

# 500 West



Milwaukee VA Medical Center  
Vol. 7, No. 2  
March 2016

**Milwaukee Engineers  
tops in nation**

# Save the date!



## Milwaukee VA Fisher House dedication

April 23, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Fisher House  
5000 W National Ave, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 53295  
Click to watch a time-lapse video of the construction on  
[www.milwaukee.va.gov](http://www.milwaukee.va.gov)



5000 West National Ave.  
Milwaukee, WI 53295  
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### On the Cover

Congratulations to Eileen Wilson from Police Service for winning Employee of the Year. Learn all about Wilson's work with World War II Veterans in a story on [Page 6](#).

## 5000 West



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# Engineer of the year

BY NATHAN WALLIN AND GARY J. KUNICH

She does her job so well they didn't give her one award, they gave her two.

But before you pat her on the back, Linda Sue Schwarz, Facility Management division manager, said any of the accomplishments are due to her staff that handles everything from paint on the wall, snow removal, wiring and a host of other things most people probably don't think about.

Schwarz was named one of the five best engineers in the Department of Veterans Affairs in the chief engineer category. Then she was named top engineer from the five.

Andrew Kusters, also of the Milwaukee VA, won in the staff biomedical engineer category. VA gives the awards in five categories: chief, staff, resident, biomedical and headquarters.

Schwarz said all credit for her award goes to the people who make up Facility Management.

"This is a division award," she said. "What I accomplish is what my staff accomplishes."

That staff includes 135 employees who work around the clock taking care of the buildings, the grounds, and the bricks and mortar that are the Milwaukee VA.

"We have five maintenance shops. We have the carpenters, the plasterers, the plumbers, the electricians and pipe fitters, we have a preventative maintenance staff," Schwarz said, ticking off some of the long list of people who make up Facility Management.

"We have grounds and transportation; the grass cutting, the snow shoveling, we maintain the boiler plant, the chiller plant, all the new construction; the parking structure, all the maintenance purchasing all repair parts," she continued.

But it takes someone who can take all of that and make it work in sync. That's what sets her apart, said Ken Dantoin, facility energy manager.

"She is exceptional and has administrative skills that are literally off the charts," he said. "First, you have to understand the breadth of what we deal with, and she has a high sense of attention to detail. If you don't have that, the big jobs don't get done. She literally tracks it all and has the ability to offer top cover at 50,000 feet, but the innate ability to go from 50,000 to on the ground and tactical to ask all the right questions."

That was echoed by Scott Ladwig, an engineering technician, who has been at VA for 10 years.

"What sets her apart is the preventive maintenance program, and an understanding that we aren't in the 70's and 80's anymore. When she first took over, there was a lot to do; she was putting out a lot of fires. Now she's putting out the coals before they become fires."

Ladwig compared the hospital to a car in need of a tune-up.

"If you replace the oil every 3,000 miles, the car lasts longer.

If you are replacing your engine every six months, maybe there's something else wrong. She has a very incredible memory and asks the right questions. It's sometimes hard to comprehend, but we have 50 specific mechanical rooms and 2 million square feet to cover, and somebody has to know all that.

"For her, it's not about the status quo, it's about making everything better," Ladwig said.

Schwarz's professional background includes work in the private sector as a heating, ventilation and air conditioning engineer.

A 27-year Veteran of the Army Reserve, she recently retired as an engineering officer as a lieutenant colonel. She's been on the Milwaukee VA staff for seven years, taking over as the FM division manager in April 2014.



PHOTO BY BENJAMIN SLANE

**Linda Sue Schwarz, director of Facility Management at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center, talks with carpenter Robb Lapp in the East Entrance of the Medical Center which, is under renovation.**

Besides the people, it's how they talk to one another. Schwarz credits much of the success in the division to the creation of integrated design teams within FM. Before, carpenters, electricians and other departments would independently work on projects; now they work in tandem, consulting and communicating amongst each other, creating a more efficient process. This all adds up to better service to her customers.

"There's communication between Maintenance and Projects, the staff are working together on projects.

"It used to take 45 days to complete work orders," she said. "We've improved

that, we've come so far."

That communication becomes vastly more important when you figure all the work that goes into one project, Ladwig said, pointing to the parking structure currently under construction.

"People see the parking structure and might not know the unbelievable amount of design and specification work," he said. "Everything has to be thought out and planned. The soil has to be tested to see if it can support the weight of the structure, we have to figure out where we get electrical power, how we're going to hook up drainage, how we're going to redirect traffic, or minimize patient interruption while it's built, what affect it will have on the view from patient rooms. (Linda Sue) has a part in all that and keeping everyone focused."

That should come as no surprise, as her nomination papers include such words as "exceptional," "tireless" and "remarkable." The nomination materials cite the "state of the art, highly motivated, multifaceted division of skilled trades and engineering professionals" she leads. Schwarz is credited with "establishing and enhancing the reputation of her division with Veterans, staff and senior management."

The complete list of her recent accomplishments filled five pages. But Schwarz said if she's engineer of the year, it's because of the other people behind the scenes.

"This award," she said, "is Facility Management getting recognized for everything they've done."

# The man behind the magic

BY GARY J. KUNICH

Just call Andy Kusters the man behind the magic.

He figured the school intern program at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center in 2011 would be a good start to pre-med career as a doctor.

Instead, he discovered his niche for biomedical engineering and has worked here ever since.

Kusters was named one of the top five VA engineers in the country in the Staff Biomedical category. Linda Sue Schwarz, Milwaukee VA's chief engineer, was also in the top five, and she won overall as engineer of the year.

"I had no idea when I got the call (from Washington, D.C.) and they told me," Kusters said. "I was kind of surprised and definitely wasn't expecting it. I didn't even know I was nominated."

