5000 West

Milwaukee VA Medical Center
Vol. 7, No. 1
January 2016

Director's Note

Greeting to the Zablocki VA family,

With the start of the New Year, I would like to begin a conversation about Secretary McDonald's strategy for transforming the VA: It's called, "myVA." While some may feel that this is simply the next "new thing," I believe that myVA is an initiative everyone can understand and is important to our efforts to improve services for our Veterans.

There are five simple points to myVA: Improving the Veteran experience, enhancing employee engagement, building strategic partnerships, improving support services and creating a culture of continuous performance improvement. Unlike other strategic plans, myVA is not about meeting a number of performance measures. Everything we do, or strive to accomplish, relates back to these five points. We've already started to implement several programs that align with myVA, to include the short videos from the staff for, "Ask Me Why I Serve."

In the coming months, leaders from across the organization, me included, will share our journey lines with staff; telling how and why we serve Wisconsin's Veterans. As I said, this is only the beginning of the conversation. I am asking all of our volunteers, Veterans, and employees to be a part of this discussion in an effort to make Zablocki the desired destination for medical care and services in the Midwest.

For more information about myVA, visit the website http://www.va.gov/opa/myva/

Thank you for providing great care for our Vets,

Jim

search: **milwaukeeva**

flickr™

5000 West is a recurring magazine produced by the Public Affairs Office and Medical Media of the Zablocki VA Medical Center, and is intended for employees, volunteers, patients, and friends. Views expressed do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the medical center. While 5000 West encourages submissions for future editions, we cannot guarantee publication, and reserve the right to edit all copy so it conforms to editorial policy and guidelines. To submit information, e-mail: Public Affairs at VHAMIWPublicAffairs@va.gov or call the Public Affairs Office at 414-384-2000, ext. 45363.

On the Cover

Jeff Clair, a health technician in the Logistics Division at the Milwaukee VA Medical center, plays the drums during a performance of "The Jeff Clair Project" Dec. 17, at the Community Living Center. Clair, once homeless, unemployed and addicted to drugs in Chicago, turned his life around during an 11-month drug rehabilitation program at the Milwaukee VA. He's been sober since 2004.

"I got tired of starting over again," he said. "You get tired of starting at zero." **See story, page 10**

CLEMENT J. ZABLOCKI VA MEDICAL CENTER

5000 West National Ave.
Milwaukee, WI 53295
www.milwaukee.va.gov

Jim McLain
Acting Medical Center Director

Drew DeWitt
Acting Deputy Director

Elsa Tucker
Acting Associate Director

Michael D. Erdmann, MD
Chief of Staff

Julia A. Roberts
Associate Director for Patient/Nursing Services

5000 *West*

Gary J. Kunich
Public Affairs Officer

Benjamin Slane
Digital media, Photographer
@benjaminslane

Yanitz Irizarry
Photographer, Writer

Christa Holland
Copy Editor

VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Milwaukee VA Medical Center

New name, same mission

'To more accurately reflect the purpose, target population, and future vision'

BY NATHAN WALLIN

There is a change occurring on the 10th floor of the Milwaukee VA Medical Center.

The team of VA employees who once worked on the "Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn Care Management Team" – or OEF/OIF/OND, for short — are now the Transition and Care Management Program.

"There was a lot of confusion with that name: OEF/OIF/OND," said Wesley M. Kereven, program support assistant for the Transition and Care Management Program.

The name change is recognition that not only Veterans of recent military operations need assistance, but also those from every era of conflict.

"We still operate as we do normally," said Kereven. "This is purely a rebranding, renaming of the program."

Established in October 2007 with an emphasis on "transition," the original OEF/OIF/OND Care Management Program was created to address and assist with the needs of Veterans as they left the military system and transitioned to the care of Veterans Affairs.

"Our mission is to assist and advise returning combat Veterans in establishing their entitlements and benefits," said Kereven.

"Whether it's obtaining a new DD-214, requesting medals or service records, the (transition patient advocates) will assist and advise with the entitlements and benefits; the paperwork, the struggles of finding and locating documentation," said Kereven.

"We also provide Case Management services for those Veterans who are having difficulty acclimating to civilian life," he said.

Each VA medical center has a designated Transition and Care Management Program to coordinate patient care and to aid Veterans as they pursue their care and benefits. At the Milwaukee VA, Kereven is one part of a 14-member team which also includes nine case managers, three transition patient advocates and one program manager.

For more information on the Transition and Care Management program at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center, call 414-384-2000, ext. 41826.

PHOTO BY BENJAMIN SLANE

The team formerly known as the OEF/OIF/OND Care Management Team serves burgers and brats at The Welcome Home Picnic outreach event. The group recently changed their name to the "Transition Care Management" team.

The Art of Healing

Veterans Creative Arts Festival offers Veterans creative outlet

BY NATHAN WALLIN

A talent competition for Veteran artists featuring nearly 100 categories in performing, visual arts, and creative writing takes place Feb. 25 and 29 at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center.

The local shows are the first step toward the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, Oct. 10 to 17 in Jackson, Mississippi. The national event features workshops and culminates with an art exhibit and stage show.

The deadline to sign up for the local show is Feb. 19 for the performance art and Feb. 24 for the visual arts.

