5000 West

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

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Postal service delivers award for VA troops

BY BRIAN WALKER
5000 West staff writer

The U.S. Postal Service delivered good news to two of our longtime employees —naming them to the list of 14 women who have put their "Stamp on Metro Milwaukee."

Darcie Greuel, a case manager for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, won in the Military Service Category, while Sonia Dumit-Minkel, a senior staff physical therapist, took top honors in the Health and Social Services Category.

Now in its 14th year, the postal service presents the awards each March to coincide with Women's History Month.

Greuel and Dumit-Minkel received their awards March 23 during an awards luncheon at the Country Springs Hotel.

Darcie Greuel

Greuel, a captain in the Army Reserves who has served for more than 27 years, was deployed to Afghanistan from 2003 to 2004. She is currently the commander of the 548th Minimal Care Detachment Unit based in Madison, Wis.

"How lucky of a girl am I to have a foot in both doors of the VA and DOD," she said. "My dual role puts me in a great position to be an advocate for Veterans' healthcare needs."

Greuel is also a parent, a volunteer with Reclaiming Our Heritage and was master of ceremonies for the 2011 Memorial Day Ceremony in Wood National Cemetery.

"I am honored to receive this award and fortunate to work with a variety of great people and teams," she said.

Darcie Greuel

Courtesy photos

Sonia Dumit-Minkel

Sonia Dumit-Minkel

Dumit-Minkel specializes in rehabilitation medicine and has been a trailblazer in her field. She has been nationally published for her work in wound care studies.

She was recognized with the Clinical Excellence Award in 2010 by the Wisconsin Physical Therapy Association and was the Employee of the Year for 2010 at the Milwaukee VA. Her work goes far beyond the walls of the medical Center. She is a board member of WIcare Ambassadors, and a member of the World Union of Wound Healing Societies.

In addition, one of her great passions is her involvement with the Milwaukee Medical Mission. Dumit-Minkel is currently president of the board of directors for this group, which provides annual trips for surgical medical care to underserved areas of Central and South America.

Dumit-Minkel referenced Ella Wheeler Wilcox when she won the award:

"Always continue to climb. It is possible to do whatever you choose, if you first get to know who you are and are willing to work with a power that is greater than ourselves to do it."

Community support rises from ashes

Staff reaches out to police officer in need

BY GARY J. KUNICH
5000 West editor

Instinct took over as Joe Allen watched flames burn through the roof of his childhood home, as his family helplessly watched from across the street.

The house was filling with smoke, but he needed to get some important papers and rescue Joker, the family puppy.

Allen, a police officer at the Milwaukee VA, was at work only moments earlier when he got a text from his wife, Becky. She was in their bedroom about 4:45 a.m. when she heard one of their children wake up and start playing the harmonica. She went to make sure her son went back to sleep, and when she returned, the bedroom was engulfed in flames.

"She doesn't even use candles," Allen said. "She just had it lit because it's an older house and was a little musty. Don't know if a blanket hit the flame or what, but that's all it took for the bedroom to go up.

"She texted and told me she was getting the kids out of the house."

The couple have three children: Andrew, 6, Lucas, 4, and Emily, 18 months. Becky is also pregnant with their fourth child.

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See Fire

Fire

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"I dropped my belt and my gun, told my supervisor what happened, and was running toward my car calling 911," he said.

By the time Allen got to his home 15 minutes later in Hales Corners, the fire department was already on scene. Becky got the three children out in just their pajamas and a blanket for each one.

Allen ran inside the smoke-filled house.

"I got the papers and went into the room where we kept the dog. It was so thick with smoke, I couldn't see anything. I knew he was there, but he wasn't coming. I opened the windows to let the smoke out, and kept calling his name, but I couldn't find him."

Allen trudged back across the street to give his kids the sad news.

"That was tough. That was their dog," he said.

As firemen doused the flames, he could only think about all the memories tied up in the house. His parents moved to the home when he was 2, then sold it after he graduated high school and joined the Army. After six years in the service, including an 18-month deployment to Iraq, he moved back home and started a family.

"That's where I played as a kid. That's where I kissed my first girlfriend. That's where I kissed my wife for the first time. It was my dream to buy back my childhood home, and that's what I did," Allen said.

Besides memories, all their belongings were destroyed in the flames and smoke — toys, clothes, all of his military awards and souvenirs, and an extensive Elvis collection of rare 45s and a commemorative gold record hanging on one of the walls.

But somehow, Joker survived.

"I believe he crawled behind the couch in that room and was dead, but he somehow got a whiff of that fresh air when I opened the window and that brought him back," Allen said. "He must have jumped out the window, and he came limping over to us, across the street. He's doing perfectly fine now."

Courtesy photo

Joe Allen. his wife, Becky, and three children lost everything when his childhood home caught on fire, but VA employees came together to help ease the pain.

With family close by, Allen was able to move in temporarily with his sister. Meanwhile, word spread fast around the VA, and employees — many he didn't even know — responded as if he was one of their own family members.

"People heard about this first thing and immediately wanted to help," said Police Chief Tim Jantz. "We had a steady line of people coming to my office dropping off clothes, toys, gift cards, you name it. They didn't want any recognition. Just wanted to make sure the family was taken care of."

Allen had no idea of the generosity, as he set to work, determined to salvage what was left of his home. Because of a glitch in billing, his homeowner's insurance expired a day earlier, and he ended up paying a more expensive premium to get coverage from the mortgage company. He's using his own skills, and the help of a lot of friends, to gut the house, remodel and rebuild the best he can.

"I had one moment of feeling sorry for myself the next day, and had a cry with my dad for about a minute, then I said, 'OK, what do we have to do? Let's get it done.' I can't break. I'm the dad. My priority is to take care of the kids. I can't dwell on this."

The hardest part was explaining to his daughter why they had to throw away melted toys. Mostly everything in the house was destroyed by fire, water or smoke damage.

"They introduced me at a village meeting, and I had to tell everyone, 'I grew up here. My whole life is here, my memories are here, I joined the Army, became a family here, and I have nothing to show for it."

He pauses for a moment as he looks up, trying to come up with just the right words.

"But," he added. "I go home, and I still have my family."

Allen is nothing if not resilient and is determined to be back in his home by April.

He remains grateful for the thoughtfulness of people he doesn't even personally know.

"I lost track of the number of truckloads of donations," he said. "There must have been 30 or 40. That definitely makes it easier. I had no idea people would care. I must walk by a million people a day. You see someone in the hall, but you don't know what is going on in their lives. For them to do what they did, it means a lot."

While gutting his house, he said, there was one glimmer of hope among the charred rubble, something that was perhaps a small reminder that all was not lost. He found a silver Elvis coin that was part of the postal service's Elvis stamp issue.

"It's weird. Everything else was destroyed, but this looks like it wasn't even touched."

5000 West

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Robert Beller
Medical Center Director

Editor — Gary J. Kunich
Copy editor — Christa Holland
Staff writer — Brian Walker

Lifesavers

Radiology techs on break rescue choking baby

BY GARY J. KUNICH
5000 West editor

Sheri Gilson and Catherine Giannese have been friends a long time and do a lot of things together. They went to school together, and both have been working here as radiology technicians for about seven years. They hang out together, and they go on break together.