The student co-op program allowed him to work one semester here and then go

back to school for a semester at Marquette University. When he graduated in 2013, he came here full-time.

"At first I thought maybe I would go pre-med, since a lot of biomedical engineering students go that route. I applied for this because I figured working in a hospital would give me good experience."

So instead of going into medicine, he became the doctor behind the scenes, using his biomedical skills to maintain all of the hospital's equipment and make sure it's safe for use, whether it be an infusion pump or CT scanner, and a lot of things in between.

"I'm more on the (Information Technology) side, maintaining the servers that run the medical devices," he said. "We're the lifeblood for the equipment behind the scenes that stores the images from the scanners, to make sure it gets to a patient's record, to make sure the computers are patched to prevent any cyber-attacks. Those programs make sure the machines deliver the proper medication to a patient, and the physiological monitors record EKGs and other parameters."

Put in simpler terms, he said, "Clinicians just expect this equipment to work. Patients expect it to work. That's our primary role."

But Kusters makes it seem a lot easier than it actually is, said Meaghen Krebsbach, the chief clinical engineer at the Oklahoma

City VA Medical Center, who put him in for the award.

"He is humble, but he really is the man behind the magic that makes all that happen," she said.

Krebsbach worked with Kusters for two years at the Milwaukee VA when she was in the Technical Career Field internship program, and she said he taught her a lot about the career field.

"Not only did he make me feel very welcome, he taught me so much about coding and technical reports," she said. "I got to see first-hand the value he brings to the program. He also works on a lot of national programs and project teams. Because of his skills, he's able to create coding that gives reports on work orders, statistics, turnaround times; with a click of a button you can see information broken out monthly, he creates databases that are being rolled out nationally."

"He develops the tools that help us do our job. Andy never has an 'I can't do it' attitude. It's always, 'I can do it.' If he encounters a problem and doesn't have the toolset to fix the problem, he throws himself into it, learns new programming and attacks everything with enthusiasm."

"We already knew he was good," Krebsbach added, "but it's good that other people now know it, too."



Bio-medical engineer Andy Kusters was awarded "Engineer of the Year" along with five other VA employees.

PHOTO BY BENJAMIN SLANE

# Presidential award for care

*“Dino, you’re my best friend. I love you. It’s time for me to die.”*

BY GARY J. KUNICH

“Dino, you’re my best friend. I love you. It’s time for me to die now.”

Five days later, Mark Danforth succumbed to his six-month fight with cancer. It was an unexpected and unplanned journey Milwaukee VA employee Dean “Dino” Mantzavrakos took with an unlikely friend who seemed to be a polar opposite.

Danforth was a quiet, 6-foot-9, truck-driving, heavy metal rocker with long shaggy hair — “like a blond Jesus,” Dino said.

Dino, a medical records administration specialist, is a smaller, balding man who loves the spotlight.

And for more than 400 hours between June and November 2015, Mantzavrakos visited with his friend, did his laundry, cleaned his house, paid his bills and watched him die.

He was honored Jan. 19 at the Milwaukee VA with the President’s Volunteer Service Award for providing end-of-life care for his friend when no one else would.

The President’s Volunteer Service Award is given to Americans nationwide on behalf of the White House, to recognize and encourage those who live a life of service and help change the world.

But this was one spotlight the normally gregarious Mantzavrakos would prefer shine elsewhere.

“I hope when he died, he looked in my heart and knows it was all done for his best interests,” Dino said softly. “The thing you really have to get is this was a very independent man who took care of everything. He was strong mentally and physically and didn’t have to rely on anyone for anything.

“When I was told I was considered for this award, I said, ‘Thank you, but no.’ This was very personal and I don’t consider it volunteer work. It was just something I had to do in my own time.”

Dino and his husband, Gregory, first met Danforth in June 2012 while moving boxes into their new West Allis home.

“He came out into our driveway and introduced himself and within minutes of knowing him, he said, ‘If anyone (screws) with you guys, I’ll blow their head off.’ Then he drew a smiley face in the dust in our garage.

“That was just the way he was. He wanted us to know we were accepted by him and we were OK. He was a truck driver in a macho industry, but he just wanted to let us know in a socially awkward way that we were OK.”

The brief exchange became a neighborly friendship.

“Here’s the thing,” said Dino. “Every time you meet a new person, you come out. You don’t come out just the first time. It’s every time you meet a new person, and whether you’re talking about your spouse or past relationships. Whenever you have to add a gender, you have to come out as a gay. You might get acceptance or you might not. You never know what you’re going to get.

“And here was this macho, straight guy — the heavy metal, rocker dude who loves guns and always dressed in black. He had

a big, black truck that could swallow both our cars whole. But we all got along. We’d say ‘Hello’ when we were mowing our grass, or have barbecues.”

Danforth lived with and took care of his elderly aunt and uncle. But when they passed, the house was sold and money shared with the cousins. He used the same realtor as Dino and moved to a ranch home a couple miles away.

They kept in touch here and there until Dino got an ominous text from his realtor friend, Jo Ann: “Our buddy Mark is not doing well, he’s got Stage 4 cancer,” she wrote.

Dino called and found out Mark was sent home to die.

“He didn’t want chemo. He had cancer twice before, and knew this was it. He did have a stroke. I went in and saw him and he was trying to put his pants on. He looked like Skeletor. That’s how he



Mark Danforth and Dino Mantzavrakos pose for a photo. In Danforth’s final days, Dino spent evenings with him, watching sports, talking about relationships and cars.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

described it. He asked me to run to the store.

