family members. Last fiscal year, 590 were laid to rest in Little Falls, 197 in Preston and 171 in Duluth. Minnesota State Veterans Cemeteries continued to operate at full staffing levels, despite the challenges and restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Minnesota's Veteran Cemeteries are among the best in the nation.**

A survey, sponsored by the National Cemetery Administration Office of Finance and Planning and conducted by the Library of Congress, given to next of kin and funeral directors in June-July 2020, indicated Minnesota's Veterans Cemeteries are among the best in the nation. Survey results:

**98.7%** agreed or strongly agreed the quality of service was excellent

**100%** agreed or strongly agreed the overall appearance was excellent

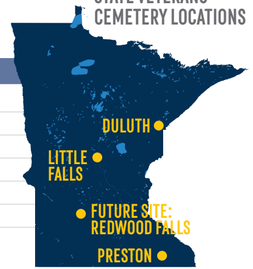
**99.6%** would recommend Minnesota State Veterans Cemeteries to other Veteran families

Demonstrating resilience as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, live stream video technology will be installed at each Cemetery to allow committal services to be shared online with families. Additionally, video teleconference technology at each Cemetery will improve staff interaction with other locations and MDVA leadership.

*MinnesotaVeteran.org/Cemeteries*

| LAID TO REST | LITTLE FALLS | PRESTON | DULUTH |
|---|---|---|---|
| Laid to Rest | 590 | 197 | 171 |
| Veterans | 386 | 158 | 136 |
| Dependents | 204 | 39 | 35 |
| Casket Burials | 188 | 24 | 19 |
| In-Ground Cremation | 250 | 128 | 77 |
| Columbariums | 152 | 45 | 75 |
| Total Since Established | 8,666 | 768 | 439 |

STATE VETERANS CEMETERY LOCATIONS




## The Minnesota State Veterans Cemetery – Redwood Falls will be the fourth State Veterans Cemetery in Minnesota.

It will serve up to 22,000 Veterans, their spouses and eligible family members.

The process began more than a decade ago in May 2009, when Gov. Tim Pawlenty signed the capital investment bill that included a new State Veterans Cemetery in Redwood County.

The search began for land and funding; Redwood County Commissioners entered into a purchase agreement with landowner Robert LeSage in 2014. The county acquired just over 63 acres of farmland from Robert and another four acres from a neighbor. Seeking to add to the aesthetics of the Cemetery, Robert donated an additional 14 acres of scenic land complete with a creek to surround the Cemetery's south side with natural beauty. Over the next six years, a road was put in and the planning for the cemetery moved forward.

In FY 2021, the National Cemetery Administration awarded a Federal grant to MDVA to support construction of a new cemetery in Redwood Falls.

MDVA hosted a groundbreaking event in the fall of 2021. Construction is projected to be completed by fall of 2022 and a dedication event will be schedule for May 2023.

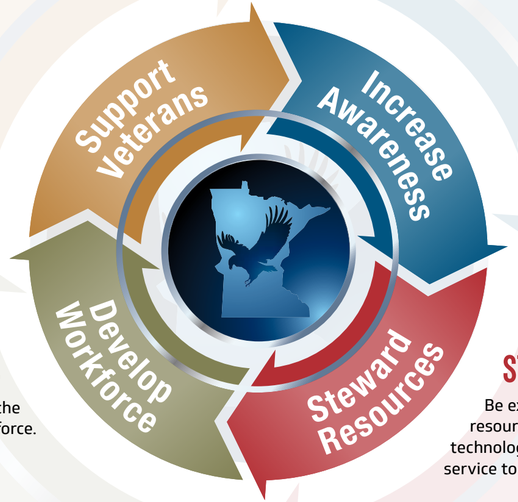
Robert LeSage enlisted in the Navy, then served with the Marines in San Diego, Calf. He has already announced that he plans for his final resting place to be the State Veterans Cemetery in Redwood Falls.

# STRATEGIC PLAN

The goals and objectives will enhance the smooth delivery of programs, services and care to Minnesota Veterans and their families.

An opportunity for improvement is fully realizing the overall effectiveness and impact of MDVA. MDVA has a Strategic Plan that will act as a roadmap and guide the Department through the opportunities and challenges over the next years. The plan focuses on providing a continuum of support to Minnesota Veterans and families, increasing the Department's visibility and relevance as a high-quality agency, practicing effective stewardship of resources, and growing and sustaining the quality of its workforce.

