

Why We Volunteer

By the Volunteers of the Clay County, MN Veterans Service Office



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Foreword

Tom Figliuzzi

My name is Tom Figliuzzi and I have the distinct honor and privilege of serving the community of Clay County, Minnesota as their County Veterans Service Officer.

Since I have arrived at Clay County, our country has entered into large scale wars around the world. We have involved our National Guardsmen and Reservists in unprecedented ways, and because of this we have created a new phenomenon wherever there are Guard and Reserve bases. We have created veterans who reside permanently within their communities at levels never seen before. This has setup a demand upon veteran's services that can only be compared to a Tsunami.

Although our county leaders have done what they can to strengthen and improve the road home for our veterans, all this came about at a particular time, during one of our nation's worst economic recessions. This created the dilemma: "how do we continue to prepare and meet the demands of the Tsunami-like inflow of veterans?"

We came up with what some might say is a risky or unheard of proposal. Almost everyone said: "Don't do it," "it will never work," "it can't be done," "it won't help your problem; it will only create new problems." But we couldn't stand still and do nothing; so we decided to buck the odds and put into place the first ever Veterans Service Office Volunteer Base that actually functions within the Veterans Service Office, thereby augmenting our services for our veterans. To get it started we partnered with a national organization that strongly represents veterans called: The Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Local Volunteers Assistance Program, which gave us a legitimate sponsor and supporter for our program. The DAV National Service Officer (Greg Seuer) was eager to support this venture, and away we went. That was 2009.

Now we are sitting on the eve of 2012 and our program is not only tried, tested, improved, and proven but it has become the "Yes We Can" of the county. It is the volunteer model for agencies everywhere. Entities all across our state are contacting us to ask "how did you guys do that?" We are even getting national inquiries about duplicating our system. Clay County can and should hold their head high knowing that we were the first in the state and first in the nation to launch this wonderful volunteer program.

Our volunteers are mature, honest, talented, gracious, loving, caring, and just so motivated to help people. Our volunteers come directly from our community. They are veterans, non-veterans, disabled veterans, widows of fallen veterans, spouses of veterans, etc. Our volunteers have their own unique set of talents that they are more than happy to have tapped into

and used. And we use those talents. We can honestly and wholeheartedly say with confidence that we absolutely would not be able to keep up with the Tsunami of veterans that we are presently experiencing; we could not function and we would not have the nice and welcoming office that we have, without our Veteran Volunteer base.

The reaction of our clientele is almost always the same: *I was so surprised when I walked in; the place was so welcoming; I was greeted by a kind, smiling, helpful person who made my encounter with a government agency a wonderful experience. The warmth and service that I received made me wonder if I was in a USO.* To hear our clients speak about how their welcome was so wonderful that it's comparable to a USO, well, what better compliment could you ask for?

Our Veterans Volunteer Base has become our family. We appreciate them and respect them and we are truly grateful to each and every one of them. Our Volunteers are giving this booklet called "Why We Volunteer" to the Clay County Leadership as their personal gift to you.

I am so fortunate to have the honor of knowing and working with such a crew, and I will never take it for granted. I believe this organization is a lasting one.

I personally want to thank each and every one of my volunteers for the service that they provide at the Clay County Veterans Service Office, and I want to thank the VFW, the American Legion and the DAV for their continued involvement and support of this program, and, last but not least; as the Veterans Service Officer of Clay County I wish to thank our former and current County Administrators and County Commissioners for their part in putting this plan into operation and their continued support. Thank you.

Tom Figliuzzi
Veterans Service Officer



Kathy Hannula



Why I Volunteer

I volunteer because I have tremendous respect for our veterans who have given so much for our freedom, and I see how the VSO office personnel often has to fight to get them what they deserve. The veterans need every advocate they can get and we all should be standing behind them in support. As a volunteer, I want to be part of an organization that does that and do my part, which is miniscule in comparison to what I receive.



By Kathy Hannula, volunteer
since April, 2009.

