

# 5000 West



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For employees, volunteers and patients of Zablocki and our community clinics

## 100,000 reasons to cheer

### Gene study hits MVP milestone

BY GARY J. KUNICH  
5000 West editor

The small amount of blood Rich Bartels gave to the VA last month is a pittance compared to the blood he spilled in Vietnam in 1966.

Bartels, 72, was the 100,000<sup>th</sup> person to volunteer for the Million Veteran Program, an ambitious gene research study, which researchers hope will lead to new treatments, breakthroughs and possible cures for a multitude of diseases.

“It was just an ounce of blood,” Bartels said after learning of his place in MVP history. “It really wasn’t that big of a deal.”

His nonchalant attitude belies his dedication to fellow Veterans and his country.

“I’m just not in MVP because of my strong, favorable feelings and allegiance to the military and Veterans. In both cases, I just thought it was a hell of a good idea. I joined the Army by choice and I did this by choice because I knew it was something great.”

He was still a young man and recently graduated from college when he joined the Army in 1965, and soon found himself in Vietnam as a second lieutenant and platoon leader.

He stepped on a land mine in 1966 while on patrol.

“My radio telephone operator behind me lost both legs beneath the knees,” he said.

“I had quite a few wounds. Had a lot of shrapnel in my left butt and in my upper



Photo by Gary Kunich

**Leanne Pomeroy, right, and Richard Bartels demonstrate how quickly and easily it is to donate blood to the MVP. Bartels was the 100,000th participant in the landmark study.**

left arm. It went straight through in my arm and you could see from one side to the other, and there was a lot of nerve damage.

“It happened so fast, I felt myself flying through the air and then I was slammed into the ground. I smelled burning flesh and realized it was mine.”

He saw the MVP poster while at the Milwaukee VA for a doctor’s appointment and knew he had to serve his country again.

MVP launched in 2011 and is a landmark research effort aimed at better understanding how genes affect health. Up to a million Veterans are expected to enroll in the VA study over the next six years.

It requires Veterans of all ages and backgrounds to make a small blood

donation. From that, all data and genetic samples collected through the study are stored securely and made available for studies by authorized researchers, with stringent safeguards in place to protect private health information.

“My wife is in the medical profession, and I’ve always been fascinated by this kind of work,” he said. “The first thing I thought of was all the designer drugs and benefits that will come out of this for years to come.

“There is nothing like this out there,” Bartels added. “It’s hard to imagine what will come from this 10 or 15 years down the road when 10 or 15 years ago we

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***“I can still remember talking to people when I came in as a lieutenant and people said, ‘We’ll never be at war again.’ They were a bit wrong. (I was deployed for) Desert Storm, and then Iraqi Freedom. I was actually there for the invasion in 2003 for 10 months.”***

**BY GARY J. KUNICH**  
5000 West editor

You can tell a lot about a man by the photos he keeps on his desk — even the ones you can’t see right away.

Jim McLain, the new deputy director of the Milwaukee VA has a few close to his heart around his office. There’s the photo of his well-loved dogs, and another posed shot of him and his older brother as children — one with an apple on his head, and the other with a bow and arrow.

And outside of view, another one that shows his sense of humor and 1980s upbringing — a framed portrait of Eddie of Iron Maiden fame.

“You gotta realize,” he said with a smile, “I’m a child of the 80s.”

It could be worse. He could have had a Flock of Seagulls picture there.

But there’s a lot more than just rock ‘n’ roll on the deputy director’s mind. The *5000 West* picked his brain on a wide range of topics, so you could get to know him a little better. In retrospect, we’re a bit flummoxed how we didn’t work in an “alien” reference after his first answer.

**Q: Tell me a little about yourself. Where did you grow up?**

**A:** I was born in Roswell, N.M., and moved to Albuquerque, N.M., when I was very young. Spent most of my youth in Albuquerque with a couple years in Kansas stuck in the middle. I probably wouldn’t have gone to college because I couldn’t afford it, but applied and got an ROTC scholarship, and at that time, they were good scholarships, it was a full ride.

It was a great opportunity not only from the standpoint of covering my college, but also the experiences I had there.

When I was in college, I got to go to jump school, and while my father had been in the military and really instilled a strong leadership ethic in setting the example and leading from the front, it was in ROTC where I learned about always being there to serve those who work for you because you ultimately work for them.

Really, the core values I have now were instilled by my parents, in terms



Photo by Gary Kunich

# One on One

with  
Jim McLain  
Deputy Director

of valuing what you have and having a strong work ethic. I had the opportunity to go to what has become one of the better regional universities in the country, Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas. After four years of college, I was assigned to Fort Campbell where I was a member of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne, and got to play in the

sand box during Desert Storm. We flew into Iraq and ended up in Ana-Asariyah on the Euphrates. It was very muddy place, from what I remember — very cold and very muddy.

I can still remember talking to people when I came in as a lieutenant and people said, “We’ll never be at war again.” They were a bit wrong.

**Q: At what point did you decide this Army thing was for you and it wasn’t going to be four years and out?**

**A:** I didn’t really know. I had no grand plan for my life. I was enjoying the military after Fort Campbell, and after Desert Storm I was able to get an internship in fiscal management and went to Brooke Army Medical Center to be the chief financial officer there. Really one of my first mentors, Col. Doug Barton, took me under his wing, and when I was about to go to the career course, I was also applying for graduate programs, and had been selected for Syracuse’s MBA program. He said, “I’ll endorse it, but you also have to apply for the U.S. Army’s master’s in healthcare administration program at Baylor.”

I didn’t think anything of it. He was on

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# One on One

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the board. I was a very junior captain at the time. It turned out if you applied and were selected for Baylor, you had to go to Baylor, and little did I know my boss was on the selection board. He wanted me to go to Baylor and I did not know that. It turned out being one of the smartest moves I ever made. It's very prestigious and a lot of people try to get in across the country.

When I completed that, I went to Walter Reed for a year. I was scheduled to become the administrator for the department of surgery at Walter Reed. But a friend of mine who had gone through Baylor wanted to stay in D.C. and she had an assignment to Germany. She was upset about having to go over, and so I called (Personnel Command) and said, "I don't mind going," and went over to Landstuhl.

When I got there, I was the administrator for their outlying health clinics, so we had four clinics in Germany, two clinics in the Netherlands, two clinics in Belgium, two clinics in Italy, and oversight for the clinic in Kuwait.

**Q: You spent 20 years in the military, and retired as a lieutenant colonel. So what was your favorite assignment?**

***"I need to focus on ensuring all the staff is fully supported in taking care of our Vets. I have to be looking internally and really getting into the details of that mission ... I've got to focus on the nuts and bolts. That does not mean I'm a micromanager. It just means I have to have an inner focus on the operation."***

**A:** There are three that stand out in my mind. Germany was phenomenal from the standpoint of I had phenomenal people I worked for and with, and many of whom I still stay in contact with, and the chance to see and experience European culture. I had taken German when I was in college and picked it right back up. I was amazed because I didn't think I'd remember any of my German. By the time I left, I was very comfortable. My wife was a French speaker. That was her major in college. That was great.

My assignment at Fort Monmouth, N.J., when I came back from my second tour of Iraq, is another one, because of the camaraderie between all the military people. It was a really great family atmosphere and a lot of fun.

My last assignment in Bangkok, Thailand, was a great experience. I was assigned to the U.S. embassy there. I worked at the Armed Forces Research Institute for Medical Sciences, and we had labs all over Southeast Asia.