MDVA continues to execute its Strategic Plan, including the following four strategic goals:




## STRATEGIC GOAL #1

Ensure a seamless continuum of support through collaborative relationships at a federal, state, and community level that addresses the evolving needs of Veterans and their families.

## STRATEGIC GOAL #2

Increase Veteran awareness and participation in MDVA healthcare, programs and services.

## STRATEGIC GOAL #3

Be exemplary stewards of natural resources, financial resources, and technology resources to improve our service to Veterans and families.

## STRATEGIC GOAL #4

Develop, sustain and retain the quality of our workforce.

MDVA

Fiscal Year 2020–2027
Strategic Plan

A Minnesota veteran at the 9/11 Day of Remembrance event at the Minnesota State Capitol. Photo by Lou Michaels.

Linda Woods Photo by Sgt. Dommnique Washington

# EXEMPLARY STEWARDS

We are exemplary stewards of natural resources, financial resources and technology resources to improve our service to Veterans and families.

MDVA provides funding to partners that assist in the goal of serving Veterans and their families. Funding is provided both by the Minnesota State Legislature and by Minnesota residents who purchase the Support Our Troops (SOT) license plates. In FY 2021, MDVA provided the following grants on behalf of Minnesota's Veterans:

### COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER (CVSO) GRANTS

MDVA was awarded $1.1 million in funds from the Legislature and distributed **$965,000** to Minnesota's 87 counties, which includes $50,000 for the Minnesota Association of County Veteran Service Officers. More than $98,830 was also invested in training for the CVSO team.

### VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATION (VSO) GRANTS

Nearly **$459,000** was dispersed to enable the beneficial work of Minnesota VSOs. Last year, the VSO's received:

**$130,420** for the American Legion

**$129,908** for the Veterans of Foreign Wars

**$103,140** for Disabled American Veterans

**$47,858** for Vietnam Veterans of America

**$45,684** for Paralyzed Veterans of America

**$1,848** for AMVETS

**MINNESOTA ASSISTANCE COUNCIL FOR VETERANS (MACV) GRANTS** - MDVA annually partners with MACV with a $750,000 grant which funds Operations and Programming to help to achieve our shared goal of ending Veteran homelessness in Minnesota.

### SUPPORT OUR TROOPS (SOT) GRANTS

Support Our Troops (SOT) Grants are funded by special revenue generated by license plate sales. In FY 2021, this program yielded $614,605.

The COVID-19 pandemic temporarily halted MDVA's SOT/competitive grant program, therefore no new SOT/competitive grants were awarded in FY 2021. Grant payments in the previous period for the amount of $556,376 were as follows:

**$339,234** VETERAN PROGRAMS

**$187,192** VSO PROGRAMS

**$25,000** MINNESOTA MILITARY RADIO HOUR

**$4,950** SPECIAL FAST-TRACK GRANT

University of Minnesota, Twin Cities Joint Service ROTC Cadets assist with the 9/11 Day of Remembrance event at the Minnesota State Capitol.



# VETERAN EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION PROGRAMS

MDVA is committed to providing Veterans with a seamless transition from military service to sustainable civilian employment. Individual education and employment are recognized to prevent homelessness.

In response to the pandemic, the Education and Employment team streamlined processes to reduce barriers for Veterans applying for school or work. **They also participated in five career fairs that connected 1,468 Veterans with 421 employers looking to hire Veterans.**

MDVA's Higher Education Program continues to be a national model, supporting colleges and universities throughout Minnesota with staff who help Veterans access educational benefits. On-campus Veterans Resource Centers provide student Veterans with enrollment assistance and opportunities for interaction and networking with Veteran peers.

MDVA is also a resource for private businesses and public employers, assisting them in the hiring and training of Veterans. The MDVA Education and Employment Team works closely with federal and state agencies, as well as employers and trade organizations, to achieve goals of maintaining a Veteran unemployment rate under 4%, increasing licensing and certification awareness and integrating Veterans with the trade industry. The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development partners closely with MDVA to ensure that all Veterans have access to education and employment.

