Suicide Prevention and The Power of 1

#thepowerof1
Start a Conversation

also inside...

Remembering Robin Williams
1951-2014
5000 West is a recurring publication produced by the Public Affairs Office and Medical Media of the Zablocki VA Medical Center, and is intended for employees, volunteers, patients and friends. Views expressed do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the medical center. While 5000 West encourages submissions for future editions, we cannot guarantee publication, and reserve the right to edit all copy so it conforms to editorial policy and guidelines. To submit information, e-mail: Antony Kamps at antony.kamps@va.gov or call the Public Affairs Office at 414-384-2000, ext. 43895.

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

Medical Center Director
Robert Beller

Deputy Director
Jim Mcclain

Acting Assistant Director
Chris Houterman

Chief of Staff
Michael D. Erdmann, MD

Acting Associate Director for Patient/Nursing Services
Mary Brunn, RN

Public Affairs Officer
Gary J. Kunich

Editor
Antony Kamps

Staff Writer and Photographer
Benjamin Slane

Copy Editor
Christa Holland

Date to Remember

On the Cover
Milwaukee Brewers catcher Jonathan Lucroy takes part in the Power of 1 campaign to raise awareness of Veteran suicide prevention. The campaign focuses on the fact a Veteran is just one call, one chat, one message or one conversation away from getting help. Learn more on page 8. — Photo courtesy of Milwaukee Brewers

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Milwaukee, WI 53295
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Town Hall Meeting
Share your thoughts
Sept. 30, 2014, 6-8p.m.

Milwaukee VA invited Veterans of all eras to come together for fun and food July 22 on the banks of Lake Wheeler.

We are inviting the public to join us for a panel discussion with Medical Center Director Bob Beller, patient enrollment and healthcare experts, Iraq/Afghanistan outreach, facility maintenance and more.

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For more information call Milwaukee VA Public Affairs 414-382-5363 vhamiwpublicaffairs@va.gov

@milwaukeeva

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Service Awards, Employee of the Month and VA Voices
### Remember Robin, a military friend

**By Antony Kamps**

The world was shocked when the news of Robin Williams’ suicide was announced Aug. 12. The comedian, actor, and Veteran supporter struggled with depression and alcoholism. Times,” before his death Williams performed for troops overseas in Bahrain, Djibouti, Germany, Iraq, Italy, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Qatar, Spain and the United Arab Emirates.

On a memorable stop at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait in December 2007, one many will never forget, he was performing for troops when the entire audience stood up and turned their backs to him as a horn played. “I’m not gonna forget that. I’ve never had an entire audience just go ‘Forget you’,” he said, turning his back to the crowd. “I was also wondering what’s coming from this way, when an entire group of military people turns that way,” he said while pointing in the distance.

“Another USO family is saddened by the news of Robin Williams’ passing. One of the great comedic actors of his generation, Williams traveled around the world to lift the spirits of our troops and their families. He will always be a part of our USO family and will be sorely missed,” Pearsall said. “Families were always on the outside looking in, and that needs to change. This is about educating the family on the illness, whether it is PTSD or some other mental health issue, so they can understand and start to grasp the problem.”

The three most common gaps identified by the summit are education of family members, lack of resources for family members and barriers to access of VA care.

“The summit identified education of family members needs to be increased before, during and after deployment of the Veteran. Family members also need to be educated on the military uses. "Excuse me, sir. Seeing as how the V.F. is such a V.I.P., shouldn’t we keep the P.C. on the QT? "Cause if it leaks to the V.C. he could end up M.I.A., and then we’d all be put out in ‘Cause if it leaks to the V.C. he could end up in jail. It’s not worth it. "A lot of ideas were included including having a VA representative at every out-processing briefing for the military as a liaison between VA and local military divisions and advertise the benefits available to Veterans on radio and TV. McBride said he was very happy with the summit this year, and he already is planning for 2015. "I was pleased with the turnout, elated with the setting at MCW, grateful for the sponsorship from the Wounded Warrior Project, but my satisfaction hinges on whether we can use the summit energy and ideas to transform VA. We need more services for families of Veterans."
Walk for the Fallen
The 5th Annual Walk for the Fallen, held at the Milwaukee County War Memorial Aug. 17 memorialized Wisconsin’s fallen service members. Families released balloons to the skies with handwritten messages to their loved ones. The walk is a time for families to grieve together in like company, fellowship and join in remembrance.