**Q: You mentioned two tours to Iraq. When were you over there?**

**A:** For Desert Storm, and then Iraqi Freedom. I was actually there for the invasion in 2003 for 10 months. It was interesting because we went through the invasion and everyone was saying, "Oh, we're all going home!"

It was interesting because 3<sup>rd</sup> (Infantry Division) had been over there forever. They had actually been doing a rotation before the war kicked off, and I was part of their readiness brigade out of Kuwait. So when the preparations for the war started, they were there. And then the war started, and they were there. So by the time they demobilized, they had been over there 18 months.

**Q: When was the last time you jumped out of a perfectly good airplane?**

**A:** With the U.S. Army in 1988. It was a long time ago.

**Q: What drew you to the VA?**

**A:** I wanted to continue to serve. When I got out of the Army in 2007, a friend of mine I had worked with at Fort Monmouth was chief of the community based outpatient clinics for VA New Jersey. He was getting ready to retire and found out I was getting ready to get out. I was getting ready to sign up for a headhunter for corporate jobs and Bob Burns called me up and said, "Would you be interested?"

I thought about it and said, "Yeah, I think I'd prefer to do that." When I go home every night, for the most part, I'm pretty happy I was at work doing my job. There is no guilt in terms of what

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# MVP

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never thought something like this would be possible. I probably shocked them because I was asking them all a million questions about this when I stopped in for my donation.”

Bambi Wessel, one of the research coordinators, said Bartels stuck out in her mind for his inquisitive nature.

“We have some wonderful Veterans and get to meet some great people in this job,”

she said. “He didn’t shock me because we love it when people come in and tell us their history and ask questions. We know if they have a positive experience here, they are going to be happy, and they are going to tell their friends, then somebody else is going to come in to donate.”

Wessel said the Milwaukee VA currently gets about 20 people a day stopping in to donate blood, and they are No. 4 out of 50 sites in the U.S.

“But we’re always looking for more, and we want to get a broad cross-spectrum of people, especially minorities and females.”

MVP is open to all Veterans, regardless of their health, she said.

“We do hear from people who say, ‘They don’t want me. I’m really sick.’ That’s not true. We want everybody. Even someone who is sick still has genes that will contribute to this study.”

The Milwaukee MVP office is located on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of the medical center and the hours are 7:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday, with hours extended on Tuesdays.

To participate or for more information, call 1-866-441-6075.

# Tai chi



Photo by Brian Walker

Master trainer Pat Corrigan Culotti teaches tai chi moves to Milwaukee VA staff members.

## *Ancient philosophy meets modern medicine to treat battlefield injuries*

**BY BRIAN WALKER**  
5000 West staff writer

Ancient philosophies are meeting cutting edge medical care at the Milwaukee VA where the Polytrauma Support Clinic team is using tai chi to treat those with traumatic injuries.

The treatment is part of a grant the VA received to see how using the ancient martial arts can help Veterans recover from traumatic injuries.

“We’re very excited about this because it shows a lot of promise, especially for those Veterans with Post Traumatic Stress,” said Mary Fran Van Derven, an occupational therapist in the Polytrauma Support Clinic

who is helping oversee the program. “This helps those with traumatic brain injuries and musculoskeletal pains from a mind-body perspective, and incorporates physical and mental healing.”

The program involves a simple form of tai chi as a moderate-intensity exercise, and not the more complex moves.

“Traditional tai chi would not blend well with the polytrauma rehabilitation population; the regular form is too complex,” said Patricia Corrigan Culotti, master certified tai chi instructor. “The development of Tai Chi Fundamentals has transformed this situation. It is a series of lessons and exercises with

increasing difficulty that promotes postural integration, deep breathing, and ease of movement leading to a person feeling more relaxed.”

The staff used the first part of the grant to get specific training in tai chi, as well as classes on how to teach it to others. Van Derven said therapists have started incorporating it into their daily therapies and interactions with Veterans. The next goal is to develop classes here and in the community over the next six months.

“We want to use this training to empower staff, to give them one more tool for treatment in their toolbox,” said Dr. Judith Kosasih, who leads the polytrauma team.

“These are learned skills that will keep on giving. It is also patient proactive and fits in well with the Veteran’s life health plan.”

The VA is partnering with several community groups such as Dry Hootch, Milwaukee Adaptive Sports and the University of Wisconsin to increase outreach. Van Derven said the team is also looking for service members and Veterans who wish to learn the skills as peer instructors.

“I think by doing that, it just improves and increases access for everyone,” she said.

For more information or to become a peer instructor for the program, call Van Derven at 414-384-2000, ext. 41140.



Photo by Brian Walker

**Paul Holz cuts some lumber while rehabbing a house near the VA as part of Property Vets.**

## *Property repair all about Vets helping Vets*

**BY BRIAN WALKER**  
5000 West staff writer

Susan Loomans has always served in some way, with an eye for paying it forward.

She spent 15 years in the Air Force as a climatologist and instructor at the Air Force Academy. As the former director of Wisconsin Green Builders Alliance, she has run several non-profit organizations that dealt with missions like organic farming and decreasing violent crime.

And now she has circled back to her roots with her new organization, Property Vets, which hires former servicemen and women to renovate houses, and provide affordable places to live.

The fruits of her labor were seen Nov. 2 when she and her crew held a grand opening for a rehabbed home they fixed up on National Avenue, across the street from the VA.

“With the current foreclosure crisis, there is a need to do something to make housing more affordable,” she said. “Think back to a program like the Civilian Conservation Corps and how that was replicated all over the country. We can do the same thing with rehabilitation of homes.”

Loomans is also reaching back to the Veteran community and getting some Veterans back into the working world. She was able to start a dialogue with Marit Solem, a vocational rehabilitation counselor with the Milwaukee VA’s Compensated Work Therapy program. Solem was able to find one Veteran in the CWT Program who had the right background for rehabilitation of homes and more Veterans followed.

According to Solem, “The renovation project allows Veterans to use their skills to work together on a mission. For many of our CWT Veterans it is important to place them in jobs they enjoy doing, as well as a supportive environment.

“Property Vets really offers the Veterans working there the best of both worlds,” she added. “We did a recent worksite visit and many of the Veterans commented on how this job has made a positive impact on their life.”

Property Vets has so far employed five CWT Veterans, including Paul Holz, who served in the Marines from 1986 to 1990. Holz is an electrician by trade and a perfect fit for Property Vets.

“It is therapeutic to work, especially after being out of work a long time. I feel a sense of accomplishment and it brings my morale up,” he said. “There should be more programs like this for Veterans.”

## Nominate your top nurse for DAISY Award

The Milwaukee VA wants you ... to nominate your favorite nurse who goes above and beyond for the monthly DAISY Award.

The DAISY Award for Extraordinary Nurses is open to all nurses within the VA, and anyone can nominate them for the honor.

Winning nurses each month will be honored in a special ceremony and receive a certificate, DAISY Award pin, and a hand-carved stone sculpture, said Andrea Klipp, an intensive care registered nurse who is organizing the program.

The DAISY Foundation was started in 1999 by the family of J. Patrick Barnes, who died at 33 from an auto-immune disease. During his two months in the hospital, his family was impressed by the care provided to Barnes and his entire family. They created the program in his memory to recognize those nurses who make a big difference in the lives of so many people.

The award is given out by hospitals internationally. At the Milwaukee VA, nurses will be selected based on how they live out the ICARE acronym of integrity, commitment, advocacy, respect and excellence.

