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Over 400 attend Veterans Benefits Information Fair in Sturgeon Bay

(STURGEON BAY) – Veterans of WWII, the Korean War, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf War, and current military operations attended a state government hosted “Veterans Benefits Information Fair” (VBIF) to learn about and apply for an array of federal and state veterans benefits and programs.

“The Veterans Benefits Information Fairs, which are similar to the larger “Supermarkets” of Veterans Benefits, are part of our ‘I Owe You’ program,” said Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary John A. Scocos, head of the agency hosting the afternoon information fair at The Reef in Sturgeon Bay. “We’re here to help our state’s veterans, to make sure they receive the information and assistance they need to apply for benefits they may have earned and are entitled to.”

The Fair was part of a broader WDVA outreach and marketing campaign called “I Owe You” aimed at educating and assisting more state veterans in accessing federal and state veterans programs for which they may be eligible. Over 16,400 veterans and family members have attended the “I Owe You” program “Supermarkets” and Benefits Fairs.

“This is such an important effort,” said Secretary Scocos, “especially reaching out to veterans in northeastern Wisconsin.”

Ken Wendt, Vice Chair of the Wisconsin Board of Veterans Affairs, said, “Veterans from this area of the state appreciate the chance to come to a ‘one-stop shop’ here and get help to learn about and apply for their benefits.”

The “I Owe You” program has also generated successes in particularly measurable ways. Data released by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and WDVA in late January showed VA funding for Wisconsin veterans has grown from \$721 to \$975 million since the program began in 2000 – or almost \$250 million more in annual federal benefits coming in to the state. Prior to the “I Owe You” program’s inception, the level of federal VA dollars coming into Wisconsin had stagnated, with a \$4 million decline in the year immediately preceding the beginning of the “I Owe You” campaign.

420 veterans and their family members came to the Fair in Sturgeon Bay, which was rescheduled from June 11th to Flag Day June 14th due to the National Day of Mourning to observe the death of former President Ronald Reagan. The veterans, along with their family members, came to the Sturgeon Bay Fair 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.

(more)

Charles "Ken" C.K. Maudsley, an 89-year-old Navy veteran who served on board an aircraft carrier in the Pacific during World War II, read about the event in a local newspaper. "I was interested in getting my medals," he said. "I moved a number of times, and you lose stuff," he said.

Another WWII veteran, Jack Jackson, 81, of Manitowoc, was with the 44th Infantry, 71st Regiment sent to France, Germany, and Austria during the war. He and his wife Dolores came to the Fair, "just to look around," and learned that he may have been eligible for a number of other veterans' benefits.

Many of those who worked the close to 26 booths from federal, state, and local governmental agencies and veterans service organizations, were veterans.

Mitch Knutowski, the new Door County Veterans Service Officer, said this was his first Fair. "A lot of veterans got a lot of information today, even some of the older guys. About three or four from town had never been in to the (CVSO) office, and now they know about it and will be back. To help them apply for their benefits is what we're here for, even to help one."

The next "Supermarket" is slated for August 21, 2004 at the Wisconsin Veterans Home at King, near Waupaca, with another event being planned for the fall in northwestern Wisconsin.

Veterans and their spouses and survivors who were unable to attend the Fair 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).