

VET'S VANTAGE

MARCH 2018

AFTER READING, PLEASE PASS THIS TO ANOTHER VETERAN !

FAST TRACK CLAIMS PROCESS EXPLAINED

Inside this issue:

The Agent Orange Fast Track Claims Processing System is dedicated to processing claims for Vietnam Veterans who are claiming service connection for any of the following conditions who served in the Republic of Vietnam or in-land waterways between January 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975.:

AL Amyloidosis, Chronic B-Cell Leukemias, Chloracne, Diabetes Type II, Hodgkin's Disease, Ischemic Heart Disease, Multiple Myeolema, Non Hodgkins' Lymphoma, Parkinson's Disease, Peripheral Neuropathy-Early Onset (within 1 year of leaving service), Porphyria Cutanea Tarda (within 1 year of leaving the service) Prostate Cancer, Respiratory Cancers (includes lung cancer) Soft Tissue Sarcomas (other than osteosarcoma, chondrosarcoma, Kaposi's sarcoma, or mesothelioma).

The Fast Tract system is exclusively a web-based platform. Whereas, veterans can simply log on to the VA web portal and submit their claims documentation, supporting medical evidence from all sources and any other documentation needed to establish and verify their service-connected claim. VA doctors will have access to the Fast Tract system, that will enable them to take the veteran out of the role as middle man between care providers and VA. VA doctors can then fill out the forms and submit them online quickly and easily. VA rating specialists will be able to log on to the system, identify outstanding information on the way to fully developing a claim (FDC) and give a suggested rating at the end of the automated process. You can apply for VA disability compensation and pension through

eBenefits on line @ www.ebenefits.va.gov.

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The Fully Developed Claim (FDC) Program is the fastest way to get your claim processed and there is no risk to participate! To participate in the FDC Program, if you are making a claim for veterans disability compensation or related compensation benefits, simply submit your claim in accordance with the "FDC Criteria" shown on VA-Form 21-526EZ, *Application For Disability Compensation and Related Compensation Benefits*. If you are making a claim for veterans non service-connected pension benefits, use VA Form 21-527EZ, *Application for Pension*. If you are making a claim for survivor benefits, use VA Form 21-534EZ, *Application for DIC, Death Pension, and/or Accrued Benefits*. VA forms are available at www.va.gov/vaforms.

Veterans who find computers challenging may want to consult with their VSO or find help from a computer specialist to help them navigate the Fast Track system. Some veterans have reported that the Fast Tract system seems cumbersome and confusing. [Source: U.S. Veteran Compensation Programs | David Fuller | February 9, 2018 ++]

Though this article makes the process sound smooth and uncomplicated don't try this UNLESS you know what you are doing. If you are an "in country" RVN veteran and have ANY of these diseases listed on the left, make an appointment to see your County Veteran Service Officer. We are a free service to veterans in Waushara County and have the training. Call 920-787-0446 to make an appointment.

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A veteran is someone who, at one point in their lives, wrote a blank check made payable to 'The United States of America' for an amount of 'up to and including my life'.



VIETNAM VETERAN IN MEMORY PROGRAM

GREEN ALERTS

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund created the 'In Memory' program to honor Vietnam veterans whose lives were cut short as a result of their service but are not eligible for inscription on The Wall under DoD guidelines. *In Memory* is a way that Vietnam veterans can be honored on the National Mall. The plaque that honors these veterans was dedicated as a part of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in 2004. *In Memory* began in 1999 and has since honored more than 3,200 veterans.



Examples of causes of death that do fit the criteria for inclusion in VVMF's *In Memory* program:

- PTSD related illnesses / events
- Exposure to Agent Orange and similar chemicals
- Diabetes
- Cancer
- Cholangiocarcinoma
- Hodgkin's Disease
- Ischemic Heart Disease
- Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma
- Parkinson's Disease

To have a loved one considered for the *In Memory* program, you must submit an application to VVMF.