“We are proud to be among the hospitals participating in the DAISY Award program. Nurses are heroes every day. It’s important that our nurses know their work is highly valued, and The DAISY Foundation provides a way for us to do that,” said Beth Ann Taylor, associate director for patient and nursing services.

For more information on the DAISY Foundation, log onto: [www.daisyfoundation.org](http://www.daisyfoundation.org).

To download a nomination form, visit: [www.milwaukee.va.gov/docs/daisy](http://www.milwaukee.va.gov/docs/daisy).

# Bottling up war makes it worse

BY BRIAN WALKER  
5000 West staff writer

The date was June 6, 1950, and Richard Zimmerman just graduated from high school in Appleton. He immediately enlisted in the Marines and soon found himself in the middle of the Korean War.

Those experiences — the good, the horrors and the post traumatic stress — shaped the rest of his life. Nearly 60 years later, those emotions still shake him.

Zimmerman, now a psychiatrist, was a guest speaker at the Milwaukee VA in October.

“My experiences in Korea are a constant companion,” he said. “I have had to learn to harness and live with them, the memories.”

He said nobody should be embarrassed, ashamed or afraid to talk about their experiences, “even when the tears start flowing down.”

Zimmerman spoke of the environmental factors they faced in Korea — extreme hot and cold, and rock hard terrain that turned soft and muddy in the rainy season; bright sunshine reflected off the snow-covered mountains with no sunglasses for protection; pitch black darkness where spotlights aimed at enemy positions offered some hope of safety.

“It was a surreal environment; the spotlights were all they had at night. The snow was our friend when we dressed in white, but the extreme cold was our enemy.”

Zimmerman was an 81mm mortar specialist, but his training as a Marine was critical, especially when it came to hand-to-hand combat with the enemy.

“There was no time to think, you just had to react.

“War is not a 24/7 experience, it does not work that way, but when it is going on, it feels like eternity,” he said.

The experience in Korea offered some hope and a positive reflection that we provide a global force for good, he added.

“Our military is unique in that we always believe every human being needs to be taken care of. I was proud of the way we treated the Korean people and they were such gentle people.”

He said they earned their respect by moving locals out of harm’s way when firefights were expected, then brought them back when the fights were over.

When the call to come home came in 1953, Zimmerman wound up on the USS



Courtesy photo

**Richard Zimmerman poses with some children during the Korean War. Though this was one of the happier memories, he still came home with post traumatic stress.**

Walker for a slow journey back home. In hindsight, he said, the trip home was beneficial. With a limited agenda and lots of time to talk, fellow soldiers could decompress and share their feelings.

“The guilt of surviving was tough. every other man who manned my gun was killed. There were many of us with similar stories and we learned it was OK because so many of us experienced it, we felt it and we felt better when we talked about it.”

Zimmerman did not realize how deeply his experiences would affect him. While still in California, getting ready to come home, he was walking with two other soldiers and a thunderstorm blew in. A crack of thunder came through so loud that he and his buddies instinctively jumped into a ditch for shelter. They all assumed they were under attack.

Now they were muddy and soaked, but standing outside a tavern where the owners came out to aid them. They brought them inside, and cleaned and dried their clothes. In the meantime, Zimmerman and his buddies sat at the bar, naked, reflecting on their reaction to a thunderstorm. They tried to find some humor in what happened, but began to sense how much their war experience was still with them.

When Zimmerman made it home to Appleton, it was close to Christmas and

his parents had delayed their celebration for his arrival.

“I was so tired from my journey that I asked my mom if I could just nap for awhile and off to my brother’s bed I went.”

His mom, still so elated he was home, came in to quietly check on him within an hour.

“When I awoke, I had my hands clenched around my mom’s neck and she was screaming and crying.”

Fortunately it only happened once, but “was a reminder that you have to face it.”

He went on to marry his high school sweetheart, Kathy, and they had seven children and 36 grandchildren. He went graduated from medical school, became a psychiatrist and a U.S. Navy officer.

In reflecting on his life Zimmerman said, “I had to become a psychiatrist to understand myself and what I had experienced. The bottom line is that you cannot be afraid of post traumatic stress. You have to stare it down. It is real, it is a struggle, but you have to try and undo what has been done to you. You cannot wait either; you have to deal with it soon. If you don’t deal with it you will become a victim again because you will experience things that will set you off, you become a victim again with no validity, but you feel all of the pain.”

# Storms of life

## TMJ4's weatherman recounts life in Vietnam for Milwaukee VA crowd

BY GARY J. KUNICH  
5000 West editor

Today's TMJ4 weatherman John Malan saw some scary stuff in Vietnam.

He pulled his buddy out of a burning tank, "and now his name is on that wall in Washington," he said.

He felt his tank bounce up and down as bombs rained down from aircraft above. He was in the thick of firefights as a tanker, and flew as a helicopter gunner through dangerous weather that tossed his chopper like a play toy.

And after two back-to-back tours, he stood in a room and exhaled.

"I just said, 'Whew. I made it home. Thank goodness I'm alive, thank goodness I came home,' and then I kind of let it go."

Malan visited the Milwaukee VA Medical Center recently to talk to a packed house about his Vietnam experiences and how he readjusted to civilian life.

Malan became fascinated with weather while in Vietnam. He used his G.I. Bill to get his college degrees in meteorology, and has been a weatherman fixture on Milwaukee television for 35 years.

The hour-long talk was part of the Milwaukee VA's Recovery Series, where Veterans from various combat eras speak about their experiences in hopes it can help others, said recovery coordinator, Dr. Mike McBride.

"It's always great to hear from other folks, find out what helped them and what lessons we can learn from that," said McBride, a VA psychiatrist who did three tours in Iraq.

"I don't usually talk a lot about Vietnam, but we're family," Malan told the crowd. "I consider all Veterans family. When I was over there, we had each other's backs. We knew about everyone's brothers, sisters, mothers and fathers. And that never changes."

He initially had dreams of becoming a major leaguer, and got a tryout with the Pittsburgh Pirates shortly after high school graduation. But after a broken ankle cut that dream short, he returned home to a draft notice. He tried to get an assignment to Germany, but as war goes, he found out he'd be the first armored tank unit to go to



Courtesy photo

Vietnam in 1968.

"You think it's warm today, folks, I got there and thought I stepped into an oven, and it was like that the whole time. The first half of the year over there, it's dusty and dry and you drive down those roads swallowing that red dirt. The other half of the year, it rains every day. And if you hung your underwear on the line, it was always wet, whether it was morning, afternoon or evening, because when it wasn't raining, it was humid."

Like a lot of soldiers, Malan said he experienced the horrors of war.

"The Armed Forces taught me a lot, and helped shape my life. I owe a lot of my success to my time serving in the Armed Forces, but there is one small part of the Armed Forces called, 'war,' and it does have an effect on you.

"I won't kid you," he added. "I saw a lot. And I served with those who saw a lot, and we still keep in touch, and we still write. I saw some bad stuff, I saw some scary stuff."

The Army gave him a chance to shave eight months off his enlistment if he'd do another tour in Vietnam. For the second stint, he served as a gunner on a helicopter that flew around VIPs, "but when there was a fight or skirmish, we were the medevac, and there were always a lot of



Photo by Gary Kunich

TMJ4 weatherman, John Malan (above) addresses the crowd, and (left) a portrait of a younger Malan in Vietnam.

skirmishes. We got shot down twice and flew into a typhoon once with 50 mph crosswinds."

Malan earned a Purple Heart when shrapnel lodged in his knee during a firefight.

