

County office provides help, counseling to vets

By Suzie Rollins Singer
staff writer

If you're an Oakland County resident and U.S. war veteran or kin to a vet, and you have questions about benefits, a county office has help.

More than 54,000 Oakland veterans or their families were served last year by the county Veterans Services Division office.

"We're a county agency and shouldn't be confused with the federal government," said Carl Pardon, manager of the Department of Public Service Veterans' Services Division.

"We assist vets and their families in filling out applications for any veteran benefit from all levels of government," he said. It operates from two offices — Royal Oak, at 542-0220, and Pontiac, at 858-0785.

The 19-member staff helps vets apply for education compensation, pensions, hospital reimbursements, insurance and burial expenses.

"We counsel them on the benefits, since we have the knowledge on all of the laws. We try to get them the maximum benefits available," he added.

PRESENTLY, the county agency is especially busy helping widows of World War II veterans secure benefits.

"If a vet's widow comes in, we file the paperwork to get a headstone, flag and arrange for widow's pension and child support pensions," Pardon explained.

About 45 percent of the veterans serving during a war are eligible for full burial rights. Their assets must not total more than \$25,000.

Burial benefits are just becoming available to Vietnam vets, as well. However, peacetime veterans are only entitled to half the burial benefits, Pardon said.

'Almost half the people in the county either are, or are associated with, a veteran.'

Approximately 125,000 veterans live in Oakland County and have more than 300,000 dependents. The majority of the questions are filed over the telephone, although personal visits are encouraged.

"Almost half the people in the county either are, or are associated with, a veteran," Pardon said.

FOR VIETNAM vets, the most sought-after benefit is education.

"We also make sure they're provided with benefits for unemployment, underemployment and economic disability. We also try to find them jobs," Pardon added.

"Most vets come to us without insurance who need hospital treatment. We can have them admitted to VA hospitals in Allen Park, Ann Arbor and Battle Creek," he said.

The county office's budget is \$835,000. Most services are required by state law, and if the office didn't exist, the work would be funneled through other departments, Pardon noted.

In Michigan, 65 out of the 83 counties have counseling agencies.

"The state doesn't have an agency to supply vets with information. The federal government has an office in Detroit, but it doesn't have the budget or manpower to carry the rest of the state," Pardon said.

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Community colleges attract broader range of students

Michigan community colleges have changed drastically in the past few years, with more "non-traditional" students studying at the institutions than in previous years.

The high cost of education, as well as the advanced curricula offered, are making closer-to-home community colleges more attractive.

In the 1980-81 academic year, community colleges enrolled over 333,000 students. This represents over 40 percent of the students in Michigan institutions of higher education.

A four-person committee, comprised of representatives from various community colleges across the state, studied the makeup of the state's two-year institutions.

Community colleges emphasize occupational programs and courses as a major component of their functions.

One out of two students is 24 years old or older, compared to one out of five that is 19 years old or younger.

Approximately 76 percent of the students are employed and 54 percent are women. About 16 percent of community college enrollees are members of minority groups.

Displaced employees are also turning to community colleges for retraining. As examples, during 1980-81, 22 community colleges enrolled over 2,200 students and the Trade Readjustment Allowance program.

General education is still the most popular curriculum, with 43 percent of the students enrolled there. The study shows that 26 percent are enrolled in occupational courses while 22 percent are majoring in business.

Alcohol's effects to be shown

The Oakland County Mothers Against Drunk Drivers and the Traffic Improvement Association of Oakland County are hosting a special program at 7:30 tonight to demonstrate the effects of drinking and driving.

The program at Roma's of Bloomfield, in the Miracle Mile shopping center on Telegraph just north of Square

Lake, will feature a controlled drinking demonstration and a display of the Mobile Breath Testing Unit.

Four subjects will consume measured quantities of alcohol and then demonstrate their ability to perform field sobriety tests.

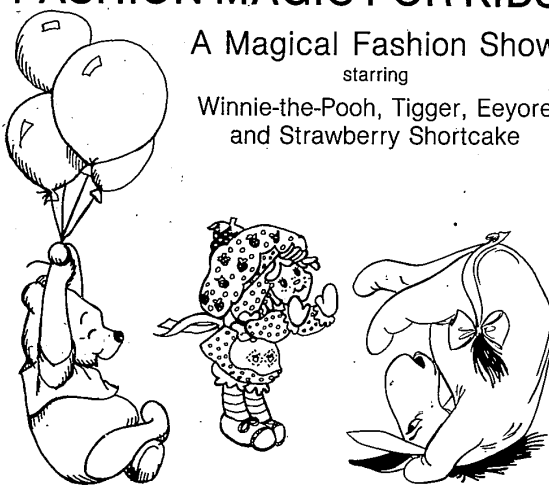
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