Letter from the editor

Welcome to the newest version of our monthly newsletter. We’ve made some changes, and hopefully you enjoy the new layout. We wanted to grab your attention right away, which is why we went with a full-sized picture on the front page.

We also wanted to make the newsletter easier to navigate, so we added a table of contents. It has a different feel, and we did it for you — the reader.

You may be an employee, Veteran, or just a member of the community but no matter what, this publication is all about you. We want to tell your story. I am constantly amazed while walking the hallways of all the great stories I come across.

Whether it be a story about an employee who tries to keep a smile on a Veteran’s face while dealing with serious issues (page 10), a volunteer looking to make a difference (page 6), or the building of a brand new facility to meet the needs of a Veteran’s family (page 5).

These are your stories.
These are the stories of the Milwaukee VA.

Sincerely,

Antony Kamps
Editor

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

Cover

The Fisher House groundbreaking on the Milwaukee VA grounds took place June 3. The Fisher House Foundation is best known for a network of comfort homes where military and Veterans’ families can stay at no cost while a loved one is receiving treatment. It offers a “home away from home” for families, and is built through donations and the foundation. — Photo by Benjamin Slane
Milwaukee VA breaks ground for Fisher House

By Antony Kamps
Editor

A groundbreaking ceremony for the Fisher House featured local politicians and Veterans June 3 at the Milwaukee VA.

In just about a year, the 6,600 Fisher House will open on the Milwaukee VA campus. The Fisher House Foundation is best known for providing free lodging to families of military and Veterans receiving medical treatment at a local facility.

The ceremony began with the recital of the Pledge of Allegiance by Vietnam Veteran and Medal of Honor recipient, Gary Wetzel, the crowd quickly followed with the National Anthem.

Will Johnson, program manager of Equal Employment Opportunity of the Milwaukee VA, sang about the hallowed grounds and to see an American flag

The home will allow families to be with their loved ones while recovering from injuries sustained on the battlefield of war.

Once again to be here on these hallowed grounds and to see an institution that has served our Veterans since the Civil War, step up one more time to make sure we take care of our Veterans better than anyone else in the United States America,” said Congresswoman Gwen Moore.

The intensity of the ceremony was eased when Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker lightened the mood by calling out local beer producer Dan Leinenkugel, referencing one of their more popular beers along with the beautiful weather.

“I saw a lot of friends here but I am going to single one out, Dan (Leinenkugel), I think he likes a summer shandy day doesn’t it?” Walker’s tone turned serious when he spoke about the immense pressure families feel when having to cope with the injury, and subsequent rehabilitation of a Veteran family member.

“For military personnel and their families there is a tremendous strain, alone, when a son or daughter, husband or wife, nephew or niece comes back from combat and is injured. There is enough strain just dealing with that, but even more so if they’re far removed from home,” said Walker. “We now have a place in this region, in this state, that provides that kind of (comfort), care and service, more importantly that kind of love. That is something to be proud of.”

He closed the speech with how we honor the lives of our fallen heroes.

“Each and every day this Fisher House

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See Fisher House

Fisher House

Continued from Page 4

has its doors open we will continue to show that we honor those lives who paid the ultimate sacrifice by ensuring those who live continue to get the dignity, respect and the honor and increasing the love they deserve.”

The final speaker was Fisher House CEO and President Ken Fisher. He started by acknowledged the hard work Buttery has done with the Fisher House project in Wisconsin.

“My job might be in a little bit of trouble, as CEO of Fisher House with Dan Buttery.”

He played to the crowd, as any good speaker would, and told the audience of his plans to change his fan affiliation.

“I am now a full-time Brewers fan, the Yankees don’t exist anymore.”

A loud thunderous ovation came from the crowd in approval of their newfound fan teammate. Fisher paused for a moment and started to backpedal from the statement in jest.

“Although …” Fisher informed the crowd of his opportunity later that night to throw the ceremonial first pitch at the Milwaukee Brewers game.

“He punched me in the arm and said, ‘If you bounce (the ball), don’t come home.”

The laugh from the crowd drew a smile from Fisher.

Fisher talked about how the Fisher House has saved families more than $230 million in travel costs since its inception. He shocked the crowd with news of something no other Fisher House project has done.