The Veterans Preference Act (VPA) provides Veterans a limited preference in seeking Minnesota state and local government employment and protection against unfair termination or layoff. It also allows for Veteran-owned and service-disabled Veteran-owned small businesses to receive up to a 6% preference for state and local government contracts. MDVA's role is to educate County Veteran Service Officers, as well as to provide Veterans and public employers information regarding the implementation of VPA. In FY 2021, MDVA helped 67 Veterans, 29 employers and verified 109 Veteran-owned small businesses.

### FY21 MN GI BILL

**1,639** PARTICIPANTS

GI BILL BENEFITS FOR:

| | |
|---|---|
| HIGHER EDUCATION | 1,250 |
| OJT/APPRENTICESHIPS | 72 |
| LICENSE & CERTIFICATION | 195 |

### TOTAL MN GI BILL FUNDS

**$3,218,224**

| | |
|---|---|
| HIGHER EDUCATION | $2,490,349 |
| OJT/APPRENTICESHIPS | $639,000 |
| LICENSE & CERTIFICATION | $88,875 |

### STATE APPROVING AGENCY (SAA) IN MINNESOTA

FY21 FACILITIES

| | |
|---|---|
| TOTAL MN APPROVED FACILITIES | 361 |
| TOTAL PUBLIC FACILITIES | 271 |
| TOTAL PRIVATE FACILITIES | 90 |
| NEW FACILITIES THIS YEAR | 5 |
| COMPLIANCE SURVEYS PERFORMED | 34 |

FY21 PROGRAMS

| | |
|---|---|
| NEW PROGRAMS ADDED | 751 |
| PROGRAMS ELIMINATED | 624 |
| TOTAL PROGRAM ACTIONS TAKEN | 1,375 |

## Next Level Support & Networking

After completing a PhD in Higher Educational Policy, Jeremy Williams found himself on back-to-back full-time military assignments as a Medical Operation Officer with the Army Reserves in Europe and Washington, D.C.

Back home in Minnesota, this resilient military Veteran felt underemployed. He sought out ways to apply his education and military experience for new career opportunities.

***"The MDVA Career Fair gave me opportunities I wouldn't have otherwise had,"*** said Jeremy. "Going into chat rooms with Veteran recruiting staff allowed me to get an inside perspective on what is available."

MDVA gave him the next level support he was looking for and connected him to a network of professionals who are assisting him during his career change. A 20-year Veteran, Jeremy plans to continue his service in the Reserves.

# CLAIMS & FIELD OPERATIONS

MDVA outreach representatives advocated for Veterans in FY 2021 by providing personal case development, seeking benefits and tracking 239 State and 815 Federal claims. They provided professional education and training to Minnesota County Veteran Service Officers (CVSO) while the resilient team adapted to the environment – both virtually and physically.

Field Operations focuses on three programs: Women Veterans, Gold Star Families and Tribal Veterans. MDVA's Women Veteran Coordinator performed 385 contacts, filing 33 State and Federal benefits claims on behalf of women Veterans. Meanwhile, the Gold Star Family coordinator continued to provide support to families despite COVID-19. The Tribal Veterans Service Officer program set the national standard for providing Veteran services on Tribal lands.

## TOTAL CLAIMS FY21

FEDERAL CLAIMS 815 STATE CLAIMS 239

TOTAL MDVA CLAIMS ON BEHALF OF VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES

FY20 1,915 FY21 1,054

## A Champion for Women's Rights

Brigadier Gen. Evelyn Patricia "Pat" Foote has been a champion for women's rights in the military and beyond. She served from 1959 to 1989, rising to the rank of brigadier general in 1986, and holds many firsts for women in the U.S. Army.

Her service began at age 29 in the Women's Army Corps, where she was just one of 28 women to graduate in her class. She was told once by a brigade commander, "I don't really approve of the idea of women in the Army," prior to her taking over the Women's Army Corps (WAC) company at Fort Belvoir. Although faced with discrimination, Foote was able to pave the way for women in the military.

She was the first female public affairs officer in Vietnam in 1967, the first female faculty member appointed to the U.S. Army War College in 1979, the first female brigade commander in Europe and the first female Inspector General in the Army in 1986.

