5000 West

Clement J. Zablocki Medical Center

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Letter from the editor

This month we are doing things a little different — again. Recently the Milwaukee VA hosted an Adaptive Sports Clinic (see page 9). It was an amazing event highlighted with the Milwaukee Police, with a little help from the Racing Sausages, taking part in wheelchair rugby. It was fun and the atmosphere was electric. Benjamin Slane, staff writer and photographer, snapped so many great photos we decided to have three separate covers this month. Make sure to check out all three.

The Milwaukee VA is proud to announce Sgt. Paul Bachmann from the Milwaukee VA Police won the most recent Lead Officer of the Year (see page 4). It's an amazing accomplishment and we're lucky to have a remarkable police staff on our grounds.

These are just a couple of the stories in this month's issue. Feel like we missed something? Maybe have an upcoming event related to Veterans? Contact our office at 414-384-2000, ext. 45363 or email us at vhamiwpublicaffairs@va.gov.

Sincerely,

Antony Kamps
Editor

5000 West is a recurring publication 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: Antony Kamps at antony.kamps@va.gov or call the Public Affairs Office at 414-384-2000, ext. 43895.

Cover 2 of 3

The Badgerland Veteran's Adaptive Sports Clinic came to the Milwaukee VA's Spinal Cord Injury building July 1. The event featured quad rugby, wheelchair tennis demos. adaptive cycling, and equipment instructions. The racing sausages made an appearance and took part in some of the activities. Read more about the event on page 9.
— Photo by Benjamin Slane

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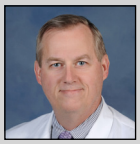

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Top Cop for VA

Milwaukee VA police officer is named Lead Officer of the Year for 2013

By Gary J. Kunich
Public Affairs Officer

Sgt. Paul Bachmann from the Milwaukee VA Police Department was named a top cop by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Bachmann, who oversees all training for 31 officers at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center and Green Bay Community Based Outpatient Clinic, was named Lead Officer of the Year for 2013.

"I certainly wasn't expecting this when I found out my name was put in," Bachmann said. "I don't know how to feel. It means a lot to me and it's very flattering. There are 3,000 police officers in the VA, so it's a big honor."

Bachmann, a Marine Corps Veteran, has been with the VA police since 2004 and the training sergeant since 2008. According to his nomination package, he saved the department more than $15,000 in 2013 by moving their gun-range training from Milwaukee Area Technical College to the Oak Creek Police Department.

But Bachmann shrugs and downplays the work involved.

"I just asked," he said. "A big part of this job is building relationships with people and rapport with other police departments. Oak Creek allows us to train on their range for free. I help them with their training programs. You never know when we might need them, or we may need to work together on something."

Bachmann was also lauded for putting together 149 hours of training yearly for every Milwaukee VA police officer, far above the normal requirement.

"That's my favorite part, teaching others these skills and seeing people get better than me," he said. "I might start out with people who can't hit a target, but now they're smoking me on the range."

Police Chief Tim Jantz said it was no surprise Bachmann won.

"He's done incredible work building up our training program, building liaisons with other police departments and working with the community," Jantz said. "It's always good for the agency and it's good for the group, but it's very well-deserved."

Bachmann said he's been successful because Jantz lets him do what needs to be done.

"The first six months I took over the job, he would tell me, 'This is what I want done, and this is how I want you to do it.' But as I came up with ideas, and showed him what I wanted to do, he really let me run my program."

Capt. Mark Zamborini, criminal investigator at the Milwaukee VA, won a similar award in 2008 when he was named police supervisor of the year, and Bachmann was quick to praise him.

"To think I got the same kind of award that (Zamborini) got is humbling. I can't hold a candle to him," Bachmann said.

That makes Zamborini laugh.

"That's crap!" Zamborini said. "Paul Bachmann is outstanding. He's just a very humble guy. I don't know how else to say it. He is very knowledgeable, especially his tactics and understanding of search and seizure. Paul does a ton of research and self-education. He makes sure he thoroughly understands a topic before he teaches anyone else.