“After that, it just became an everyday thing after work. We both really love cool cars, and even though I’m not a huge sports fan, I’d watch games with him. He loved the Brewers and really liked the Bulls. He liked the Raiders, Packers and the Bears. We’d talk about women and sports and relationships. I don’t think there was anything we talked about that he wasn’t interested in.

“A lot of times we talked about just what life means,” Dino added. “He wanted to know if it meant anything. And I would respond, ‘Does the time here mean something to you? Because it means something to me.’”

Danforth was married and divorced years ago. His ex-wife came to visit once in a while, but there were no children. Dino said there were times the daily visits were exhausting, but he knew it was important to his friend.

Continued on Page 14  
See PRESIDENT

# Employee of the year

*A lifetime of service to VA and Veterans*

BY GARY J. KUNICH

Eileen Wilson knew it was something special when she got that phone call seven years ago.

“That’s one of those things you remember where you were and you remember it for the rest of your life,” she said.

It was the Honor Guard folks calling her back, a year after she volunteered to be on a flight to Washington, D.C., with a World War II Veteran.

But even then, she didn’t realize how life-changing it would be.

Wilson, administrative assistant for the Milwaukee VA’s chief of police, has continued her volunteer efforts for Honor Flight and speaking up for Veterans, a big reason for her selection as the 2015 employee of the year.

It’s the second year in a row the award has gone to someone in the police department.

“She’s been with police services for just under a year, but I’ve worked with her over the years and knew she was a hard worker,” said her boss, Police Chief Tim Jantz. “She works very closely with procurements, time cards and has a lot of responsibilities, but she keeps this place running. She hit the ground running, and is still running today.”

Jantz said the job is more than just paperwork and filing. He said one of her biggest assets is her ability to connect with veterans through the Honor Flight.

Wilson’s first brush with Honor Flight was when she hobbled on a broken foot to welcome home returning Veterans, and she rose through the ranks over several years, eventually serving as volunteer coordinator for three years.

“Telethons, presentations, setting up events, getting other volunteers, I did everything they asked and they kept giving me more responsibility,” she said.

For Wilson, her career here has come full circle from where she started as a teen.

“I’ve been volunteering since I was in high school,” she said. “I was one of the original candy strippers at a hospital, with the whole frilly apron and candy-striped shirt. I never had any big plans to work for VA. It just happened.”

She was working elsewhere when an old friend, Deb Zieman, recruited her to work as a secretary.

“I managed the operating room,” Wilson said. “Deb needed someone who could organize things and she knew me from Froedtert, so she encouraged me to apply.”

It was just a job, Wilson said. Then it became something more.

“I’m not a vet,” she said. “Nobody in my immediate family is. They have their own language, their own way of doing things. And when you don’t have a military background, it takes time to figure it out, absolutely.

“But I think just interacting with them, helping them through my regular job and hearing their stories, I was able to learn about the military and what Veterans go through; the effect that has,” Wilson added. “Because I’m not a Veteran, I will never fully understand what it’s like to go through boot camp, to be in a peace zone and a war zone. You will never fully comprehend that unless you walk the walk.”

Wilson saw an Honor Flight article in the paper asking for volunteers to come to the airport and welcome home veterans from

their Washington, D.C., trip.

“I was on crutches and had a cast on my foot from a torn ligament in my heel, but it sounded like fun, so I hobbled out there,” she said.

And like that, a light comes on in her eyes. Wilson grows more loud and animated, as she remembers what it was like.

“If you have never been to one of those welcome home events, you have to go! Oh, my gosh! It’s amazing! The line stretches out down the airport with bands playing and people shaking hands and hugging. It’s an experience. I never forgot about it. I came home and right after that, signed up to be a guardian.

Guardians pay \$500 for their own trip, while veterans have their fare and all expenses covered by donations. After training, Wilson was paired with World War II and Korean War veteran Dave Brandt.

“I got his phone number, went to his house, chatted for an hour and kind of fell in love with him. He’s just so cute,” she smiled.

“They’re just so humble and a totally different generation from the folks of today. Every single veteran I’ve met through Honor Flight, that’s the way they were. They had a job to do and they did it. It was just a different mindset.

“Most of these older vets are just the typical guy next door,” she added. “If you see them outside the VA, they just look like anybody



Eileen Wilson

PHOTO BY NATHAN WALLIN

else. But they just have the most amazing stories.”

The trip is anything but a vacation. Wilson had to be at the airport with Brandt by 3 a.m. for the whirlwind trip that includes visits to all the monuments, Arlington Cemetery and more.

“What made it so awesome for me was experiencing this through his eyes,” Wilson said. “Honor Flight does everything over the top, and because these veterans are with other veterans from the same era, they aren’t afraid to share stories, or bawl when they read the letters from home. And then you get off that plane and go through the parade back home. Halfway through that first day, I knew I was going to immediately volunteer for it again.”

It took another year before she was paired with Dorothy Hanson, also a World War II veteran, who passed away.

“She was a spitfire,” Wilson said. “I’d go visit her in the nursing home, and she’d ask me to smuggle in barbecue chips and Twix candy bars. She was in the Army and she drove trucks. She was a tough cookie and didn’t put up with anything from anybody.”

From there she went on to help plan a huge Welcome Home event at Miller Park, which filled the stands, and as a volunteer coordinator, got to return the favor granted to her so many years ago.

She was the one who found guardians and got to make that call to tell them they'd be going to D.C.

All told, the local Honor Flight organization — with the help of Wilson and others — garnered two special honors: most Korean War veterans and most veterans overall flown in 2015.

Through it all, she's forged lifelong friendships she never expected.

Julian Plaster, 92, is a Navy veteran who fought in the south Pacific during World War II. Wilson didn't know him but offered to give him a ride to a local Honor Flight event.