Following her retirement in 1989, Brig. Gen. Foote moved to Minnesota. However, retirement was not the end of her service. In 1996, she served as Vice Chair of the Secretary of the Army's Senior Review Panel on Sexual Harassment. From 1998 to 2007, she served as president of the Alliance for National Defense, a non-profit organization that supports women in the military. She has remained an active spokesperson concerning the role of women in the military services and demonstrated that commitment by speaking at the 2018 Minnesota Women's Veteran Program.

# DEDICATED STAFF

MDVA is passionate about investing in employees, supervisors and managers so that they have the necessary skills to take care of our state's Veterans. **The agency offers generous State of Minnesota employee benefits, competitive pay, continuing education and a mission that instills pride.** Ultimately, working for MDVA is about caring for Veterans and having the opportunity to serve those that have served.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, MDVA found ways to withstand staffing shortages in Veterans Homes. Minnesota Veterans Homes have creatively worked to address the long-term care workforce shortage experienced around the country. Specifically focusing on retention activities such as the Heroes Caring for Heroes publication, community engagement activities, employee wellness program and Resident focused activities with staff. These innovative retention strategies coupled with recruitment activities such as job fairs, partnerships with clinical education institutions, and the use of social media ensure we are competitive into the future.

### BREAKOUT BY JOB TYPE

| DIVISION/HOME | EMPLOYEES |
|---|---|
| Accounting & Finance/Homes | 39 |
| Administrative Support/Customer Service | 76 |
| Building, Grounds & Maintenance | 165 |
| Chaplains | 4 |
| Dietary | 173 |
| Human Resources, Safety & Training/Healthcare | 31 |
| Licensed Practical Nurses | 134 |
| Management & Leadership/Healthcare | 29 |
| Nurse Management | 35 |
| Nursing Assistants/Aides | 490 |
| Pharmacy | 14 |
| Physicians | 3 |
| Public Relations/Marketing/Healthcare | 11 |
| Registered Nurses | 141 |
| Resident Therapists | 69 |
| Skilled Craft | 42 |
| Social Work | 18 |
| Total Employees | 1,540 |

### PART AND FULL-TIME EMPLOYEE BREAKOUT

| DIVISION/HOME | PT | FT | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|
| Central Office | 8 | 57 | 65 |
| Fergus Falls Veterans Home | 129 | 84 | 213 |
| Hastings Veterans Home | 20 | 71 | 91 |
| Luverne Veterans Home | 188 | 19 | 207 |
| Minneapolis Veterans Home | 252 | 395 | 647 |
| Mpls. Veterans Home - Adult Day Ctr. | 3 | 7 | 10 |
| Programs and Services | 5 | 103 | 108 |
| Silver Bay Veterans Home | 87 | 76 | 163 |
| Veterans Healthcare Central Office | 6 | 30 | 36 |
| Total Employees | 698 | 842 | 1,540 |

| DIVISION/HOME | PT | FT | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|
| Programs and Services | 5 | 103 | 108 |
| Central Office | 8 | 57 | 65 |
| Veterans Healthcare Central Office & Homes | 615 | 662 | 1367 |
| Total Employees | 628 | 822 | 1,540 |

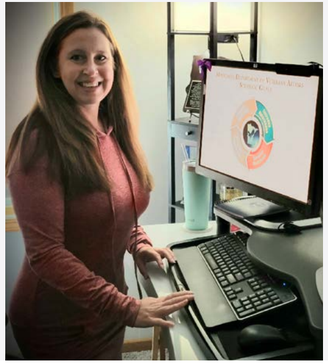
## Adapting to Work From Home

Jennell Stai is an Intermediate Office Administrative Specialist. Her job is to ensure that MDVA Staff and Minnesota County Veteran Service Officers have the necessary resources and tools to assist Veterans and families with their State and Federal benefits.

Before COVID-19, Jennell worked in the Whipple Building. When she moved to working remotely, the technical transition was the most challenging change, for not only Jennell, but many staff as they learned to use new applications to communicate.

"We have all had to deal with a lot of changes in the office and in our homes over the past 18 months," said Jennell. Demonstrating resilience and care for others, Jennell reached out to co-workers. Through friendly conversations and a little bit of tech support, she helped her team reconnect both literally and figuratively.

"As a team, we have overcome difficulties and minor hiccups," said Jennell. "Pulling together when times were tough is what we did best."