Go to <http://www.vvmf.org/userfiles/files/PDF/In%20Memory%20Application%202018%20web.pdf> to fill out an application online which are due by March 9 for the 2018 Program. If you have a question about the program or are experiencing difficulty with the application, contact VVMF at (202) 393-0090 or via e-mail at inmemory@vvmf.org. Along with the application there are two documents required in the application process. A copy of the death certificate and a copy of the DD214. Examples of proof of service in Vietnam are listed on the DD214 as:

- Vietnam Service Medal (VSM)
- Vietnam Campaign Medal
- Vietnam Service Ribbon

Having a loved one honored in VVMF's *In Memory* program includes:

- Inclusion in the annual *In Memory* Day ceremony held on the National Mall. Family and friends of new honorees are invited to attend the ceremony and say their loved one's name.
- At the ceremony, you will be provided with a "Tribute" – a 9 x 12 framed certificate containing the Honoree's photo and other provided information.

Your loved one will be included in the annual *In Memory* yearbook. The yearbook includes the full list and photos of current year's honorees. Your Honoree will be added to VVMF's virtual *In Memory* Honor Roll. Family and friends of honorees are invited to attend all future *In Memory* ceremonies. [Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly | February 2, 2018 ++]

Wisconsin might become the first state in the nation to create a Green Alert system for missing vulnerable veterans. The system would be similar to state Amber and Silver alerts for missing children and older adults, respectively. The state Senate passed legislation to create the system last week, and the state Assembly is expected to take up the bill in February. "We're hoping this goes national," state Democratic Sen. LaTonya Johnson told the newspaper. Johnson had introduced the bill. "Veterans give so much." Johnson said. Referring to an Air Force veteran whose death prompted her to introduce the bill, she said that the vet had "served (three) tours and he came home safe. If he made it home safe we should have done everything to make sure he was made whole." Republican state Assemblyman Joel Kleefisch, a sponsor of the bill, said he expects it to pass the Assembly and be on Gov. Scott Walker's desk by the end of February. "I will not be surprised if we see Green Alert in every state of the union in the next three to four years," Kleefisch told the newspaper. [Source: The Republican | Diane Lederman | January 12, 2018 ++]



Green Alert for Missing Vulnerable Veterans



VA HUD-VASH UPDATE

The Department of Veterans Affairs issued a memorandum in early February that officially reverses plans to shift millions of dollars from a VA account dedicated to combating veteran homelessness. Steve Young, VA deputy undersecretary for health, sent the memo Tuesday to all VA network directors, homeless coordinators and medical center directors. It states the VA will not reallocate funds this fiscal year earmarked for a veteran housing program known as HUD-VASH, in which the VA provides case management for veterans who receive housing vouchers from the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The memo eased concerns among collaborators who help veterans get shelter through HUD-VASH. Collaborators spoke out in December when they discovered VA Secretary David Shulkin planned to reallocate \$460 million specifically geared toward the program into hospitals' general-purpose accounts. Shulkin quickly backtracked after swift outcry from the collaborators and lawmakers, but doubts lingered.

"This does give us more confidence," Leon Winston, chief operating officer of Swords to Plowshares, said of the memo. Swords to Plowshares is a nonprofit organization that helps house veterans in Northern California.

It was clear in January during a hearing of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs that a rift existed between collaborators, such as Swords to Plowshares, and the VA. At the time, Kathryn Monet, chief executive officer of the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, still worried the funding could be cut from HUD-VASH. On

February 8, 2018, Monet said the memo alleviated some of her doubts. "The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans is pleased that the [VA] has announced a decision not to move HUD-VASH case management funding for the rest of the fiscal year," she wrote in an email. "This commitment must remain in the years to come."

Shulkin explained to Congress last month that his intent was to move funding from HUD-VASH into a general-purpose account to provide more flexibility for local leaders, who could then decide how to combat veteran homelessness in their geographical area. Though the memo states the VA won't shift funding in fiscal year 2018, which ends 30 SEP, there could be future changes. According to a HUD report from December, there were 585 more homeless veterans at the beginning of 2017 than in 2016. It was the first increase of homeless veterans since 2010. Because of that, the HUD-VASH program needs a "reboot," Shulkin said. Winston would support more funding flexibility for local VA leaders but said there must be a process for garnering input before any changes are made. The VA's lack of communication in December was worrisome, he said. "The messaging was so mixed up, based on who you talked to and what day of the week it was," Winston said. "It was conflated. That's why everybody was so very troubled."