And on Monday, they saved a baby's life together.

Gilson and Giannese were outside the Milwaukee VA's South Entrance the morning of March 19 when a man who lived in the house across the street came outside screaming.

"At first we thought, 'It's getting to be summer. People are going to be loud.' Then he ran back in the house and came out carrying a baby," Gilson said.

"That's when we heard him yell, 'Help me! Lord Jesus, help me!'" Giannese said. "We just heard that and flew across the street."

Giannese already had a 911 operator on her cell phone as her friend helped the two navigate through traffic.

"We got to the man and the baby was just dangling there, not breathing, and it looked like his eyes were rolling back in his head. The man said the baby had been in the crib and he just found him."

That's when the CPR classes they are required to take every two years came into play for Gilson.

"I turned the baby over and whacked his back, I don't know how many times. I'm thinking, 'Dear God, this baby cannot die in my arms.' All of a sudden, he just took a gasp of breath."

The two usually take their break together about 10 a.m. each day, but on this day, they were both tied up at work and a little busy. They didn't get outside until about 10:30. Had they been outside at the usual time, the outcome may have been tragic.

Gilson and Giannese waited for the ambulance to arrive and tried to reassure the worried dad. He told them the baby's name was Joe-Joe and his one-year birthday was coming up March 27.

"We want to go back over and visit him," Giannese said. "We got Joe-Joe a football and some outfits, just to let him know we're thinking about him."

Both said they were grateful to know what to do.

"We sit through the (CPR) class, and when it gets to the part about babies, I always think, 'There are no babies here at the VA. Why do we need to know this?'" Gilson said. "Now I'm glad to have the training. Everybody should have this CPR training and know what to do."

Giannese added: "My baby is six months old, and it's made me realize the importance of people knowing how to save my own baby. The main thing is, we didn't do this for glory. We did it because it was the right thing to do. If my baby was hurt, I would want people to help me. I'm glad we could do it."

Once the situation calmed down, they called their boss, Peggy Gronowski, to let her know why they were a little late getting back from break.

"I was kind of flabbergasted to hear the news," Gronowski said. "It just put tears in my eyes. I'm pretty proud of those girls, but it doesn't surprise me. Everyone in this group has been a go-getter. If they see someone in need, or someone in distress, they do what needs to be done."

photo by Gary Kunich

Sheri Gilson, left, and Catherine Giannese, put their VA training into practice when they saved the life of a choking baby.

"I turned the baby over and whacked his back. I don't know how many times. I'm thinking, 'Dear God, this baby cannot die in my arms.' All of a sudden, he just took a gasp of breath."

-- Sheri Gilson
Radiology technician

photos by Gary Kunich

PHOTOS (Clockwise from left): Retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Wilma Vaught talks about the memorial in Washington, D.C., and how far women have come in the military. Vaught later met with many in the crowd, including Army Veteran Mary Hoettels, who showed her a picture of her daughter, an Air Force captain. Eileen Wilson brought her friend, Dorothy Hanson, as a special guest. Hanson served in the Women's Army Corps from 1942 to 1947.

General wows the crowd at speaking event

BY GARY J. KUNICH
5000 West editor

Even at 82 and no longer wearing stars on her shoulder boards, Wilma Vaught knows how to command an audience —whether she's speaking to a large auditorium or just giving a hug or taking a picture.

The retired Air Force general who was the visionary behind the Women's Memorial in Washington, D.C., visited the Milwaukee VA March 8 in honor of Women's History Month. She spoke about how far women have come since the early days of the military as well as the subject very close to her heart — the military memorial to women in D.C. which probably never would have happened without her, raising $47 million to make it a reality.

That's one reason why Enssaf Bassiouni, a registered nurse here, could barely contain her excitement when Vaught walked into a room.

"Can I please get a photo with you?" she asked.

"You know," the general said, "If I had charged for every photo I've taken, that would have paid for the memorial all by itself."

Bassiouni, who hails from Egypt, said Vaught has been a role model for years because she has defied the odds.

"I heard her speak on NPR and she made me cry. It has always been my dream to meet her, and now it is a reality. She is an inspiration for everyone, not just military or women from this country."

Jean Qualler, who works in the low-vision clinic, said she was surprised at how easy it was to speak to Vaught.

"I felt intimidated at first because of everything she has done, but she is really very approachable, and makes you feel so welcome."

More than 120 employees and Veterans packed into the Matousek to hear Vaught speak, but she made a point to walk around the room before and after to speak individually with many in the audience.

Vaught came up in the military at a time when women were thought to be inferior to men and who would seldom be able to lead. Despite those challenges, she said many people didn't know that women were serving in many military roles long before Vietnam, but had to fight hard to get benefits and retirement.

Even while she served, it was impossible for a woman to make it past lieutenant colonel, and when it did change, and she made it to colonel and then brigadier general, she was one of only seven women in the Armed Forces to reach that rank.

"My line for that is, 'I worked longer, harder and smarter,'" she said.

She told the crowd how women veterans actually formed the second American Legion post in history, and it wasn't until 2006 when women from the Women's Army Air Corps could be buried in Arlington.

Another concern the brass had about making women leaders was whether or not men would listen to them, Vaught said with a chuckle.

"Women have been telling men what to do for years."

photo by Gary Kunich

Chaplain Drew Russell visits with a patient during his morning rounds at the Milwaukee VA.

Navy Vet leads ministry of presence

BY GARY J. KUNICH
5000 West editor

God talked to Drew Russell that day in church. Of that, he's certain.

He was a chief petty officer working in anti-submarine warfare in his 17th year in the Navy. He and his wife were still dealing with the loss of their 21-month-old son a year earlier to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

"My wife took comfort in counseling. I took comfort in Jim Beam," he said.

But he was in church listening to the pastor, he said, when he heard a low, booming voice speak into his right ear.

"This is what I want you to do," the voice said.

"And there was no one sitting to the right of me, and my wife didn't hear it," Russell said. "It was God. And I thought, 'Me?' I'm a chief petty officer with a GED, and I'm a hard-living, hard-partying sailor."

Maybe that's why he seems to fit so comfortably in his role as Milwaukee VA chaplain where he works closely with many patients who may have only days or weeks to live.

"After 20 years in the military, I'm a Veteran and I talk in their own language," he said. "I was just reading in Scripture: 'Become a Jew to the Jews, a Greek to the Greeks. I have become all things to all people.' One day I might be sitting down and talking with a guy who is a down-and-out drug addict who doesn't have any hope. The next day it might be someone with cancer. We talk to them about the things they want to talk about, and I talk like a sailor."

Well, maybe not all those sailor words.

"I talk like a sailor," he emphasized with a laugh. "I don't swear like one."

Russell retired from the Navy in 1990, and used his G.I. Bill and other VA benefits to get his bachelor's degree and then went onto seminary to become a Lutheran minister. For more than three years now, he has served on the staff at the Milwaukee VA, with a special focus on the palliative care unit. He recently received his VA certification in ministering to palliative care patients. While not necessary, he said it was part of his quest to continue learning and developing as a chaplain.