"But it's not just police stuff that allows him to do that," he added. "He is very personable and works very hard. He's the first one at work in the morning and the last one to leave."

But for Bachmann, it's all in a day's work.

"Working here is different than other police stations, and it's important to be able to talk to people and work with them," he said. "On a typical day, we talk and work with more people than a cop in West Allis might see in a week. It's different than any other police department. It's very personality driven, and I love what I do."

Photo by Benjamin Slane

Sgt. Paul Bachmann who (left) oversees all training for officers at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center and Green Bay Community Based Outpatient Clinic. He was named Lead Officer of the Year for 2013.

Photo by Benjamin Slane

Milwaukee VA Police awarded seven certificates of appreciation for their actions April 27 to prevent a non-combat Veteran from jumping off the Zablocki Bridge. From left to right: Ryan Komers, Andre Callender, Seth Tuler, Jill Hewitt, Christopher Thorn, Kevin Bostick, and Charles McCuller

Good Citizens

Seven are awarded certificates for their actions April 27 to save a non-combat Veteran

By Gary J. Kunich
Public Affairs Officer

Seth Tuler was running late for work the afternoon of April 27 when something made him look up at the Zablocki Bridge near Miller Park.

"I saw a gentleman on the bridge attempting to climb over the fence," he said. "My first thought was it was someone doing something stupid, but I had to call it in."

Tuler, a Milwaukee VA nursing assistant, along with a private citizen and five VA police officers are credited with saving the man's life.

Milwaukee VA Police Chief Tim Jantz presented the group July 8 with framed certificates and thanked them for their efforts.

In addition to Tuler, certificates were awarded to Jill Hewitt, who kept the man calm until police arrived; Lt. Andre Callender; and Officers Ryan Komers, Kevin Bostick, Charles McCuller and Chris Thorn.

"We are incredibly grateful that people cared enough to get involved and save a man's life," Jantz said. "From Mr. Tuler calling this in to Ms. Hewitt talking to the individual until our officers arrived on scene and pulled him to safety, it was a perfect example of community working together with our police. This was very heroic for all involved. I'm proud of my guys and deeply thankful for everyone involved."

Tuler was eastbound on I-94 about 3:15 p.m. when he spotted the man on the bridge that connects Wood National Cemetery with Zablocki Drive. Moments after he called in the emergency, he came upon a VA police cruiser a few blocks from the scene.

"I told him, and he took off with lights on," Tuler said.

When police arrived, they found Hewitt holding the man's hand and talking to him in a soothing tone.