In a hearing last month, Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) asked Shulkin for more transparency, stating many members of Congress didn't know about the proposed shift

in homelessness funding until some nonprofit groups spoke against it. Monet agreed if the VA were to make changes, stakeholders should know beforehand. "We hope VA will carefully examine any changes it may propose to critical programs for homeless veterans to ensure there will be no unintended confusion for, or adverse impact on, the veterans these programs serve," she said. Tuesday's memo followed another VA directive in January that delayed shifting the homeless funding. That directive said funds could still be reallocated in fiscal year 2019. [Source: Stars And Stripes | Nikki Wentling | February 8, 2018 ++]

HUD-VASH: Permanent Housing for Homeless Veterans



VA Welcome Kit

<https://www.vets.gov/welcome-to-va/>

By going to the web site above, you will find all kinds of information and contacts for the VA.

A "Welcome Home Kit", can be printed in black and white or in color includes information on all aspects of the veterans life, such as getting out of the service, making a claim, pre interment for a burial in a Veterans Memorial Cemetery, buying a house etc. Worth your time to read!



SSIA: FUNDING NEEDED TO END WIDOW'S TAX

The Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) is calling on lawmakers to end the widows tax on 67,000 military survivors. Compared to the last session of Congress, there appears to be more momentum to address the issue. Currently, the number of House cosponsors to end the widows tax is up from 175 to 207; in the Senate, the number of lawmakers supporting repeal has increased to 37 from 30.

Widows Tax Explained

Current federal law requires survivors of deceased military members to forfeit part or all of their Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) annuity when they are awarded VA Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC). This loss of any portion of the SBP annuity is known as the "widows tax." Congress recognizes the inequity and has worked hard over the years to address the issue. Starting in 2008, Congress established the Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance (SSIA) to help military survivors affected by the widows tax. SSIA began as a 10-year temporary benefit. Thanks to the hard work of House Armed Services Committee chair Mac Thornberry (R-Texas), a provision in the FY 2018 National Defense Authorization Act makes SSIA permanent at its current level of \$310 a month. Future increases will be indexed to inflation.

State of Play

"Last year's work by Chairman Thornberry was a strong good faith effort showing how seriously he takes this issue. There's concern in the survivors' community that lawmakers may consider the issue fixed and they can move on to other priorities," said Jamie Naughton, Associate Director of Government Relations at MOAA. Raising awareness of the issue is important. According to DoD's Office of the Actuary, over 40 percent of military survivors affected by the widows tax live in five states: Texas, Florida, California, Virginia, and North Carolina.

The increased support is deeply appreciated, but we know lawmakers won't be able to do much unless they're given the budget authority necessary to pay for ending the tax. The first step in the process is to get the House and Senate Budget Committees to give their counterparts on the Armed Services Committees - who have jurisdiction over military survivor issues - necessary funding to provide relief. Readers are requested to send their elected officials a MOAA-suggested message asking them to end the widows tax for military survivors. Refer to <http://takeaction.moaa.org/app/write-a-letter?0&engagementId=352553>. [Source: MOAA Leg Up | January 19, 2018 ++]

Gun Control Update

A group of bipartisan U.S. Senators has filed legislation to reverse the fact that some vets are losing their right to keep and bear arms because someone is handling their finances. On February 6, 2018, Senate Judiciary Chairman Chuck Grassley — joined by fellow Iowa Republican Sen. Joni Ernst and West Virginia Democrat Sen. Joe Manchin — introduced S.2386, which could tackle how the Department of Veterans Affairs reports veterans to the FBI's National Criminal Background Check System.

Currently, a veteran assigned a fiduciary trustee to act on their behalf is automatically declared "mentally defective" and is reported to NICS, the database Federal Fire-

arms Licensees use to determine whether a prospective buyer is eligible to buy guns. Grassley feels to do so is a Second Amendment violation. "Veterans are losing their Second Amendment rights because they have someone managing their checkbook," Grassley said on the floor of the Senate. As of Dec. 31, 2016, NICS had active records on 167,824 veterans reported by the VA for mental health reasons. This figure is down from 260,381 in 2015. Still, Grassley points out that 98 percent of the names in the gun check system listed by federal agencies for mental health reasons come from the VA alone.