There are 81 different categories in three primary areas including: creative writing, dance, drama and music. Many of the categories offer a solo and group option.

- Creative writing categories include: poetry, essay, personal experience, short story, monologue/duologue.
- Dance categories include: ballroom, novelty, line dance and country, folk, ethnic and cultural. The dance categories also include wheelchair and ambulatory sub-categories.
- Drama categories include: prose, poetry, comedy, performance and mime, juggling, magic and puppetry.
- Music categories include: vocal and instrumental.
- Art categories include: Fine art: to include the sub-categories - painting, sculpture, graphics, photography, pottery, and more.
- Applied art: to include the sub-categories - ceramics, woodworking, carving, jewelry, collage, leather carving and stamping, mosaic, metal work, glass work and bead work.

- Kit art: to include the sub-categories — string art, needlework, fabric art, figurine painting, leather kit, wood building, engraving and more.
- The performance art contestants will present two separate shows at 2 and 6:30 p.m. Feb. 25 in the in Recreation Hall, room 3435.
- The gallery exhibit of art entries takes place 11 am. to 3 p.m. Feb. 29 in Recreation Hall.
- To sign up and for more information, call 414-384-2000, and then the following extensions:
- Visual Arts - Kris Kulas, ext. 41688
- Music and Dance - Sandi McCormick, ext. 41988
- Creative Writing and Drama - Courtney Zeller, ext. 45981

VA medical facilities incorporate the creative arts into their recreation therapy programs to offer Veterans an additional avenue for healing.

McCormick, a creative arts therapist, said the art and stage show provides, "another medium for people to have an outlet for their feelings, for self-expression. They're trying to find a way to heal."

Air Force Veteran Don Dorff agreed with McCormick.

"My mind is on nothing but the music," he said. "It's good therapy. It's like things that may be bothersome just wash away."

Dorff, a vocalist and guitarist, first participated in the Milwaukee Creative Arts Festival in 2007. The 2016 festival will mark his ninth year of participation.

"I'm in my own world when I play," he said. "I'm totally absorbed."

In his first year he took first place at the local level and won the bronze medal at the national Creative Arts Festival in St. Louis, Missouri.

While the contest is open to all Veterans, many use the arts and the festival as part of their ongoing therapy and healing from Post-Traumatic Stress, anxiety and other challenges.

"It's process-driven driven therapy," McCormick said. "Rec therapists teach different ways to adapt to the world, to have fun again."

PHOTO BY BENJAMIN SLANE

The Veterans Creative Arts Fair will be held at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center Feb. 25 and 29. Deadline for registration is Feb. 19 for performers and Feb. 24 for visual artists.

Renowned chef wants to share passion

BY GARY KUNICH

PHOTO BY NATHAN WALLIN

Guest speaker Chef Michael Feker gives a live cooking demonstration during the Martin Luther King Jr. Day observance at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center, Jan. 19. During the presentation Feker answered questions from the audience and gave cooking and nutrition advice.

Michael Feker was living the life of privilege as an Iranian teenager living and going to school abroad in Switzerland.

And then a revolution happened.

The Shah of Iran was kicked out of power, and soon after, the Ayatollah Khomeini took control of his country. By the time militant Iranian students stormed the U.S. embassy and took 66 people hostage, Feker was already safe in America.

But he never forgot.

"I saw the wrath and the madness and it was absolutely devastating," he said.

The renowned chef who owns two restaurants in southeast Wisconsin, and has appeared on Food Network, said it gave him an appreciation for the American soldier who goes into harm's way to protect freedom. Now he wants to give back by creating a non-profit that introduces Veterans to the world of culinary arts.

Feker was the guest speaker and gave a cooking demonstration Jan. 19 at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center's Martin Luther King Jr. celebration. He also talked about his own dream to start a non-profit to build interest in a cooking school geared toward Veterans.

"The message from Martin Luther King was, 'What have you done for others?' In that way he wanted everyone to contribute to a better life. You can't ask for a better example of that than our Veterans. They don't need to be asked that question, because they have done for others without be asked. They are willing to step in front of a bullet to give someone else the dream of freedom," Feker said.

"Now, I want to give back and help them. If Veterans are struggling or looking for a career, I want to introduce them to my love of culinary arts. It takes a lot of discipline and focus to work in a kitchen. It's not easy, but it's not easy being a soldier, either. They have a lot of these skills, and I want to make them ambassadors for this career. I want to take Veterans and make them flavor ambassadors."

Feker never served in uniform but said his background makes him appreciate what he has today.

"What happened in Iran (in 1979) was very complicated and deep-rooted," Feker said. "Some may be too young to understand that or remember what happened, but I lived it, I understand it and that's why I appreciate the freedom I have as an American citizen."

With anger building toward the Shah, who ruled with the help of secret police, Iranians turned to Khomeini, who was in exile in France. They smuggled in cassette tapes of him speaking, which eventually led to the revolution and an even harsher regime.

"There was a lot of resentment to the Shah at that time, and that planted the seeds, that drove it. People were willing to say "Yes" to anything and that is how revolution happens. There is push and push and push and then an explosion."

Feker's mom died shortly before the Iranian revolution. He got to the United States and his father joined him a couple years later.

"I have never taken my freedom for granted or those who fight for that freedom," he said, "especially those who have gone to the Middle East to fight."