Charlie Bowman



Why I Volunteer

- Since becoming disabled, I find volunteering therapeutic for both my mind and body.
- It is self-satisfying to know people appreciate my efforts.
- I'm given a chance to utilize my skills and talents.



By Charlie Bowman, volunteer
since April, 2009.

Joan Frey



Why I Volunteer

My name is Joan Frey. I have been a volunteer at the Veterans Service Office since April 2009 (and am probably the oldest volunteer, at 78 years of age).

I first learned of the VSO from a notice in The Forum regarding the Dental and Vision programs offered to veterans and spouses.

My husband was a WWII veteran. He had served in the Army in the European Theater in France, Germany, and Belgium during the Battle of the Bulge and had often told me stories of his experiences. How I wish I would have written them down for our two sons and two daughters prior to his death in 1986!

Because of this, I decided to look into the help offered. I was approved for the Dental and Vision assistance. This has truly been a blessing for me and I continue to be grateful.

My older brother, George Hill, a Glyndon native, also served in the Army overseas during WWII. He was active in the Warroad, MN American Legion until his death last year. Because of my husband's and brother's pride in being a veteran, I felt this was an opportunity to give in my own way.

I have volunteered at several places over the years; Hospice, Eventide, and through my church.

Seeing first-hand how well the veterans are treated and given help in this office has been a good experience! Tom, JoDee, Jennifer, and Bonnie work very hard to help educate and encourage the many men and women who have served our country.

I appreciate that we volunteers have been told by the County Commissioners, Tom, and others how grateful they are to have us!



By Joan Frey, volunteer since
April, 2009.

Kari Tester



Why I Volunteer

I volunteer at the Clay County Veterans Service Office out of respect and admiration for our veterans. I recognize the importance of what our office does to support veterans and I'm honored to play a part in giving back to them for the commitment and sacrifices they have made to protect our freedoms.



By Kari Tester, volunteer
since May, 2009.

Tony Whitehead



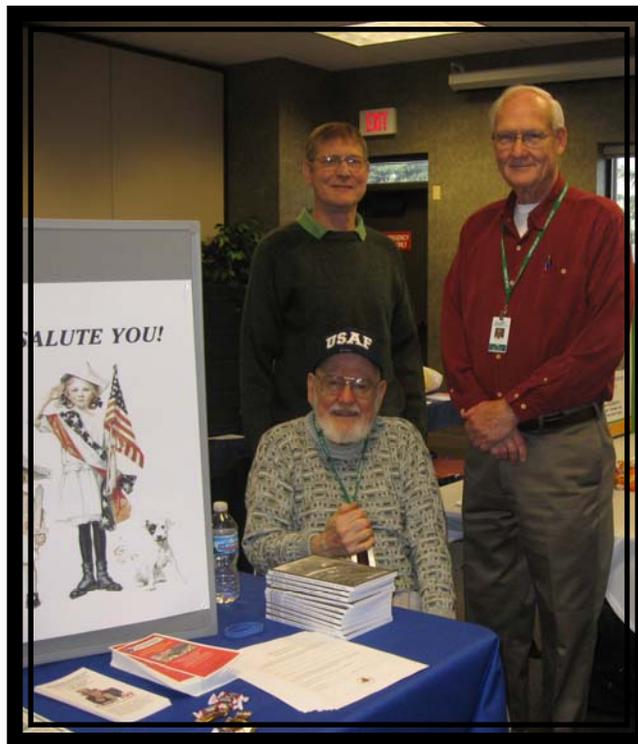
Why I Volunteer

There are several reasons why I volunteer. The following, while not necessarily in order of priority, should cover my volunteer service in the Clay County Veterans Service Office. From very early on I was taught that it was a duty, a requirement, to help my neighbor in time of need. As long as I can remember I have been volunteering in one way or another. Along with this is the need to “pay it forward.”

I currently devote much of my volunteer time to organizations that serve our veterans. This is my “pay it forward.” It is my repayment for the help and services I received.