“Without hesitation I can tell you this has really never happened before,” Fisher said. “The amount of money that has been raised here has enabled the foundation to actually match dollar for dollar on a $50/50 basis, and that has never been done before, that includes bigger cities than Milwaukee.”

The crowd clapped and cheered with the revelation of this unprecedented news.

Fisher ended by addressing the current issues VA has faced in recent months.

“We’ve all heard some negative stories in the past few months, but we’re at a crossroads right now, I think it’s time for the American people to stop looking at what’s wrong and what doesn’t work, and let’s instead have a new attitude, let’s find out what works. We can never ever fall short in terms of treatment for our Veterans and their families. So we’re focused, we’re energized and it’s up to us as Americans to make sure that we stay that way.”

Governor Scott Walker (left) gives Fisher House President and CEO, Ken Fisher (right) tips on how to throw out the first pitch. Fisher House Wisconsin Chairman of the Board Dan Buttery (middle) is also pictured.

Fisher House by the numbers:

• Families served: More than 22,000 in 2013
• Daily capacity: 832 families
• Families served: More than 220,000 since inception
• Number of lodging days offered: Over 5.2 million
• 7,000 students have received $11 million in scholarship awards
• Over 46,000 airline tickets provided by Hero Miles to service members and their families, worth nearly $73 million

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Retiree thought about Veterans when he made the decision to volunteer

By Benjamin Slane
Staff writer

Volunteering for David Miller is out of the norm for him. As a self-proclaimed introvert, being around people is just not his style.

Miller volunteers at the Green Bay VA Outpatient Clinic more than 30 hours per week. He looked for ways to occupy his time after retiring from the information technology field. The 65-year-old retiree decided to volunteer at VA.

“I tried to figure out how to help Veterans,” Miller said, “I called Milwaukee to help with claims, even Minneapolis, something, anything to help, even just to do data entry.”

A friend told him about a new VA clinic opening August 2013 in Green Bay. He started volunteering soon after it opened.

“The interaction there is pretty nice,” Miller said.

Most of his time is spent in the Veteran Canteen Service retail store. Lisa Bricker, canteen chief, said Miller has taken his role in the clinic with enthusiasm and pride, an asset to the entire clinic.

“Dave is very dedicated to making our Veterans comfortable in the canteen,” Bricker said. “He is very passionate about his role in making our canteen successful. (He) always has an idea on how to make improvements.”

Miller attributes his retail knowledge to the time he spent in Alaska working in gift shops at Denali National Park.

“I have been doing this all my life, in various ways, helping people,” Miller said. “It’s what I do.”

Interested in volunteering? Contact the Voluntary Service in Milwaukee at 414-384-2000, ext. 41803 or in Green Bay at 920-431-2639.

Chicago VA brings in more than $2,800 in donations at VA2K Walk

By Antony Kamps
Editor

More than 400 VA employees, Veterans, and community members raised over $2,800 in toiletry donations for homeless Veterans at the Fourth Annual VA2K Walk May 21. The VA2K Walk is a nationwide event that takes place at all VA facilities on the same day each year. The walk encourages people to step up their fitness level and support homeless Veterans with donated items. Participants at the Milwaukee VA dropped off their donations before taking two laps around Lake Wheeler.

The donations made at the Milwaukee VA went to Viet’s Place Central, located in Milwaukee. The community based outpatient clinics in Green Bay, Appleton, Cleveland, and Union Grove sent their donations to a local veteran organization of their choice.

Debra Stempinski, nurse practitioner and head of the local VA2K walk committee, said she was very pleased with the turnout and amount of donations.

“We could not have asked for a better weather day. It’s so nice to see employees and Veterans from our clinics, regional office and Milwaukee VA support homeless Veterans,” Stempinski said.

Kayleen Wiclinski, dietitian and VA2K walk committee member, said it’s important for VA to encourage employees and Veterans to increase their exercise routines.

“The benefits of employee wellness are incredible and beyond number,” Wiclinski. “Benefits accrue from decreased sick leave, decreased turnover and increased productivity. For Veterans it can lead to improved self-esteem, stress management and creativity after a walk.”

For more information on VA weight management and exercise programs go to move.va.gov or call, Kristen Bertram, coordinator for MOVE! Weight Management Program, at 414-384-2000, ext. 44505.