Termed the **Veterans' Second Amendment Rights Restoration Act of 2018**, the language of the bill would force the VA to overhaul who they report to

Rather than use the fiduciary rule, similar to one proposed by the Social Security Administration and repealed by Congress, the VA would have to submit individuals to a board made up of three former judicial officers or administrative law judges or through a judicial process. While it would not automatically remove those currently reported to the FBI, those with active files would be able to challenge their classification and all would be given notice by the VA of their rights to due process. "When a constitutional right is involved, the burden must always be on the government," said Grassley. The measure has been referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs. [Source: Guns.com | Chris Eger | February 8, 2018 ++]



VA CARE GIVER PROGRAM UPDATE

Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin insists a limited expansion of his department's caregivers stipend program could save the federal government around \$2.5 billion annually. But the upfront costs of the plan still present a major obstacle for congressional lawmakers. On February 6, 2018 the House Veterans' Affairs Committee renewed debate on the issue of VA's caregiver program, which awards living stipends — totaling up to several thousands of dollars a month — to the families of veterans who require around-the-clock home care. When lawmakers created the program in 2011, it only covered veterans of the post-Sept. 11 era. For much of the last year, Shulkin has advocated (along with veterans groups) that the program should include other generations of veterans as well, especially as they age and require new medical care.

Lawmakers in both the House and Senate have been supportive of the idea, but not necessarily the cost. Senate lawmakers have suggested a rolling expansion of the stipend program that the Congressional Budget Office says would require \$3.4 billion in new funding over five years, money that would require offsets under House rules. "No veteran and no caregiver from any generation is well-served by having access in name only to a program that has the deficits this one does and is as ill-prepared as this one is to accept a sudden influx of new beneficiaries," said committee Chairman Rep. Phil Roe (R-TN). He noted past VA underestimates estimates on eligibility and usage of the stipend program, which currently serves about 26,000 caregivers at a cost of around \$400 million.

Shulkin acknowledged that a simple expansion of the existing program to all veterans would likely swell the participants and cost sevenfold, to more than 180,000 caregivers. He is supporting expanding the program to only the most severely injured and incapacitated veterans, which would add around 40,000 new stipends. That move, he said, could save the department \$2.5 billion a year by the late 2020s, through reduced nursing home and medical assistance costs. Current recipients would be grandfathered into the program. Democrats on the committee, who have largely looked past the cost issue in the debate, framed the expansion as another opportunity for "choice" in veterans medical care, an echo of the president's promises to give veterans more flexibility in private-sector care options.

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Non-monetary support services are available to caregivers from every war generation, and current stipend recipients have complained about processing and changing eligibility problems with the current system. Shulkin said work is being done to address those complaints, including some program changes that do not require legislative intervention. But he also said those reviews should not slow down progress on future expansions. "We need to be adding that one piece to the program that has been missing," he said. "These caregivers are already unbelievably burdened." Shulkin told reporters following the hearing Tuesday that he would present new eligibility standards to Congress, which would be responsible for any final decision. "We're just going to provide the very best

recommendations that we can to congress," Shulkin said. "It's up to them. They built these eligibility standards into the current law, so it will be theirs to decide to change." The VA initiated a review of the program last April, following an NPR investigation that found 32 VA medical centers had cut the number of families from the program since 2014, some of them by more than half. There were inconsistent decisions across the VA system about who should be removed, and some caregivers and veterans were kicked out erroneously. "Needless to say, significantly higher-than-expected demand for the program has created set-backs," Roe said. "There has been miscommunication, confusion, and frustration from veterans, caregivers and VA employees alike concerning practically every aspect of this program." Since April, the agency stopped removing veterans from the program for three months while it trained employees who work with caregivers, Shulkin said. Prior to the training, the VA removed an average of 237 caregivers each month from the support program. Now, an average of 192 are removed. The VA was seeking input recently from the public about possible changes, such as how injured a veteran must be to qualify, how often their eligibility should be reassessed and how the VA should calculate monthly stipend amounts. The one-month public comment period ended February 5, 2018 and garnered about 300 responses. The VA will go through the answers in the next six to eight weeks, find patterns and use the answers to guide regulatory changes, Shulkin said. [Source: ArmyTimes | Leo Shane III | February 6, 2018 ++]