# STATE BENEFITS

Working closely with federal, state and community partners, MDVA state benefits supplement existing programs, as well as address the needs specific to Minnesota Veterans. In any given year, this enormous effort addresses immediate gaps in federal Veterans services by providing Minnesota Veterans and their families with compassionate resources to help with their mental, physical and financial needs until their crisis is resolved or long-term assistance can be acquired. With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this responsibility was expertly carried out by the agile State Benefits Division.

## MINNESOTA SERVICE CORE
(Casework, Outreach, Referral and Education)

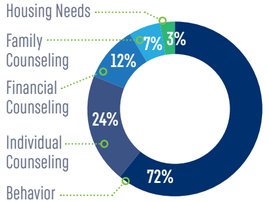
**701**
Veterans sought CORE Assistance in FY 21

**10,304**
Total Hours of Service

### COUNSELING

| | |
|---|---|
| Veterans | 510 |
| WWII | 1 |
| Kosovo | 5 |
| Korean | 9 |
| Gulf | 63 |
| OEF/OIF | 295 |
| Vietnam | 163 |
| Peacetime | 165 |
| Spouses Served | 129 |
| Children Served | 61 |
| TOTAL SERVED: | 701 |

### TYPE OF SERVICE




### AGES SERVED

| | |
|---|---|
| Ages 0-19 | 62 |
| Ages 20-39 | 186 |
| Ages 40-49 | 102 |
| Ages 50-59 | 121 |
| Ages 50-69 | 93 |
| Ages 70-79 | 117 |
| Ages 80+ | 20 |

### FUNDING
TOTAL FUNDS COLLECTED: **$133,000**

### SATISFACTION

| | |
|---|---|
| Services Helpful: | 100% |
| Treated with Respect: | 100% |
| Would Use Again: | 100% |
| Would Recommend: | 100% |

## STATE SOLDIER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM BY COUNTY

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| AITKIN | $16,484 | ISANTI | $85,239 | PIPESTONE | $2,000 |
| ANOKA | $203,616 | ITASCA | $185,683 | POLK | $36,468 |
| BECKER | $36,443 | JACKSON | $6,620 | POPE | $15,176 |
| BELTRAMI | $24,602 | KANABEC | $33,665 | RAMSEY | $322,814 |
| BENTON | $64,569 | KANDIYOHI | $139,809 | RED LAKE | $0 |
| BIG STONE | $5,872 | KITTSON | $6,556 | REDWOOD | $24,078 |
| BLUE EARTH | $134,384 | KOOCHICHING | $18,561 | RENVILLE | $39,049 |
| BROWN | $44,360 | LAC QUI PARLE | $48,320 | RICE | $54,801 |
| CARLTON | $36,955 | LAKE | $6,973 | ROCK | $6,947 |
| CARVER | $83,778 | LAKE OF THE WOODS | $0 | ROSEAU | $40,344 |
| CASS | $48,439 | LE SUEUR | $44,938 | SAINT LOUIS | $206,009 |
| CHIPPEWA | $30,311 | LINCOLN | $5,000 | SCOTT | $78,915 |
| CHISAGO | $38,580 | LYON | $45,363 | SHERBURNE | $165,137 |
| CLAY | $140,320 | MAHNOMEN | $2,208 | SIBLEY | $13,249 |
| CLEARWATER | $24,611 | MARSHALL | $8,448 | STEARNS | $199,248 |
| COOK | $7,000 | MARTIN | $9,651 | STEELE | $44,611 |
| COTTONWOOD | $20,952 | MCLEOD | $88,401 | STEVENS | $3,381 |
| CROW WING | $169,276 | MEEKER | $79,939 | SWIFT | $40,403 |
| DAKOTA | $445,039 | MILLE LACS | $33,969 | TODD | $39,536 |
| DODGE | $30,719 | MORRISON | $63,647 | TRAVERSE | $16,967 |
| DOUGLAS | $29,789 | MOWER | $42,384 | WABASHA | $21,214 |
| FARIBAULT | $39,717 | MURRAY | $11,896 | WADENA | $27,766 |
| FILLMORE | $4,769 | NICOLLET | $136,344 | WASECA | $42,460 |
| FREEBORN | $44,590 | NOBLES | $9,400 | WASHINGTON | $202,198 |
| GOODHUE | $32,727 | NORMAN | $1,295 | WATONWAN | $13,891 |
| GRANT | $4,243 | OLMSTED | $185,689 | WILKIN | $0 |
| HENNEPIN | $459,391 | OTTER TAIL | $56,575 | WINONA | 18,510 |
| HOUSTON | $10,730 | PENNINGTON | $2,378 | WRIGHT | $124,839 |
| HUBBARD | $15,569 | PINE | $43,552 | YELLOW MEDICINE | $36,000 |