Early on, Russell said he felt called to serve in this area as he helped his own family deal with health scares and end-of-life issues.

"When I retired out of the Navy, the plan was I was going to play a lot of golf with my dad, and I went home and we played a lot of golf for two weeks. Two weeks after that, he had a massive stroke. He was completely paralyzed on his left side, but lived another five years, surviving a case of colon cancer before he got it again.

"He hated life, he wanted to die and not be a burden on my mom so he decided to let it take its course. He was a guy my size, and I walked in the room and he was 70 pounds."

He had three more days with his dad before he died.

After becoming ordained, Russell spent a few years working with cancer patients and the elderly, and honed his skills as a listener.

"People see this collar and think, 'I don't want to die, I don't want to see him. This guy's gonna start Bible teaching. But I'm not going to Bible thump them. I'm

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Chaplain

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not going to try to turn them Lutheran. If people want to talk religion, we are here. If they don't want to talk religion they have freedom from religion as well.

"In this setting, we're not allowed to proselytize, but if someone is an atheist and wants to talk to me, that's fine. Sometimes, after talking for awhile, you find out the person isn't an atheist. Maybe they've come back from war and they're angry at God. They want to know why God can let certain things happen, and I tell them that's man's inhumanity to man. I tell them I hear their pain, and I have a lot of questions, too, and I don't have all the answers."

VA chaplains call it a ministry of presence. Sometimes that works for the patients as well as the staff.

"It takes a special kind of person to work here, and we have some of the most loving and caring staff (in palliative care), and you can't help but become close with some of the patients. Sometimes, I'm here for them, too. And people will come in my office and just want to sit and cry. It's because they care so much."

Because he never knows what will happen from one room to the next, it's hard to fully plan a day. One visit might take a minute. Another might take two hours.

"I really feel at those moments I'm standing on holy ground as they pour out their hearts to me, and I have to come back to my office and sit quietly just to regroup."

And, he says, sometimes those visits reshape him.

"I was with a man who had oral cancer and it was in his jaw and throat. He didn't want anything to do with me. Eventually, he asked me in and we talked and developed a relationship. We didn't talk much religion. We talked fishing and the Wisconsin River. He said that's where he found peace with God. Eventually, he was moved to home hospice in his final days. As he was leaving, he motioned to be to lean closer. I thought he was going to whisper in my ear, but he kissed me on the cheek."

The man died a week later. Russell knows he gave him some peace and happiness.

Maybe that's all God wanted him to do, that day he talked to him in church.

But Russell knows the job isn't done. So he walks into another room, and says, "Hello."

Boutique offers good fashion at no charge

BY BRIAN WALKER
5000 West staff writer

You can find almost anything at the Women's Clothing Room at the Milwaukee VA — business suits, dresses, jackets, shoes, fancy under garments, scarves, jewelry and even swimsuits.

Ask the volunteers who man the station and they will tell you this is a lot more than a clothing room. They call it a boutique.

This is a 100-percent volunteer operation. When you stop by, you'll meet folks with a sense of fashion and hearts of gold.

"We want to get the word out to all lady Veterans, that we are here," said volunteer Lisa Wermuth. "We can help you find clothing for a wide variety of needs."

She said they are well-stocked with donations and don't need anything else at this time, except women looking for a great deal — all the items are free.

photo by Brian Walker

Volunteers Lisa Wermuth and Kim Poklar look over some of the clothes available at no charge for women Veterans.

The Women's Clothing Room is open Monday and Wednesday from 9 a,m to noon. It is located in building 70, Room B39.

Eligible Veterans should first see their VA social worker for a referral form. For more information, call 414-384-2000, Ext. 46579.

Bring a large shopping bag, your referral form and be ready to have a relaxing and enjoyable shopping experience with the volunteers in the Women's Clothing Room.

Camp American Legion gives free week to Women Veterans

Women Veterans can participate in the annual Women Veterans Week at Camp American Legion, June 18 to 24.

There is no cost for food and lodging.

The camp serves Wisconsin Veterans with physical or psychological illness, injury or disability, and active-duty recently returned from deployment.

For more information, call Kevin Moshea, camp director, at 715-277-2510.

Simple smile sets soaring standard

Delon Powell

"Let's face it, in a hospital setting, we already know most of our veterans are coming in because they have health challenges. Many are already not in the best of moods; but we have the power to set the tone of the interaction by our smile. When you smile, it can be like pouring cold water on a raging flame. It may not put out the fire, but it surely decreases the temperature."

Have Your Say

By now many of you may have given up on your New Year's resolutions because they were too hard, or took too much of your time. But there's no reason why you can't continue to make resolutions, and here's an easy one for you — smile.

That's it. Just smile.

You know you're already doing some of that now that the weather is getting nicer. I need you to continue smiling when you walk through the sliding glass doors of the Milwaukee VA every day.

Speaking as someone who sits on the Customer Service Committee, we are always trying to brainstorm ways to offer more customer service, and this is an easy one.

I can already hear someone commenting, "I didn't know we were in the customer service business."

We all are, and if you don't know that, you might be in the wrong line of work!

In this arena, our customers are our veterans. So don't look at it as just customer service. It's Veteran's service. Many of you have served in the military, so you know how important that is. Some of you may have never served but know the importance of this job and look at it as a true calling. Some of you may have forgotten. It's time to remember.

The easy part is you don't have to be on a committee or take up your lunch hour to get in on this.

We wanted to start putting together a column that highlights simple things we all can do and implement rather quickly. We want to bring attention to those things that enhance the experience of the Veteran, and bring out the best in us as employees who have the wonderful privilege of serving this nation's servicemen and servicewomen.

We have all heard the slogan, "Service with a smile!" It's not just a slogan. Smiling is a simple act that makes a tremendous impact. In interacting with the public, it is a small gesture that goes a long way.

When was the last time you had to interact with someone in customer service? Was it in person? Over the phone? How did it go? Could you immediately tell if the service representative was having a good or bad day? How did this affect your opinion of the organization? It sounds simple, but a smile could have a lot of influence on the answers to these questions.

When someone smiles, it disarms an individual. It brings warmth to the exchange. Let's face it, in a hospital setting, we already know most of our veterans are coming in because they have health challenges. Many are already not in the best of moods; but we have the power to set the tone of the interaction by our smile.

At every opportunity, our Veterans should be met with a smile. Beginning with the initial intake until the finishing exam, our Veterans should know they are welcome here. There is absolutely no excuse to have anything less than a genuine smile. The Veteran will likely be happier and not attempt to make your day any harder. And if your day is easier, that makes it easier to smile at everyone else.

If we focus more on the customer, we will soon forget whatever difficulties we are facing that day. Smile even while speaking with a Veteran on the phone. It comes through in our voices. It is more inviting but also assists in sifting through any potential problems that may arise.

"Well, what about the Vet that's always angry?" you may ask.