"I don't know why I was able to come back and be OK, and some of my friends weren't," he said. "It's unpredictable, like the weather. I'm a Christian and came from a strong family, but so did they. You can't predict how some people are going to take war, and some take it very hard. I'm thankful I was able to carry on."

Malan said he woke up with night sweats and bad memories the first couple of years, and every so often still has bad dreams.

"I don't talk about Vietnam a lot, so I do probably bury it somewhat. I do sometimes still get nightmares, but not much. I can't tell you why I'm OK, and some aren't. That is something that is indefinable. It doesn't make me better, and it doesn't make someone worse if they have problems."

One veteran in the front row was quick to speak up and give his own advice to the crowd.

"My advice is if you are suffering from PTSD, hurry up and get help," the veteran said. "I served in Vietnam, too, and I came home confused, and I spent time (in treatment). Don't be afraid. Get the help if you need it."

"That is very good advice," Malan said. "I would encourage everyone to get help and to use all their benefits. Go for the G.I. Bill and any other benefits you have coming to you, to better your life. You earned those benefits, and those are yours."

# Friendship woven amongst tragedy



Christa Holland

***“Death cuts a permanent hole through one’s heart, but some days the dagger doesn’t dig as deeply and it is a bit easier to breathe.”***

## Have Your Say

This time of year often brings heart-warming stories told while sipping a mug of hot cocoa in front of a roaring fireplace.

As is often the case when lives become interwoven, tragedy is involved. However, to paraphrase Winston Churchill, “An optimist sees the opportunity in every tragedy.”

Thinking about the way these events unfolded reinforces my personal belief that things don’t happen randomly or without the plan of a master designer.

I was in my late 20s, enjoying raising my 1-year-old daughter, working as a clerk in the radiology department of a local hospital, and living in the construction zone that was my house. In his spare time, my father was a self-taught carpenter who dreamed of flipping houses. After most of us were on our own, he helped us achieve the American dream, at a price we could afford.

I worked the noon to 10:30 p.m. shift the night I got the call.

My family never called me at work, so when I received a call from my sister asking for me by my maiden name, I knew something was wrong.

Dad was running with the high school cross country team he coached and had collapsed. I was told it was a heart attack. Still, I didn’t rush away from work. One staff member had

already called in sick and due to my occupation, I saw heart attack survivors every day. Most of them were in much worse shape than my slim, athletic father.

Because the assistant coach and students with him had acted heroically, a newspaper article in the Kenosha News was written about my dad and the event.

It said he was expected to survive.

I clung to that.

Ten days later, I, along with my mother, one sister and grandmother watched as life support was turned off. I watched his last breath leave his body.

Another article appeared in the local paper. The days went by. Death cuts a permanent hole through one’s heart, but some days the dagger doesn’t dig as deeply and it is a bit easier to breathe.

More than three years later, I was invited to attend an informational session with the new public affairs officer at the Milwaukee VA. Eager to once again put the bachelor’s degree I had paid for to good use, I headed to the meeting.

It was that day I met Gary. Gary Kunich is the kind of person who can attend a party of complete strangers and leave with 95 percent of them as new friends. The other 5 percent are those who have a preference for introversion and stay amongst themselves. He became my friend that day.

I watched his presentation and heard him talk about his

credentials and his former employer. Perhaps the “ch” at the end of his name that was so familiar in my own name stuck itself in my brain and made me curious. A few days later, I pulled out those old newspaper articles about my dad.

I saw exactly what I expected to see — the byline read, “Gary J. Kunich” on both of them.

We’ve had many discussions since then, including on how our faith has pulled us through tragedy.

Shortly after returning from maternity leave last year, I learned that tragedy had come to Gary and his family. His oldest son was struck and killed by a driver distracted by her cell phone.

While some anger is an unavoidable emotion in these types of circumstances, the Kunich’s have taken the higher road towards healing and forgiveness. They have used their grief to fuel a campaign to educate others on the dangers of driving while distracted — particularly driving while distracted by a cell phone.

In this season of giving, many are concerned with purchasing the perfect gift. There is something you can do for yourself and those around you on the road and it is priceless — pledge to put your phone down when your foot is on the gas pedal and the key is in the ignition.

Taking this simple action could prevent a tragedy for yourself and countless others.

Letters to the Editor



## Thanks from a grateful employee

I have worked with Facility Management at this VA Medical Center the last 42 years. I retired recently, but almost did not make it that far. I want to share a story with you about gratitude and thanks. I am not a Veteran, but understand

sometimes situations arise and the VA provides humanitarian care. In my case, it was lifesaving care.

I started my work day June 11 just coming off a great weekend spent with family and friends. It was a hot summer morning, typical of the summer of 2012.

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# Letters

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I walked a great deal in the morning and start feeling weak in the afternoon. I thought it might be due to heat exhaustion. As the day moved on, my symptoms worsened. My breathing became more difficult, my arms start feeling weak and I had mild chest discomfort.

I work alongside Brian Held and he observed the difficulty I was having. I was moving slowly and he encouraged me to take a few minutes to rest. After this time passed, Brian told me I did not look well. He said I needed to seek some medical care. Brian picked up the phone, dialed 911 and asked for the rapid response team. We had been working in building 70 and Brian had to prop open two doors to allow access to the corridor we were in. It took about 60 seconds for the rapid response team to come racing into our location.

The cardiologist that was attending determined I was probably experiencing a heart attack. I was in the Emergency Department before I knew it and the doctor ordered a cardiac catheterization. This test showed I had 99 percent blockage in my left artery. It was determined that immediate medical action was necessary; there was no time for a second opinion or time to transfer me to another facility. I told the doctor, "Let's do what we need to do."

A five-hour, open-heart surgery followed in which a double bypass procedure was performed. This surgery concluded at about 2:30 am on Tuesday. I spent a couple of days in Intensive Care, and then was transferred to the Cardiac Care recovery unit. I spent another day and a half there and they prepared me for going home. What a whirlwind week it was — a fun weekend, report to work on Monday and open heart surgery that same day. You just never know what may be in store for you.

I am so thankful for the quick, professional and compassionate care I received through every step of this process. My fellow employees did the right thing and made the call. The rapid response team was everything they are supposed to be. Thanks to the Emergency Department for making the right decisions, the operating room staff for a successful midnight surgery, the intensive care team for 24-hour continuous care and the cardiac recovery unit for getting me ready to go home.

The doctors, medical technicians, nurses, assistants, aides, therapists, housekeepers and my band of brothers in the engineering section of Facility Management all performed in a first class and professional manner. Their actions are the reason our Milwaukee VA Medical Center is the best.

I humbly say, "Thank you," for saving my life.

**Fred Walecki**  
Facilities Management

# One on One

Continued from Page 3

I do. Working in corporate healthcare, I'm not so sure I would have felt that way, where a lot of it is about the bottom line and not necessarily what is best for your patients. So, I wanted to continue to serve my troops.

**Q: What do you see as your job as deputy director?**

**A:** Well, if there's anything wrong, it's my fault.

I see this as the equivalent of a chief operating officer position. I need to focus on ensuring all the staff is fully supported in taking care of our Vets. I have to be looking internally and really getting into the details of that mission.

Mr. Beller, as our director, his role is to set the vision of where we are going, and have the big-picture view. He's got the big brain, and I've got to focus on the nuts and bolts. That does not mean I'm a micromanager. It just means I have to have an inner focus of the operation.