### LINKVET INQUIRIES

| | |
|---|---|
| **3,394** Phone Calls Received | **99%** Service Calls Resolved |
| **1,132** Outbound Calls | **184** Calls Without Merit |
| **7,259** Total Inquiries | **-1,227** Decrease from FY 20 |
| **1,971** Web Online Chats | **762** Email Inquiries |

### TOPICS OF INQUIRY

## SSAP FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Dental - 824 served
**$620,182**

Optical - 523 served
**$117,170**

Special Needs - 270 served
**$812,213**

HUD/VASH - 3 served
**$1,247**

Subsistence - 153 served
**$32,821**

Education Veteran - 2 served
**$750**

Education Dependant - 36 served
**$19,674**

COVID-19 Disaster Relief Grant - 1,074 served
**$1,937,000**

COVID-19 Distance Learning Support Grant - 668 served
**$2,004,000**

COVID-19 Special Needs Grant - 136 served
**$184,714**

Total FY 2021
**$5,729,772**

Total Dependants Served: **410**
Total Veterans Served: **3,057**
Total Clients Served: **3,467**

## Caring for Veterans in their final breaths

Julie Luchsinger is the Therapeutic Recreation Director at the Minnesota Veterans Home - Silver Bay. The COVID-19 pandemic tested her resilience, but she went above and beyond to stay with Residents during some of the most challenging of times – sitting with them at their bedside and facilitating communication opportunities with families.

"One was a Resident who I came to know well," said Julie. "I also know his wife, as she spent more time with him in the Memory Care Unit where he resided than she spent at her own home. She always planned to be with him when he died."

"But COVID-19 happened and she was allowed a brief visit, due to infection control protocols, and then I 'tagged her out.' I promised I would stay until his last breath. I played music, read to him and simply sat holding his hand. I remembered a recent article about his son's childhood in a Facebook post. I looked it up on the iPad and began reading it to him."

Julie read the article, occasionally seeing a glimmer in his previously unresponsive eye, and she played music by Fleetwood Mac. She knew he preferred it to the oldies because his son played in a band. She stayed with him as the song "Don't Stop" played and he gently passed away.

Later, Julie shared this story with his wife Sheila. She was comforted to know her husband had someone he knew with him in his last moments.

"COVID-19 changed the way we did our jobs at the Veterans Home, but it only made our commitment to be with the dying stronger," said Julie.

Sheila Leppala and Julie Luchsinger, Recreation Director. Sheila is holding a photo of her late husband Wayne Dahl, WWII Army Veteran and his first great-grandchild Henry Thesing. Photo taken in the front of Wayne and Sheila's home at the Lakeview National Golf Course.

# LEGISLATIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND GOALS

## Accomplishments

The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs had a very successful 2021 Legislative session.

New state funding was put in place to secure an end to Veteran homelessness and suicide in Minnesota. This includes $6.33 million in the biennium to provide State vouchers and supportive services to help homeless Veterans who are not eligible for Federal resources. It also included $1.65 million in the biennium to establish an office to provide coordination and collaboration on Minnesota's efforts to prevent Veteran suicide.

Also included in the State Government Finance bill was an appropriation of $4.5 million to fully fund the new Redwood Falls State Veterans Cemetery.

The landmark 'Veterans Restorative Justice Act' is a new statutory section providing a specialized sentencing structure for Veterans who are found to have committed criminal offenses as a result of a service-related condition. This statewide standard for sentencing justice-involved Veterans in Minnesota courts has been a priority of Veterans groups since 2017, with a bill first receiving introduction in 2019.

Special Session House File 13 included the Legacy bill that funds projects from the outdoor heritage, clean water, parks and trails and arts and cultural heritage funds that were established by the Legacy Amendment in 2008. Several Veterans provisions were included:

- State matching grants for Veteran memorials
- Funds for the Disabled Veterans Rest Camp on Big Marine Lake in Washington County
- Money to restore the Veterans Memorial Park in Kasson
- Funding to the Association of Minnesota Public Educational Radio Stations (AMPERS) for its Veterans' Voices program to educate and engage communities with an emphasis on the untold stories of Veterans from diverse communities.