Feker went to culinary school in 1984, then worked in various kitchens.

"I didn't dare call myself a chef until 1990," he said. "It took many years from cook to chef. It's a big journey of building character, learning time management, the chemistry of food, and putting it all together.

"It's really what our Veterans go through. If you want to be a success, you have to be willing to work hard and do something right. They already are taught these skills to be successful in the military."

Feker eventually opened three restaurants in Los Angeles. But now married with three children, ages 13, 11, and 9, he wanted a change.

"I was looking to settle down and find a bit more peaceful place for my children, and found it here," he said.

Feker owns and operates two restaurants in the area — Il Mito Trattoria, which specializes in Italian cuisine, in Wauwatosa; and Zesti in Hartland, which offers different meals from around the world in a casual atmosphere.

Food Network has also taken notice. Feker appeared on "Guy's Grocery Games," and "Cutthroat Kitchen."

The premise of "Cutthroat Kitchen" is to pit chefs against one another to sometimes outwit and sabotage to win. Each episode features four people vying to win $25,000.

While he didn't win the top prize during his Dec. 27 show, he made it to second place and used it as platform to share his dream about starting the non-profit.

"I love to cook and share my love of cooking with others," he said. "But I want to do more than cook. I want to give back to the community and help the next generation."

Will Johnson, the Equal Employment Opportunity program manager, said he has known Feker for years, and this has always been his desire.

"He's the real deal," Johnson said. "I've

Continued on Page 16
See CHEF

IN AND AROUND MILWAUKEE VA

TOP LEFT: Congresswoman Gwen Moore speaks with Army Veteran Norman Wagner during a New Year's celebration at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center, Dec. 31.
MIDDLE: Air National Guard Master Sgt. Christine Hopkins wishes holiday cheer to Veteran Conrad Bilgrian during Dec. 9 visit. Hopkins and about 20 other Airmen from the Air National Guard's 128th Air Refueling Wing and volunteers from the Elks, Masons, Army Navy Union, AMVETS/ AMVETS Auxiliary and other Veteran groups packed and distributed more than 450 holiday gift bags at the Milwaukee VA.
BOTTOM: Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett chats with a Veteran in the Matousek Auditorium Dec. 21, during the "Veterans Drive 2015" event. Milwaukee city and county employees and residents donated 15,000 items to the Milwaukee VA as part of its holiday gift giving drive. All of the items will go to Veterans and Veteran programs such as our homeless outreach.

FISHER HOUSE WISCONSIN ABOVE: Rich Heinze,
Medical Center campus, January 6. TOP RIGHT: An interic
VA Medical Center campus Wednesday, January 6. PHOTOS BY

PHOTO BY BENJAMIN SLANE

project superintendent for Tony Garcsynski, stands in the front walkway of Fisher House Wisconsin on the Milwuakee VA
or shot of a bathroom at the Fisher House. BOTTOM: An exterior shot of the Fisher House on the campus of the Milwaukee

NATHAN WALLIN

Diamond In The Rough

Valuable delivery lands in Logistics, then delivered to rightful owner

BY GARY KUNICH

More than 300 UPS packages are delivered each day to the Milwaukee VA, but one outshined them all — a $6,000 diamond ring set that wasn't supposed to be delivered to the medical center.

"I saw all those diamonds and went, 'Wow!'"

That's what Tim Reichman, a material handler from the logistics division, said when he opened the package Oct. 22 and saw the engagement ring and wedding set.

With some quick detective work, Reichman got the ring in the right hands within an hour.

"We get a lot of expensive narcotics delivered here and other supplies, but you don't ever really see a ring," Reichman said.

Every weekday UPS delivers hundreds of packages to the warehouse. Staff scans the delivery bar codes, opens the packages and makes sure the items get routed throughout the hospital.

But in this case, UPS mistakenly put the wrong delivery label on the package. The ring's owner dropped the set off at a Jared's jewelry store in Green Bay for repairs. That store sent it to Jared's Jewelry Galleria in Brookfield, Wisconsin, but it never arrived and took a detour to the Milwaukee VA.

"To me, it was just a ring, and a ring is a ring," Reichman said. "I had no idea it was that valuable. I just knew it didn't belong here."

He brought it to his coworker, Dan Lampi, and the two worked together to find the right owner.

"The first thing we did was seal it with the security tape we use for narcotics packages to make sure it was safe," Lampi said. "Something like this happens, it could easily be stolen, and it just speaks to the integrity of Tim and our whole team."

The phone number inside the package was wrong, but after Googling the sender's address, they found out where it was supposed to go.

"We still had to be sure because we're not just going to give away a ring like that," Lampi said. "We called and asked if they were expecting a UPS shipment and gave them a tracking number," Lampi said.

That led them to Brett Swann, who was waiting on the ring in Brookfield.

"I'll be right there!" Swann told them.

"What they did was phenomenal," he said. "I was shocked. I dropped everything, washed my face and hands, got directions, got in my car and got over there as fast as I could.

"I am so grateful for their honesty and going the extra step to find out where it was supposed to go," Swann said. "This was on a Thursday and the person who owned the ring set was expecting to pick it up on Saturday."

He was able to do six hours of work on the ring set and get it back to the owner in time. That wouldn't have happened, he said, if VA had simply returned it to UPS and let them figure out the problem.