"From there we just struck up a friendship," she said.

Plaster, whose wife of 60 years died nine years ago, said it's more than that.

"She's made a point to call me or take me out at least once a week," he said. "I don't have anyone at home. It's tough to just sit there. Sometimes we go out for the day. I know I can call her and talk anytime."

They talk about life, God, past relationships and crack jokes on one another.

"Julian is just very witty; very funny," she said.

"I don't have the looks anymore," he says while pointing to his face.

"Don't worry, I overlook that part," she replies, and they both laugh.

Plaster added: "I feel very honored someone like Eileen calls me her friend. She calls me, shows concern for me and we have a lot in common. She'll sit and listen to an old man complain. She is so giving and never once made me feel like she is doing me a favor."



Eileen Wilson with a group of Veterans at the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C., as part of Stars & Stripes Honor Flight.

Wilson said: "You know when you watch the news today it's all death and rude politics and terrorism. It's awful. But when you sit down and talk to this man, he sheds a whole new light and appreciation for life in general. He's more than just a good friend. He's a grandfather, a father, a confidant and has always been a Godsend to me."

Although Wilson has stepped back from some of her bigger Honor Flight roles, she isn't walking away completely.

"I'm still recruiting," she said. "I can't help it. This is just what I do every day, so it's not for an award or an accolade. I know if I'm walking down the hall and see someone with an Honor Flight cap or jacket, they have a story.

"I thank them and ask, 'What's with your hat?'"

"They just glow and they smile and tell me their stories," Wilson said. "That's the best part of this job."

That's no surprise to her boss.

"I see her once a week just sitting out in the lobby or the Emergency Department talking to veterans, or more likely listening to veterans," Jantz said. "Many of them are elderly and she is just building relationships.

"She is here for veterans and is all in for the veterans," he said. "This may have just been a job when she first came to VA, but I think she learned what veterans are all about, the sacrifices they have given, what sacrifices their families have given, and she respects veterans. That makes the difference. She's just an amazing person when it comes to our veterans."

## Vietnam Veteran commemoration



The Milwaukee VA will host a special Vietnam Veteran commemoration.

The commemoration begins 9:30 a.m. March 25 in the Matousek Auditorium with a slide show and Vietnam-era music. The ceremony begins at 10 a.m. and includes the short documentary film, "Oneida Soldier," which focuses on the story of Milwaukee VA employee Myron Webster, a Native-American who said VA helped him get sober and saved his life in the 1990s. Joe Campbell, Vietnam Veteran and creator of the Wisconsin Veterans Story Project will be guest speaker. Medal of Honor recipient Gary Wetzel will lead the audience in the Pledge of Allegiance. All Vietnam Veterans will receive a special, commemorative lapel pin from VA. Matousek Auditorium, 5000 W. National Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53295.

## Vet Center

There are couple events this month at the Vet Center, RSVP to the number below:

**Vietnam Veteran breakfast**  
**Saturday, March 26, 2016, 10 a.m. to noon.**

Breakfast honoring Vietnam Veterans. All Veterans are welcome. RSVP by March 19, 2016.

**Women Veterans wellness gathering**  
**Monday, March 28, 2016, 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.**

Join us for a light meal and conversation about women Veterans. Bring another female Veteran with you! RSVP by March 26, 2016.

Vet Center  
 7910 N 76th Street  
 Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53223  
 414-434-1311

# PHOTO FEATURE

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## In and around Milwaukee VA

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Ashley Fry hands out flags at our 17th Annual Salute to African-American Veterans. More than 125 people filled the Rec Hall for the music-filled educational event. Veterans “high five” after winning raffles for items donated during the Salute to Veterans. Social worker Patricia Black-Evers (left) talks with a homeless duo tucked away under Interstate-94 at 4th and Beecher Street in Milwaukee during a January point-in-time homeless count. With temperatures far below freezing, the encampment was surrounded by ice. A couch and sheet of plywood served as a windbreaker from the chills of Lake Michigan. “Thank you for seeing me as a veteran and not a homeless man.” That is written in the painting on the first-place-winning pastel piece by Veteran Willie Weaver-Bey at Milwaukee VA’s 2016 Creative Arts Festival. It’s not just your Milwaukee VA, it’s L.C. Satterfield’s VA, too. When doctor’s saved his life here, it became his dream to one day at VA. LC, a housekeeping staff member at the local Creative Arts Festival with his spoken word performance “a Veteran, That’s Why I Care.” Guest Speaker Clayborn Benson at the Black Historical Society Museum, speaks about the city of Milwaukee at VA’s Black History Month event. Clayborn Benson hugs Veteran Ervin Leiphart after Leiphart travels to the VA Center to read Schumacher-Monfre’s DAISY Award-winning poem. Common, the Veteran who nominated and traveled to the VA. Not. Leiphart, Schumacher-Monfre and other Veterans.

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VIEW THE ALBUM



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FOR MORE ON  
“WHY I CARE”  
THE



CLICK THE IMAGE  
FOR THE GALLERY  
"IN THE LIGHT OF NIGHT"



supervisor, brought down the house  
formance about why he loves VA, "I'm  
son III, an Army Veteran who founded  
out African-American contributions to  
th event. Tammy Schumacher-Monfre  
eled to the Milwaukee VA Medical  
ard nomination. Though the award is  
eled to participate in the ceremony is  
A employees fought back tears while

CLICK THE IMAGE  
TO WATCH  
THE VIDEO  
"I SERVE YOU,  
A VETERAN"

he read his  
nomination  
letter.  
Leiphart  
closed his  
letter with,  
"So Tammy,  
yes, you did  
save my life!"