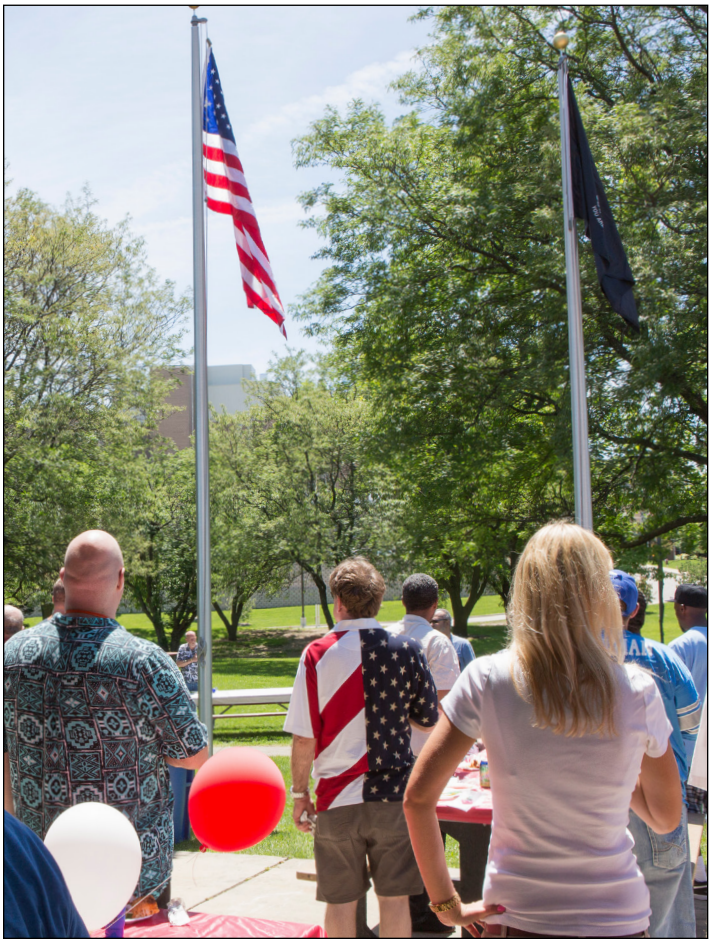
Photo by Benjamin Slane

Jill Hewitt helped the Milwaukee VA Police prevent a man from jumping off Zablocki Bridge April 27. She was awarded a certificate of appreciation for her role.

The officers cautiously approached and continued speaking to the man before pulling him to safety, Jantz said. The man was a non-combat Veteran and not an established VA patient. He was treated at the medical center and released later in the week.

Tuler said he was glad to be at the right place to help save a life.

"We save lives here every day. I work in a hospital with hundreds and hundreds of healthcare employees, and I think this is my calling," he said. "I'm glad I could make a difference. It just makes you feel good. If anything, I hope it sends a message to others to not be afraid to get involved."



July Fourth Celebration

Clockwise from the top: Carlos Smith, volunteer, cooks up hamburgers for attendees at the annual July 4th celebration at Milwaukee VA's Lake Wheeler Pavilion. A young boy shows his patriotism by waving a miniature U.S. Flag. All who attended stood up and showed respect as the flags were raised. — Photos by Benjamin Slane

In and Around Milwaukee VA

Clockwise from top right: "Kayleen's Kitchen" is back and in full force, as Kayleen Wichlinski (left) will show how to cook a delicious healthy meal. Look for new episodes on the Milwaukee VA's Facebook page. Eric Buchmann (standing), carpenter at Milwaukee VA, watches over as Benjamin Slane downloads pictures from a camera more than 60 feet off the ground. The camera is taking a picture every minute to document the building of the Fisher House. Mike Martinez, Army Veteran, helps paint the spring well, known as Structure 58 located on the bank of Lake Wheeler. Cheri Kaczmarek, dietitian, explains the benefits of drinking infused water at the "Backyard BBQ" July 21 in the Recreation Hall. Milwaukee VA dietitians came together and cooked an entire meal to celebrate this month's Healthy Living message of Eat Wisely. — Photos by Benjamin Slane

Russian physicians visit VA clinic

Physicians came to compare the types of care given to Veterans

By Benjamin Slane
Staff Writer

Photos by Benjamin Slane

Viktorovich Konyukhov, a urologist from Moscow, looks at nitrile examination gloves for the first time.

Twelve Russian physicians visited the Green Bay VA Outpatient Clinic in May to compare and contrast differences in Veteran and civilian healthcare in the U.S. and Russia.

The visit is part of the Open World program facilitated by the U.S. State Department. The program has been around since 1999 and began as a method to bring civic and political leaders to the U.S. It expanded to include Eurasian countries Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Ukraine.

"What you have here is much different than what is in Russia," said psychiatrist Maksim Kirsanov, speaking through an interpreter,. "The pharmacy windows are something unheard of."

The Green Bay Clinic has a new, different, feature — enclosed prescription rooms. A Veteran can walk in, close the door and speak with a pharmacy tech without disclosing patient information.

"Privacy is different in Russia, for Veterans and civilians. Everyone hears everyone's business," said Kirsanov.

"It's interesting to see what happens in America," said Kirsanov. "All we hear about is how poorly Veterans are treated, but here at this hospital, it is so different. So positive, not the negative we always hear."