Evacuation Exercise
The Milwaukee VA conducted an evacuation exercise July 31, to ensure the preparedness of the hospital in the event of an emergency. It also helped evaluate the recently developed inpatient evacuation standard operating procedures and evacuation tool kit materials, have clinical staff demonstrate the ability to evaluate patients for evacuation then coordinate and track inpatient movement. The Hospital Incident Management Team staff also demonstrated the ability to coordinate a response requiring delayed evacuation of the medical center, and mobilize and configure the Dual Use Vehicles on campus for patient and medical staff transport. Clockwise from top: The evacuation team leaders, Janice Lutomski, Angela Garza, Tandria Williams meet with the staff on the fourth floor to discuss how the evacuation will be conducted. Erica Please, registered nurse, talks with nursing student Herbert Raasch about the evacuation process. Nursing students served as the exercise patients. Krystal Arcamo, nursing student, is loaded onto the dual use vehicle designed to transport patients off grounds in case of emergencies. Tiffany Pilliow, nursing student, is pushed down the hallway during the exercise and is being escorted by Megan Singer, registered nurse.
National campaign reaches out to more than 22,000 through social media

Milwaukee VA employees funnel out of the south entrance of the hospital walking toward a skylift positioned on the grass just off National Avenue. It’s a hot day for the month of September in Wisconsin the group looks for relief from the relentless sun under a group of trees outside the hospital. But the heat doesn’t detract from the gathering, as they group know they are there for good reason; to raise awareness of suicide prevention among Veterans.

“I was very impressed at the turn out, it was great to see the enthusiastic support everyone showed for The Power of 1,” said Karen Gage, Suicide Prevention coordinator at Milwaukee VA.

September is Suicide Prevention Awareness month and the Suicide Prevention team at Milwaukee VA, with the help of Public Affairs, has taken the VA’s national campaign to a new level. Using the power of social media, a picture is posted every day on Facebook and Twitter of a person holding a sign with #thepowerof1 scribbled on top. The use of the symbol # makes it possible to take multiple messages from multiple users and group them together. Written underneath is the one thing that person believes could be done to make a difference for a Veteran in crisis. More than 22,000 people have been reached through social media with the message #thepowerof1 in the first two weeks of the campaign.

“The Power of 1” emphasizes taking the time to reach out to someone can be the first step to getting those who served the support they need. A single action of one call, one chat, one text, or one conversation can have a significant impact.

“Reaching out is perhaps the hardest thing a person can do, especially when they are in distress,” said Gage. “The Power of 1 emphasizes that we all have the power to help another person in distress by providing support.”

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, 22 Veterans commit suicide each day – or one every 65 minutes. Milwaukee VA has several programs for Veterans in crisis. The Veterans Crisis Line encourages Veterans to call 1-800-273-8255 and press 1 to talk with a VA mental health professional or text 838255 or chat at VeteransCrisisLine.net.

“If a Veteran is in crisis we encourage them to come directly to the hospital and seek help,” Gage said.

According to the Mental Health Suicide Prevention website, the line has answered more than 1.25 million calls since its inception in 2007 and made more than 39,000 lifesaving rescues. Since then, an anonymous online chat and text messaging service began to provide another outlet for Veterans to find help in a confidential way. More than 175,000 chats and 24,000 texts have been received by both services.

“Since the inception of the crisis line there has been an overall decrease rate of suicide for those Veterans who are enrolled in VA services, and the rate of suicide among Veterans aged 35 to 64 have decreased as well,” Gage said.

“There is still a lot of work to do; we need to continue to reach out to younger Veterans, to women Veterans and all Veterans to reach the goal to end suicide among our Veteran populations.”

It’s time.

Benjamin Slane, public affairs specialist at Milwaukee VA is perched high above the VA in a sky lift provided by Facility Maintenance. He directs the group, positioning each person in the correct spot. Employees are still coming out of the hospital wanting to be a part of the special picture. As they approach, Slane waves his hand, pointing to where people should stand. Finally, everyone in place. Thirteen of them are holding signs. They raise the signs high above their heads towards the sky, spelling out, #thepowerof1.