That is a legitimate question. We have all experienced situations where we have to assist someone who may be irritable. Those situations certainly are not the best experience. We don't know what may have happened that put that person in a bad mood, but you can have one positive affect that may change it for the rest of the day. As professionals, it is in our best interest to treat this individual positively. But beyond that, it's just the right thing to do.

When you smile, it can be like pouring cold water on a raging flame. It may not put out the fire, but it surely decreases the temperature.

Now that you've read the column, it's time to practice. Go out and smile at the next three people you see. Now that's a thought that makes me smile.

Delon Powell is an Iraq Veteran who serves on our outreach team, and is part of the Customer Service Committee.

Show us your pearly whites for Facebook

If you're happy and you know it (and you already know you ought to be showing it), don't just clap your hands and stomp your feet, send us a picture for the Milwaukee VA Facebook page.

Send your smiling photos of you and colleagues on the job to: Gary.Kunich@va.gov.

We'll run the photos at different times throughout the month.

Medication Reconciliation

By Anita Rabiega
Medication Reconciliation
Team Member

This column can save a life.

One in five medical injuries or deaths nationwide are caused by preventable adverse drug events.

I hope that gets your attention — whether you are one of our stellar providers at the Milwaukee VA, or one of our honored veterans who counts on us for world-class care. Those of us who are employees have an integral role in making and keeping you healthy, while those who get care here can play a pivotal role in knowing all medications they are taking.

Regardless of which one you might be, how many times have you been part of this or a similar conversation:

Provider: What medications are you taking?

Veteran: I can't remember all the names. Don't you have all that information in your computer?

While the computer might be a good indicator, just because a medication is listed there doesn't meant that's what the patient is taking at home. That's why we ask Veterans to carry a complete list of all their medications, including over-the-counter supplements. Something may have been left out. Something may have been changed since the last time the list was compiled.

According to national statistics, 46 percent of medication errors occur on admission or discharge from a clinical unit or hospital when patient orders are written. A study by the National Academy of Sciences determined the annual cost of injuries caused by medication errors was about $3.5 billion in 2006.

Veterans, rest assured, we take these numbers very seriously here, and make every effort to ensure you are treated safely, by putting in place redundant practices, and constantly stressing the importance of these steps with our employees.

The Joint Commission, an independent, non-profit organization which accredits and certifies more than 19,000 healthcare organizations, including the VA, has established Medication Reconciliation as a National Patient Safety Goal to help prevent these adverse events.

What you know can save your life

Medication Reconciliation involves identifying, addressing, and documenting any discrepancies found in the VA electronic medical record, compared with information supplied by the patient. This information, along with any changes made during the episode of care, should be communicated to the patient, caregiver or family member, and those who are part of the healthcare team.

All providers need to be sure Veterans know what medications they should be taking and should update the medication orders to reflect that information.

How can we do this? Here's how.

Veterans:

- Carry a current medication list with you at all times. You never know when you will need it. The list should include all the medications ordered by providers at *this* VA, *other* VAs and outside healthcare facilities, over-the-counter medications such as Tylenol and Motrin, vitamins and herbal medications.
- Always tell your provider (doctor, physician's assistant, nurse practitioner, etc.) about any medications you've stopped or started since your last appointment, even if you think it's not important.
- Use the MyHealth*e*Vet website to keep track of your medications.

Providers:

- Keep the active medication orders current to reflect any changes you verbally tell the patient to make. This is important to ensure various medication lists used in templates or the "meds tab" are accurate.
- Review your patient's medication list with the patient or caregiver, whenever possible.
- If you don't want a new supply of the medication to be mailed to the patient, include a statement in the provider comments of the order. Don't send refills until a patient actually needs it.
- Notify the appropriate provider of a medication discrepancy by adding him/her as an additional signer to the note, describing the issue.
- Arrange for the patient to receive a "Med Grid for Patient" list, when needed. It is located in the Computerized Patient Record System under the "Reports" tab. This also includes the prescription number, reordering phone number, locally and remotely entered allergies and is the same list all patients receive upon discharge.
- Use the Medication Reconciliation template to guide you through the "med rec" process.

Patient safety is something we take seriously every day in every way. Ask many of our providers, and they will tell you this job is a sacred calling, and we owe you nothing but the best. Veterans, we are here for you, and you can help us to help serve you better by following some of these guidelines. If you ever feel you aren't getting the proper care you have earned and deserve at any time, please talk to a Patient Advocate.

We are here to serve you, and we thank you for your service.

More sneaky speedster secrets

Christa Holland

Finding Fitness

"I'm hoping this inspires you to greatness in your own way, by just trying. It starts with making a plan, sticking to it, and putting one foot in front of the other — whether it's the walk around the block or a marathon."

I still like the alliteration of that headline, even though we all know who I am. Since the first column, I thought of a few more things to share.

If you are pressed for time and collapse every night wondering how you could possibly fit anything else into your day, select one activity that gives you the most bang for your buck.

For me, this is running (although my body doesn't seem to agree as much after my last baby —grrrrrr …!). It also helps that I've been doing this most of my life. Starting around 4 or 5, I did kiddy track meets at a nearby college and spent several summers competing in the Badger State Games. There was never the danger of me coming close to winning, but it was a nice experience for our whole family.

I did my first 5K at 11 and worked my way up since then. I don't have huge amounts of time to train, but sometimes determination (or temporary insanity) makes the impossible possible.

Sometimes you just have to set a goal and go for it. I recently tested this theory with my post-baby marathon debut. I purposely selected a marathon with a course that was open for seven hours to ensure completion even if I had to walk — which I thought for sure would be a factor … especially when race day came and it was 20 degrees.

But when the starting gun went off, my body obeyed as if following the Pied Piper. Blasting against the breeze, with frigid air biting into my body and face, my arms and legs churned in rhythm. Halfway through, with the wind at my back, I felt a slight glimmer of hope. Miles 17 and 18 were the worst — a purgatory of rough terrain, burning soles, and not enough distraction.

Mile 21 came along with a caffeinated burst of energy gel. Doubt was obliterated. My face stretched into a grin — I was going to run the whole thing! I practically soared up the almost mile-long incline at the end and even managed to pass someone. I ran the entire race *and* had a personal best. No, it wasn't even close to my best time ever. In fact, I was 35 minutes slower than the same race two years earlier. But the best thing about setting a goal is it is *your* goal. For me, this was a personal best for my second post-baby marathon. That may seem like ooey-gooey Mozzarella, but for me, it's important to be positive.

Think you'll never do a marathon? Then train for a triathlon. I've done sprint triathlons (quarter-mile swim, 15-mile bike and 5K run) in kind of the same manner. Never trained for the swimming or biking — just the running and managed to complete them mid-pack. And that was without a speedy, stealthy tri-bike — just my regular Schwinn — which made the biking portions frustrating, but not impossible.

I'm not boasting. I'm hoping this inspires you to greatness in your own way, by just trying. It starts with making a plan, sticking to it, and putting one foot in front of the other — whether it's the walk around the block or a marathon. Maybe running isn't for you. Archery, downhill skiing, power walking and softball are just a few things that aren't for me. There are still so many choices to fit fitness into your life!