I also volunteer for a selfish reason. It keeps me up and moving, physically and mentally. After the death of my partner of 25 years I found myself moping around and feeling sorry for myself. Volunteering forces me to get up and out, to socialize and to face new challenges.

Volunteering can be boring and tedious at times, but seeing the look of relief as a problem is solved, and bringing a smile to the face is well worth the effort.



By Tony Whitehead, volunteer
since June, 2009.

Bonnie Christopherson



Why I Volunteer

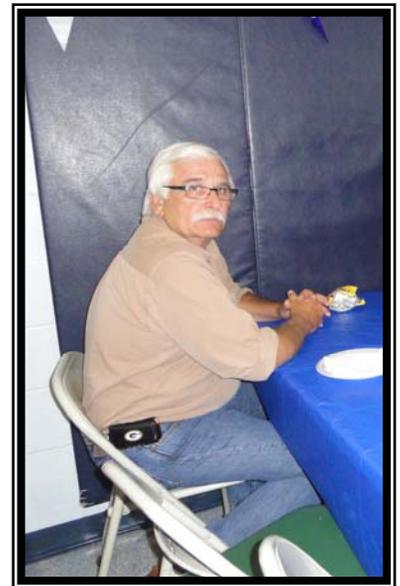
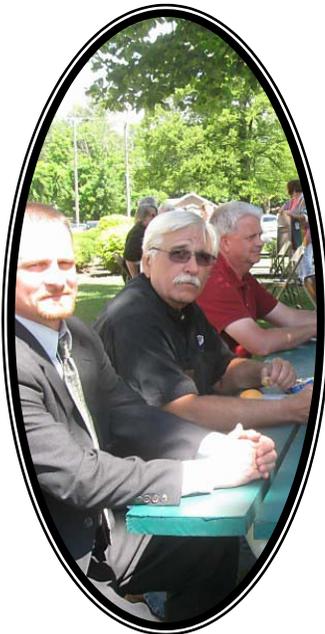
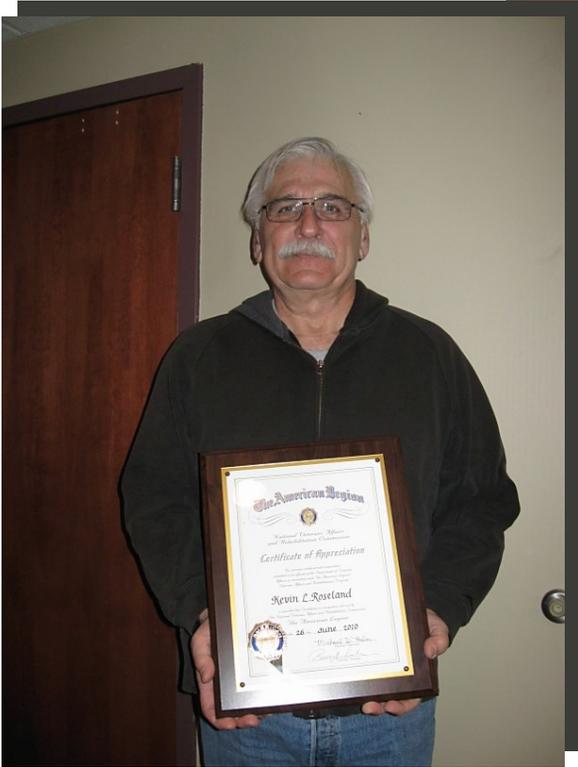
When I was a little girl, my mother told me about my grandfather's service in the Army. He had first joined the Coast Guard in Duluth, MN and transferred to the US Army. They changed the spelling of his name (Neumann) to Newman to avoid any problems. When he came home he just left it as Newman. He was wounded while serving in France. Both of his sons served, US Navy and US Army. My brother served in the US Air Force, though he was discharged due to a medical problem. My dad's brother-in-law, James, US Navy, and both of his sons, LeRoy and Jimmy served. LeRoy's daughter is in the Army and has served three tours of duty (military police) in Iraq and from our last communication is head back to Fort Leonard Wood, MO as a Drill Sergeant... Also, my two sons have served, one in the US Marine Corps and the North Dakota Air National Guard, and the other in the Minnesota Army National Guard, here in Moorhead. It seems that one of the ways that I can honor their service is by volunteering in programs that benefit the veterans.