**Q: Time for your first test. What's the first and last**

**name of every person you've met so far?**

**A:** Oh, there we go! I'm fired!

**Q: What is one thing you want people to know about you?**

**A:** I tend to be very focused on things, and they may see me walking through the halls or going to and from my car with a scowling look on my face. They need to know I'm not scowling at them. I'm just thinking about stuff, and I tend to get lost in thought to the point where I may not interact socially, but I try to avoid falling into that trap.

I try to smile and let people know I am approachable, and that is the one thing I want people to know. No matter what I look like, I am approachable; I'm not going to bite.

**Q: Where do you see yourself going from here? Or hard to say at this point?**

**A:** I'm going to be at work probably until about 5 o'clock tonight, then ...

... I'm in absolutely no

rush to go anywhere. I like this level of support, and being this close to staff and Veterans. When you become more of a director, you have to focus a lot on the outside stakeholders, and that's important. But I like being closer to where the rubber meets the road. I like to work with physicians, nurses and staff, talking to the (housekeeping) staff. I learned a long time ago, listen to what your housekeeping staff has to say, because they know what's going on before anyone else.

**Q: When you do go home at the end of the day, are you a Facebook kind-of-guy, ESPN, romantic movie with the wife, good book or something else?**

**A:** All depends. Typically, I go to the gym and work out.

I'm the one who cooks dinner. When I was growing up, I spent a lot of time talking with my mother while she was cooking, so I became very comfortable in the kitchen.

I cooked for myself through high school and college, and then, when I got over to Europe, my first boss, Colonel Baker, was a gourmet cook. He spent a lot of time educating

me in the finer arts of cooking. When I was in Thailand, I actually went to cooking school and took some classes.

**Q: So you have something to fall back on if this doesn't work out.**

**A:** No! That's a tough business! It's a hard job. I worked in restaurants when I was in college. I would rather do it at home.

**Q: What's the best meal you ever made?**

**A:** We had friends over in Europe, and I made a six-course Italian meal. That's probably what I cook the best — Italian food.

**Q: I'm good at making cornflake chicken.**

**A:** Hey, sometimes simple is better.

**Q: What is the last book you read?**

**A:** I guess this is kind of embarrassing, but I'm reading, "The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo." Everyone has already read it. Probably the last leadership book I read is, "Do More With Less: LEAN Thinking." I think, "The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo" is a little better reading."

**Q: Favorite rock group?**

**A:** Easy. Motorhead.



Photo by Gary Kunich



Courtesy photo

**Darleen Hinterberg was only 21 (left photo) and already working at the VA for two years when this picture was snapped. All told, she's been on the job for 55 years, and that manual typewriter has long ago been replaced with a computer. Hinterberg's last day on the job was Nov. 3.**

giggles.

Elvis and Dwight may have long left the building permanently, but Darleen hung around for 11 presidents in all, and too many music trends to count.

Hinterberg, who started in administration in the 1950s, and has

"I'm a get-up-and-go kind of person," said Hinterberg, 74. "I'm still gonna get-up-and-go because that keeps you young. I think I will sleep in the first day. But sleeping in for me is usually until 7:30."

Hinterberg first started government service in September 1957 with a temporary position at the Federal Building, replacing a woman who was out for maternity leave.

"My boss told me, 'You know, Darleen, when she comes back, you're out of a job, but if you want to continue civil service, they have positions at the VA.' He let me go over to apply and interview, and I've been here ever since.

"I remember when we had to use carbon paper for everything we typed up," she added.

And she giggles at the thought.

"I'll bet there aren't too many people who remember that!"

She's gone from manual typewriters to IBM Selectrics to modern-day gizmos.

"I like the computers," she said. "They have made things a whole lot easier."

Robert Beller, the medical center director, said Hinterberg was a one-of-a-kind employee.

"I think we are all incredibly grateful for her dedicated service and in awe of her work ethic," he said. "We just had a ceremony to recognize all of our employees who have reached career milestones. I told her she is my first and only employee I have ever given a service pin for 55 years. I wish her an incredibly happy and relaxing retirement, but from what I hear, she's not planning to sit still."

Some thought she was planning retirement five years ago, when the VA held a special ceremony to mark her half century of employment.

"Then they saw me a few weeks or few months later, and asked, 'What are you still doing here? I thought you retired?'"

# 55 years

Before Elvis joined the Army, Darleen Hinterberg was on the job; now she's calling it a career

**BY GARY J. KUNICH**  
5000 West editor

Elvis wasn't even in the Army yet when Darleen Hinterberg joined the Milwaukee VA staff in 1957.

"And Eisenhower was the president!" she said before breaking into a fit of

worked as a medical transcriptionist since 1980, retired Nov. 3 after 55 years of government service, and is looking forward to a not-so-quiet retirement.

In typical Darleen Hinterberg fashion, she peppers her retirement interview with lots of stories and lots of giggles.

**Continued on Page 11**  
**See 55 years**

## Dossier

### Margaret Amato Registered nurse program manager Spinal Cord Injury Center

**Hometown:** Mequon, Wis.

**Years of government service (plus any military time):** 31 years.

**Family:** "Married to my husband, Mark, for 27 years. Two sons — Dominic and Austin."

**What is the coolest/strangest thing about your family?:** "I am related to a saint. Sister Faustina Kowalska was my maternal grandmother's cousin."

**Any pets?:** "For the first time in 23 years we have no pets. Lost our 10 chickens to a fox in the last month."

**What are your favorite songs?:** "Music from Heart, Phoebe Snow, Pink Floyd, Moody Blues, and Alex Wilson."

**What are your favorite reads?** Margaret Coel mysteries. There is a connection to Milwaukee in the storyline.

**If you were sent to the moon with nothing but a book and a book light, what book would you choose?:** "I would take a Kindle with the following authors: J.K. Rowling, Carlos Castaneda, John Steinbeck, J.R.R. Tolkien, Margaret Coel and the Bible."

**Favorite sports and teams?:** "Milwaukee Brewers and Green Bay Packers."

**What are your hobbies?:** "Exploring,

bird watching, gardening, and antique shopping."

**Do you believe in ghosts?:** "Yes, I lived with one for 20 years."

**If you could only eat one food for the rest of your life, what would it be?:** "Casseroles."

**Three things that can always be found in your refrigerator?:** "Eggs, fresh fruit and Pepsi."

**Waffles or pancakes?:** "Homemade waffles."

**Favorite type of exercise?:** "Walking."

**What is the meaning of life?:** "Life is nothing until it is lived, but it is yours to make sense of; the value of life is nothing other than the sense you choose." — Jean Paul Sartre."

**Favorite pair of shoes:** "A good pair of walking shoes."

**Bratwurst and beer, or filet mignon and Merlot?:** "Bratwurst and beer."

**If you won \$20 million, what would do with it?:** "One, retire; two, pay off debt; three, invest; four, donate; and five, travel and explore the world."

**A little bit country, or a little bit rock**



Photo by Gary Kunich

**Margaret Amato poses with some of her Christmas decorations in her office at the Spinal Cord Injury Center.**

**'n' roll?** A little bit of rock 'n' roll.

**If you were stranded on a deserted island with just a boom box and three CDs, what would they be?:** "Hmmm, no MP3 Player? Pink Floyd's, 'Division Bell,' Heartmongers, 'Christmas,' and a CD on how to learn to speak German."

**Motto you live by:** "Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around." — Leo F. Buscaglia."

## 55 Years

Continued from Page 10

said, "No, that was just another milestone. I'm still working, because I have nothing better to do."

The recollection makes her laugh.

Each weekday, Hinterberg, who never learned to drive, has taken the bus from her apartment to the VA, and hasn't missed many days. She doesn't even take all her vacation time each year, and has more than 2,200 hours of sick leave she never had to take.