Besides subscribing heavily to the theory of mind over matter, make sure you take time for yourself. When I'm childless, I usually end up exercising. Yes, it would be nice to go grocery shopping without someone trying to climb out of the cart. It would be fabulous to load the dishwasher without a curious toddler trying to climb inside, but it's not impossible to do those things with the kids underfoot. It's also not impossible to exercise with kids (Hello, jogging stroller and bike trailer), Just find the time to do something.

Something else, which might sound slightly goofy is I try to use more vacation time in the winter when there is not as much daylight. That way, I can request to take off early some afternoons and get a good outdoor run in without having to worry about things that go bump in the night (miscreants, ne'r'do-wells, my rump on a patch of ice ...) In the summer, I get up about 4 a.m. for some outdoor miles. While it's a pain to get up that early, exercising while still half-asleep makes it seem much easier. Carry your phone and stick to well-traveled roads if you try this. A mid to large-sized dog for extra security doesn't hurt, either. I seriously need to find someone to loan me their dog.

Finally, think about picking up some Febreze Sport! Yes, I am that gross, but if it's good enough for the NFL or NBA, it should be quite sufficient for me!

With the kids, I have enough wash to do already, so if I can get a few more wears out some of my running gear before adding to the laundry mountain, so much the better.

Besides, I don't act like my sweat doesn't stink because I'm a female and I'm told that we perspire. Or is it glow?

On that (sweet?) note, happy trails, track or treadmill until next time!

Longtime friends, coworkers leave with 40 years of memories

BY BRIAN WALKER
5000 West staff writer

The year was 1972.

Richard Nixon was president, Apollo 16 landed on the moon and the Vietnam War raged on. In February of that year, two young ladies, the exact same age, started their VA careers and developed a friendship that has carried on for 40 years.

Jeanne Hanrihar began working at the Woods VA Medical Center Feb. 3 and was assigned to be a timekeeper in Dietetics. Jill Rutz — now Elskamp — started the following week in the same position and department. So began a parallel series of payroll-oriented assignments that kept them close together throughout their VA careers.

Jill and Jeanne have helped manage their fellow employees' time and pay for 40 years.

Jeanne summed it up this way: "Payroll was always interesting and we always knew we had an impact on every employee's life."

The world of payroll and timekeeping was a little different back in the 1970s, they said. A payroll card with employee social security number had to be keypunched to an IBM card, which in turn led to a teletype to the VA Pay Headquarters in Austin, Texas. Jeanne and Jill remember many late Friday evenings trying hard to meet the two-week pay period deadlines for payroll submission. Payroll was a close knit bunch; they made the best of it, ordering pizzas for dinner and putting social plans on hold to get the job completed.

"We always took pride in making sure our fellow employees got paid correctly," Jill said.

When Jeanne transferred to Fiscal in 1973, Jill followed a few months later. Eventually they both became payroll technicians and bounced between Fiscal and Human Resources assignments with similar jobs. Their physical work stations moved, and sometimes they were separated, but in the VA circle of life, they always wound up working in close proximity again. And though job titles changed and they took on more responsibilities, their friendship never wavered.

photos by Brian Walker

Jill Elskamp and Jeanne Hanrihar look over an old-time punchcard they used to have to work with when they first started at the VA 40 years ago.

In the 1980s they both served on a team that was a test site for the development of the VISTA program that runs payroll, accounting and other fiscal applications. They learned how to adapt to changes as VA Payroll was moved out of Austin, and parlayed to Defense Finance and Accounting Services. Jeanne said the move to DFAS was like starting over.

Jump ahead to 2012.

We are now officially the Clement J. Zablocki VA Medical Center.

We still use VISTA, but after 40 years of service it is time for Jeanne and Jill to say goodbye to this chapter of their lives. They'll soon call it a career.

"We came in and we were the kids," Jill said. And after spending their entire career with one agency, they are now the experienced ones counting down the days until retirement.

Jill proudly displays a photograph of her new granddaughter, Avery, and wants to be available to help her daughter with childcare. Jeanne's mom needs a little more assistance than she used to and the time is right to offer that support.

Still, it's easy to be wistful.

"While change is typically good for most, I usually don't do well with it, but I hope this change will be a good one," Jeanne said.

They initially made plans to retire at different times this year. But when they got together and discussed plans they decided to end it like it was started.

"We came in together and now we decided to leave together," Jill said.

So on some night close to May 3 there will be a party in the community to honor these dedicated employees. They will share some funny work stories, some hugs and some tears. Their 40 years of service may be coming to an end, but chances are another 40 years of friendship is just the beginning.

Jill Elskamp and Jeanne Hanrihar have served and worked together since Richard Nixon was president.

"We came in and we were the kids. We came in together and now we decided to leave together."

-- Jill Elskamp
GLFS program manager

Dossier

John Good
Medical Support Assistant

Division: Primary Care, Appleton Community Based Outpatient Clinic.

Hometown: Sauk Prairie, Wis.

Years of government service (plus any military time): Two and a half years.

Family: My wife, Amy, and three children: Isiah, 4, Tegan, 2, and Katryn, 15 Months.

What is your ideal job? Working for the VA. As a veteran myself, it has become more than a job for me, but rather a passion. I feel incredibly lucky to be able to carry on the VA's mission as part of my career.

Branch of service: Wisconsin Army National Guard.

When did you serve: August 2004 – November 2005

Why did you join the service: I enlisted two weeks prior to 9/11 to help pay for college. After that day I knew what I had to do.

Best service experience: Returning home. I will never forget the feeling of seeing, hugging, and kissing my wife after our plane touched down on U.S. soil.

Photo by Jacqueline Thomson-Ehlers

So maybe the Chuck Berry tune, "Johnny B. Goode" isn't about John Good, a medical support assistant from Appleton, but it still makes him smile.

If you could pick your own theme music, what would it be? 'Johnny B. Goode,' by Chuck Berry.

What is your favorite song?: "American Soldier," by Toby Keith. Toby was the only celebrity during my tour in Iraq who came outside the wire to boost the morale of the soldiers.

What are your favorite TV shows?: "Dexter," "Criminal Minds," and "Sons of Anarchy."

What are your favorite movies?: "Saving Private Ryan," "Red Dawn," and "Dumb and Dumber."

If you were sent to the moon with nothing but a book and a book light, what book would you choose?: 'Space Exploration for Dummies.'

Favorite sports and teams?: Football and the Green Bay Packers.

What are your hobbies?: Home theater.

What's your favorite ethnic food?: Mexican.

What is one thing most people don't know about you?: I have traveled throughout Europe multiple times. My father immigrated to America from Ireland.

What is the best advice you have received?: To enjoy the journey.

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

Three things that can always be found in your refrigerator?: Guinness, milk, and ranch dressing.

What is the meaning of life?: To enjoy life and live everyday like it's your last.

Favorite pair of shoes: Doc Martens.

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

If you won $20 million, what would do with it?: Ensure my family's long-term financial stability, pay off my immediate family's debt, help support causes I believe in, and then buy some junk I don't need.