"Sometimes mail gets misdirected, and sometimes people keep something that isn't theirs," Swann said. "It would have been easy for that ring to disappear."

But Reichman, who started working here in 1992 after high school graduation, said that never crossed his mind.

"A ring isn't worth losing your job over," he said. "I got the ring to the right place because that's my job. I like my job and I like to do it right, then go home. I'm glad we found the right person. Sometimes magic happens."

Milwaukee VA logistics employees Dan Lampi and Tim Reichman found the $6,000 ring and tracked down the intended addressee to a jeweler in Brookfield, Wisconsin.

PHOTO BY BENJAMIN SLANE

Shocking Relief

An ancient method shows results in treatment of back pain

BY BENJAMIN SLANE

PHOTOS BY BENJAMIN SLANE

ABOVE: Anne Gongola, advanced dry needling practitioner at Milwaukee VA, adjusts the electrical current running from a stimulation device, through the needles and into the muscle tissue.
LEFT: Gongola presses along the spine feeling for knotted or tense muscles.

If you like fresh Wisconsin cheese curds, you may also like dry needling.

We tagged along with a Veteran who was undergoing therapy for back muscle spasms. First, the therapist grinds knots in the muscles, then progresses to dry needles. For the final touch, she adds electricity to stimulate the muscle.

"It is an interesting feeling," said Kristy Ludin, Army Veteran. "You can akin the feeling of the needling pullout to the sound of chewing a cheese curd! I don't know how to explain it."

Dry needline treatment is thousands of years old, but only within the last couple of years pricked its way into treatment courses at Milwaukee VA as part of a holistic, non-medicated approach.

The dry needle treatment and deep tissue massage are a last effort when traditional care fails and provides an opportunity to start a course of treatment without prescription medication.

Ludin's primary care provider suggested the needling to help ease the nearly debilitating muscle spasms.

"I was tired of taking too many pain pills," said Ludin, "and more concerned with effect of the pills on my my body."

So, she took her needling referral to orthopedic physical therapy.

Anne Gongola is an advanced dry needling practitioner at Milwaukee VA.

"Dry needling can be highly effective," said Gongola, who has performed this since 2013. "You'll likely feel immediate relief."

In Ludin's case, the muscle spasms were so intense she needed something more. She would be in so much pain during her drive from West Bend to the medical center that her anxiety would increase.

"They hook up a TENS unit to the needles," Ludin said. "That is when the muscle relief sets in."

Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation, or TENS, is used to increase pain relief and efficacy of dry needling by running a controlled amount of electrical current through the muscles.

Gongola said a majority of her patients are apprehensive at first, but after the initial session were hooked.

"I became involved through physical therapy. I was tired of taking too many pain pills and I was concerned about what it does to my body so I tried it. I had no idea VA offered it as a course of treatment. Since dry needling, I no longer take pain pills and I haven't had to use my TENS unit once. It feels as if my back was given a second chance!"

The Jeff Clair Project

Recovering addict flips life with help from Milwaukee VA

BY NATHAN WALLIN

Jeff Clair made a real mess of his life in Chicago.

He lost his job. He was homeless. He was an addict.`

Clair had been in and out of short-term drug treatment programs numerous times but all for naught. Time and again he'd relapse, unable to beat his demons.

"I'd done numerous 30-, 90-day programs only to return back to my world of chaos," he said.

His struggle to overcome addiction was going nowhere, until he came to Milwaukee.

An 11-month stint at an in-patient drug rehabilitation program at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center's Domiciliary 123 finally stuck. Clair has been sober ever since.

"I've been clean now, shoot, it's been 11 years," he said.

Sober since 2004, Clair now has a full-time job at the Milwaukee VA. He's also the leader of his own band, "The Jeff Clair Project," that performs throughout the city.

But if not for VA, he said he wouldn't even be alive today.

A Chicago native, Clair served three years in the Army in the early 1970s as a radio communications specialist in Germany.

After his service in the Army, Clair became a musician.

Temptations became bad habits and bad habits became an addiction.

"It got excessive, one thing led to another," he said. "It follows most musicians."

Clair didn't have one particular vice. He drank, he smoked, he snorted, and he abused over-the-counter medication.

"I did everything, drugs, alcohol, it didn't matter. Usually alcohol set off the mood to go to something stronger," he said.

And that led to problems outside of music.

"People under addiction lose focus as to what you're supposed to do in life," Clair said.

Clair lost his job with the Postal Service and his life fell apart piece by piece.

"I was fired for my excessive tardiness," he said. "My license was messed up, I owed the IRS money.

"But all these things have changed, by the grace of God and all the people who have come into my life," he said.

Once a patient at the domiciliary, Clair's project of turning his life around began.

"I was determined to undo the damage," he said. "It was the best thing for me."

In the program, Clair learned a new way to live his life and made a change. He also learned he'd had enough of making costly mistakes.

"You get tired of starting at zero."

The life skills and lessons helped him turn his life around. He started working at Milwaukee VA in 2005 as part of the Compensated Work Therapy program. He became a full-time employee in 2009. Today he works as a health technician in the logistics division.

Clair's co-workers in the logistics division say he is a valued member of their team and his contributions go beyond simply showing up and doing his job.