"I had surgery once back in

the 80s, and was out for about eight weeks, but there have been years where I worked 12 months without a sick day," she said. "Let me tell you a story. I know a guy who retired, and he sat on his couch watching television all day and smoking cigarettes, and he just got sick and didn't last long. I don't smoke. Never have. And I stay busy. I'm always walking somewhere."

But she does love animals, and since she can't have any pets in her apartment, she plans on going to the animals.

"I love dogs and cats, so I think I'll just figure out what bus goes to the Wisconsin Humane Society and I'll work there with the animals."

And maybe — just maybe —

she'll have time for some other things.

Hinterberg said she was so busy with work, "I never had time to get married. I was smart and stayed single!

"But stranger things have happened. One of my housekeeper friends said I'll have time to go to the West Indies, and lay out on the beach all day. Maybe now I'll have time for a man!"

Hinterberg sits back in her chair and giggles some more.

Then the phone rings.

There's still work to do.

After giving 55 years of her life, no sense taking it easy just yet.

So like she's always done for so many years, Darleen Hinterberg goes back to work.

**"I had surgery once back in the 80s where I was out for about eight weeks, but there have been years where I worked 12 months straight without a sick day."**

— Darleen Hinterberg

Talking about her 55 years of service to the VA

## In Service

Congratulations to the following Zablocki employees who reached career milestones in September and October:

**55 YEARS**  
Darleen Hinterberg

### 40 YEARS

Susan Vlazny  
Duane Wichman

### 35 YEARS

Mary Kay O'Brien  
John Rychlik  
Gerard Verkuilen  
Brian Zielke

### 30 YEARS

Dion Archie  
Linda Daufenbach  
Amelia Kaho  
Anne Orlow  
Victor Sudo  
Gregory Thompson  
Leslie Voigt

### 25 YEARS

Paul Bailey  
Tammy Banks  
Jane Blahnik  
David Carroll  
Richard Gibson  
Thomas Jeffries  
Pamela Kozinski  
Benita Lennix  
Philip Redlich  
Emma Williams

### 20 YEARS

Karen Berte  
Nathalie Breese  
Paul Leonard  
Alfred Nicolosi

Glennnda Tyszko  
Anthony Webb

### 15 YEARS

Daniel Knoedler  
Peter Langenstroer  
Ruthie Matthews  
Paul Pagel  
Lori Poss  
Kathleen Regner  
Patrick Roe  
Dawn Sitter  
Karen Staszak  
Christopher Thorn

### 10 YEARS

Barbara Anderson

Oscar Clements  
Marylouise Felhofer  
Sweeta Gandhi  
Herman Gates  
Aaron Hoffer  
Heather Heling  
Peter Kallio  
Mary McCoy  
Michael  
Miklaszewicz  
Elliott Miller  
Mariah Monroe  
Lyndon Moton  
Lisa Phillips  
Stephanie Pulsfus  
Larry Robinson  
Jean Van Den Elzen  
Aisha Warren

## Reporting Aboard

Welcome to some of our new employees who started working at the Milwaukee VA since June:

**William Arnold**  
*Surgical technician*

**Hometown:** Rockford, Ill.

**Prior military service:** Marine Corps, six and a half years.

**Hobbies:** Riding my Harley-Davidson.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** To serve the Vets and be part of a family.

**First impressions:** To help anyone in need.

**Christopher Behnke**  
*Medical support assistant*

**Hometown:** Milwaukee, Wis.

**Prior military service:** Army, six years.

**Hobbies:** Drawing, basketball, and playing with my four children.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** A part of me is missing since being discharged from the military. Working with Veterans will hopefully fill that void.

**First impressions:** Very helpful, outgoing and polite staff.

**Roy "Roy Boy" Berger**  
*Housekeeping aide*

**Hometown:** West Bend, Wis.

**Prior military service:** Army, three years.

**Hobbies:** Fishing and woodworking.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** Working

for our Vets.

**First impressions:** It's great to be here.

**Patricia Blanchette**  
*Registered nurse*

**Hometown:** Saukville, Wis.

**Hobbies:** Bicycling, traveling, camping and hiking.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** Benefits, and references from friends.

**First impressions:** Very busy and friendly.

**Colleen Boyd**  
*Registered nurse*

**Hometown:** Sussex, Wis.

**Hobbies:** Gardening and scrapbooking.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** Originally, I had a nursing clinical rotation here, then I got a job as a licensed practical nurse.

**Carol Jo "CJ" Breska**  
*Medical support assistant*

**Hometown:** Kaukauna, Wis.

**Prior military service:** Air Force, three and a half years.

**Hobbies:** Brewer and Timber Rattler games.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** It is a great work environment that offers many opportunities with great benefits.

**First impressions:** It's a very welcoming place and everyone here is helpful.

**Marty Brooks**  
*Housekeeping aide*

**Hometown:** Stevens Point, Wis.

**Prior military service:** Marine Corps Reserves, six years.

**Hobbies:** Gardening, travel, home repair, learning Japanese, eating and cooking.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** The VA offers a nice community for Veterans and employees.

**First impressions:** It feels like home.

**Bennie Brown**  
*Housekeeping aide*

**Prior military service:** Navy, two years.

**Hometown:** Maywood, Ill.

**Hobbies:** Watching sports.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** Being around Veterans, because I truly believe I found a home away from home.

**First impressions:** The caring and feeling of good spirit in the air.

**Bridget Cholewa**  
*Medical technician*

**Hometown:** Elgin, Ill.

**Hobbies:** Spending time with friends and family, going to the beach and bike riding.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** In order to give back to our Veterans who served our country.

**First impressions:** The medical center is enormous.

**Ryan Cvecko**  
*Medical technician*

**Hometown:** Wauwatosa, Wis.

**Hobbies:** Playing volleyball and baseball.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** So it would prepare me to be a medical technologist.

**First impressions:** Very friendly and clean environment.

**Peggy Curry**  
*Supervisory program specialist*

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See Reporting Aboard**

# Reporting Aboard

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**Hometown:** Waukegan, Ill.

**Prior military service:** Army, two years active-duty and two years in the Reserves.

**Hobbies:** Spending time with family and praise dancing.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** Because I had family and friends who worked for the VA and I saw the growth opportunities.

**First impressions:** I can't remember. That was eight years ago, but Milwaukee seems to be organized and friendly.

**Christine "Chris" Davis**

*Physician assistant trainee*

**Hometown:** Apple Valley, Calif.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** Primary care residency is a new program.

I'm interested in serving the Veteran population.

**First impressions:** I love the diversity here. Everyone has been friendly, helpful and professional.

**Frederick Davis**

*Housekeeping aide*

**Hometown:** Milwaukee, Wis.

**Prior military service:** Army, three years, and Army Reserves, eight years and counting.

**Hobbies:** Reading.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** I had a better chance at getting hired as a Veteran.

**Thomas Donoghue**

*Housekeeping aide*

**Hometown:** Chicago, Ill.

**Prior military service:** Army, one year.

**Hobbies:** Sports, fishing and military history.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** I like the atmosphere. People here are very friendly. I also like to work with fellow Vets.

**Ryan Driscoll**

*Nursing assistant*

**Hometown:** Milwaukee, Wis.

**Hobbies:** Photography.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** I wanted to give back to the men and women who have served our country.