A little bit country or a little bit rock 'n' roll?: A little bit rock 'n' roll.

Motto you live by: 'If it is to be, it's up to me.'

Waffles or pancakes?: Pancakes.

Corned beef hash or bacon?: Bacon.

If I had a super power it would be: Telepathy.

Reporting Aboard

Megan Adams
Registered nurse
Hometown: Milwaukee.
Hobbies: Running, volleyball, cooking and spending time with my family.
Why did you choose the VA?: Potential to grow within the organization.
First impressions: Friendly environment.

Victor Aviles
Nursing assistant
Hometown: Mukwonago, Wis.
Hobbies: Boxing and eating.
Why did you choose the VA?: It's an excellent place for me to get the experience I need for the medical field.
First impressions: Great opportunity.

Julie "Jules" Bessette
Licensed practical nurse
Hometown: Manawa, Wis.
Hobbies: Snowmobiling, baking and spending time with family.
Why did you choose the VA?: Great place to work, friendly people, wonderful benefits and to serve our veterans.
First impressions: Friendly, helpful and positive!

Feudele Black
Licensed practical nurse
Hometown: Streator, Ill.
Prior military service: Army, six years.
Hobbies: Music and working out.
Why did you choose the VA?: I wanted to do my part to help vets.
First impressions: A good place to work.

Jessica Bogard
Physical therapist trainee
Hometown: Woodruff, Wis.
Hobbies: Cooking, traveling, and hiking with my fiancée and my Chinese Pug.
Why did you choose the VA?: To serve America's veterans and provide comprehensive, patient-centered care in a unique environment.
First impressions: Well-rounded facility with beautiful, historic grounds and friendly staff.

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In Service

Congratulations to the following Zablocki employees who have reached career milestones in March and April:

35 YEARS
Edmund Duthie
Frances Majszak
Karen Olson
John Ramos
Teresa Weber

30 YEARS
Thomas Blodgett
Jesse Fitzgerald
Shirley Kraemer
Linda Oravec
Richard Tulpa
Jana Zimmerman

25 YEARS
Donna Chmielewski
Pamela Kroll
Gary Seabrook
Linda Smith

20 YEARS
Ethel Davenport
Joe Holifield
Cheryl Kinsman
Karla Krohn

15 YEARS
Andrew Brenner
Janet Chickey
Russell Gonnering
Jeanine Harvey
Paul Knox
Jodie Kulp
Susan Oakley
Emily Rosario
Christine Splichal
Laura Tyson

10 YEARS
Shannon Dreblow
Mary Fondren
Malgorzata Franczak
Michael Dechant
Yvonne Harris
Jason Keyser
Larry Jones
Christopher McCain
Kristin Nisiewicz
Delon Powell
Charles Quigley

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Corrine Boyea
Physical therapist trainee
Hometown: New Berlin, Wis.
Hobbies: Photography, and hiking with my dog.
Why did you choose the VA?: It's in the great town of Milwaukee; looks like a great community of people and workers.
First impressions: It is a big place with a lot of history that I would be honored to work at.

Jermaine "Maine" Brister
Food service worker
Hometown: Milwaukee.
Hobbies: Baseball and basketball.
Why did you choose the VA?: My father is a veteran, and this is a better opportunity.
First impressions: Great place.

Tamara "Tam" Brister
Contract specialist
Hometown: Greenwood, Miss.
Hobbies: Traveling.
Why did you choose the VA?: I love working with the veterans to help provide efficient service.
First impressions: Welcoming, quality care, clean facility and professional.

Mitchell "Mitch" Burke
Registered nurse
Hometown: Racine, Wis.
Prior military service: Air National Guard, six months.
Hobbies: Playing drums, racing BMWs and travel.
Why did you choose the VA?: I performed aero-medical missions while activated. I became interested in healthcare for our troops as a result.
First impressions: Proud of the tradition and service to our veterans.

Linda "Linny" Cayan
Registered nurse
Hometown: Watertown, Wis.
Hobbies: Reading, gardening, knitting and watching hockey.
Why did you choose the VA?: I was so impressed with the care my father received when he was a patient at the VA that I knew I wanted to work with the staff here. I was excited when a position became available that will let me contribute to the care of Vets.
First impressions: Everyone is so friendly and welcoming. I can feel that employees really believe in the organization's mission to care for vets.

Ratnesh "RC" Chopra
Emergency room and research physician
Hometown: New Delhi, India.
Hobbies: Golf and news.
Why did you choose the VA?: Flexible job opportunity and research.
First impressions: Very professional.

Stephanie "Dundee" Culpepper
Nursing assistant
Hometown: Burdette, Ark.
Hobbies: Collecting black figurines.
Why did you choose the VA?: I wanted to try a new experience working with the veterans.
First impressions: Friendly. So far everyone has been very polite, helpful and courteous. The first impression was wonderful.

Tracie Davis
Human resources assistant
Hometown: Brooklyn, N.Y.
Prior military service: Army.
Why did you choose the VA?: Because as a Veteran, I believe in supporting our Vets.
First impressions: Very impressed.

Beth DeJongh
Pharmacist
Hometown: Crandon, Wis.
Hobbies: Skiing, snorkeling and traveling.
Why did you choose the VA?: I did my pharmacy residency at a VA and loved the commitment to patient care and the opportunities available to pharmacists.
First impressions: The campus appears to be rich in history and the hallways are quite busy.

Francisco De La Cruz
Medical support assistant
Hometown: Milwaukee.
Prior military service: Army, 21 years.
Hobbies: Building computer systems.
Why did you choose the VA?: I have a desire to serve those who have served our country.
First impressions: Awesome.

Josh "Dre" Drephal
Diagnostic radiology technician
Hometown: Kaukauna, Wis.
Prior military service: Marines, four years active-duty; and Army National Guard, five years.
Hobbies: Scuba diving and hunting.
Why did you choose the VA?: To serve fellow veterans, and for the benefits.
First impressions: I like the high level of commitment to veterans.

David Duter
Medical support assistant
Hometown: Pensacola, Fla.

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Reporting Aboard

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Prior military service: Coast Guard, 20 years.
Hobbies: Hang gliding, hiking and biking.
Why did you choose the VA?: I wanted to be a part of an organization that helps people — most importantly, our veterans.
First impressions: Very caring, professional, dedicated people.

Alberta Essuman
Nurse practitioner
Hometown: Ghana.
Hobbies: Love to read.
Why did you choose the VA?: Friends working at the VA told me how wonderful it is to work here.
First impressions: Very friendly group of people.

Charles "EZ" Ezell
Housekeeping aide
Hometown: Hoopeston, Ill.
Prior military service: Army, eight years.
Hobbies: Music and biking.
Why did you choose the VA?: To serve fellow veterans and start a new career.
First impressions: I've been a patient here since 2005 and always have been impressed with the care. As a new hire, I'm very excited about the opportunity to serve fellow veterans.

Carol Ffrench
Licensed practical nurse
Hometown: Milwaukee.
Hobbies: Singing, reading and cooking.
Why did you choose the VA?: To be a part of a great team.
First impressions: It's a very busy facility.