# Butt out *Smoking cessation programs offer Vets, employees chance to break habit*



**BY YANITZ IRIZARRY**

The VA is giving away \$2,500 and free vacations to whoever wants it.

Well, sort of.

But for smokers willing to give up the habit, that's about how much money they can save each year—that's a lot of cash or even a nice Caribbean cruise.

"People save an average of two to three grand per year," said Dr. Colleen Heinkel, a healthy psychologist who oversees the smoking cessation program. She said that's just one of many benefits of giving up cigarettes; the other is health, with lungs and other organs repairing themselves in three days, and improvements in taste and smell.

"Smoking enflames our systems, so pain can be reduced when you stop smoking," said Heinkel. "For surgery, there are also better recovery results for patients who aren't smoking."

The Milwaukee VA starts two sessions each month to help people stop smoking, and it's open to Veterans and all employees. The classes meet Mondays at 1:30 and 5:30 p.m. Each class is an hour and a half for the first five weeks followed by three 20-minute sessions. The classes offer a combination of education, counseling and support. Classes are free but there may be copays for any medication.

And in this case, the saying, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again," or in the case of smoking: try, try, try, try, try, try.

"Research shows that 70 percent of smokers want to quit, but it's not easy, and people have six to eight relapses," said Heinkel. "With our smoking cessation class, we have a 30 to 50 percent success rate of people who are able to quit permanently."

The first session introduces smokers to the team of experts from Patient Education, Mental Health and Pharmacy who will help them stop. Participants get a workbook, information on how to get medication, and ways to avoid the urge.

They can also see the results the longer they quit smoking.

"We use a carbon monoxide machine to determine carbon monoxide levels in the body," said Angie Paniagua, associate

chief of pharmacy. "It provides positive reinforcement, the longer the patient goes without smoking, the lower the carbon monoxide levels will be."

Heinkel said she tells people the first thing they need to do is remove all smoke-related items from their homes, including tobacco, lighters and ashtrays.

The workbook reminds patients to clear out all the hidden places you store items and even the butts from where you go out and smoke. If you remove the butts and the smoking smell with an odor neutralizer, that helps reduce the urge to smoke. It's good to keep toothpicks or gum available and maybe even a hobby to keep your mind and hands occupied.

"If we can get to the other side of the urge we are good," said Heinkel. "Oftentimes we will ask people to think of things you can do to surf the urge, you know get through the urge."

She said those who have the best chances of quitting use a combination of counseling and medication. VA offers a variety of medications the patients can choose from to include:

**Chantix** – Reduces the urge to smoke by blocking pleasure receptors of the brain associated with smoking. Weekly assessments may be required for patients with a history of depression or suicidal thoughts.

**Zyban** – A medication that increases dopamine in the brain. It can be used in combination with nicotine replacement therapy such as nicotine patches, gum or lozenges.

Paniagua goes over the pros and cons of each medication during the first class, specifically concerns of suicide associated with Chantix.

"My approach is I would rather address it and they hear my thoughts on it, rather than see the commercial and be surprised. We hit it in the class before it even comes up," she said. "All the studies have shown the risk is highest for patients who have untreated depression or post-traumatic stress, but that is something we check with the patient before they start and check their progress weekly. We have an honest discussion with the patient."

While it might be difficult to pinpoint the best ways to give up tobacco, and it can be difficult, it's a battle worth taking, Paniagua said.

"The thing is, it is rare for the first time you quit and be successful, but if you are going to be successful, there has to be a first time."

*For more information please ask your primary care physician, the national quit hotline at 855-784-8838 or call the smoking cessation at Milwaukee VA at 414-384-2000, ext. 42098.*

# ‘MOVE’ to lose, get fit

BY YANITZ IRIZARRY AND CHRISTIAN GARZONE

Veterans and brothers Tom and Ted Coon could barely walk outside their house without losing their breath. Gone were the days when they were lean, mean and in Army shape.

“When I came home from Vietnam I was in the best shape of my life at 187 pounds,” said Ted Coon. “That was back in 1972. Tom came home a little after me, in 1973, and he was pretty fit, too.”

Time and food took its toll. They busted the scales and were on a collision course with bad health. Then they lost a combined weight of 176 pounds — the equivalent of an entire person.

They did it with the help of the “MOVE!” team, whose aim is to help Veterans lose weight to control any health-related issues.

“MOVE!” is a national weight management program for overweight Veterans to learn about healthy eating, exercising and making changes to their lifestyle to get back in shape. It’s open to all those getting care at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center and clinics with a body mass index over 30, or BMI over 25 with at least one weight-related health condition.

All told, 137 Veterans completed the intensive “Choose to MOVE!” program in 2015, losing a combined total of 2,005 pounds.

“It’s really rewarding to see the ones who put in the hard work and effort and how well they do and how much better they feel,” said Kristen Bertram, registered dietician who runs the program. “It really changes their life.”

Gone are the days when Ted Coon and his brother would get out of breath from simple tasks.

“We both have hunting dogs. It got to the point where I could only go about 200 yards before I was winded,” he said. “Now I am at (level) 4 on the treadmill and I could go an hour. I am not the least bit winded; all I do is sweat.”

Veterans in the program start by tracking their BMI, body fat percentage, weight, and waist circumference to evaluate their progress. Diabetes and cholesterol levels are monitored every three months.

This free program starts with a monthly group-setting orientation class where staff explains the different options within “MOVE!” such as Telehealth, Walk A Mile or More, Choose to MOVE and many more. Most start off with a three-week introductory series for

nutrition, physical activity and lifestyle-change classes.

Bertram recommends Veterans first take the group introductory series before moving to the more intensive exercise and nutrition options.