Upcoming Events

The United States Congress chose March 25th when it designated a National Medal of Honor Day as the first Medal of Honor awards were made to six members of Andrew's Raiders during the Civil War on March 25, 1863. 2009 Wisconsin Act 144 enacted on March 3, 2010 creates an annual Wisconsin Medal of Honor Day. The Medal of Honor is the highest military award for bravery that can be conferred on a member of the American armed forces. 62 citizens from Wisconsin received the Medal of Honor from Civil War to now.

To recognize the 1,239 Wisconsin armed forces members who are listed on the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C., and to express pride and gratitude to the veterans of that war, March 29 is designated as "Vietnam Veterans Day" in Wisconsin. The governor shall issue annually a suitable proclamation for the observance of "Vietnam Veterans Day" and request that some portion of the day be used to recall the Vietnam veterans' accomplishments and to thank those veterans for their service during that war.

WI Vets Museum School Days Off

FREE family-friendly activities at the museum 10 AM to 2 PM

March 16: Anniversary of Sinking of the Maine—Boatbuilding

March 27: Design Your Own Insignia

March 28: Explore & Create Maps

March 29: Explore Aerial Photographs & Draw From an Aerial Perspective

March 30: The Art of Disguise Make your own camouflage pattern.

DACA "Dreamers" Protected Status

The approximately 800 service members whose military service was put in limbo by President Donald Trump's decision to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, program will not be deported, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said 8 FEB. Congress has been at an impasse over DACA, which provides a protected status for some younger undocumented immigrants who were brought to the U.S. as children. Mattis told reporters that he has finalized an agreement with Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen to put the military's "Dreamers" in a protected status.

The Military Accessions Vital to National Interest pilot program is one way service members may gain U.S. citizenship; the program has been on hold since summer 2017. "Anyone who is in the delayed enlistment program, in other words they are already signed up and they are waiting to go into boot camp, anyone on active duty and anyone in the active reserves and anyone with an honorable discharge is, right now, except for two possible exceptions, they will not be subject to any kind of deportation." The exceptions are:

If for some reason they have committed a serious felony, and I realize even a low-level felony apparently does not put you in that category ... that could jeopardize them. They are just like any other citizen," Mattis said.

If a federal judge has signed a final order of deportation — that would be a judicial action that

obviously would have had to be obeyed.

Mattis did not provide additional details on the agreement but said it was his understanding that DACA military service members were always protected. "They're protected," Mattis said. He also said he thinks the program will live on. "I think that it is not coming to an end right now either," Mattis said. "You can sign up right now, as I understand."

In January a federal court issued a preliminary injunction ordering the Department of Homeland Security to resume accepting DACA applicants. The controversy over DACA in Washington is fueled by Trump's requirement that any agreement to extend DACA would include broader immigration policy changes, including a border wall. The issue split Congress to the extent that the government shut down over the issue in January. [Source: Air-ForceTimes | Tara Copp February 8, 2018 ++]



Immigrants and Non-Citizens in the US Armed Service. (Army Photo)



LIVER FLUKES FOUND IN 25% RVN VETS IN SMALL STUDY

Nearly one in four Vietnam War combat veterans who participated in a small study at the Northport VA to detect past infestations of the cancer-causing liver fluke parasite tested positive, according to a paper penned by researchers at the VA Medical Center. The pilot study, titled “Screening US Vietnam Veterans for Liver Fluke Exposure 5 Decades After the End of the War,” is in the current edition of the periodical *Infectious Diseases in Clinical Practice*. The Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center at Northport conducted the study last spring, after Vietnam combat veteran Jerry Chiano of Valley Stream was diagnosed with bile-duct cancer in 2013. Chiano died in November.

Northport examined 97 Vietnam War veterans and selected 50 who met the inclusion criteria of having eaten undercooked freshwater fish while serving in Vietnam. Blood samples collected at Northport were subjected to serological examinations performed by researchers at Seoul National University College of Medicine in South Korea because no facility in the United States is equipped to identify the antigen marker that shows the parasite was once present.