Diana Glaunert
Medical support assistant
Hometown: Brookfield, Wis.
Hobbies: Reading and cooking.
Why did you choose the VA?: Partly altruistic and partly for the benefits of the work environment. The VA has a very good reputation for being a good employer.
First impressions: Very favorable! There is a sense of camaraderie here.

Mark Graveline
Contract specialist
Hometown: Melbourne Beach, Fla.
Prior military service: Coast Guard, four years.
Hobbies: Skiing, motorcycling and golf.
Why did you choose the VA?: The VA is the best way for me to continue serving my country and fellow veterans.
First impressions: The Milwaukee VA is very impressive with all the history and heritage that is on site. It's like no other VA I have ever seen.

Jimmie D. Gulley
Licensed practical nurse
Nickname: JD, but only by my mother.
Hometown: Prescott, Ark.
Hobbies: Fishing and deer hunting.
Why did you choose the VA?: I have always felt strongly about the care of the people who helped build this country. They gave their blood, sweat and tears so we can enjoy the freedoms that we have today. I am proud to serve them as they have served us.
First impressions: Awesome! Absolutely impressive.

Colleen "Jelly Bean" Heinkel
Psychologist
Hometown: Crystal Lake, Ill.
Hobbies: Civil Air Patrol, flying, hiking, music/keyboard and fostering companion animals.
Why did you choose the VA?: It's more than a hospital — it's a family that cares for one another. It's an honor to care for those who have served our country.
First impressions: The most caring and friendly people I've ever met.

Heather Hougum
Licensed practical nurse
Hometown: New Berlin, Wis.
Hobbies: Going to our cabin, camping, fishing and hunting.
Why did you choose the VA?: Did clinical here, and it was my most rewarding rotation. I want to give back to the veterans.
First impressions: Busy place and a good resource for veterans.

Kristan Hughes
Medical support assistant
Hometown: Mukwonago, Wis.
Hobbies: Hunting.
Why did you choose the VA?: The job I applied for looked very interesting and sounded like a great opportunity for me.
First impressions: I've met lots of nice people and am excited to be working here.

Ryan "Hutch" Hutchison
Food service worker
Hometown: Cashton, Wis.
Hobbies: Television, movies and video games.
Why did you choose the VA?: Better pay, better benefits, ability to advance.
First impressions: Everyone is very friendly and helpful. It feels like this will be a great place to work.

Shamika Jackson
Food service worker
Hometown: Milwaukee.
Hobbies: Traveling, shopping, writing and taking pictures.
Why did you choose the VA?: I chose to work at the VA because my father and grandfather are Veterans. I enjoy working with the Veterans.
First impressions: Very big place with a friendly environment.

Catherine "Cathy" Jankowski
Nursing assistant
Hometown: Milwaukee is where I grew up. I now live in Greendale, Wis.
Hobbies: Vacationing with family.
Why did you choose the VA?: I probably never would be here if it wasn't for my father, Staff Sgt. Kenneth L. Fleury Sr. I come from a very long line of various military history, as well as four uncles in the service. I, myself, tried to be a part of the military. I did eight months of weekend drills and two months in basic training in holdover status, and then found I couldn't wear the combat boots due to flat feet. So they sent me home. If I can't serve my country, at least I can serve my Vets.
First impressions: VA is like my second home. I'm very comfortable and proud to be here.

Natasha "Tasha" Joas
Nursing assistant
Hometown: Burlington, Wis.
Hobbies: Studying, shopping, poodles and reading.
Why did you choose the VA?: I had a great clinical experience here on 7C, and I knew this is where I wanted to work when I graduate in May as a registered nurse.
First impressions: Nice facility with nice people. Older-looking building.

Michael Land
Nursing assistant
Hometown: Brooklyn, N.Y.
Prior military experience: Army, six years.

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Hobbies: Playing football and working on cars.
Why did you choose the VA?: Continue serving those who served us.
First impressions: Camaraderie.

Notley Mark Lewis II
Human resources assistant
Hometown: Moorehead, N.C.
Prior military service: Marine Corps, 2004 to 2009.
Hobbies: Paper airplanes and video games.
Why did you choose the VA?: To move family closer to home.
First impressions: Friendly and helpful.

Deborah "Deb" Mahuta
Physical therapist
Hometown: Sussex, Wis.
Hobbies: Girls' lacrosse.
Why did you choose the VA?: I'm attracted to the mission of serving Vets, as it is very patient-oriented.
First impressions: Staff is very accommodating, friendly and helpful.

Beverlee McCorkle
Dental assistant
Hometown: New Albany, Ind.
Hobbies: Motocross and BMX biking.
Why did you choose the VA?: My father is a Vet and I want to make sure he and all other Vets get the best of care.
First impressions: Very busy and friendly atmosphere.

William "Willie" Montanez
Medical supply technician
Hometown: Chicago, Ill.
Prior military service: Army, three and a half years.
Hobbies: Reading.
Why did you choose the VA?: Because it offers security of a government job.
First impressions: Very good.

David Morigeau
Secretary
Hometown: Alamo, Calif.
Prior military service: Marine Corps, five years.
Hobbies: Exercise, technology, and traveling outside the U.S.
Why did you choose the VA?: Opportunity to work with Veterans and grow professionally.
First impressions: Extremely welcoming and very professional. The employees have close, personal relationships and a high degree of camaraderie.

Dinah "Joy" Metzger
Nursing assistant
Hometown: Port Washington, Wis.
Why did you choose the VA?: To serve Veterans.
First impressions: People are friendly and the facility is huge.

Erika Naber
Biomed intern
Hometown: Willmar, Minn.

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Photo by Gary Kunich

That's a healthy pasta!

Chef Paul Brinkman, a supervisor in the Milwaukee VA kitchen, sautees a whole grain pasta with veggies and whole grain noodles at the March 22 Nutrition Fair in Recreation Hall. More than 400 employees and Veterans attended the fair.

Reporting Aboard

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Hobbies: Reading and dancing.
Why did you choose the VA?: To get experience with a variety of medical equipment.
First impressions: Everyone is very friendly.

Brian Naidicz
Medical technologist
Hometown: Kenosha, Wis.
Hobbies: Hunting, fishing, off-roading, Jeeps, cooking, Brewers, Packers, Bucks and Badgers.
Why did you choose the VA?: Interned here, moved to Chicago and worked at the Jesse Brown VA. Transferred back to Milwaukee.
First impressions: Dedicated to the mission and vision statements.

Ryan Ohrmundt
Medical supply technician
Hometown: Oconomowoc, Wis.
Prior military service: Army Reserves, eight years.
Hobbies: Waterskiing, biking and high-performance American cars.
Why did you choose the VA?: Whenever I came to an appointment at the VA, I always thought it would be cool to work here because the employees always looked so well-acquainted with one another and were so enthusiastic about helping me and anybody else.
First impressions: Clean, busy and organized.

Blake Peterson
Dental assistant
Hometown: Milwaukee.
Prior military service: Navy, eight years.
Hobbies: Traveling, poker, chess and fishing.
Why did you choose the VA?: To serve the vets.
First impressions: A great place to work.

