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Supermarket of Veterans Benefits reaches out to veterans and their families in western Wisconsin and Minnesota

(LACROSSE) – The Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA), as part of its “I Owe You” campaign and new “Mission: Welcome Home” initiative hosted a *Supermarket of Veterans Benefits* in LaCrosse, expanding the department’s outreach to veterans Wisconsin veterans.

“It was great to see so many veterans from western Wisconsin and our neighbors from Minnesota coming to our ‘one-stop shop’ event to find out about the benefits and services they may be eligible for,” said department Secretary John A. Scocos. “This *Supermarket* was our second ‘I Owe You’ outreach event of six planned for this year and is the continuation of the success in reaching out to Wisconsin veterans. These events provide a venue where veterans and their family members can learn about and apply for benefits and services earned.”

The two-day event was held on May 13th and 14th at the LaCrosse Center, serving nearly 600 veterans and their families. Presented in conjunction with other agencies such as the VA Hospital, VA Benefits Administration, veterans service organizations, County Veterans Services Officers, and other local services, the LaCrosse *Supermarket* brings to over **18,500** the number of veterans and their family members who have been reached by the “I Owe You” campaign, resulting in over \$350 million in new federal VA funding to assist Wisconsin veterans since the campaign's inception in 2000.

“These *Supermarkets* have been very important to the department's outreach to veterans at different locations statewide,” said Scocos. “Through the ‘I Owe You’ campaign and the new ‘Mission: Welcome Home’ program, we want to make sure that our veterans in Wisconsin receive the quality benefits they deserve for their service.”

Clark Dyrud, Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs, was present at the event, along with staff members James Kelly, Claims Division Supervisor, and Reggie Worlds, Veterans Outreach Coordinator, who saw many veterans. Mr. Dyrud and staff were enthused with the “I Owe You” campaign and the tremendous benefits that Wisconsin provides to its veterans.

Rudy Nedvidek, Commander of the local Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 1530, said “We want to form a committee locally to work on ‘Mission: Welcome Home,’ with one or two representatives from each of the veterans service organizations from the LaCrosse area to work together on the program.

(more)

Nedvidek said the VFW post's "Adopt a Unit" program currently assists local servicemembers from the 32nd Engineer Company of the Wisconsin Army National Guard and the 458th Service Company of the United States Army Reserve. "We respond when servicemembers are deployed," Nedvidek said, "and along with the Auxiliary members we help families who may need a sink fixed or water shut off."

Dan Foley of Viola and his family attended the *Supermarket* "to look around," and visited the "Mission: Welcome Home" booth. Foley recently returned from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. He took advantage of the opportunity to learn about federal and state benefits that he would be eligible for.

About the *Supermarket*, Ken Wendt, Chair of the Wisconsin Board of Veterans Affairs, said, "This *Supermarket* showed again the number of veterans who are signing up for health care and the vast majority who do not know what they are eligible for, including the state benefits available to Wisconsin veterans."

One veteran who found out about federal VA health care was Rudolph "Rudy" Jolivette, 77, a Korean War Veteran from LaCrosse who said, "I was satisfied with what I learned about my VA health care. It cleared up some misconceptions I'd heard from other guys."

Gregory F. Klos, an 83-year-old veteran of World War II and the Korean War, said, "I found out about my burial rights and will get a copy of my records. I have my medals from World War II but wanted to get my Korean War medal."

Charlie Cameron of LaCrosse came to the *Supermarket* with his wife and four kids. His active duty service in the U.S. Air Force ended in 1989 and then used the G.I. Bill to attain an engineering degree. Cameron said he came to the information fair "to find out about burial and cemetery benefits – to plan ahead of time, and to find out about additional education benefits and awards and medals. Attending the *Supermarket* has been a great experience for me."

LaCrosse County Veterans Service Officer Jim Gausmann said, "The event gave veterans a chance to receive current information on health, disability, education, loan and grant programs available through federal and state departments of veterans affairs. The *Supermarket* proved to be a great opportunity for LaCrosse and area veterans."

Jim Young, Vernon County Veterans Service Officer, said, "The *Supermarket* was great. I met with many veterans and have set up follow-up appointments for claims development and further information on applications."

Upcoming "I Owe You" events are also planned for Platteville (May 20), Fort McCoy (September 2), Oneida-Green Bay (September 21), and Milwaukee in October.

For more information on "I Owe You" events, visit WDVA's website at www.dva.state.wi.us, contact a County Veterans Service Officer or Tribal Veterans Service Officer, or call WDVA toll-free at 1-800-WIS-VETS (1-800-947-8387).