



LASALLE COUNTY VETERANS ASSISTANCE COMMISSION

# ANNUAL REPORT

## FISCAL YEAR 2024

A Annual Overview of the Lasalle County VAC Events, Claims and Programs.



ADVOCATING FOR VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES.

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# OFFICE SUMMARY

## OVERVIEW

The LaSalle County Veterans Assistance Commission (VAC) assists Veterans and their Families find and apply for any benefits they may be eligible for.

## IMPACT STATEMENT

By assisting the Veterans and Families with benefits, the LaSalle County VAC brings in compensation payments to those who are eligible. This in turn allows for the Veterans and Families to stay in their communities and helps the area in which they reside thrive.

## FISCAL YEAR 2024 RESULTS

In fiscal year 2024, the LaSalle County VAC netted over \$10.5 million dollars in benefits paid directly to our Veterans and Families. The office also assisted in paying over \$24,000 in rent/utility payments for Veterans in need. Overall, the office has increased payouts to Veterans by over \$3.2 million dollars compared to FY 2023.

## PARTNERSHIPS

The LaSalle County VAC not only assisted Veterans and Families financially, we also hosted, created and held events/programs that benefited our Veterans as well. This year we again partnered with Hines VA Medical Center, Veteran Readiness & Employment (VR&E), and new this year- we now provide a space for a counselor from the Aurora Vet Center. We continue to partner with a local food pantry and Midwest Shelter for Homeless Veterans to assist those that may need help with more non-perishable items.

## FUTURE GOALS

The goal of the LaSalle County VAC has always been, and will continue to be, that of assisting our Veterans and their Families in every way possible. Our office has provided great benefits for the county and our Veterans this past year and we will continue to do so for years to come.

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# STAFF

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## Christa Hammers- USAF Veteran

### Superintendent

- Employed at LCVAC since 2017
  - Acquired CVA in 2022
  - Superintendent since June 2022
  - IACVAC Liason to IDVA
  - 2024 "40 under 40" Award Recipient
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## Lissa Olson

### Assistant Superintendent

- Employed at LCVAC since 2019
  - IVAC Ambassador
  - Secretary of IACVAC
  - IVAC Volunteer of the Year 2023
  - 2024 "Cornerstone Award" Recipient
  - IVAC Board Member 2024
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## James Sturtevant, USN Veteran

### Veterans Service Officer

- Employed at LCVAC since 2022
  - Accredited 2022
  - Completed Advanced Appeals Training in 2024
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## Emily Hackler

### Veterans Service Officer (Outreach VSO)

- Employed at LCVAC since 2022
  - Accredited 2023
  - Daughter of Veteran
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## Kelli Reitgraf

### Administrative Assistant

- Employed at LCVAC since January 2023
- Completed Basic Benefits Course
- Niece of Veteran

# Measuring Progress

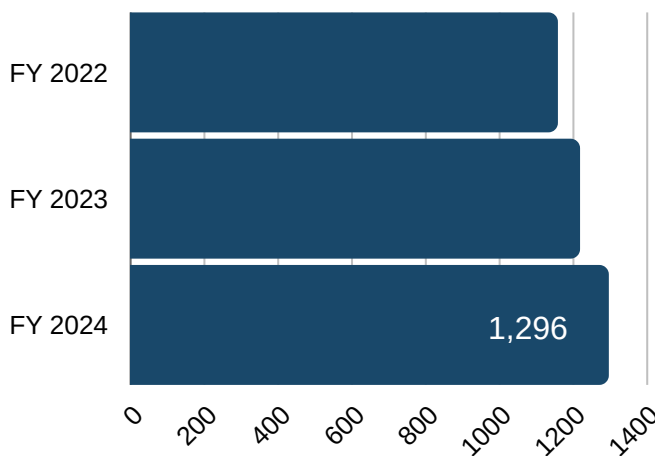
Claims processing has continued to be a 12-16 month wait time from start of the claims process until decision is made with Veterans Affairs. Even with that, our office was still able to secure over \$10.5 million dollars in direct benefit payouts for our Veterans and Families. Below is a break down of number claim type submitted by the last 3 fiscal years and the total payout to Veterans/Families for that year.