Rachel Pinkalla
Registered nurse
Hometown: Galesburg, Ill.
Hobbies: Vacationing.
Why did you choose the VA?: Opportunity. It's a great learning and teaching place.
First impressions: Awesome.

Cawanda "Wanda" Ragland
Nursing assistant
Hometown: Milwaukee.
Why did you choose the VA?: To grow and start my career at the VA and to impart joy into other's lives while I'm here.
First impressions: Very diverse, and the VA wants its employees to learn more.

Michael Reed
Housekeeping aide
Hometown: Milwaukee.
Hobbies: Cleaning my house.
Why did you choose the VA?: Because of the people I get to work with.
First impressions: Very good.

Gloria Richardson
Medical support assistant
Hometown: Pine Bluff, Ark.
Prior military service: Army, 11 years.
Hobbies: Family vacations and attending church.
Why did you choose the VA?: Benefits of learning something new and serving veterans.
First impressions: Because I am a Veteran, my first impression was poor care, but I have seen the positive changes the VA has made.

Chad Running
Medical support assistant
Hometown: Cedar Rapids, Iowa.
Prior military service: Army, six years.
Hobbies: Frisbee golf, cross country skiing and hiking.
Why did you choose the VA?: I enjoy working with and for fellow Veterans.
First impressions: Having worked at the Iowa City VA and now the Cleveland Community Based Outpatient Clinic, I hope to make a career of helping Veterans.

Lauren "Shea" Saddy
Registered nurse
Hometown: Muskego, Wis.
Hobbies: Cooking, reading, golf, and watching the Packers and the Brewers.
Why did you choose the VA?: The people I know who have worked here have had positive things to say and I can't think of anyone else I'd rather serve.
First impressions: Everyone is very friendly and welcoming. It feels like home.

John Schmitz
Respiratory therapist
Hometown: Fond Du Lac, Wis.
Prior military service: Air Force, four years.
Hobbies: Golf and cooking.
Why did you choose the VA?: I enjoy working with Vets since I also served.

Brittney Shaffer
Occupational therapist intern
Hometown: Reinbeck, Iowa.
Hobbies: Being with friends and family, and watching the Iowa Hawkeyes.
Why did you choose the VA?: To give back to our Veterans.
First impressions: Very busy and very friendly!

Gretchen Snyder
Patient services assistant
Hometown: Waukesha, Wis.
Prior military service: Air Force and Army, 24 years.
Hobbies: Cooking.
Why did you choose the VA?: Concern for the Veterans.
First impressions: Dedicated employees.

Diana Sramek
Biomedical
Hometown: Walton Hills, Ohio.
Why did you choose the VA?: Great opportunity to learn a lot about the hospital setting and medical equipment.
First impressions: It seems like a great place to work. Everyone — staff and patients — appear to be very kind and helpful to everyone else.

Amanda Stoffel
Social worker intern
Hometown: Cedarburg, Wis.
Hobbies: My kids and my family!
Why did you choose the VA?: My mother, father and brother are all Veterans, and this is a great internship opportunity."
First impressions: Exciting place to work and learn.

Graham Ternes
Patient services assistant
Hometown: Wauwatosa, Wis.
Prior military service: Army, three years.
Hobbies: Sports, reading and running.
Why did you choose the VA?: After returning from Afghanistan, I wanted to help those Vets I served alongside with, and those from other wars.
First impressions: A great atmosphere with friendly people.

Vilai Thao
Food service worker
Hometown: Milwaukee.
Hobbies: Cooking.
Why did you choose the VA?: I believe I

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have the experience to help the VA and the patients there.
First impressions: It's a nice hospital with a lot of coworkers who are helpful.

Ray Ulrich
Health technician
Hometown: Mount Vernon, Wash.
Prior military service: Navy, five years; and Navy Reserves, four years and counting.
Hobbies: Running, collecting and spending time with family.
Why did you choose the VA?: To me, working at the VA is more of a calling than just a job. Happy to be here and proud to serve my fellow Veterans.
First impressions: Big building, big campus. Very caring and a good place to come to work.

Paul Vandenberg
Registered nurse
Hometown: Kaukauna, Wis.
Hobbies: Traveling and watching movies.
Why did you choose the VA?: It's rewarding to take care of those in need who have done so much for our country.
First impressions: Everyone is very nice and helpful.

Robert "Sugarman" Van Hicks
Housekeeping aide
Hometown: Chicago, Ill.
Prior military service: Marines, 14 months.
Hobbies: Weightlifting.
Why did you choose the VA?: Because it feels like I'm at home, being around a lot of Veterans. I enjoy helping people and the VA cares a lot for veterans.
First impressions: My first impression was this was a good – no, make that *great* – hospital.

Breann "Bre" Waarvik
Registered nurse
Hometown: New Berlin, Wis.
Hobbies: Reading, running and shopping.
Why did you choose the VA?: To provide outstanding care to our heroes.
First impressions: Exceptional.

Lem Wells
Laundry worker
Hometown: Milwaukee.
Prior military service: Army, five and a half years.
Hobbies: Cooking, church and pool.
Why did you choose the VA?: The 401k retirement plan.
First impressions: Outstanding! I really liked the tour of the grounds.

Michelle Wierman
Registered nurse
Hometown: Nashotah, Wis.
Hobbies: Walking my dogs, watching movies, spending time with friends and family.
Why did you choose the VA?: I have family members who are Veterans and know people who worked here and said how much they loved working for the VA. I find it rewarding working for the vets.
First impressions: Very welcoming and friendly staff.

Mamie Williams
Medical support assistant
Hometown: Hammond, Ind.
Hobbies: Reading and exercise.
Why did you choose the VA?: To serve and try to give back to our Veterans.
First impressions: Great work environment.

Michael Wojciechowski
Housekeeping aide
Hometown: Milwaukee.
Prior military service: Army, 1967 to 1970.
Hobbies: Fixing things.
Why did you choose the VA?: I worked for CWT and Facilities Management, and I like the people at the VA.
First impressions: People who help veterans with a good attitude.

VA Voices

Question: If you could go back into any era or time, what would it be and why?

Janet Williamson, Neurology medical support assistant: "The 1980s. I loved the style of clothes. Gas didn't cost $4 a gallon, you didn't have kids shooting neighbors, and you didn't need to spend $300 to have a good time. You could have a good time with just a pair of roller skates."

Karen Slade, pharmacy technician: "I don't think I would want to go back in time. Everything is good and life is good for me right now."

Wayne Lauton, American Federation of Government Employees Local 3 vice president: "World War II era because I'm a General Patton fanatic. My father served under Patton at the Battle of the Bulge, and I know all about him. He's a fascinating person."

Dr. Sana Gafoor, Internal Medicine: "Back to the days of ancient Roman civilization. I always liked that style. It would be kind of cool to go back and experience that kind of history."

Eileen Wilson, Mental Health secretary: "The 1920s to be a Flapper, with the dress, the hat and a flask on my thigh. Life was a lot simpler then."