"I've worked with him for four years," said Jermaine Brister. "He's got a great work ethic. But he's also a great guy. He's really good with people."

Clair's supervisor, Pam Thelen, echoes Brister's praise.

"He's a good worker: he's good with the Vets, he's helpful, he's got integrity, he's got a good heart and he's kind," she said. "He's willing to go the extra mile."

Clair doesn't shy away from his past struggles. He hopes by sharing his story and offering his mentorship he can sway others from the struggles he endured.

"You're only as sick as your secrets," he said. "It keeps me sober and straight to not forget where I came from.

"I don't have any secrets, you can ask me anything."

The four members of the "Jeff Clair Project:" J.C. Mabone on lead guitar; Pete McPeak on bass; Bobby Jiles on keyboard and rhythm guitar and Clair on drums, set up their instruments at the ninth floor Community Living Center at the Milwaukee VA. They're about to to play an hour-long set of blues, R&B, and holiday music for the Veterans.

"Project" is a fitting title for Clair's band. As a recovering addict, Clair's own life has been a project, and he demonstrates each day that's it's been a successful one. Since he beat his addiction, both in the literal and metaphoric sense, Clair's been making sweet music ever since.

Clair, the eponymous band leader, calls the shots from behind his kit.

"Good morning, Veterans!" he says. "We're going to start things off with a little blues."

And with that, the quartet begins to play an up-tempo, smooth, blues song.

The group of Veterans listens to the quartet intently, pleased for the opportunity to listen to live music. "The Jeff Clair Project" plays on.

And Clair smiles behind the drum kit.

"There's a life," he says, "after drugs and alcohol."

The "Jeff Clair Project," a blues and R&B quartet featuring (left to right) Jeff Clair on drums, Pete McPeak on bass and Bobby Jiles on keyboard and rhythm guitar plays for Veterans at the Community Living Center, Dec. 17. Not pictured: Lead guitarist J.C. Mabone.

PHOTO BY NATHAN WALLIN

A Clothing Boutique

BY YANITZ IRIZARRY

PHOTO BY BENJAMIN SLANE

Boutique volunteers inspect clothing donations in the Milwaukee VA women's clothing room.

Ladies, it's time for a change in what you're wearing.

No, not a fashion change, but a change in where you can pick up some of the latest styles and accessories to help for a day at the beach, your next job interview or even a night on the town.

But keep your wallet in your purse. Even though this clothing store offers everything from toiletries to coats, purses, jewelry and other accessories, there is no charge. The purpose is to help those Veterans who may not be able to afford a nicer outfit at a commercial store get just that right outfit.

It's all available at the Milwaukee VA women's clothing room, which has a remodeled and revamped look to create a more inviting shopping experience for female Veterans.

The clothing room, located in the basement of Building 70, Room 70-B39, is open to female Veterans with a referral from their social worker or counselor.

The new look is the work of John and Terri West. The husband-and-wife team gave a facelift to the women's clothing room a year and a half ago.

"It was a room that felt like it was forgotten," said John West.

So they decided to make some changes to spruce up the place. Within a month and with the help of Milwaukee VA staff, the sparkle showed once again in the women's clothing room.

First, the Wests obtained a storage garage so they could tidy up the room and only put out relevant clothes for each season.

"Sweaters and coats aren't appropriate for the summer," Terri West said. "You have to stick to what's in season. You have to put out what people need."

The Wests also built a rapport with the staff to help get things done.

"The staff here are really nice. If you ask for it they will help you out right away," said John West. "We got a lot done by simply by talking to people. We just had to ask the right people to make it happen."

Within a few weeks they were able to get clothing racks, the floor waxed and new paint on the walls. John West asked housekeeping if something could be done about the floor in the clothing room. He found out there were already plans to wax the hallway.

"They just tacked it on," John West said. "The housekeepers moved everything to one side, waxed, and the following day they moved everything to the other side to wax."

With the essentials done, there was still more to do.

They chose an eye-catching teal blue paint for the walls, updated the changing area with a new shower curtain and decorated the room with the donated supplies.

Each visitor is greeted with a warm smile by a volunteer who stands at the half door.

As you enter, you notice a rack with long winter coats styled with fashionable scarves. A stand filled with an assortment of knitted hats, gloves and scarves to keep warm is off to the left, with blazers of all fabric types, from tweed to wool and everything in between, on the other side.

Above you see a shelf decorated with accessories like hand bags, necklaces and styled by a backdrop of clothing against the lively blue walls. You pass a distressed wooden shadowbox, which gives off an antique vibe. It's filled with an assortment of jewelry. As you head toward the teal green-flowered curtain for a fitting room, you'll find even more stuff, like a one-of-a-kind boutique that offers a rainbow of sweaters to match your pants or skirt, right down to the just-right pair of shoes.

The goal, John West said, was simple: "Let's make it inviting.

"We got it done in a month," he said. "The maintenance staff painted when we were not here; the housekeepers got the floors done when we were not here. The staff here is incredible."

Now the Wests want other women to find out about the clothing room.

"We are working on trying to get more women Veterans to come here," said Terri West. "We would like it to be available to all female Veterans with a DD-214."

There's no telling what you might find from day to day. One Veteran on a recent visit stopped in and found a new leather coat valued at $500.

"It still had the tags on it," said Mary Mainella, a volunteer who helps in the clothing room. "I couldn't believe it."