FY 2024	FY 2023	FY 2022
Total Forms: 2,331	Total Forms: 2,325	Total Forms: 1,529
Compensation: 381	Compensation: 439	Compensation: 303
Pension: 8	Pension: 43	Pension: 44
Survivors Pension: 3	Survivors Pension: 4	Survivors Pension: 6
Appeals: 217	Appeals: 146	Appeals: 233
Healthcare: 134	Healthcare: 102	Healthcare: 28
<b>TOTAL PAYOUT:</b> <b>\$10,574,006.26</b>	<b>TOTAL PAYOUT:</b> <b>\$7,347,603.80</b>	<b>TOTAL PAYOUT:</b> <b>\$5,832,997.81</b>

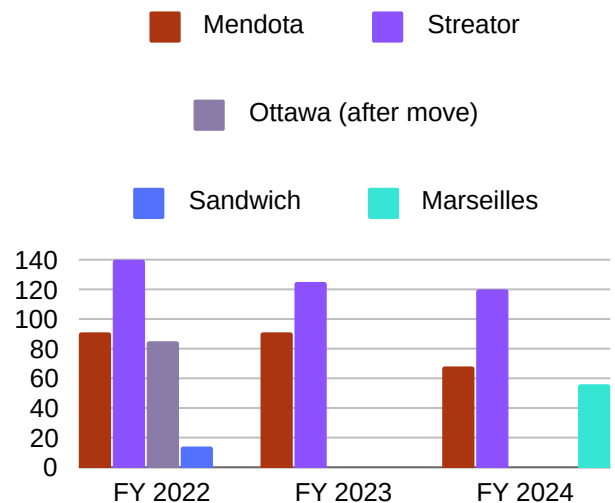
Office visits and phone calls are one of the many ways we connect with our Veterans/Families. These numbers have increased significantly since our move to Peru (just South of the LaSalle VA Clinic). Our Veterans have repeatedly stated that our location is much more convenient and friendly than our previous Ottawa location. We also offer outreach for our Veterans/Families that may not be able to drive to Peru. Below is the office visit, phone call and walk-in numbers for the past 3 fiscal years, along with our outreach numbers for each location- Marseilles, IL has been added for FY24.

## Office Visits per Fiscal Year

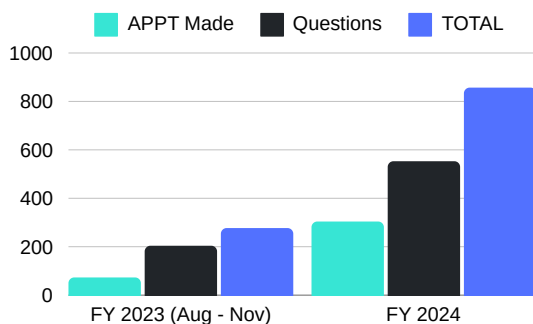
In Person Visits - Peru (Main Office)



In Person Visits - Outreach



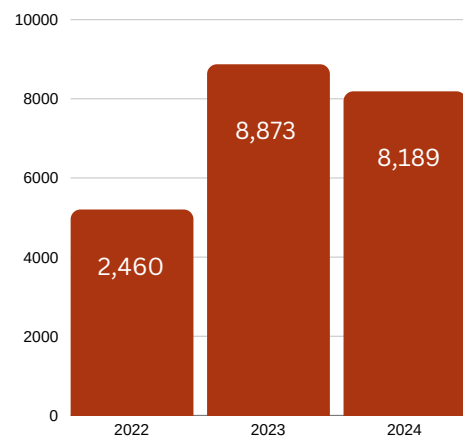
Marseilles Added in FY24.



