

North Iowa Southern Minnesota Veteran Stand Down

DBA Operation Golden Hawk

Introduction

The "North Iowa Southern Minnesota Veteran Stand Down" is a one-day event intended to provide support and resources to Veterans and their families. The event brings together a wide range of organizations including local government agencies, non-profits, and community organizations, to provide a variety of services and support to Veterans in a welcoming environment under one roof.

The event offers services to address many Veteran needs such as insecurities with housing, food, clothing, employment, physical health, mental health, and alcohol/substance abuse. Attendees also receive free food, clothing, personal care items, educational information, financial counseling, legal advice, and access to recreational activities and entertainment.

The goal of the Veteran Stand Down is to provide Veterans with a one-stop-shop, so they can have their critical needs met, and receive the support and resources that are available to them. All services at the event are completely free of charge. The event also serves as an opportunity for Veterans to connect with other Veterans and build a sense of comradery and community.

Background information

"Stand Down" is a military term referring to an opportunity to achieve a brief respite from combat. Troops assemble in a base camp to receive new clothing, hot food, support services, and a relative degree of safety before returning to combat action. The concept of the Veteran Stand Down event originated in the 1980's as a way to provide support and resources to homeless Veterans. Over the years, the concept has evolved nationwide to include a wider range of services and support for all Veterans, regardless of their housing situation.

The Veteran Stand Down event provides a critical source of support and resources to Veterans in the region, many of whom may be struggling with physical, mental, or financial challenges, because of their service. The event is designed to connect Veterans with the resources and support they need to overcome challenges and lead successful and fulfilling lives. The critical services provided through the event could be the catalyst that enables a Veteran to reenter the workforce.

Many Veterans have suffered chronic issues since ending their military service, issues often inadequately addressed by traditional services. This is due in part to a lack of structured and effective collaboration among agencies, forcing Veterans to go from one agency to another to access the various resources they need.

The lack of efficient support from traditional Veteran Services has led to Veterans' mistrust of the very government agencies and large institutions created to help them. The Veteran Stand Down brings together the agencies and service providers to provide a comprehensive system that encourages and assists Veterans to overcome their distrust, or feelings of isolation, with the knowledge that this event promises to address multiple problems at one day. It provides a safe environment in which they can connect with other Veterans who may have shared experiences and cultivate hope that they can rebuild their lives.

Local Information

The third annual North Iowa Southern Minnesota Veteran Stand Down event in September 2024, served more than 515 Veterans and 560 of their family members. There were 315 Volunteers, 82 Service Providers, 125 Sponsors and 50 food service personnel. We are growing and our Veterans' needs are becoming more complicated.

The total years of military service of the Veterans in attendance was more than 3,850 years when combined.

The 2024 Intake Forms indicated that 12.2% of the Veterans in attendance where housing insecure (no stable housing or staying in an apartment where the lease is not in their name), 33.2% were food insecure, and 76.3% have a household income less than \$69,360 (the CRA Income Assessment average for the area). In addition, 350 Veterans received winter coats and boots, 202 Veterans received Health Screenings and flu shots, 120 Veterans received treatment from the Chiropractor or massage therapists, 34 Veterans received Mental Health assistance, and 8 Veterans received immediate assistance for Substance Abuse.

“Operation Golden Hawk” is a 18-person volunteer Committee organized for the purpose of facilitating the North Iowa Southern Minnesota Veteran Stand Down event. Operation Golden Hawk exists under the leadership of retired Veteran Peter Bieber. Greg Benedict is the Vice President. Retired Veteran, Lawrence Paul, is the Secretary. Angelyn Lander is the Treasurer. The Committee filed Articles of Incorporation on April 6, 2022, and is in good standing with the State of Iowa, Secretary of State. The Employer Federal Identification Number for the 501c(3) filed with the Internal Revenue Service on May 23, 2022 is #88-2440331.

