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Bandera County seeks Veterans Service Officer

Each year a small group young men and women from Bandera County make a choice to serve in the nation's military. This is a decision that will affect them for the rest of their lives.

Only 1 percent of Americans currently serve in the military. The other 99 percent benefit from the sacrifices made by this select group of citizens. People volunteer to serve in the military for many reasons. They may want to provide an important public service, follow a family tradition, find adventure in far-away places, or gain beneficial job skills. Some join in order to secure financial security which includes the benefits they receive as veterans.

Veterans comprise 5 percent of the U.S. population. This is reflected in the 5.3 percent veteran population in the State of Texas. However, 11 percent of Bandera County's population are veterans - more than twice that of the U.S.

Veterans are attracted to Bandera County for a number of reasons. Bandera County is close to the veteran services one can get at the military bases in San Antonio. Veterans in Bandera County also favor the Veterans Affairs Medical Center located in nearby Kerrville.

The federal government and the State of Texas provide a wide array of benefits to veterans. But veterans have to apply for these benefits. This is often a complex task, especially in the case of veterans who wish to file disability claims for injuries or illness connected to their military service.

The Department of Veterans Affairs accredits qualified and trained individuals to assist veterans in filling claims with the VA. The VA also encourages veterans to utilize the services of accredited Veterans Service Officers (VSO).

Not everyone can become an accredited VSO. But the VA established the means by which the State of Texas and individual counties can hire

and employ accredited VSOs. These VSOs provide services free of charge to veterans.

One reason for accredited VSOs at the county level is that it is a local service. Veterans in the county do not have to travel to regional VA centers in Waco or Houston. They can meet with a benefits counselor in their home area.

Bandera County currently has an opening for a Veterans Service Officer (VSO).

Veteran population in Bandera County is about 2,300. The veteran population in Gillespie County is about 1,700 and in Kerr County about 4,600.

Bandera County veterans deserve the availability of at least one full-time professional VSO. Neighboring counties do not have to provide services to Bandera County veterans. They are being turned away.

There is an overall shortage of VSOs in Texas. This causes some veterans to give up hope in receiving the benefits they earned.

Gary Noller is a U.S. Army veteran with service in the Vietnam War. He is a member of American Legion Post 157 in Bandera.