**First impressions:** I enjoy the positive attitude of everyone, especially the Veterans.

**Joseph Faulkner Jr.**

*Housekeeping aide*

**Hometown:** Chicago, Ill.

**Prior military service:** Marine Corps, four years.

**Hobbies:** Classic cars.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** It's an opportunity for advancement, and a job with benefits. I am also a Veteran receiving health benefits.

**First impressions:** The amount of Veterans being helped here.

**Mark England**

*Physician*

**Hometown:** Neillsville, Wis.

**Hobbies:** Hunting, fishing, camping and kids.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** I was a resident with the VA and enjoyed my time with the Vets.

**Erin Fallis**

*Registered nurse*

**Hometown:** Skokie, Ill.

**Hobbies:** Reading, singing and watching movies.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** My husband is a Vet and gets great care at the VA. This is my chance to give back and say thanks! I also had a wonderful experience working as a VALOR nursing student here and it was fabulous!

**First impressions:** This is the best place on the planet to work. We get to take care of our nation's heroes!

**Katherine Fischer**

*Registered nurse*

**Hometown:** Menomonee Falls, Wis.

**Prior military service:** Navy, 12 years.

**Hobbies:** Running, biking, hiking, reading and spending time with my husband and children.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** I enjoy working with the Vets. They are wonderful people.

**First impressions:** Busy!

**Julio Fontanez**

*Claims assistant*

**Hometown:** West Milwaukee, Wis.

**Prior military service:** Army, three years.

**Hobbies:** Internet, friends, movies, biking, hiking and being outdoors.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** I want to continue to serve people who have helped me.

**First impressions:** I was timid seeing injured Veterans at first, but have experienced care here, and I'm proud to be part of the team.

**Gerard Gawrys**

*Pharmacy resident*

**Hometown:** St. Louis, Mo.

**Hobbies:** Travel and exercise.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** Previous VA experience and the enjoyment of working with Veterans.

**First impressions:** I love the VA!

**Barry Greene**

*Housekeeping aide*

**Hometown:** Germantown, Wis.

**Prior military service:** Army, seven years.

**Hobbies:** Reading the *Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times* and other papers.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** Helping Veterans and working for the taxpayer is a high honor.

**First impressions:** Clean and organized.

**Charles Griffin Jr.**

*Housekeeping aide*

**Hometown:** Chicago, Ill.

**Prior military service:** Army, three and a half years.

**Hobbies:** Dancing, driving and fragrance.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** I am a Veteran and a people person. I want to help my comrades. I live for and love other Veterans. I am perfectly suited for this job. Desert Storm Vets are Veterans, too!

**First impressions:** Scary, interesting, happy, professional, pleasant, encouraging and motivating.

**Jacquelyn "Jackie" Guenette**

*Dental assistant*

**Hometown:** Cudahy, Wis.

**Hobbies:** Spending time with family, cooking, baking and reading.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** Full-time position, looking to learn new things in the dental field and the awesome benefits.

**First impressions:** Everyone you encounter is very nice!

**David Henderson**

*Information technology specialist*

**Hometown:** Newburg, Wis.

**Prior military service:** Army, four years active-duty, and three years in the Reserves.

**Hobbies:** Gaming, music and driving.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** To help Veterans and the benefits.

**First impressions:** Very friendly

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See Reporting Aboard

# Reporting Aboard

Continued from Page 14

environment.

## Patrick "Pat" Ingol

*Supply systems analyst*

**Hometown:** Akron, Ohio.

**Prior military service:** Navy, 10 years.

**Hobbies:** Fishing and cycling.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** I am a Veteran.

**First impressions:** Awesome.

## Donald Irving

*Housekeeping aide*

**Hometown:** St. Louis, Mo.

**Prior military service:** Air Force, two years, seven months and 15 days.

**Hobbies:** Puzzles and movies.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** It's one of the best places. I want to give back to myself and others.

**First impressions:** The unique and pleasant people.

## Laneasz "Neasi" Jackson

*Health technician*

**Hometown:** Dayton, Ohio.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** Several family members are Veterans and giving back to those who not only served me, but are close to me, is important.

**First impressions:** Feels like home, because to me, Veterans equal family.

## Jason Jarentowski

*Housekeeping aide*

**Hometown:** Milwaukee, Wis.

**Prior military service:** Marine Corps, four years.

**Why did you choose to work at the VA?:** Being a Veteran myself, I wanted to work in a place where I can give back to those who served.

**First impressions:** It's a great place to be around and I feel the VA definitely gives back to those who served this country.

## Brittany Kennedy

*Physical therapy trainee*

**Hometown:** Huntington, Pa.

**Hobbies:** Music, dancing, exploring new areas and reading.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** Great PT residency program.

**First impressions:** Excellent patient care



Photo by Gary Kunich

## Harley for the holidays

VA volunteers Mary Jo Jankovic, Mike Temke and Wayne Utecht cut tags on hundreds of pieces of Harley gear as they sort and box it up for needy Veterans. Homeless and at-need Veterans will be a lot warmer this holiday season thanks to Harley-Davidson, which donated \$75,000 in hats, sweatshirts, jackets, rain gear and more to the VA, and the same amount to 14 other groups.

and I'm ready to serve our Veterans.

## Danielle Kissel

*Dental resident*

**Hometown:** Battle Creek, Mich.

**Hobbies:** Jogging, reading and baking.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** To have an opportunity to serve Veterans and enrich my professional knowledge.

**First impressions:** Very well organized, patient-friendly and employees all appear to work well together.

## Stanley "Stan the Man" Knox

*Housekeeping aide*

**Hometown:** Memphis, Tenn.

**Prior military service:** Army, three years.

**Hobbies:** Bowling, home repair and dominos.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** Being a Veteran and coming out to the VA, I see the need to be able to inform other Vets about the services that are offered to them that they did not know about.

**First impressions:** A medical center that really shows they care about Veterans. It's a place that I need, and if given the chance, I can help fellow Veterans.

## Sara Koberstein

*Pharmacy resident*

**Hometown:** Mequon, Wis.

**Hobbies:** Supporting Wisconsin sports — Brewers, Badgers and Packers.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** A chance to give back to the Vets, and the innovative use of health care professionals.

**First impressions:** Big! Also very friendly.

## Jessica "Jess" Kuester

*Physician*

**Hometown:** La Crosse, Wis.

**Hobbies:** Spin class, walking and hiking.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** Great job opportunities.

## Alexis Kyle

*Nursing assistant*

**Hometown:** Racine, Wis.

**Hobbies:** Playing videogames and basketball.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** I have heard nothing but great things about the VA hospital. I'm a nursing student and want to learn everything I need to know before I'm finished. I believe the VA hospital will give me that and more.

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# Reporting Aboard

Continued from Page 14

**First impressions:** Wow!! What a big hospital. Very friendly and helpful staff, just welcoming to others.

## Casey Landeros

*Pipe fitter*

**Hometown:** Mosinee, Wis.

**Prior military service:** Navy (Seabees), seven years, eight months and one day.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** To help Veterans.

## Frank Lee Jr.

*Housekeeping aide*

**Hometown:** West Helen, Ark.

**Prior military service:** Army National Guard, 15 years.

**Hobbies:** Football.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** For a stable job.

## Caryn Lehmann

*Pharmacy resident*

**Hometown:** Milwaukee, Wis.

**Hobbies:** Spending time with family and friends.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** After spending time at the VA as a pharmacy student, I decided to pursue a residency here because of the friendly staff and effective learning environment.