She said most decide to join, “Choose to MOVE!” — a six-month, intensive group that meets twice a month for two hours. The class size averages about 20 people and 70 percent go on to finish it. The goal is for Veterans to lose 5 to 10 percent of their starting body weight in a six- to 12-month timeframe.

“When I started, my wife couldn’t reach her hands around me ... At the beginning we were all pretty heavy,” said Ken Anderson, an Army Veteran. “It’s amazing when you put the effort in and you get to see the results. It’s encouraging, it’s rewarding, especially when people say, ‘Wow! You lost some weight since I last saw you.’ That’s really kind of pleasing to see that.”

Follow-up classes are maintained through a support group called, “Move Forward,” which meets twice a month.

“Many Veterans find that losing weight is difficult but keeping the weight off is even more difficult,” said Bertram. “The ‘MOVE! Forward’ program is a support group designed to help Veterans maintain their weight loss or continue to lose weight until they achieve their health goals. Having support of their peers in this interactive program helps Veterans to learn tips and tricks from fellow Veterans who have been successful in maintaining their weight.”

For Army Veteran Tom Coon, who lost 85 pounds, he was afraid if he didn’t do something drastic, he’d lose legs to diabetes.

“I read an article about a fellow that was a little overweight who was a Veteran with all kinds of problems — diabetes, I think he lost a leg, he lost his sight. I thought this is not the life for Tom, I gotta do something about this weight,” he said. “I got to lower my meds quite a bit; one of them I stopped completely.”

Occupational therapy and the “MOVE!” team work hand-in-hand to run programs such as the supervised exercise groups and WAMM — Walk A Mile or More, which helps Veterans on their weight loss journey.

“It is not just the weight loss,” said Dan Ody. “I am almost completely off my meds.”

These Veterans can be seen with their bright-colored red shirts, logging their miles throughout the hallways of the medical center. But when Navy Veteran Steven Bavers first started, he could barely

walk to his mailbox, let alone throughout the medical center.

“I looked in the mirror and said if I don’t do something I won’t be here very long!” he said. “At first it would take me 45 minutes to recover from a half an hour of activity. Now I can walk an entire golf course and not even get winded.”

Bavers, who has been with the program on and off since it started in 2005, has lost and kept off 60 pounds.

“I wish people would understand,” he said. “It doesn’t take a lot of weight loss to have real lasting results on your health. You get people who lose even five or 10 pounds, you would see a great improvement. If I can encourage people, please lose some weight, and make it an ongoing project.”

But the work doesn’t stop with exercising.

“MOVE! Your Skillet” is a cooking class

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See MOVE

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PHOTO BY BENJAMIN SLANE

Walk A Mile or More participants line the halls of Milwaukee VA on a regular basis as part of their program of walking at least a mile.

# In Service

Congratulations to the following Milwaukee VA employees who reached career milestones in December 2015 to February 2016:

## 40 Years of Service

Susan Anewer  
Terri Grisham  
Virginia Mueller  
E H Stempkowski

## 35 Years of Service

Carla Maize  
Julie Nelson  
James Sanger  
Judith Semrad  
Patricia Siebenaller

## 30 Years of Service

David Amyx  
Michael Erdmann  
David Gutterman  
Sean Hayes  
Tania Hollinshed  
Lori Holtz  
Anne Kelly  
Sara Shuler  
Ronald Thornton  
Brian Walker  
Sandra Zygarlicki

## 25 Years of Service

Laverne Brady  
Veronica Davi  
Kevin Decker  
Marcia Depons  
Deborah Engel  
Karen Gage  
Margie Gainer  
Donald Gall  
Marshall Hairston  
Daniel Hermes  
Marcia Hinton  
Gerald Hodges  
Mark Kinder  
Joan Koehn-Fogl  
Regina Majjala  
Carl Morris  
Connie Pohlhammer  
Lawrence Platt  
Michele Rhynard  
Michelle Sawyers  
Randal St Louis  
Cynthia Ziegler

## 20 Years of Service

Anna Arvan  
Catherine Boyle  
Gwendolyn Evans  
Barry Greene  
Robert Hirschman  
Lois Hollis  
Scott Ladwig  
Sue Miller  
Leora Roberson  
Kevin Thomsen  
Lajohn Tobler  
David Weinberg

## 15 Years of Service

Rachele Balzer  
Ann Blankenburg  
Jennifer Carlson  
Shanon Cousland  
Karen Deglau  
Kathryn Denson  
Holly Francis  
Kristy Fritz  
William Glover  
Deborah Hagen  
Richard Hanson  
Matthew Hawkins  
Chrystal Hickling  
Terry Johnson  
Joseph Junemann  
Diane Kesler  
Megan Kilps  
Jeanette Klundt  
Lisa Knoff  
Kasmira Kolden  
Rebecca Ligrow  
Joy Mcginnis  
Stacey Mielke  
Richard Miller  
Debra Munson  
Mattie Murry  
Lurean Nelson  
Slocum  
Tracey Rewolinski  
Paula Rodz  
Barbara Roohr  
David Rosenmarkle  
Julie Schmitz  
Randolph Schuppe  
Tammy Soukup

Maurice Smith  
Linda Tibbits  
Dina Twigg  
Tina Ukasick  
Robert Whifers  
Deborah Woelfel  
John Wofford