In Russia, all males are required to join the military for one year, but the word Veteran has a varied definition. All males are bound to enlist in the Russian military until the age of 27.

Russian military members would be considered Veterans by U.S. standards, but the requirements are different in Russia .

"Our Veterans are different," said urologist Viktrovich Konyukhov. "In Russia, a Veteran has seen combat. Nobody else is (considered) a veteran."

World War II soldiers, combat or not, are all cared for by Russian WW II veteran clinics, said a second male physician.

Barbara O'Connor-Schevers, who proctored the physician's tour, is an registered nurse and teaches nursing at Fox Valley Technical College.

"I have never been inside this clinic. Every day I see it, but this is exciting," said O'Connor-Schevers. "To host this Open World group and see firsthand how we care for Veterans is just wonderful."

Twelve Russian citizen physicians visited Green Bay VA Outpatient Clinic in May to compare differences in Veteran and civilian health care in America and Russia.

Community rides with Veterans

By Benjamin Slane
Staff Writer

For Veteran John O'Donnel the annual adaptive sports clinic at Milwaukee was an eye-opening experience.

"Oh man, this is great," said O'Donnel. "I was on the fence with doing some of this stuff before, but that rugby sure is something."

The clinic is an annual event hosted by the Spinal Cord Injury Center at Milwaukee VA Medical Center. More than 100 Veterans, friends and family members attended the clinic this year.

Wheelchair rugby involves no lower body, just torso and arms. O'Donnel faced off against other Veterans, Klements Racing Sausages and officers from the Milwaukee Police Department.

"That right there, that will build up your confidence," said O'Donnel, "Hell of a time, I had a blast."

This is O'Donnel's first time, but the third year of the Annual Badgerland Veterans Adaptive Sports Club Adaptive Cycling Clinic. The clinic, founded by Milwaukee VA Medical Center's Spinal Cord Injury Center started with an informal adaptive bicycle ride. As more people got involved, it turned into a weekly ride. The group decided to hold an annual event in addition to the weekly rides.

"With support of the community and Veterans this has become a success," said SCI Director Dr. Ken Lee.

Photo by Benjamin Slane

Ian Young, service manager at Wheel and Sprocket, took time to help fix a fellow rider's bike at the annual Adaptive Sports Clinic July 1 at Milwaukee VA.

Members from Paralyzed Veterans of America presented a lunchtime discussion on the career potential as an athlete to Veterans.

More than 20 Milwaukee Police Department bicycle patrol officers volunteered to assist Veterans for the day.

"We'd do anything for our Veterans," said Officer Peter Pfau. "It's a simple decision to ride side-by-side."

The officers rode across the ten-mile stretch of the Hank Aaron Trail.

Lee's goal in this clinic is simple — introduce Veterans with disabilities to the world of adaptive cycling and health wellness. The Paralyzed Veterans of America Racing Team provided peer support to the Veterans and held an open discussion with Veterans on adaptive sports options.

John Sison of Wheel and Sprocket attended the adaptive sports clinic for the third year in a row.

"This is to enrich Veterans with spinal cord injury," Sison said. "It forms a good relationship with Veterans and the community."

Sison said Wheel and Sprocket is a strong supporter of service members and hopes the partnership continues in the future.

"This is something that has really opened our eyes to the Veteran community," said Sison.

At the end of the clinic, Veterans, police officers, and racers hit the Hank Aaron Trail for a 10-mile ride.

Veterans captivate crowd

By Gary J. Kunich
Public Affairs Officer

Coiled and looking ready to breathe fire, the 90-pound metal dragon held court June 11 at the center of the Milwaukee VA Medical Center's Recreation Hall. A flicked tongue and piercing eyes grab attention of those passing by.

The artwork of World War II Veteran, Willis Johnson, 88, captivated judges and onlookers alike, who stood mesmerized by its artistry.

"Dragon," as it was appropriately named, was one of 53 first-place winners in the National Veterans Creative Arts Exhibit that will be featured later this year at the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival in Milwaukee.