Two members of Congress — Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-NY) and Rep. Tom Suozzi (D-Glen Cove) — released statements calling for a broader study to determine whether wartime exposure to liver fluke should be considered service-related. “The Northport Medical VA Center’s groundbreaking

study confirms what many vets have asserted: some of our brave Vietnam veterans were, in fact, exposed to cancer-causing parasites when serving overseas,” Schumer said in a release. “I am urging the VA to move forward with developing a treatment, screening and awareness program to help our Vietnam veterans who may be at risk to developing bile duct cancer in the future,” Schumer said. Suozzi said the VA should move quickly to address the study’s findings. “There must be a lot of anxiety in the Vietnam veterans community and we should try to alleviate that anxiety by actually getting firm answers,” Suozzi said.

Liver flukes are parasitic worms that spend part of their life cycle in freshwater snails that inhabit rivers throughout parts of the Far East, including Southeast Asia, China and the Korean Peninsula. The snails release larvae that burrow into the flesh of fish and can infest the bile ducts of humans who eat the fish. They can reside symptomless in a victim’s body for decades. The adult worm is believed to release an irritant during its quarter-century life span — an irritant that can lead to cancerous lesions in the bile duct decades after the parasitic infestation has died out. In some south Asian villages where raw fish consumption is part of the culture, more than one in two people harbor liver fluke infestations, according to parasitologists.

Some activists have likened the seriousness of fluke exposure in Vietnam veterans to Agent Orange, a class of dioxin-contaminated herbicides believed to have tainted

hundreds of thousands of U.S. troops. The VA pays disability claims to Vietnam veterans who suffer from any of a host of maladies linked to Agent Orange exposure, from heart disease to bladder cancer. Since 2013, the VA has received 240 disability claims related to bile-duct cancers associated with liver fluke, the agency said. It had rejected more than 76 percent of those claims. [Source: *Newsday* | Martin C. Evans | January 25, 2018 ++]



These RVN vets received notice they were part of the 25% RVN veterans who tested positive for liver flukes. There is nothing at this time saying the VA will continue the study.

...VA sometimes approves the link between wartime service and cholangiocarcinoma, the vast majority of claims — 3 out of 4 — are rejected, according to data obtained by The Associated Press through the Freedom of Information Act.—News Nation & world article The Mercury News

Liver flukes - Opisthorchis/Clonorchis

- 3 major spp:
 - *Opisthorchis viverrini* - Thailand & Laos
 - *Opisthorchis felineus* - former USSR
 - *Clonorchis sinensis* - China, Korea, Vietnam
- Hosts: **snails.**
- Reservoirs: **mammals**
- Infection: **ingestion of raw fish**

Mental Health, Energy Assistance Homelessness/Job Counseling

Julie Powers 608-264-5342 of the Madison Vet Center Free Counseling to combat veterans and sexual trauma veterans. 5 sessions to non-combat veterans. Marriage counseling, also offered. Please call and arrange an appointment with Julie.

If you have been denied Energy Assistance, and you are a veteran, you may have one more option to seek help. Heat for Heroes will first need a denial from Energy Assistance and they might be able to help you with your energy bill. If you have been denied by Energy Assistance, please call 800-891-9276

Center for Vet Issues: (Homeless/Near Homeless)

Angela Kalsbbeck MSW 920-906-4779

JOBS!!! Low Income/Disabled/ Newly Returned or Vets between the ages of 18-24. Corey Skaags DWD counsels helps with resume' building for jobs at Waushara Co. Court House 2nd and 4th Thursdays each month. Call 920-251-4761 for appt.

Issues many different, AODA, Mental Health and other issues: Cal Stammer 715-409-3767

SUICIDE PREVENTION Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, text to 838255, or chat online 24/7/365



Waushara County Veteran Services

PO BOX 159

230 W. Park St

Wautoma, WI 54982

veterans.parkstreet@co.waushara.wi.us

(920)787-0446 Fax (920)787-0423

Berlin Public Library

121 W Park Ave

Berlin, WI 54923