## 10 Years of Service

Tara Atanasoff  
Carla Bednarek  
James Beier  
Lynn Budzak  
Taylor Briggs  
William Burns  
Orlando Clay  
Rosonna Comers  
Tabitha Eden  
Jeffrey Erisman  
Margaret Frittitta  
Cynthia Grzanna  
Kristi Haug  
Kim Henry  
Danuta Hetrick  
Bobbie James-Wirth  
Lakesia Johnson  
Ronald Jones  
Jeremy Jutrzonka  
Diane Kazmierski  
Theresa Koch  
Scot Kueper  
Patricia Lauton  
Joseph Layde  
Elizabeth Loggins  
Michele Malone  
Jeremy Martell  
Nicol Martin  
Dorothy McCollum  
Michael McElwee  
Gary Mosley  
Jennifer Mulhall  
Cynthia Nickels  
Ellen Nill  
Marian Obrien-Frigo  
Lesley Ockwood  
Kam Odell  
Christopher Ohanison  
Elizabeth Paulsen  
Nadine Potkonjak



**February 2016**  
**Janice Curnes**  
Medical librarian

"She not only works in the Library. She works hands-on at the Holiday giving collections, and also behind the scenes with the donations of blood, food, clothes, and school supplies. She makes sure there is coverage at each event, and at times jumps in to makes sure the events come off without a hitch."

Mary Rashed  
Kathy Reinick  
Katie Ripple  
Shanna Roloff  
John Savorias  
Sarah Savorias  
Maryann Schacht  
Amy Schneider  
Kevin Schneider  
Linda Schwarz  
Lucie Semerau  
Lynn Servais  
Gregory Silva  
Cindy Smith  
Patrick Smith  
Yolanda Smith  
Lewis Somberg  
Jon Stelzner  
Letha Taylor  
Sarah Teller  
Keith Thompson  
Nicholas Thorn  
Sherry Wiesner  
Gayle Williams  
Mary Withee  
Lynette Zamborini

# Bowling Blind

BY YANITZ IRIZARRY

Veteran Eddie Beamon hefts his black and blue bowling ball in the air and whips it down the lane, hoping for the strike.

The pins fall and everyone yells and gets excited. Except Eddie. “What happened?” he asked.

Beamon is blind so needed someone to call color commentary. But that’s OK.

Even blind men can bowl.

Beamon joined a group of 11 visually impaired Veterans from the Milwaukee VA for an afternoon bowling outing, Feb. 22 at Court Lanes North.

“A lot of [visually impaired] tend to stay at home. It is easier than having to burden someone else,” said Bob Ivy, VIVA chairman at the Milwaukee VA. “They don’t want to be embarrassed if they, let’s say, spill a drink or something.”

VIVA, which stands for Visually Impaired Veteran Activities, is dedicated to keeping blind and near-blind Veterans active.

Veterans first attend a six-week course to include mobility training to learn how to use their guide stick. Outings then reinforce that training and help Veterans use their cane skills.

“If you don’t use it, you lose it,” said Ivy. “A lot of money went into this training and stuff. It’s a waste if it just goes into the closet.”

Beamon, who is completely blind, was able to join in on the festivities. He was able to use his cane to determine the left and right side of the bowling lane. With the assistance of volunteer Chuck Cook, he was able to position himself to bowl.

“I always have fun. I enjoy what I do,” said Chuck Cook.

This seemed to be the consensus for the VIVA group.

“First place winner!” Ivy gasped. “This is a first time for me, but I’ll learn to love it. I was just surprised as anyone that I broke 100. It was a computerized score, so I didn’t cheat.”

Even Veterans wary about playing were shocked by their success.

“I wasn’t even going to play,” said Don Williams, the second-place winner. “I was just going to sit on the sidelines. Now look at me!”



PHOTO BY IZZY IRIZARRY

Chuck Cook (center) helps blind Veteran Eddie Beamon line up with a bowling lane. Beamon checks the sides of the lane with his cane to verify the left and right limits, then Cook helps position Beamon before his strike.



## First Air Force 4-star visting

BY GARY J. KUNICH

Janet Wolfenbarger began and ended her career as a first.

She was in the first class of female cadets at the Air Force Academy in 1976 and the first Air Force woman to pin on four stars.

Now retired since June 2015, the general will be guest speaker at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center’s Women’s History Month celebration.

The event takes place 11 a.m. to noon March 23 in the Matousek Auditorium.

Wolfenbarger is one of only three women to ever reach that rank. She served 35 years in the Air Force, including commander of Air Force Materiel Command at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio.

She serves on an advisory board for an engineering and architecture firm, and was just appointed to the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, the first time a four-star general served in that position.

But when she was still in high school she wasn’t sure what she wanted to be when she grew up, until her dad — an Air Force major — came home with big news.

“He told me Congress just opened the service academies to women and I said, ‘I’m going to see if I can get in. That’s how I went down this path.’”

“It’s absolutely fair to say there was a fair share in the cadet wing who were unhappy with this decision that Congress made, and they wanted to prove Congress was wrong. I met some resistance and bad behavior, some harassment. Some in the academy might say their experiences were worse than that. I didn’t focus on being a woman; I just focused on proving myself.”

Four years later, a little more than a third of the women dropped out, about the same statistic for men.

“They were four tough years, no matter what you use to

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**MOVE**

Continued —

offered once per month that teaches Veterans how to cook delicious, nutritional meals.

“People ask me, ‘How did you do it?’ I explain to them It’s all in the food you eat, you have to eat the right portions, the right food, stay away from sweets,” said John Kinjerski, Navy Veteran participant.

And if you get out of the habit, it’s not the end of the world, Bavers added.

“You have to make the commitment; no one can make you do it. You have to make that internal commitment,” he said. “If you fall of the wagon, and it happens, realize you haven’t lost out on everything. You can start again the next day. Every day is the first day of the rest of your life. So you can get right back on the wagon the next day, with no lasting effects on your program.”

*For more information on these programs, call 414-384-2000, ext. 44505.*

**PRESIDENT**

Continued —

“Here’s something caregivers don’t talk about,” he said. “There were days I was just tired, but my fear is there would be nobody to help him. I’d shop, clean and do everything.”