Each week brings a new arrival of donations.

"We may have a small bag or two, or we may have 20," John West said.

Volunteers want to ensure Veterans receive only high-quality clothes. They check everything. Clothes with stains, tears or reeking of cigarette smoke are cast aside.

"The goal is to provide the veterans with clothes in good, clean order," Terri West said.

They said their next goal is to find more volunteers so the room can be open longer hours. It's currently only open from noon to 3 p.m. Monday and 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesdays.

There is still a big need for new underwear still in its original packaging, socks, and toiletries.

To donate items or volunteer, call 414-384-2000, ext. 41803.

Voluntary Service

Therapist shares with portraits

BY YANITZ IRIZARRY

Six-year-old Barbara James didn't want to play the day her mom sent her outside until she came across some discarded bottles in a trash can.

And it changed her life.

"My teacher threw away two paints, a brown and a white one. I had a cardboard box I tore off, that I wanted to save for a special occasion," she said. "So I mixed the colors up to four different colors and I painted Mary and baby Jesus.

"I finished the pictures and took it to my mom. She had this expression that stayed with me until my adulthood. She had tears in her eyes and said, 'You did this?'"

"Yeah," Barbara replied. "It reminded me of you, mom."

James made a career out of her love for art in recreation therapy at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center. As a holiday gift, she drew 60 ink portraits for each of the Veterans who attend the daily Vet's Club at the medical center. Vet's Club is an interactive outpatient program for older Veterans who may need assistance and care during the day.

"I was trying to think of something that I could give the Veterans — something that will stay with them and be meaningful to their services," said James. "I remembered how it made my mother feel when she received my painting."

She started drawing the portraits in early October, spending about 20 minutes with each person. She completed all 60 portraits and began giving them out for the Dec. 3 Vet's Club holiday party.

PHOTO BY BENJAMIN SLANE

VA employee Barbara James sketches a portrait of a Veteran at Vet's Club. James began drawing the portraits a few years ago and now sketches each Veteran and gives them the sketch as a Christmas gift. BELOW: A sample sketch of Veteran Don, one of the Veterans.

"It was nice. Everyone was crying, and even people with Alzheimer's cried and pointed at the picture and said, 'Me?' It was just such a moving experience," she said. "The families are so appreciative. They try to send me gifts, but I tell them this is free, it's for the Veterans. We are honored to give it."

The Veterans were amazed at the outcome.

"Beautiful, it's really beautiful. Nice job," said Veteran Albert Halvorsen with a chuckle. "You did my hair better than I do at home."

World War II Veteran Earnest Yankee waved James closer, then kissed her cheek.

"Thank you very much, Barbara, I appreciate it," he said. "I want you girls to know you deserve a lot more than what you are getting. You have been a great pleasure to me."

She returned his smile and gently put her hand on his shoulder.

"I love the ways that I can reward you for your service," she replied.

James said her gifts and artwork are more than just a hobby for her.

"Drawing to me is therapeutic," said James. "It's almost like it's creative emotion."

She's been drawing ever since that day she made the portrait for her mom. She went on to study art and earned a degree from University of Wisconsin — Milwaukee. For the past 17 years she has been working as a recreation therapist assistant at Milwaukee VA.

James said the job is more meaningful because she lost a brother in the Vietnam War. Her son and many of her family members serve as well.

"I love this job, I love working with the Vets. I owe them for the freedom they've given us," said James. "I am doing something my brother would like me to do."

James is grateful her mom sent her out to play so many years ago.

What she didn't know is how much it really meant to her mom until she passed away and they found it tucked in a drawer.

"My mom was not a pack rat, so when my brother found it, he wanted it, but I kept it and still have it to this day," James said. "It brought a lot of emotions and happiness."

Kayleen's KITCHEN

Kayleen Wichlinski
Registered Dietitian

Each February, we celebrate 'National Wear Red Day' to support women who are diagnosed with heart disease and stroke survivors. This year, we will 'Go Red' on Feb. 5, 2016. Heart disease and stroke cause 1 in 3 deaths in women each year. Luckily, we can prevent 80 percent of heart and stroke occurrences with education and action. By wearing red, we can bring awareness to this program and help to stop heart disease among women.

Wearing red on "National Wear Red Day" is not the only way to support heart health. By choosing to follow a heart-healthy diet, you can also encourage others to engage in a healthy lifestyle. Let's start with breakfast. February mornings are often cold and dark, and we may lack time to make a full breakfast before heading to work. A warm, heart-healthy breakfast like oatmeal may be just what you need to jumpstart your workday. But, how can you make time to prepare breakfast in your already busy morning?

Try this "overnight oatmeal" recipe to keep flexibility in your morning routine while adding heart healthy foods into your diet. You can even make this recipe in larger batches for the week. Just put all of your ingredients into sealed, microwavable containers, and grab-and-go each container throughout the week. In minutes, you have a warm, heart-healthy breakfast.

Oats are incredibly powerful heart-healthy superfood. They contain soluble fiber which helps remove excess cholesterol from the body. This soluble fiber also helps keep you feeling full for a longer period of time. In addition, oats contain potassium which has been shown to keep blood pressure within a healthy range. They also have avenanthramides which are antioxidants that have been shown to keep blood vessels healthy.