I joined the Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary in West Fargo and transferred to the Moorhead auxiliary when we moved back to Moorhead. Since then I have kept busy with all kinds of veteran's projects. My favorite project is playing bingo with the veterans at the Fargo VA. Maybe it's selfish of me, but, making them happy makes me happy. A happy heart makes a happy life. Volunteering here in the Veterans Service Office is another way to have a happy heart and happy life.



By Bonnie Christopherson, volunteer
since July, 2009.

Kevin Roseland



Why I Volunteer

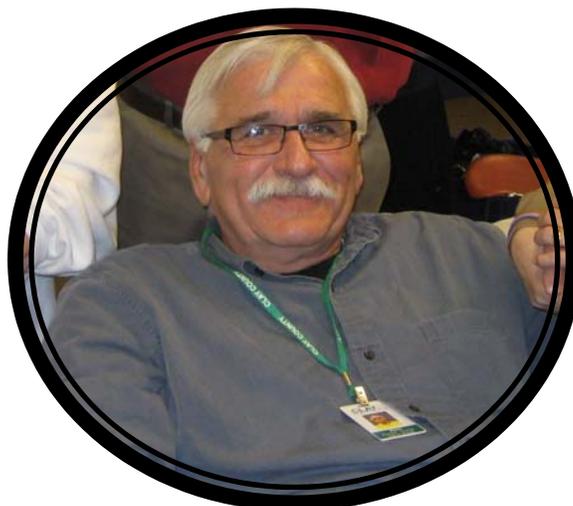
After 62 years of living, reflecting upon where I have been and where I am now, there is one theme that continuously is present throughout. Without the kindness and skills of others, and their willingness to share on my behalf, I am confident that my life could have turned out much differently than it has.

I have not always known what I had to offer, if anything, that would be of value. Ultimately, after many false starts and stumbles, it became apparent that certain gifts were bestowed upon me that were not necessarily of my own doing. I recognizing and developing these gifts, I learned that a single person can have significant benefit, even in a world seemingly gone chaotic and crazy.

Hard work, loyalty, giving of oneself, honesty and integrity can be expressed in many ways and shapes and forms. My career with the VA was a great example of where these factors had positive influence. While I never once did what I did for fame or fortune; I can recall, and periodically am reminded when I run into someone I have dealt with during my career, that their lives are somewhat better, in part, due to actions I have taken with them. For the most part, I can also say (perhaps with the exception of having to deal with ever-changing bureaucracy) that the majority of my career was fun and extremely satisfying.

Upon retirement, I had to make a decision. What was I going to do? Will I retire and basically play the rest of my life, or is there something I can give, even part-time, which would continue to make a difference. As luck would have it, I saw an advertisement on TV indicating volunteers were needed at the Clay County Veterans Service Office. Subsequently, I contacted Tom, and made application. While this may have been the beginning of his troubles, I was selected anyway.

Two years have now passed, and each time I go to my office, I am reminded of how much I enjoyed working with deserving veterans. Additionally, I have great respect for Tom and his staff, since they also uphold the importance of putting veterans first. I volunteer, mostly to keep sharp, continue giving to my community, and benefitting from being surrounded by some of the most caring and helpful people I have had the honor of working with.



By Kevin Roseland, volunteer since December, 2009.

Jim Beckstrom



Why I Volunteer

In the fall of 2009, I mentioned to a friend—Jason Hicks—that I had heard that the VSO needed help. He said that he happened to know something about that and handed me the paperwork.

