

Property Tax Assistance For Veterans

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Madison County officials are developing a new program that will provide property tax relief for struggling military veterans.

Madison County Treasurer Kurt Prenzler, CPA, and Madison County Veterans' Assistance Commission (VAC) Superintendent Brad Lavite want to help honorably discharged veterans who are facing financial difficulties and are unable to pay their property taxes.

“We want to do something to assist veterans who are facing the possibility of not staying current with their taxes,” Lavite said. “The goal is to make sure veterans’ property taxes are paid, rather than the delinquent amount going to the tax sale.”

The new program was announced during U.S. Rep. John Shimkus’ (R-Illinois) Veterans Advisory Committee meeting Tuesday at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 5694 in Highland.

The VAC program will assist qualifying veterans on paying current property taxes, so he /she will not lose their homes.

Lavite said he approached Prenzler about the new program, an idea that was first discussed years ago, because he wants to make sure veterans get the help they need.

“The goal is to keep a veteran in his or her home,” Lavite said. “It costs more to relocate and to set someone up in another place than it does to keep the veteran in the current home.”

The VAC provides emergency aid and services to approximately 45,000 veterans and their families throughout Madison County.

“This program is just another step in making sure veterans get help in a time of need,” he said.

Prenzler said that veterans can reduce their property tax assessment with qualifying exemptions. Currently, there are more than 700 taxpayers who receive the Returning Veterans’ Homestead and the Disabled Veterans’ Standard Homestead exemptions, he said.

For more information on veterans’ exemptions, contact the Chief County Assessment Office at (618) 692-6270.

Lavite said this program will assist any honorably discharged veterans, even those who don’t qualify for property tax exemptions.

“There are veterans out there who qualify for assistance and never apply,” he said. “We want to make sure they get any and all of the assistance they can.”

The VAC assists thousands of veterans each year with rent payments to avoid eviction and with utility payments to avoid shut-off. The VAC also refers the homeless /transitional for housing, as well as provides food/family essentials, miscellaneous disability care expenses, and other assistance as needed.

To qualify, a veteran must provide proof of an Honorable Discharge (DD-214) from active duty with the U.S. Military, along with proof of ownership of the property, (i.e., a tax bill or the property deed in the veteran's name). The veteran also must have proof of income and the inability to pay.

Lavite said that the property must be the veteran's primary residence for which he/she is applying for assistance. A veteran also must meet income guidelines and agree to adhere to the VAC program guidelines, which include participating in the Jobs Program or applying for VA service-connected and pension claims, health care benefits, or Aid and Attendance benefits.

A widow or a widower of a veteran, as well as the disabled child of a veteran older than 18, also may qualify.

"Our goal is to make sure the needs of a veteran or his/her family members are being met," he said.

Prenzler said he appreciates that the county's VAC wants to assist the men and the women who proudly served this country.

"Working with the Veterans' Assistance Commission is a way to make sure that veterans' property taxes are paid," Prenzler said. "These men and women, who are of all ages, honorably served our country. They shouldn't fear losing their homes because they are facing hard times."

Veterans must contact the VAC no later than Dec. 1, to receive property tax assistance.

If you are an honorably discharged veteran who needs assistance, or if you know of a veteran in need, please contact the Veterans' Assistance Commission at (618) 629-7040, ext. 4554.