Next time you bypass breakfast because you hit the snooze button one too many times, consider preparing this heart-healthy breakfast the night before work. Your heart will love you for it!

Recipe of the Month

Overnight Oatmeal

Ingredients:

½ cup rolled oats
6-8 oz milk
Any add-ins that you would like:
Fresh, frozen, or dried fruit
Cinnamon, nutmeg, pumpkin pie spice
Nuts
Brown sugar, etc.

Directions:

1. Place oats and milk in a microwave safe cup, bowl, or jar. Stir.
2. Add fruit, spices, nuts, etc.
3. Cover, and place in the refrigerator overnight.
4. Just before serving, place in the microwave until warm (about 1-2 minutes).

PHOTO BY NATHAN WALLIN

In Service

Congratulations to the following Milwaukee VA employees who reached career milestones in August, September, October and November 2015:

40 Years
Susan D'Amato
Patricia Kostka
Michael Ptacin

35 Years
Carlos Benitez
Julianne Crow-Pan
Barbara Dropp
Donna Mitchell
Dawn Ragonese
Ruthann Swickard

30 Years
Hossein Almassi
Thomas Ebert
Steven Eigen
George Haasler
Jill Hutterer Stimac
Barbara Kolden
Cindy Luker
Barbara Mclaughlin
William Rowe
John Schmidt
Wendy Van Camp

25 Years
Marcia Anderson
Ryan Biggin
Gregina Deacon
Diana Donald
Winston Hainsworth
Emma Harrell
Roger Lohr
Janice Lutomski
Michael Mahoney
Michele Malone
Delia Meyer
Kathleen Mundschau
Frank Pintar
Kay Schwieger
Benita Vazquez-Santiago
Melanie Ziarek

20 Years
Brent Hibbard
Mark Marnocha
Suzanne Massalske
Jai Reneau
Bhavna Sheth
Lorena Sims
Vaughan Sura

15 Years
William Albrecht
Gary Barnas
A G Bharatkumar
Rhonda Biese
Vernon Coley
Roger Daley
Susan Davids
David Davis
Carnice Dixon
Debra Frank
Mary Gondek
Darcie Greuel
Jeffrey Grigg
Cynthia Hanson
Wendy Janssen
David Johnson
Jarrell Johnson
Melita Johnson
Alberta Klein
Brian Lamberson
Patricia Lehman
Joseph Mohrbacker
Sonya Moore
Anne-Marie Nelson
Lillian Neylon
Rebecca Niemczyk
Trisha Oleary
Patricia Rompesky
Paolo Sali
Paul Sandford
John Sattler III
Jennifer Schmidt
Jennifer Schueler
Paula Scott
Jessica Serdynski
Kalin Sisco
Lisa Starks
Roy Walker Jr
Cecil Whitley
Daphne Windom-Chivers
William Wirostko
Danny Woods
Michael Young
Debbie Young-Watson

10 Years
Katherine Abad
Andreea Anton
Robert Barden
Kenneth Burgner
Kenneth Campbell
Krina Christensen
Matthew Comp
Catherine Coppolillo
Michelle Davis
Panayotis Fasseas
Thomas Fickau
Richard Fronek Jr
Katrina Games
Ronald Grayson
Hossam Hamda
Tyler Hilgart
Gregory Hobbs
Devin Hoskins
Angelina Kinter
Jennifer Konicki
Susan Kroll
Aaron Krueger
Nancy Krueger
Brian Lewis
William Lorber
Becky Massey
Ange Mays-Gordon
Irene Medellin
Victoria Meyer
Jodi Morgan
Jutta Novalija
Shailendra Patel
Joshua Porter
Sean Quinn
Abigail Reymann
Ann Rye
Milton Sarria
Michelle Seavers
David Silva
Jane Skirven
Tina Smith
Eric Swinford
Tina Tomek
Christopher Toth
Michael Whiting
Jamie Winner
Jimmy Withers

I CARE
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

July 2015

Kelly Robar

Nurse Assitant for Acute Care Veterans on 7C

"She is flexible in the face of changing staffing circumstances. She provides comfort to those who are in distress, jokes with those who want to laugh, and I have heard her sing with Veterans who wanted to sing."

September 2015

Tanya Hazelwood

Nurse Assistant for Heroe's Corner on 8A

"She provides excellent cares for the Veterans which often causes the Veterans and/or families to comment on those excellent cares provided."

October 2015

Matthew Behrend

Administrative Officer for Facility Managment

"He stepped-up and in addition to his regular responsibilities, successfully placed thousands of dollars of purchases for materials and services to keep the medical center operational."

November 2015

Eileen Wilson

VA Police Service Secretary

"She has proven time and again her willingness to help wherever she can. Her extraordinary work ethic, and all around amazing attitude has brought a much appreciated light to this department."

December 2015

Julie Malchak

Respiratory Care - Pulmonary (Green Bay)

"Julie epitomizes the meaning of a team player. She displays high moral and ethical values, not only to the Veterans, but to her coworkers across many disciplines. For all of her continued hard work to make this place a great place for the Veterans to receive care and for our staff to work."