“All right, here we go. One ... Two ... Three!, ” Slane shouts down to the group. A series of flashes burst as the crowd yells “Cheese!” A quick glance at the picture and Slane gives the crowd the thumbs up. The picture turns out perfectly.

“Thank you,” shouts Slane from the top of the sky lift.

People start to flow back into the hospital talking with each other.

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“Thank you,” shouts Slane from the top of the sky lift.

People start to flow back into the hospital talking with each other.

“What a great idea,” said one employee.

The Power of 1. One chat, one text, one message, one conversation or … one photo.

#thepowerof1

Story by Antony Kamps
Photos by Benjamin Slane
Veterans play for fun, to heal

“We Duce” will perform at the 2014 National Creative Arts Festival in Milwaukee Nov. 2.

By Antony Kamps

After my wife passed away years ago, I put the guitar down, ” said McNatt. “He left for the Navy and I missed him so much I picked up his guitar and played because it made me feel closer to him.”

Like Ricks, a personal tragedy caused him to stop playing. Years went by and finally the Phoenix VA Recreation Therapy staff convinced McNatt to join the Guitars for Vets program.

“I was an introvert, I never left my house,” said McNatt. “I am so glad they pushed me to join that program. The class got me through and made me leave the introvert lifestyle behind.”

Both McNatt and Ricks are now instructors for Guitars for Vets, and McNatt is the event coordinator for the program. They play at local fundraisers for Veterans to help raise money for homeless Veterans.

“I love the music in my heart,” said McNatt. “I need to let it out to help heal the wounds of other Veterans like it healed mine.”

As an infant, Ricks’ grandfather said he would be famous. Little did Ricks know it would be for playing the flute.

“For as long as God gives me oxygen I’ll keep playing,” said Ricks. Then they turn back to their music, filling the halls with their unique music once again.

For more information on how to get free tickets to the NVCAF, call 414-389-4099. Tickets are limited.

Years went by and Ricks continued to play the flute, but never the guitar. He decided one day it was wrong for him to stop playing the guitar, but it was difficult picking up where he left off.

“When you stop doing it for so long you kind of lose the ability,” Ricks said.

He went to a Guitar for Vets class and that’s where he met McNatt.

“I started playing the guitar at a young age, mainly because my older brother played,” said McNatt. “He left for the Navy and I missed him so much I picked up his guitar and played because it made me feel closer to him.”

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“Vets Club” keeps older Veterans active

Daily activity groups keep energy high, and Veterans engaged

By Antony Kamps

“Any concern I have they figure out and make me understand it, and make me feel OK about it.”

He said the Vets Club has changed his outlook on life.

“I used to be a pessimistic person, now I’m upbeat, happy and positive,” said Bavers. “I’m a different person.”

For more information on the Vets Club, contact Cathi Lapp, registered nurse at Milwaukee VA, 414-384-2000, ext. 42063.
Milwaukee VA welcomes home Veterans

By Antony Kamps
Editor

The Milwaukee VA invited Veterans of all eras to come together for fun and food July 22 on the banks of Lake Wheeler. The "Welcome Home" event started in 2007 as a way to show support to troops returning home from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, and has expanded to all Veterans.

"It's the VA's way of saying 'thank you' to the soldiers for serving," said Powell. Milwaukee VA Transition Patient Advocate Delon Powell, who is also an Army Veteran.

Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn Team from left to right: Al Hanley, Erin Bullock, Jennifer Kiefer, Kelly Pearce, Darcie Greuel, Leikiesha Williams, Delon Powell, Scott Ottesen

Two Milwaukee VA employees who died from illnesses earlier this summer were remembered by friends and coworkers as friendly and dedicated to serving Veterans.

Bertha Sharbutt, local American Federation of Government Employees president, died Aug. 24. Roberta Sharbutt, a registered nurse who was a performance improvement coordinator, died June 3. Beth Miller, a registered nurse who worked as the AFGE vice president, died June 3. Beth Miller, a registered nurse who was a performance improvement coordinator, died Aug. 24.

Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn Team from left to right: Al Hanley, Erin Bullock, Jennifer Kiefer, Kelly Pearce, Darcie Greuel, Leikiesha Williams, Delon Powell, Scott Ottesen

Milwaukee VA bids farewell to 2 dedicated and friendly employees

By Gary J. Kunich
Public Affairs Officer

"Two Milwaukee VA employees who died from illnesses earlier this summer were remembered by friends and coworkers as friendly and dedicated to serving Veterans."

Vivian Hendershot, Army Veteran deployed to Iraq in 2006, said it isn't a fancy meal, but it's still appreciated. "It's a huge morale booster to honor Veterans with these events. I think it's a bigger benefit for older Veterans. They're more attached to VA than younger Veterans, like me."

Vivian Hendershot

The team of social workers made their way around the pavilion thanking the Veterans for coming. The Veterans seemed to be more engrossed in trading stories than talking with them. Powell, who is also an Army Veteran, said that is what makes this event special.

"This is a chance for Veterans of all eras to come together and form a closer bond," said Powell. "Enjoy music, some food and get to know one another."
Thank you letter to Milwaukee VA from Ryan Pitts, Medal of Honor recipient

A few days after Ryan Pitts visited the Milwaukee VA, he sent a letter thanking the staff. Pitts met dozens of Veterans inside the Matzouk and through out the hospital. His visit also included meeting Veterans who were unable to make it down to the auditorium. You can see a copy of the letter below. It reads as follows:

To the staff of the Clement J. Zablocki VA Medical Center,

Thank you for the hospitality during my recent visit.

It was an honor to meet the Veterans, past and present, who served our country.

Thank you to the staff who serve those who served. It was great to see the incredible care given to Veterans.

Keep up the good work!

Very Respectfully,
Ryan Pitts

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Medal of Honor recipient visits Milwaukee VA

By Gary J. Kunich
Public Affairs Officer

With military precision, the caravan of three vehicles pulled into the East Entrance parking lot Aug. 6 at 8:55 a.m. sharp. The side door of the black minivan slid open and out stepped one of America’s newest heroes.

“Hi, I’m Ryan!” he said with his arm extended and a relaxed grin on his face.

Dressed in a dark blue pinstripe suit, the one thing that set him apart was the blue neck decoration with 13 white stars — those who put themselves in harm’s way to protect us.

Pitts earned his medal for actions he took in Afghanistan.

Despite holding the highest military medal, Pitts eschewed any pomp and circumstance and instead was quick with a smile to put everyone at ease around him.

“I really believe in the mission of the VA, and what you guys are doing,” he said. “You have one of the most important jobs in the world — taking care of our Veterans. It’s a very noble profession, and I’m here to thank you.”

He backed that up as he walked down the hall, shaking hands and posing for photos, each time with a disarming smile, as he thanked those around him for their service.

Pitts earned his medal for actions he took July 21, 2008, while serving at an outpost in Afghanistan that was nearly overrun before the sun came up by more than 200 insurgents. Despite serious wounds to his arm and both legs, but with incredible toughness and resolve, he subsequently took control of the observation post and returned fire on the enemy. As the enemy drew nearer, Sergeant Pitts threw grenades, holding them after the pin was pulled and the safety lever was released to allow a near-immediate detonation on the hostile forces.

Unable to stand on his own and near death because of the severity of his wounds and blood loss, Sergeant Pitts continued to lay suppressive fire until a two-man reinforcement team arrived. Sergeant Pitts quickly assisted them by using his main weapon and throwing ammunition all while continually lobbing fragmentary grenades until these were expended.

At this point, Sergeant Pitts crawled to the northern position radio and described the situation to the command post as the enemy continued to try and isolate the observation post from the Main Patrol Base.

With the enemy close enough for him to hear their voices and with total disregard for his own life, Sergeant Pitts whispered in radio situation reports and conveyed information that the Command Post used to provide indirect fire support.

Sergeant Pitts’ courage, steadfast commitment to the defense of his unit and ability to fight while seriously wounded prevented the enemy from overrunning the observation post and capturing fallen American soldiers, and ultimately prevented the enemy from gaining fortified positions on higher ground from which to attack Wanat Vehicle Patrol Base.