**Total Number of Walk-Ins Aug-Nov 2023: 277**

**Total Number of Walk-Ins FY 2024: 857**

Our office just started tracking the number of walk-in clients/questions a month in August 2023.



Number of Phone Calls Per FY

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# Events/Programs

Not only does the LaSalle County Veterans Assistance Commission assist Veterans and Families with finding and applying for benefits- we also host, create and partake in events for our Veterans to connect with resources and build programs to assist our Veterans with needs that may otherwise go unmet.

Fiscal Year 2024 Events:

- Quilts of Valor Ceremony
- Fox Valley Senior Center Resource Fair
- Veterans Expo 2024
- Alternatives/Bridges Community Presentation
- Senior Resource Fair - Princeton
- Warriors & Guardians 5K
- Military Night at LaSalle Peru Highschool
- Presentation at Streator Library
- Senator Rezin Resource Fair
- Naplate Safety Day
- Presentation at Tiskilwa Library
- Senator Tom Bennett Resource Gathering
- IVCC Flag Raising Ceremony
- Utica Veterans Day Parade
- YMCA (Peru) Resource Fair
- YMCA (Streator) Resource Fair
- Operation Green Light (Gave out over 150 lights)
- Pearl Harbor Day Ceremony - Peru
- Veterans Giving Tree (Over 300 gifts to 83 LaSalle Veterans Home Residents)
- Christmas Window Painting (decorated windows at LaSalle Veterans Home)
- Vets Visit with Santa (Vietnam Veteran gifted time dressed as Santa for photos)
- Streator Church Group Presentation



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**We also would like to thank all who donated to our office this year:**

- Bill Walsh Automotive
- Holy Family School

Contributions go towards our Events and Programs.

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## Education

We continue to push further education with our staff so we can stay up to date with the new legislature and best practices for our clients. Our office has had one VSO complete the Advanced Appeals Training and one applying for Certified Veterans Advocacy Training in FY25. We also continue to attend annual training courses and meetings - both state and nation-wide. Our office has attended the Illinois Association of County Officials (IACO) Conference, Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA) Conference, Illinois Association of County Veterans Assistance Commissions (IACVAC) Trainings, and the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO) Trainings this past year and will continue to do so in the future.

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## Financial Aid

The LaSalle County Veterans Assistance Commission not only offers claims assistance, programs and events- we also assist Veterans in their time of need. Whether it is a one-time event or monthly occurrence. In FY 2024, our office has paid claims for direct financial aid totaling \$24,754.43 via vouchers to vendors. These payments are to assist Veterans with either rent/mortgage or utilities payments. It is this office's aim to not only see these Veterans and make sure they are receiving every benefit they are eligible for, but also connect them with other community resources that may be able to further assist them.

Community resources our office continues to work with:

- Business Employment Skills Team (BEST), Inc - resume writing
- North Central Area Transit (NCAT)- rides for appointments
- TriCounty - Bill pay/clothing/food vouchers
- MidWest Shelter Freedom Commissary - household goods
- LiHeap- Bill payments (utilities)
- Social Security- Benefit payments/Unemployable Veterans
- Ottawa Food Pantry- Assist Veterans with non-perishable food items

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## Looking Ahead

The LaSalle County Veterans Assistance Commission will continue to strive to do everything we can for our Veterans and Families. It is our aim to keep education and knowledge a priority to best assist any client. In the future it is our mission to keep our office effective and make sure that anyone who walks in our doors leaves more understanding of benefits and resources available to them. We will continue to hold events, create programs and reach out to our Veterans/Families that may not be able to make it into our main office. It is our honor to serve our Nation's heroes and their families, and we will continue to expand our services in the hopes of filling needs of even a greater number of Veterans.







Advocating for Veterans & Their Families

815-433-1761  
[www.lasallecountyvac.com](http://www.lasallecountyvac.com)

Prepared by: Christa Hammers, Superintendent  
December 30, 2024