"Well I'm just tickled that I won! It's my first time going to the national event and winning," said Johnson, who gets his care at the Roseburg VA in Oregon. "It was my wife's idea. She just loves dragons, so I tried making one. Sometimes the first one isn't good, but if you keep trying, you keep getting better."

The exhibit was the last stop for Veterans on their way to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, Oct. 27 to Nov. 2 in downtown Milwaukee.

The national festival, which dates back to 1981, was designed to spotlight the five creative art therapies of art, music, dance, drama and creative writing. It features the national winning artists from the national exhibit; as well as singers, musicians, dancers, and creative writers who have their own competition, and perform a stage show at the end of the week-long event.

Veterans also participate in therapeutic workshops throughout the week. The free art show and stage performance takes place Nov. 2 at the Milwaukee Theatre.

Artist-judges from the local area were on hand early in the morning to judge more than 150 art pieces at the exhibit — the top winners at all the local Veteran art festivals from throughout the nation. Categories included everything from craft kits and leather work to various forms of painting, sculpture and woodwork.

Each category received first, second and third place awards.

"I have been amazed. All this work is very moving," said Anita Bergermeister, who has judged the local Milwaukee festival for five years. "I am always amazed at the local artwork which is so good, and this is even more incredible.

"Most of this is from the heart and it tells a story," she added. "It's an outlet for people, and for some who have sometimes lived through something horrid, this gives them a chance to express themselves."

Vietnam Veteran and local artist Anthony Suminski said artwork helped him express himself after the war. Now as a judge, he sees how others use art for their own healing.

"(Art) saved my life," he said, "and I see how it has saved other lives. I volunteered and helped Veterans here (in Milwaukee), and saw how it gave them the chance to mentally get out of that war mindset.

"There is some very high-end art here," he said, pausing at a piece called, "Glory."

The piece featured a basilica, with ornate statues, intricate windows and detailed brick work. The work by Dennis Linn of Fort Meade, South Dakota, won first place in the fine art mixed media category.

"You can see how this artist used sand texturing to add dimension and depth to his work," Suminski said. "This clearly took a lot of time; it took hours and hours of work just to do the tiniest of details."

First-year judge Matt McFall, who works as a fashion photographer, was stunned by the quality.

"This is really overwhelming and I didn't expect such a wide variety and so much talent. Any of this could be on display in a gallery," he said.

Artwork ran the gamut at the exhibition. In one corner was a handmade dress. Another had intricate sculptures and leatherwork, paintings and photography.

Neil Gillis from the Minneapolis VA, took first place in carving with his dramatic piece entitled, "Christ's Footsteps," which featured scenes from the Gospels, including the crucifixion.

"That piece is amazing," said housekeeper Melvin Smith. "Just look at the detail there. I can't imagine how long that must have taken. There is a lot of creativity here from people who don't normally get the type of recognition they deserve. All of this work should be on a national stage, and they should all be getting national recognition."

The public will next get the chance to see the artwork and the stage show at the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. Tickets to the event are free and open to the public. To reserve tickets, call 1-888-469-6614.

Photo by Benjamin Slane

The exhibit was the last stop for Veterans on their way to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, Oct. 27 to Nov. 2 in downtown Milwaukee.

Photo by Benjamin Slane

Willis Johnson, World War II Veteran, found metal sculpting as a hobby when he retired 20 years ago.

World War II Veteran metalwork sculpture hammers competition

By Gary J. Kunich
Public Affairs Officer

Willis Johnson spent most of his life not even knowing he was an artist.

The World War II Veteran spent two years in the Marines from 1943 to 1945. He was shot five days after arriving on Iwo Jima. After the Marines, he got a job as a log trucker.

But when he retired 20 years ago, he needed a hobby.

"Mama," as he affectionately calls his wife, was the one who got him started.

"Mama asked me to build her a couple birds for the yard," he said. "They weren't good, but they got better."

