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1,650 Attend Veterans Benefits “Supermarket”

SCHOFIELD, Wis. – Veterans of WWII, the Korean War, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf War, and current military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq came to Schofield this weekend from as far away as Bayfield and Green Bay to attend a state government hosted “Supermarket of Veterans Benefits” to learn about and apply for an array of federal and state veterans benefits and programs.

“It’s good to see government and veterans affairs reaching out to veterans who served their country,” said State Senator Russ Decker (D-Schofield), who attended the event on both days. “I’m thankful that many of these veterans are able to get the help they have coming,” said Decker.

The two day event, hosted by the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) at the D.C. Everest high school in Schofield, Wisconsin, is part of a broader WDVA outreach and marketing campaign called “I Owe You” that is aimed at educating and assisting more state veterans in accessing federal and state veterans programs for which they may be eligible.

“This is such an important effort,” said WDVA Secretary John A. Scocos. “The department is continuing the legacy in creative ways to reach out to veterans and their families to help ensure they receive the benefits and services they may not even know they’re entitled to,” said Scocos.

The “I Owe You” program has also generated successes in particularly measurable ways. Data released by the VA and WDVA in early October showed a \$200 million annual increase in federal VA dollars coming into Wisconsin since the program was first launched three years ago by Raymond G. Boland, Wisconsin’s popular and longest serving Secretary of veterans affairs. Prior to the program’s inception, the level of federal VA dollars coming into the state had stagnated, with a \$4 million dollar decline in the year immediately preceding the beginning of the “I Owe You” campaign.

More than 1,650 veterans and family members came from across the northern portion of the state to the WDVA Supermarket to receive information about federal VA health care benefits, state and federal home mortgage and home improvement loans, education and job training grants, and a host of information about other services and benefits that many professed to not know anything about.

(more)

Wausau veteran Tony Hiebl, a peacetime veteran who served in the armed forces in the late 1950's, said, "Through the county veterans office I was able to get a free copy of my DD-214 (discharge papers) and everything went from there, but I'm so glad that WDVA put this together because a lot of people are missing out on some benefits they didn't know about and they didn't know where to go to find out about them."

"Though the Supermarket got off to a little slower start than we had hoped due to the rain and cold, we assisted more than 600 attendees on Friday alone," said WDVA Secretary Scocos. Attendance on Saturday boomed, topping the earlier day's attendance not even two hours into the morning.

Vietnam Veteran Roger Olshanski, of Racine and Wausau, received helpful information for two generations of veterans – for his uncle who is an 84-year-old World War II veteran, and for himself.

Olshanski, a 100 percent disabled veteran of the Vietnam war, was concerned about learning about whether his family might be eligible for additional assistance because of his inability to work due to his military service-connected disability. He was pleased to learn that they would be.

"I also came here to find out about getting my uncle an increase in his disability from the federal VA," Olshanski said. "He's in the VA hospital in Milwaukee now, but I got a videotape for him so he would have an idea of what the Wisconsin Veterans Home at King is like. We can even get a pre-admission tour prior to his making a decision to go there," said Olshanski.

Sandra Ott, a Persian Gulf War veteran and National Guard retiree with four DD-214s covering nearly 21 years of active military service said, "I wanted to take advantage of new information, and learn about tax and state revenue information, which is why I came to the Supermarket."

"I even talked to someone about the Troops To Teachers program and am considering going into it," said Ott.

"I came to the Supermarket here in Schofield on both days because I couldn't get to everything yesterday," said Ott. "Yesterday I listened to a briefing on health care and there was a lot of stuff here I wasn't even aware of," she said. "I'm also here to get some information for someone else who couldn't come."

The Schofield "Supermarket" was the seventh put on by WDVA since the inception of the department's "I Owe You" outreach and marketing campaign. "While our staff help veterans every day, they feel great about being able to go out into a community and meet face-to-face with hundreds of veterans who might not otherwise have known about benefits they have earned by their service to our Nation," said Scocos.

Veterans and their spouses and survivors who were unable to attend the Supermarket can obtain information by contacting their county veterans service officer (CVSO), by visiting the WDVA website (<http://dva.state.wi.us>), or by calling WDVA toll-free at 1-800-WIS-VETS (1-800-947-8387).

"These events are so valuable," said Marathon CVSO Scott Berger, who was one of a handful of CVSOs from northern Wisconsin who attended the event. "This weekend, I was able to meet with a lot of veterans that didn't even know that we have a county veterans service office in every Wisconsin county. I know that I'll continue to have an overflow of veterans coming into my office as a result of this event."

Berger's Wausau office is located at 212 River Dr., Suite 1, or he can be contacted by phone at (715) 261-1141.