Sergeant Ryan M. Pitts distinguished himself by extraordinary acts of heroism at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a Forward Observer in 2nd Platoon, Chosen Company, 2nd Battalion (Airborne), 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade, during combat operations against an armed enemy at Vehicle Patrol Base Kahler vicinity of Wanat Village, Kunar Province, Afghanistan, on July 13, 2008.

Early that morning, while Sergeant Pitts was providing perimeter security at Observation Post Topside, a well-organized Anti-Afghan Force consisting of over 200 members initiated a close proximity sustained and complex assault using accurate and intense rocket-propelled grenade, machine gun and small arms fire on Wanat Vehicle Patrol Base. An immediate wave of rocket-propelled grenade rounds engulfed the Observation Post wounding Sergeant Pitts and inflicting heavy casualties.

Sergeant Pitts had been knocked to the ground and was hit heavily from shrapnel wounds to his arm and legs, but with incredible toughness and resolve, he subsequently took control of the observation post and returned fire on the enemy. As the enemy drew nearer, Sergeant Pitts threw grenades, holding them after the pin was pulled and the safety lever was released to allow a near-immediate detonation on the hostile forces.

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Sergeant Ryan M. Pitts’ extraordinary heroism and selflessness above and beyond the call of duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, Company C, 2nd Battalion (Airborne), 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade and the United States Army.
In Service

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

45 Years
Mary Kogelmann

40 Years
Barbara Gilbert
Irene Hawkinson
Linda Longpre
Michael Rose
Thomas Woo
Warren White

35 Years
Corrine Chyla
Diane Brazale
Jean Cook
Linda Bednarek
Lorri Rogers

30 Years
Dean Temlitz
Karen Sakar
Lynn Nuccio
Sandy Bohlmann

25 Years
Arlene Kasten
Cora Webster
Gary Kunich
Michelle Jones
Michelle Singer

20 Years
Pamela Scholl
Randi Gilman
Suzi Bloedel
Timothy Jantz
Yolanda Osborne

15 Years
Bruce Bacon
Calvin Srock
Carol Steberl
Catherine Hida
Cheri Stuttley
Diane Dixon
Jason Derousseau
Linda Shaw
Martin Manser
Mary Vanderven
Michael Young
Nicholas Herrmann
Pa Her Thor
Sandra Jorgenson
Tasleem Raza
Vanessa Ealy

10 Years
Ann Parris
Anthony Brinza
Brian Greenawalt
Cathrine Giannese
Dawn Vorpahl
Drew Dewitt
Elizabeth Ebner
Jade Parisey
James Weltzien
Janice Golembiewski
Joseph Glowacki
Julie Kronenburg
Karen McClory
Karol Resczynski
Kelly Wimmer
Kimberly Bender
Laura Ramerez
Melvin Schiro
Melvin Smith
Michael Schiro
Michael Orwig
Nancy Brunette
Padma Reddi
Pontus Ostman
Randy Spahos
Robert Sthokal
Shiloh Ramos
Tricia Sands

Employee of the Month

July 2014
Christa Holland
Rehabilitation, Extended and Community Care, lead program support assistant
What does this award mean to you?:
“I am very humbled as well as honored to be the recipient of this award. My gratitude for the support and encouragement I have been shown is tremendous.”

Photo by Amanda Urrea

August 2014
Brett Lieungh
Primary Care, medical support assistant
What does this award mean to you?:
“I have been a patient of this Medical Center for the last 26 years. In those years I have been treated with respect and given outstanding medical care. This award means I am giving back to those who have served our country. For that I am very grateful.”

Photo by Amanda Urrea

VA VOICES

Winter is coming ...

Hiram Miller, health systems specialist: “Planning on doing some skiing and ice fishing. And drink a little to stay warm — hot cocoa, of course.”

Carol Jackson, medical support assistant: “Going to have some fun making snowmen with my grandkids.”

Ned Stark, Lord of the North: “Brace yourselves.”

Melissa Mbida, medical support assistant: “Reminds me, I need to get new tires for my truck.”

Delon Powell, transition patient advocate: “Looking forward to the holidays. I’m going to watch ‘Game of Thrones’ and ‘Boardwalk Empire.’”