

# ‘Whole New Universe’ Opens to Michigan Service Officer

## Troy North has been a VFW-accredited service officer for one year, and his own quest for benefits has helped him help others

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Troy North’s background is in aviation mechanics. But when he started learning about VA claims, he couldn’t keep that information to himself.

North has been the VFW-accredited service officer at the VA Ann Arbor (Mich.) Healthcare System for the past year. He started navigating the VA system for himself and his wife, who also is a veteran, and wanted to help others obtain their benefits.

“It opened up a whole new universe to me,” North said.

He wanted to take that knowledge and find an outlet where he could both challenge himself and educate others.

Previously, North worked at a small college, teaching students who were earning their airframe and power plant licenses.

A lot of those students, according to North, were looking to use the GI Bill. The college also had a VA representative on-site, and North said he started to “pick his brain.” North then reached out to the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency in Lansing, Mich., and took a class to get himself “oriented” with the issues.

“Once I did that, I applied for a couple VSO positions, and the VFW brought me in,” North said.

While he doesn’t have a medical background, North said, he has the customer service skills appropriate for the position.

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“I worked in aviation for 20-plus years in logistics,” North said. “I’ve done everything but fly. I think I had that part down where I could actually have a conversation with somebody. Working at the school really helped make that transition as well.”

Once coming on as a VFW service officer, North attended VFW’s annual service officer training in Annapolis, Md.

“That was an eye-opener as well,” said North, who served in the Navy from 1992-96 as a jet mechanic with Electronic Attack Squadron (VAQ) 136 aboard the aircraft carrier USS Independence off of Japan. He also was attached to VAQ-140 on the USS George Washington out of Norfolk, Va.

One of North’s most recent victories as a service officer was helping a veteran who had been diagnosed with non-Hodgkin lymphoma and was rated at 100 percent disabled also receive a 100 percent permanent and total rating.

The process, North said, took about one week. When he notified the veteran and his spouse, North said they were “super” thankful.

“You could tell it meant a lot to him,” North said.

Now, the veteran’s spouse can receive benefits such as insurance, and the couple’s property tax was waived.

North said as the only VFW-accredited service officer at the Ann Arbor VA, he handles about two claims per day, and meets with about a dozen veterans on a given day. The most common claims he works with are related to tinnitus and bilateral hearing loss.

He said the most rewarding aspect of his role as a service officer is meeting “new and interesting” people.

“You do have your regulars, but you always meet new people every day,” North said. “That’s the part I enjoy. I don’t mind it at all. I find it interesting to see how the rest of the world’s living, and for the most part, we’re all the same.”

***Editor’s note: This is the fourth in a series of feature articles on VFW’s accredited veteran service officers. In 2019, VFW is commemorating the 100th anniversary of its National Veteran Service and National Legislative Service offices in Washington, D.C.***

*This article is featured in the May 2019 issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Kari Williams](#), associate editor for VFW magazine.*