**First impressions:** Helpful staff that displayed teamwork and truly cared for their patients.

## Mary Beth McColgan

*Registered nurse*

**Hometown:** Milwaukee, Wis.

**Hobbies:** Cooking, biking and bird watching.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** I have a commitment to serve the Veterans with high-quality healthcare.

**First impressions:** Many people who are passionate about their work.

## Michael McCrea

*Psychologist*

**Hometown:** Benton, Wis.

**Hobbies:** Spending time with my three kids.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** Research opportunities.

**First impressions:** Impressive.

## Scott Menzer

*Contract specialist*

**Hometown:** Sheboygan, Wis.

**Prior military service:** Air Force, 20 years.

**Hobbies:** Football and gardening.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** Great opportunity to move closer to family while serving my fellow Veterans.

**First impressions:** Very large and very busy!

## Paul Metevia

*Supply technician*

**Hometown:** Union Lake, Mich.

**Prior military service:** Navy, 25 years.

**Hobbies:** My daughter.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** To help people.

**First impressions:** Excited!

## Melissa "Mel" Miller

*Registered nurse*

**Hometown:** Greendale, Wis.

**Hobbies:** Running and swimming.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** I wanted to serve the men and women who have served our country.

**First impressions:** It is a very busy place full of friendly and eager staff and volunteers.

## Robert Mitchell

*Supply technician*

**Hometown:** Milwaukee, Wis.

**Prior military service:** Marine Corps, four years.

**Hobbies:** Basketball and PlayStation 3.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** I chose the VA because it's the best place for a Vet to help Vets.

**First impressions:** The people are really helpful.

## Jeffrey Murphy

*Medical support assistant*

**Hometown:** Appleton, Wis.

**Prior military service:** Army, 21 years.

**Hobbies:** Bow hunting and anything else outdoors.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** To assist Veterans and make a difference.

**First impressions:** It's been great for me!

## Elisa "Nav" Navarrette

*Police officer*

**Hometown:** Milwaukee, Wis.

**Prior military service:** Air Force.

**Hobbies:** Softball.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** I could relate to the patients, and it seems like a nice place to work.

**First impressions:** I noticed how

welcoming people here were.

## Sara Paulus

*Physician assistant trainee*

**Hometown:** Neenah, Wis.

**Hobbies:** Biking, kayaking, reading and spending time with friends and family.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** I want to learn from the Veterans and staff to help broaden my clinical knowledge.

**First impressions:** Very welcoming! I feel so grateful to be here and look forward to meeting people!

## Sue Pena

*Contracting specialist*

**Hometown:** Arecibo, Puerto Rico

**Prior military service:** Army, three years.

**Hobbies:** Scuba diving, sailing and painting.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** I am an OEF combat Veteran and this allows me to continue to serve my country by serving our Veterans.

**First impressions:** Good.

## LeAnne Pomeroy

*Program support assistant*

**Hometown:** Sussex, Wis.

**Prior military service:** Air Force.

**Hobbies:** Dog training, grooming and playing poker.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** To serve Vets.

**First impressions:** Friendly people.

## Robert Reed IV

*Supply clerk*

**Hometown:** Milwaukee, Wis.

**Prior military service:** Marine Corps, four years and two months.

**Hobbies:** Sports and watching movies.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** I'm a Veteran and working with and for Veterans makes life easy.

**First impressions:** Huge and very comfortable.

## Cynthia Richmond

*Canteen program manager*

**Hometown:** Pine Bluff, Ark.

**Hobbies:** Singing, writing and music composition.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** I wanted a career challenge and change.

**First impressions:** Great place to work. Wonderful patient service.

## Glendaly Ruiz

*Health administrative Intern*

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# Reporting Aboard

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**Hometown:** Puerto Rico

**Hobbies:** Biking and running.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** I'm doing an internship.

**First impressions:** Good.

**Chris Sargent**

*Respiratory therapist*

**Hometown:** Watertown, Wis.

**Hobbies:** Music.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** The benefits.

**First impressions:** The people seem happy.

**Lisa Spannbauer**

*Nurse practitioner*

**Hometown:** Milwaukee, Wis.

**Hobbies:** Running.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** Opportunities the VA provides.

**First impressions:** Friendly staff.

**Ronald De Shonne Starks**

*Housekeeping aide*

**Hometown:** Milwaukee, Wis.

**Hobbies:** Watching ESPN.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** I am a Vet myself. I wanted to be in this environment.

**First impressions:** A lot of great work gets done here.

**Heather Stumpf**

*Dietitian*

**Hometown:** Appleton, Wis.

**Hobbies:** Fitness, running and jewelry.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** To help those who helped us.

**First impressions:** Caring and organized.

**Travis Suss**

*Pharmacy resident*

**Hometown:** Lakeville, Minn.

**Hobbies:** The Wisconsin Badgers.

**Scott Taylor**

*Financial accounts technician*

**Hometown:** West Allis, Wis.

**Prior military service:** Navy and Navy Reserves, eight years.

**Hobbies:** Reading, following the Packers and the Brewers, and playing the drums.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** I enjoy working with people. I believe the VA will give me the opportunity to meet new friends and share stories. I also am pleased with the benefits offered.

**First impressions:** There seems to be a lot of doors throughout the building.

**Sherry Tennies**

*Patient safety fellow*

**Hometown:** West Bend, Wis.

**Hobbies:** Running, sewing, tennis and playing with my kids.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** Referred by a colleague.

**First impressions:** Everyone is very friendly.

**Michael Thomas**

*Housekeeping aide*

**Hometown:** Burlington, Wis.

**Prior military service:** Army, three years with two in Vietnam.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** Visited the job fair, applied and got the job.

**First impressions:** Welcoming, warm, friendly, outgoing, and informative people.

**Koutseng Yang**

*Licensed practical nurse*

**Hometown:** Milwaukee, Wis.

**Hobbies:** Driving and scrapbooking.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** For the experience it has to offer.

**First impressions:** Busy and big.

**Charles "Chuck" Zehner**

*Supply technician*

**Hometown:** Dale, Wis.

**Prior military service:** Army, 28 years.

**Hobbies:** Hunting, riding All Terrain Vehicles and leading youth activities.

**Why did you choose the VA?:** To continue serving service members past and current.

**First impressions:** Excellent customer care and service.

## VA Voices

**Question: What's the best or worst movie you've seen all year?**



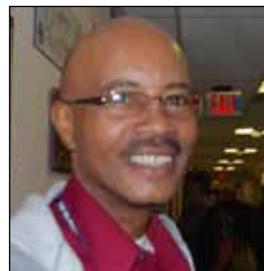
**Stan Rintelman, nurse practitioner, Spinal Cord Injury Center:** "Probably the best movie was the last Bond film. They just did a great job with that. It was a lot of fun with a lot of surprises at the end that you just won't expect."



**Phyllis Sherman, medical support assistant, cardiology:** "I haven't seen any movies. I get out of here at 9 and I go to bed. I do like TV, though. My favorite show is, 'Scandal.' And if I miss any episodes, I just go to Hulu."



**David Bertino, safety officer:** "The worst movie I saw was 'Sucker Punch' about a girl in an asylum, and it was a quasi-fantasy. It was horrible. I didn't even make it halfway through before I turned the television off."



**Freddie Howard, medical support assistant, Blue Clinic:** "'American House of Horrors.' We saw it last night and it was goofy. It was a stupid B-movie. We changed the channel and watched something else on the Syfy Channel."



**Virgil Smith, Canteen cashier:** "The best movie I saw was, 'Ted' with the stuffed bear. I went just for the bear, but it was a lot funnier than I thought it would be, but you don't want to bring kids to that movie."