Continued on next page

Sen. Amy Klobuchar visits Minnesota Veteran Home – Minneapolis to thank MDVA staff for their support during the COVID-19 pandemic.

F-16 fighter jets from the 148th fighter wing, Duluth, performed a flyover during the 9/11 Day of Remembrance event at the Minnesota State Capitol.

Finally, the Tax bill, Special Session House File 9 included two Veterans items. The bill now excludes Veteran disability compensation from the definition of "income" used for purposes of the homestead credit refund and renter's property tax refund. The bill also changed the application deadline for the disabled Veteran's homestead market value exclusion to Dec. 31.

## Goals

The primary focus for the next legislative session is to secure capital investment funding for existing Veterans Homes and State Veterans Cemeteries, and additional construction funds for the three new Veteran Homes in Bemidji, Montevideo and Preston.

MDVA will also be pursuing some supplemental budget funding for the agency and, where possible, working to support the legislative priorities of our partners and stakeholders to include the Minnesota Commanders' Task Force (CTF) and Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Officers (MACVSO).

# FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

**FISCAL YEAR 2021:**
JULY 1, 2020-JUNE 30, 2021

## EXPENDITURES

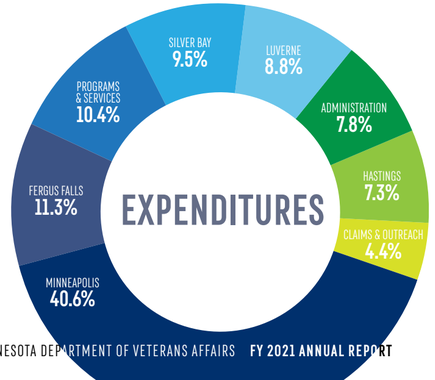
Total Expenditures.....**$151,592,060**

| VETERANS HOMES | | |
|---|---|---|
| MINNEAPOLIS | $61,490,453 | 40.6% |
| FERGUS FALLS | $17,070,416 | 11.3% |
| SILVER BAY | $14,379,036 | 9.5% |
| LUVERNE | $13,345,851 | 8.8% |
| HASTINGS | $11,130,285 | 7.3% |
| **PROGRAMS AND SERVICES** | $15,695,553 | 10.4% |
| **ADMINISTRATION** | $11,865,050 | 7.8% |
| **CLAIMS AND OUTREACH** | $6,615,416 | 4.4% |

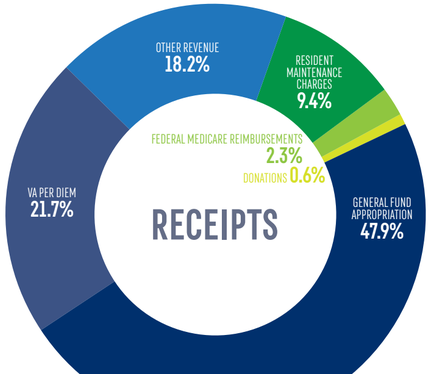
## RECEIPTS

Total Receipts.....**$158,298,700**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **GENERAL FUND APPROPRIATION**<br>HEALTHCARE $57,761,000 • PROGRAMS $18,153,000 | $75,941,000 | 47.9% |
| **VA PER DIEM** | $34,310,101 | 21.7% |
| **RESIDENT MAINTENANCE CHARGES** | $14,855,333 | 9.4% |
| **FEDERAL MEDICARE REIMBURSEMENTS** | $3,590,938 | 2.3% |
| **OTHER REVENUE**<br>HEALTHCARE $20,287,660 • PROGRAMS $8,544,579 | $28,832,239 | 18.2% |
| **DONATIONS**<br>HEALTHCARE $831,568 • PROGRAMS $66,121 | $897,689 | 0.6% |




**CAPITAL CONSTRUCTION**
FY21 **$14,200,000**



## DO YOU KNOW OF A VETERAN WHO NEEDS HELP?

Call 1-888-LINKVET

or visit MinnesotaVeteran.org

Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs
20 West 12th Street, St. Paul, MN 55155
651-296-2562 • MinnesotaVeteran.org