For some reason I think I was set-up. Oh well, I wouldn't trade the experience for anything. I have made friends, learned new things, and above all helped veterans.

My background as an Infantry Platoon Sergeant allows me to fit right in with military paperwork and forms. Plus I can identify with vets and talk their language.

Objective:

- Veteran come in with frown on face and "down in the dumps" attitude.
- Veteran interacts with Tom and staff.
- Veteran leaves with smile on face and hope in heart.



By Jim Beckstrom, volunteer
since December, 2009.

Christian Henderson



Why I Volunteer

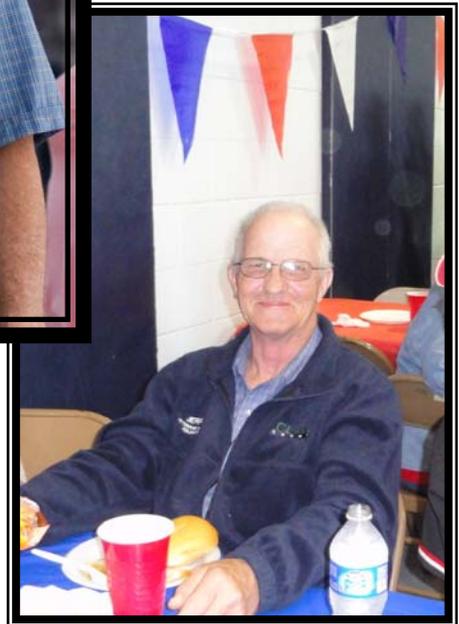
I first was interested when I received my D.A.V. letter and I saw that the Clay County VSO needed help. To make it clear, I'm a resident of Cass County and I could not believe that Clay County could not come up with the funds to support an efficient staff to support its veterans; they certainly have a strong local military history and have enjoyed military units in their community, which is definitely a source of revenue. So I decided to take action, and I began about 2 years ago with putting in one block a week, which consisted of four to five hours, which was very self-rewarding and uplifting to help others. Eventually I started taking projects home to research and develop.

I have really enjoyed working with the full time staff and other volunteers along with greeting veterans at the front desk, for I have been on the other side of the desk since the spring of 2004. To me this has been a real eye opener, to see what these VSO's must go through on a daily basis and the monumental tasks they have to accomplish on minimal funds; often reaching into their own pockets to accomplish their goals. I wish I could volunteer more but I also wish a community who supports its law enforcement community to protect its citizens could do the same for its military that performs the same function.



By Christian Henderson, volunteer
since April, 2010.