He uses blow torches, welding equipment, plasma cutters and a variety of metals to create his art. His metalwork piece, "Dragon," earned him first place in this year's National Veterans Creative Arts exhibit. It was created with steel and brass, along with silicon and phosphorous bronze.

"You make it like an armored chair," he said. "You start cutting the metal in lengths and wrap them around. But when you start putting the color on like the bronze and the brass … wow! I just love doing it. When you take a bunch of metal and see what you can create out of it, that's nice."

Johnson figures he spends about six hours a day, seven days a week, working on his metal projects. It took him about a month to make "Dragon."

"I'm usually in my shop every day in the wintertime. You can just get lost in that time and not think about anything else. Sometimes Mama thinks (I spend too much), so I have to sell them and make some money," he chuckled.

He normally puts some of his pieces in an art gallery in Roseburg, Ore. He figures he'll eventually sell "Dragon" for about $3,000.

As for his military days, he'd rather talk about his artwork.

"Oh, I try not to think about it, but you can't forget," he said. "It's something you just don't want to talk about much, but art, that helps you escape everything."

Even if he doesn't get rich off his creations, that's OK by him.

"It's not like I'm making minimum wage," he said. "It's just fun."

You can see Johnson's, and other Veteran's, art on display Nov. 2 at the Milwaukee Theatre.

For more information about the National Veterans Creative Art Festival contact Shep Crumrine at 414-384-2000, ext. 48653, or Marisa Straub at ext. 48628. Or to reserve tickets, call 1-888-469-6614.

In Service

Congratulations to the following Zablocki employees who have reached career milestones in July:

40 years
Laura Schmidbauer

35 years
Gina Banach
Carrie Murphy

30 years
Paul Barkhaus
Ansley Gooding
Anita Rabiega

25 years
Jonathan Cherry
Lynn Gutknecht
Betty Henderson
Kathleen Keefe
Diane Waldner
Sandra Weickardt

20 years
Christine Angeles
Terrence Hess
Jon Lehrmann
Rick Purko
Clare Scheuerell
Jill Underberg

15 years
Gurmeet Bhatia
Amy Deschane
Mike Grunske
Debbie Hirvela
Todd Loehrl
Lewis Mallett Jr
Rodney Pearsall
John Reynolds

10 years
David Armin
Krista Berner
Linda Brennan
Gina Hart
Mindy Marcus
Rita Mendez
Gary Pryor
Kimberly Ridl
Mary Sabino
Stephen Smith

Employee of the Month

Photo by Amanda Urrea

June 2014
Michael Whiting
Facility Management, pipefitter

Whiting is an Air Force Veteran with more than 18 years of service. He is set to retire from the Air Force in December 2016. He started at Milwaukee VA in September 2010, and aspires to climb the ladder to one day be in a position to make decisions to improve upon the facility.

What does this award mean to you?:

"Winning this award is a great honor, and proves that all the long hours, extra efforts, and hard work that have been put in are recognized. This award should be split six ways amongst the pipe shop because these are the guys putting in the long hours, sacrificing personal time, putting out the fires that occur hourly, and still leaving here with smiles at the end of the day."

VA VOICES

Which upcoming summer movie are you looking forward to see, and why?

Elizabeth Simon, canteen services: "'Dawn of the Planet of the Apes.' I really liked the first one, and all the previews made this one look really good."

Daniel Fitten, chaplain: "There's a bunch out there. Most people will say 'Guardians of the Galaxy,' but I want to see 'Dawn of the Planet of the Apes.' I want to see how they evolve the story from the original '70s version."

Larisa Dezayas, blind rehab specialist: "'Fifty Shades of Grey.' Why do you think?"

Eric Buchmann, carpenter: "None really, but my wife bought me my favorite movie on Blu-Ray, 'Tombstone.' I look forward to watching it all summer."

Joy Gumm, licensed clinical social worker: "I really want to see 'The Fault in Our Stars.' It looks really intense, and I think it will make people appreciate life. And of course, it has the love story every girl dreams of."