Event Details

The next Veteran Stand Down will be held on Saturday September 27, 2025. Doors at the North Iowa Event Center at the North Iowa Fairground will open for all Veterans and their families at 8:00 AM. A hot breakfast, hot lunch, and take-home sack dinner will be available. All partners and collaborators will be provided with a table and chairs to meet with Veterans throughout the day. Medical providers are provided with privacy screens for their designated work areas. Afternoon activities will include BINGO games, trivia games, raffle prizes, and live music. The doors will close at 5:00 PM.

Partnerships and Collaborations

The future partnerships for the Veteran Stand Down may vary depending on the specific resources and volunteers available. However, the partnerships that were formed from the 2024 Veteran Stand Down event include: Heath Care Agencies, Housing Assistance Agencies, Mental Health Care Agencies, Employment Referral Agencies, Veteran’s Benefits Counseling Agencies, Social and Community Services, Hunting and Fishing Licenses, Legal Advice and Services, Financial Counseling Services, Educational Services, Personal Care Assistance, Clothing and Outdoor Gear Assistance, Hot Meals and the Iowa Army National Guard provided security and military tents.

These partnerships help to ensure that Veterans have access to a comprehensive range of services and support during the event and also help to increase awareness of the event and the needs of Veterans in the community.

Evaluation and Impact

The Veteran Stand Down event has a significant impact on the local Veterans' community by providing a range of services, assistance, goods, and support to Veterans who may be facing a variety of challenges or having insecurities with housing, unemployment, physical issues, mental health issues, and financial difficulties. Some of the key impacts of the Veteran Stand Down event include:

Improved health and well-being: By providing access to medical, dental, and mental health services, as well as employment assistance, education guidance, financial counseling, and legal advice, the Veteran Stand Down event can help improve the overall health and well-being of Veterans.

Increased access to resources: Through partnerships with local government agencies, non-profit organizations, and community organizations, the Veteran Stand Down event provides Veterans with access to a wide range of resources, support, and referrals that they may not have had access to otherwise.

Reduced homelessness: By offering services such as housing assistance, employment assistance, and financial counseling, the Veteran Stand Down event can help reduce the number of homeless Veterans in the community. As noted, 12.2% of Veterans who attended in 2024 were housing insecure.

Strengthened community relationships: By bringing together Veterans, their families, and members of the local community, the Veteran Stand Down event can help to build stronger relationships between these groups and foster a sense of comradery among Veterans.

Increased awareness: The Veteran Stand Down event can help to increase awareness of the needs and challenges faced by Veterans and raise the profile of organizations that are working to support them.

Improved employment prospects: Through employment, education, and career counseling services, the Veteran Stand Down event can help Veterans to find employment and secure their financial future.

Overall, the Veteran Stand Down event provides a unique opportunity for Veterans to access a wide range of services and support, and to connect with others in their community. By helping to address the critical challenges faced by Veterans, the event can have a positive and long-lasting impact on their lives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the North Iowa Southern Minnesota Veteran Stand Down serves as a vital event for the community, by providing a wide range of critical services, assistance, goods, and support for Veterans facing insecurities with housing, food, clothing, employment, physical health, mental health and alcohol/substance abuse. This event will have a profound impact on the lives of Veterans in the region and provide a critical support network for those in need.

The Committee's short-term goal is to raise \$75,000 to serve 700 Veterans at the 2025 Stand Down event. The Committee's long-term goal, written as "Operation Northern Exposure", is to purchase a 48-foot enclosed trailer containing essential items needed to conduct "pop-up" Stand Downs in the surrounding areas.

We believe that it is a privilege to be able to give back to those who have served our country, and we are committed to ensuring that all Veterans have access to the support and resources they need to succeed. The event will make a real difference in the lives of Veterans and their families. We want to help to ensure that this vital event continues to be held for many years to come.

The North Iowa Southern Minnesota Veteran Stand Down will make a difference for those who have made a difference for us all.

Thank you for your consideration and continued support. --The Operation Golden Hawk Committee