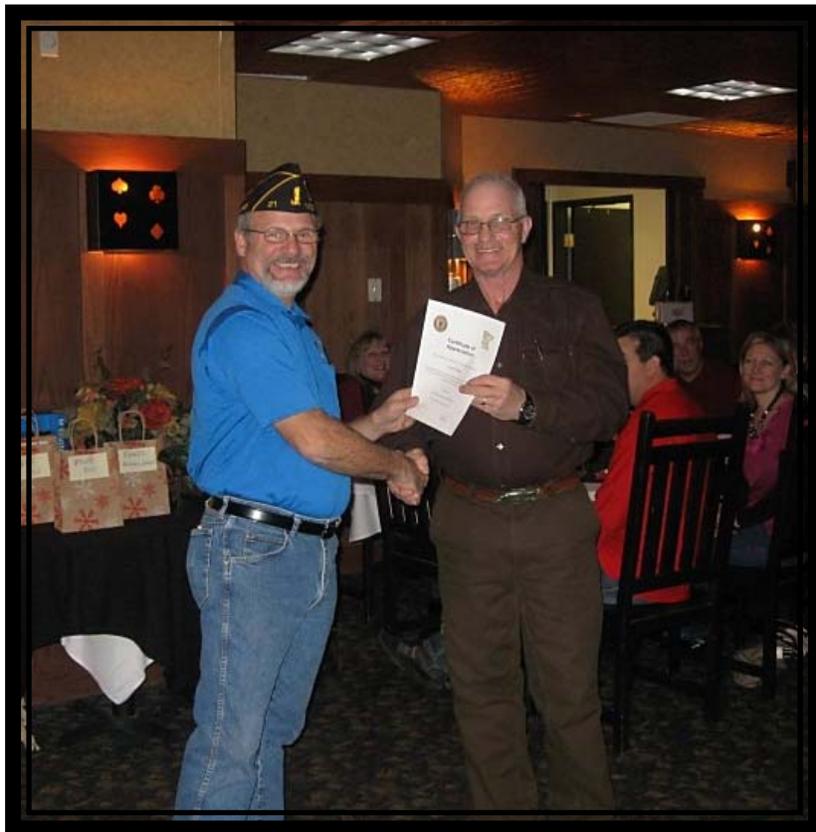
Jerry Walker



Why I Volunteer

Initially I started volunteering with the CCVSO because they had helped me out. I had been doing volunteering since 1977 with different agencies. I wanted to help make a difference in other veterans' lives by volunteering with the Veterans Service Office.

Volunteering helping other sisters and brothers that are veterans makes my heart sing. I like knowing that I can make a difference in their lives. People have made a difference in my life when I needed it. I just want to give back to others in need. I really think God wanted me to volunteer all my life. So I have volunteered for 34 years.



By Jerry Walker, volunteer
since June 2010.

Larry Nicholson



Why I Volunteer

I'm a veteran helping veterans... we always have each other's backs. If we can help then we help!



By Larry Nicholson, volunteer
since January, 2011.

Charles Leitheiser



Why I Volunteer

I always felt that if I have some spare time and have task oriented skills that I could share in helping out in different activities for the public. I volunteer now at Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge, Minnesota Loon Monitoring Program, and Clay County Restorative Justice Program. The Clay County Veterans Service Office has been very good to me. When I needed veteran information Tom Figliuzzi and his staff were more than professional and served me well. If you take something from the community there should be a way of returning those efforts. That is why I volunteer.



By Charles Leitheiser, volunteer
since March, 2011.

Ruth Johnson



Why I Volunteer

I joined the D.A.V.A. It was at one of the meetings that someone suggested that I talk to Tom about volunteering. It was sometime this spring of 2011 that I stopped in the office.

My husband died May 12, 2010. Since he was a veteran I like working in the VSO to honor him. It is fun to meet different people that come in. And, the office is usually a comfortable serene place to be – with you, good and fun people.



By Ruth Johnson, volunteer
since April, 2011.

Linda Gibson

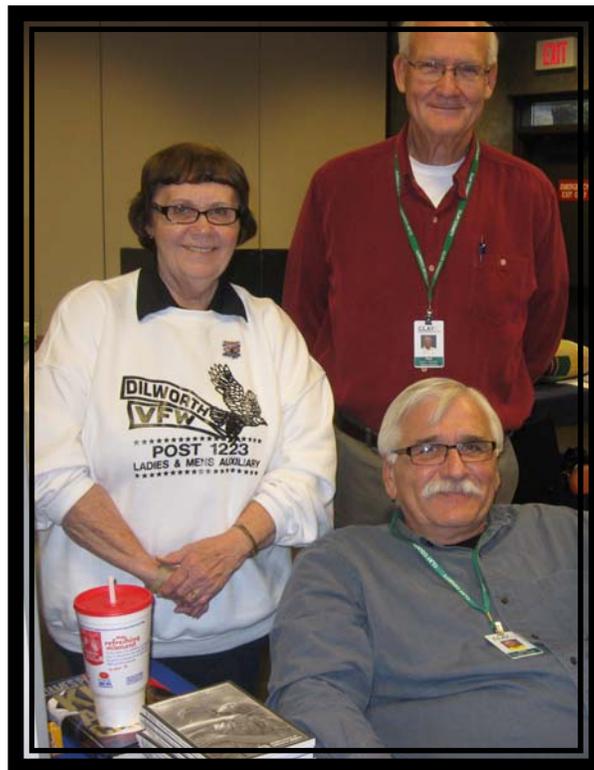


Why I Volunteer

Volunteering at the Clay County Veterans Service Office brings back good memories for me, of when my husband was in the service. Being a military wife stays with you forever. Now I am a military mom and grandmother. I am so very proud of the military men in my life.

