



Saint Louis County

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NEWS RELEASE

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Veterans Service Officer honored for catching old error Northland veteran receives more than \$300,000 in back pay

Brian Rulifson had been on the job as a St. Louis County Veterans Service Officer less than six months when he was visited in September by a Vietnam vet in need of medical assistance through the Veterans Administration (VA). The veteran, who is from the northern part of St. Louis County, is undergoing treatment for cancer. He asked to not be identified but agreed to let the details of his story be shared.

As Rulifson looked through the paperwork in the vet's file, he noted something didn't look right. The vet, who has what's termed a presumptive cancer – meaning it's a type of cancer that's presumed to be linked to his service in Vietnam – had applied for certain benefits in 2004, but been turned down. Rulifson brought it to the attention of Sherry Rodriguez, director of Veterans Service Offices for the county, who agreed that this veteran had wrongly been denied benefits, and pursued the case with the VA. Ultimately, the VA ruled that a "Clear and Unmistakable Error" had occurred nine years ago, and last week issued a check to this veteran, for \$306,962 in back pay. It is believed to be the largest single payout ever to a veteran in the county. Additionally, the man is now considered permanently and totally disabled, which means he will receive increased monthly payments for the rest of his life.

On Tuesday, November 12, St. Louis County commissioners will recognize Rulifson for his diligence during their County Board meeting, which begins at 9:30 a.m. in the Fredenberg Town Hall, 5104 Fish Lake Road, Duluth.

"I am so happy for this veteran that he is finally receiving the benefits he deserves," said Rodriguez. "Laws change and so do the benefits available, so I encourage veterans to stop into our

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offices and talk with us, even if you've been denied in the past. We are here, as Brian demonstrated, to make sure veterans receive the benefits they've earned through their service.”

The County's Veterans Service Office was established in 1946 to assist veterans and their eligible dependents in obtaining benefits and services accrued through military service. St. Louis County offers four Veterans Service Offices – in Duluth, Hibbing, Virginia and Ely. For more information about services for veterans or to schedule an appointment with a Veterans Service Officer, call (218) 725-5285 or visit stlouiscountymn.gov/veterans.

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