Dino and his husband had plans to go on a cruise in November, and Mark was adamant he would go. Before leaving, he made arrangements with an around-the-clock, home health care nurse and friends to check in. Dino also checked in via Facetime. But slowly, Mark began to slip away.

“The nurse said he would only perk up when he heard my name. He was pretty much incoherent by then.”

As soon as he got back home Nov. 21, Dino stopped by. Mark suddenly opened his eyes and grabbed Dino’s hand.

“Dino, you’re my best friend. I love you. It’s time for me to die now,” he said.

“I know,” Dino replied. “You just let go, my friend. You are home now. It’s OK.”

Mark slipped into a coma and lived five more days. At one point, while Dino read to him a Facebook post Mark wrote earlier, his grip tightened around his hand.

“I felt when he squeezed my hand, he could still hear me.”

Will Johnson, the Equal Employment Opportunity program manager, who oversees the award each year, said because Dino didn’t want to be recognized is why he deserved it.

“We had to convince Dino to talk about this. It was a very personal journey for him. Anyone who knows Dino knows he’s a nice guy, but the compassion he gave went so far beyond what people ordinarily do. I told him his story would empower others to step in,” he said.

And that is why Dino ultimately was OK with the honor.

“I never shy away from the spotlight,” he said. “I am the center of attention and want all eyes on me. It’s the theater in me. But this thing I did was not about me. So, in a way, this was so uncomfortable getting the credit. But what I learned, and what I tell others, is this shows how important it is to have someone advocating for you who can help make decisions so you aren’t at the mercy of an institution.

“I’m coming to accept that maybe if someone in their life needs help, even if it’s not end-of-life, don’t be afraid to offer that help. You might be the only kind person someone has.”

**GENERAL**

Continued —

measure that — physical, mental, emotional, academic, but I came through that and realize I am far more capable than I ever thought I could be,” she said. “It brought a confidence in myself — not ego — that I relied on professionally and personally. I cannot even put a value on that experience. It is the foundation of who I am today.”

Wolfenbarger will speak about the evolution of women in the military during her lifetime.

“When I came in in the mid 70s, there were many career fields still closed to women, especially in other services. It took years to have women serve in those career fields. But I believe the Air Force was much further ahead. I was always given positions of increased responsibility, which is what I always wanted. Every job I got was more challenging. It stretched me. It gave me a chance to make a difference.

“It went so quickly. Thirty-five years went by in a flash,” she said. “I think about it more now in reflection since my retirement.”

*For more information on the Women’s History Month event, call Jill Feldman at 414-384-2000, ext. 41926. or 44347*



**Who is a woman in history that influences you?**



**Barbara Gilbert, homeless prevention manager:** “Ohh,” she gasps with her hand over her heart, “Harriet Tubman.”



**Jill Zahn, Librarian:** “Elizabeth Corbett, she was a very patriotic author, friend to Veterans and lived here in Milwaukee.”



**Anne Snieg, library technician:** “Katharine Hepburn, she was very independent, adventurous and caring.”



**Marianne Geib, library technician:** “Laura Ingalls Wilder. She was such a great writer, and revered by many. People could enjoy her novels for decades.”



**Edward Eisenhauer, safety specialist:** “Oh my, where would you begin? Nancy Reagan, since she just passed away.”

## Kayleen's KITCHEN

Popcorn can be an excellent healthy snack. Whether you are reaching for something to snack on during a movie or a Town Hall Meeting at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center, popcorn is high in fiber and a whole grain. Some studies even show corn has higher levels of antioxidants than other grains and vegetables. Popcorn has about 86 calories per serving, so it is a healthy snack option if you do not eat too much of it. While it is an excellent high-fiber snack, adding too much butter and oil can quickly turn this into an unhealthy snack.

If plain popcorn does not excite you, add a little spice to this treat. There are many recipes available via the internet for healthy and flavorful popcorn. Try making popcorn sweet with a little cinnamon and a dusting of sugar, or add rosemary and a bit of parmesan cheese for a savory flavor. However you decide to spice up your treat, be careful not to add too much butter and salt. To cut out added butter and limit salt, I like popcorn with spices instead. Try adding cayenne pepper for a little added heat.

You can also experiment preparing your homemade popcorn with different oils. In this recipe, I used coconut oil to give it a rich and buttery taste. However, most oil varieties can be used (corn, canola, vegetable, etc.) when preparing this homemade snack!

*Check out [www.facebook.com/milwaukeeva](http://www.facebook.com/milwaukeeva) for more of Kayleen's Kitchen videos with full recipes! For a free DVD of the most recent episodes, contact public affairs at 414-382-5363.*



Kayleen Wichlinski  
Registered Dietitian

### Recipe of the Month

## Spicy Popcorn

#### For spice blend:

1. 1 1/2 tsp celery salt
2. 1 1/2 tsp dried parsley flakes
3. 3/4 teaspoon garlic powder
4. 1/4 tsp dried thyme
5. 1/4 black pepper
6. 1/4 tsp turmeric
7. 1/4 tsp ground sage

#### For popcorn:

1. 1/2 cup popping corn
2. 3 tbsp coconut oil (you choose)

#### Directions:

Mix all spice ingredients, set aside. In a large Dutch oven, on medium high, add oil, salt and popping corn. Shake the oven to cover corn kernels. Once popped, remove from heat and cover in spice blend. Enjoy!





# Zablocki VA Medical Center Milwaukee Campus

## PARKING

- Medical Staff
- Employee
- Patient
- Handicap
- C Contractor
- V Valet
- VA Shuttle Stop