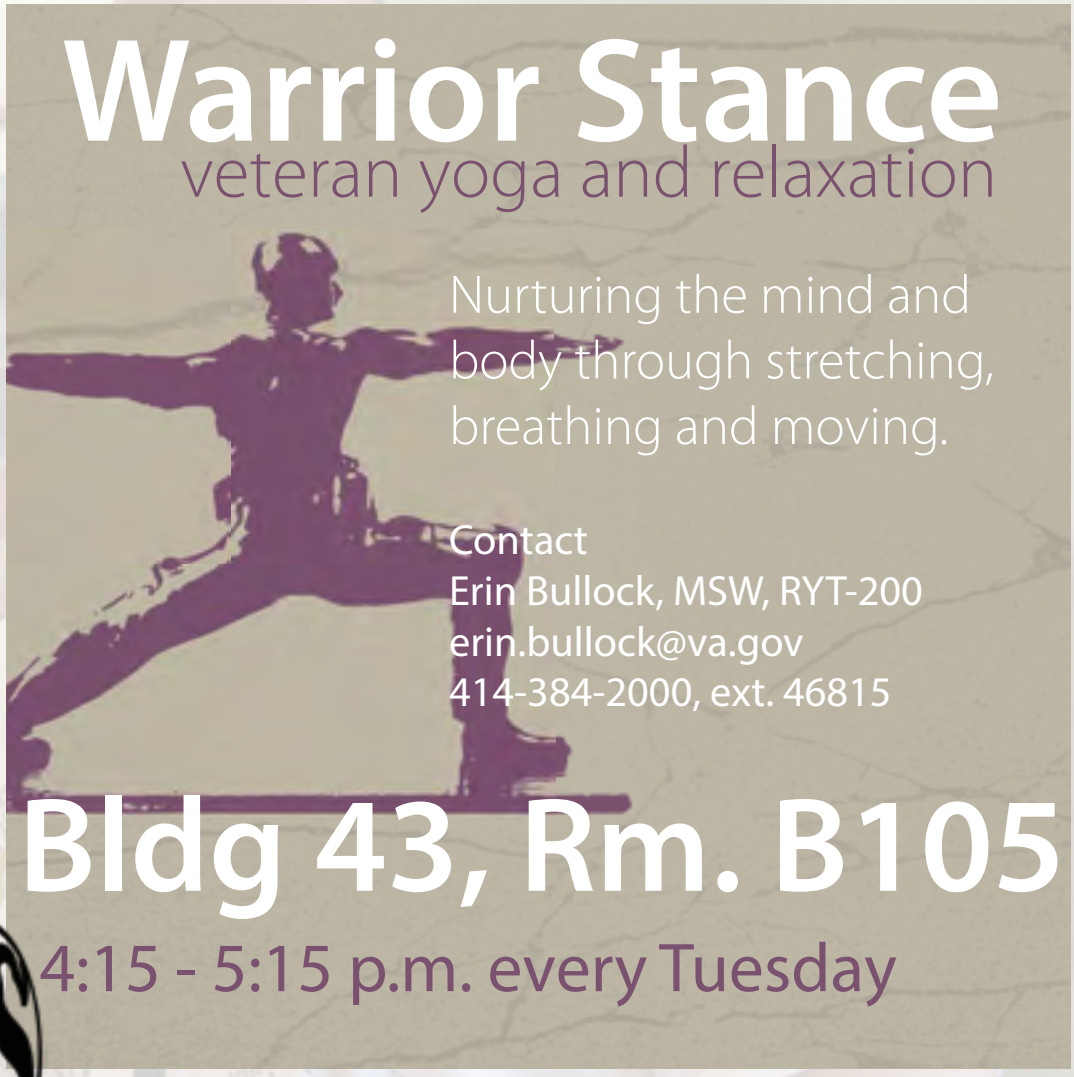
CHEF

Continued from Page 5

eaten at his restaurants and had him over to my home, and he is a flavor master. He's been talking about taking this to the next level with the non-profit for a good, long while. He is so passionate about cooking and sharing that with others."

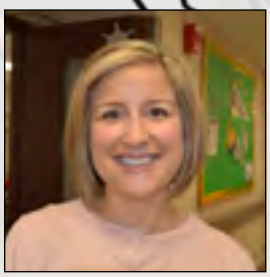
But for Feker, it doesn't matter if it's a national television stage, one of his restaurants or even now at the Milwaukee VA.

"I believe when we are at our very best, we are teachers," he said. "My love of life and food have brought me to this point in my life. I want to give back as Martin Luther King asked all of us to do. I want to share what I know best."



VA VOICES

What would you do if you won the Powerball?



Kelly Rooney, Vet's Club social worker: "I'd take a nice big vacation around the world, first class, then I'd donate to the Vet's Club. It's a wonderful club and they deserve it."

Selina Briggs, Medical support assistant: "My husband and I talk about that every other day. Probably buy a home and move away to Arizona."

Ron Johnson, Facility Management: "Probably get a financial adviser. That's a lot of money and I really wouldn't know how to spend it all."

Lt. Geraldine Rodgers, VA Police: "Ooh-we! I'd give some of it to my church so we could keep doing what we're doing on the streets, helping homeless people with coats, food and anything else they need. Then I'd take my mom on a vacation around the world, wherever she wants to go."

Michael Schmierer, Facility Management: "I would disperse it with all my coworkers. I would decide who gets what. It's my day to act like God."