I started volunteering at the Veterans Service Office in April 2011. I have been doing volunteer work for RSVP for several years. I enjoy it so much and it keeps me busy, and each time I volunteer it's a new adventure for me. It's great meeting new people and making new friends.

Volunteering at the Veterans Service Office is a new challenge for me, but I do so enjoy it. Tom and Jennifer are so great to work for. They are so friendly and always very thankful for that you do. I'm so pleased that there is a place like the Veterans Service Office for veterans to go to get the help they need. Hats off to Tom and Jennifer for the great work they do!!!!



By Linda Gibson, volunteer
since April, 2011.

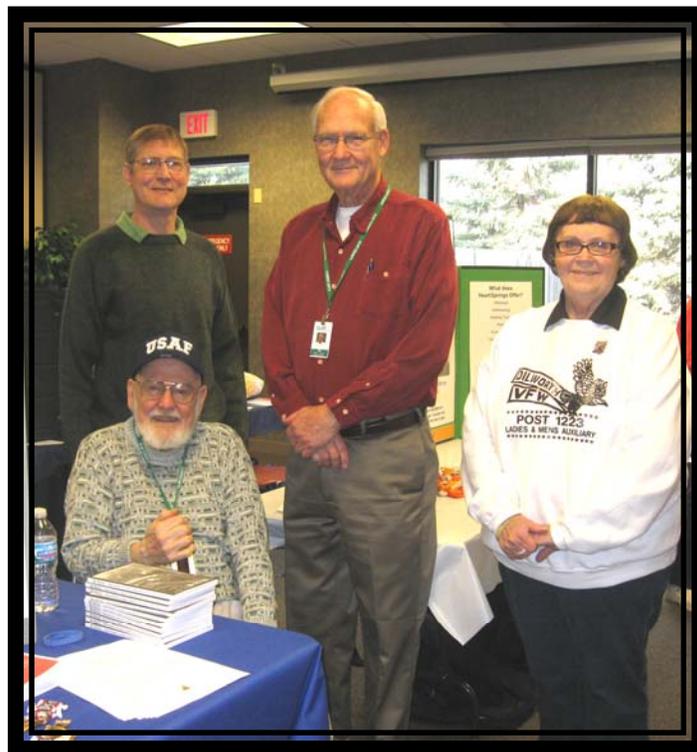
Paul Larsen



Why I Volunteer

When I saw the notice in my Legion monthly paper about the need for volunteers at the Service Office it seemed to be something I could do. I filled out the application and started in April of 2011.

What I like about the job is it only requires half a day each week. During this time one gets to meet people who need help; mostly to get through the maze of government paperwork. It is gratifying when their needs are satisfied and then life is made better.



By Paul Larsen, volunteer since
April, 2011.

Joe Bennett



Why I Volunteer

I have volunteered for many years and it has been a way of life as I was growing up. Although I was born in the depression and money was very short my mom and dad always had time to help out other ones in need.

Why I volunteered at the Clay County Veterans Service Office is because, although I am a veteran myself, I had it much easier and felt this was a way I could give back to them. If it weren't for veterans we would not enjoy the freedoms we have today.

I have been here a very short time but enjoy talking to the veterans.



By Joe Bennett, volunteer since
October, 2011.

Acknowledgements

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The text and images have been provided by the Clay County Veterans Service Office Volunteers:

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Kari Tester

Charlie Leitheiser

Tony Whitehead

Ruth Johnson

Bonnie Christopherson

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Kevin Roseland

Paul Larsen

Jim Beckstrom

Joe Bennett

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