

VFW Recovers \$11.2 Billion for Veterans

In 2022, VFW's National Veterans Service helped more than 560,000 veterans receive billions of dollars of VA disability benefits, including back pay

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VFW has done it again. The organization's National Veterans Service and its network of veterans service officers around the world have helped veterans recover a collective total of more than \$11.2 billion last year — the most amount of money ever.

For more than 120 years, VFW's National Veterans Service has served veterans and their families by assisting with the filing of VA disability claims and fighting for the benefits they have earned. VFW Service Officers represent more than 560,000 veterans.

VFW National Veterans Service Director Michael Figlioli said that VFW is committed to a lifetime of advocacy for all veterans.

“Our accredited representatives are with the claimant from filing the claim, through review of the decision and then any follow-on appeals that may be necessary to achieve the maximum benefit allowed by law,” Figlioli said. “But we don't stop there. Our representatives must know about other VA benefit programs, such as the GI Bill, VA home loans, VA health care and National Cemetery Administration benefits.”

Figlioli said that with VFW's network of more than 2,000 VA-accredited service officers, all veterans — regardless of VFW membership — can get help.

“VFW will never charge a fee for assisting a veteran, their spouse or family member in filing a claim,” Figlioli said. “Last year, our representatives recovered more than \$11.2 billion in benefits for our clients. Every single dime of that went to the claimant. We do not receive any compensation for assisting those who seek our help.”

Figlioli added that VFW's VA-accredited veterans service officers can be found at 23

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different Benefits Delivery at Discharge sites. He also said VFW's service officers are in VA regional offices and many other VA facilities. One of those VFW Service Officers is Allen Barnes.

'I'M LUCKY THAT I GET TO HELP'

Barnes, a Bronze Legacy Life member of VFW Post 56 in Leavenworth, Kansas, served in Operation Desert Storm and the Iraq War. He said he is happy that he can continue to work with the military community even after his service.

"I love my job," said Barnes, a retired Army National Guard veteran. "I truly feel as if I'm doing the job I was meant to do. I'm lucky that I get to help veterans and their family members every day."

Barnes said he has seen significantly more veterans after the signing of the Honoring Our PACT Act in August. He recalled a case he handled to help a widow of an Army veteran after the landmark toxic-exposure reform legislation became law last year. Barnes said that the veteran had died from colon cancer, which he said was related to toxic exposure.

"The wife was not receiving any benefits due to her husband's death, and she needed to take care of a special-needs child and her granddaughter," Barnes said. "She was doing this on her own, and she had to have three jobs."

Due to the Honoring Our PACT Act, the widow was granted VA benefits because of her husband's passing from colon cancer. (See sidebar.)

"We did everything we could do for her," Barnes said. "And by the end of January, she started receiving Dependency and Indemnity Compensation from VA. She also got back pay from the date the bill was signed."

Barnes said that the money the widow received was "life-changing" and that the woman only needed to have one job instead of three.

"Without our help, she would not be receiving those earned benefits," Barnes said. "After she received her first paycheck, she called and thanked me. But I'm only here to help veterans and their family members receive the benefits they deserve. As long as that happens, that's all I care about."

'SECOND TO NONE'

Figlioli said that one of the main jobs of a veterans service officer is to help veterans navigate through the VA claims process, especially now that the Honoring Our PACT Act is law, which Figlioli said is the "most important veterans legislative victory" in recent history.

"Our highly capable network of VFW Service Officers and claims consultants began

receiving training on the PACT Act as soon as it was signed into law,” Figlioli said. “It was also incorporated into our formal service officer training curriculum, and we are continuously monitoring VA. If something changes that may affect benefits, we get it to the field staff quickly, so they are up-to-date with the latest information.”

Barnes claimed that VFW’s required training is the reason the organization’s VA-accredited service officers are “the best” at what they do.

“Every day, I tell people that VFW Service Officers are the best service officers,” Barnes said. “I tell them they are missing out if they don’t come to us, because we are absolutely the best — second to none. Our training is awesome.”

TWICE THE TRAINING

Figlioli said VFW provides its veterans service officers up to 80 hours of training each year to maintain the qualification to represent veterans who file disability claims with the VA. He added that only 40 annual hours of training is required by the VA and that VFW’s Service Officers work tirelessly on behalf of veterans every day.

Figlioli also said that VFW’s training includes in-person and online training. He added that VFW offers in-person quality assurance checks within the first year of a service officers’ employment. After that, National Veterans Service team members try to visit a VFW Service Officer about every month or so as needed.

Barnes said that he is grateful to help at least 50 veterans or family members a month as a VFW VA-accredited veterans service officer.

“I love being a veteran and what I did in the Army, but right now, I feel great about being a VFW veterans service officer,” Barnes said. “I get to help people — there is nothing better than that.

This article is featured in the 2023 April issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Dave Spiva](#), associate editor for VFW magazine.