Interested in volunteering? Contact the Voluntary Service in Milwaukee at 414-384-2000, ext. 41803 or in Green Bay at 920-431-2639.
National Creative Arts brings healing and hope

While some performers and artists compete in the local and national creative arts festival just for the love of their crafts, others use it as therapy for post-traumatic stress, substance abuse or other traumas.

Thousands start out at the local festival level and only about 150 make it to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, which will be held this year Oct. 27 to Nov. 2 in downtown Milwaukee.

Veterans began competing at their local VA medical centers in February and March. Top finishers in each category moved forward.

Everywhere at the festival, Veterans tell compelling stories about how performing and artwork saved them. C.J. Lockwood, an Army Veteran from Muskogee, Okla., at last year’s festival said it saved his life. After slipping into a deep depression, the songwriter and performer decided to commit suicide.

But when he won for the first time in 2008, everything changed.

“I made it up in my mind that this was the end. I had a gun and the place picked out…I really thought the whole festival was just going to be some fly-by-night operation to appease the Veterans. I was so wrong. The people running the event, they treated me like I was somebody important.

“By the end of the week, I wrote my first song in two years. It was just kind of a jumpstart.”

Lockwood said he tries to come back to each festival now to encourage others.

Brenda Bushera, a Wisconsin Army National Guard Veteran, made her way to the national festival last year by way of the Central Texas Veterans Healthcare System in Temple, Texas.

She received treatment there for mental health and alcoholism.

Bushera, a professionally trained opera singer, played saxophone and performed in Army bands during her military career. During a 10-month Iraq deployment she traveled around the country to entertain and provide a piece of home.

“We did gigs in the sand all over the place, especially remote bases where soldiers didn’t have anything else. We sang Pink, Kid Rock, Green Day, Katy Perry, and other stuff like that.”

She and her bandmates also played “Taps” for military funerals and the National Anthem during military ceremonies. She brought the war home with her and turned to the VA.

“Music brought me back,” she said. Jeff McNeil from the Milwaukee VA echoed those statements. He said a life on the road as a truck driver led to bad habits he couldn’t shake.

“Eating, drugging,” he said. “Things about driving, semi, you aren’t accountable to anyone. It took me awhile to learn when I’m around the VA, I flourish.”

McNeil earned a solo spot in last year’s festival, as well as a closing number.

“I don’t want to blow this chance God gave me,” he said at the time. “I am so happy to be here, so excited I got the solo closing number. I told them, ‘If I was a dog, my tail would be wagging so hard, I’d be smacking everybody in the face. ‘

He has a chance again to make it this year, as one of the national finalists.

Milwaukee performing artists competing at the national level are:


Creative writing — Mary Novotny, John Buck, William Jackson-Burnett and Jeff Cameron

Drama — Joseph Knox, Melvin Ridgeman and David Rashinger

Dance — Edwin Olvera

National winners will be announced later in June. — By Gary J. Kunich, Public Affairs Officer
**Employee of the Month**

May 2014
Stephanie Culpepper
Rehabilitation Extended and Community Care, nursing assistant
Culpepper is a mother of two daughters, and has been a nursing assistant for 14 years. She’s not a veteran, but enjoys taking care of our nation’s heroes here at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center.

**What does this award mean to you?**
“I love the fact that I get the chance to serve my Vets and it feels good to be recognized for the work that we do here at the VA hospital. I really feel blessed. Thank you.”

**June Healthy Living Message**

**Be Safe.**
Wear seat belts in cars and helmets on motorcycles and bikes.

Don’t text message or talk on your cell phone while driving.

Sponsored by your Health Promotion/Disease Prevention Program.
In Service

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

35 years
Jodee Jackson
Lynnette Priebe
Kathleen Thoren

30 years
Philip Debruin

25 years
Mitchell Dolata
Michelle Piwowarczyk

20 years
Victor Brown
Anne Lutze Koth
James Melville
Jon Ohnesorge
Marlise Williams

Debra Wroblewski

15 years
Joseph Durkatz
Ronald Dusenberry
Gregg Hablewitz
Kyle Haile
Mary Lisiak
Dean Regazzi
Donna Thorpe-Love
Stephanie Wenzlick

10 years
Toni Agalar
Joseph Allen
Jacqueline Alomepe
J. G. Batie Mueller
Matthew Behrend
Jeane Borkowski
Tamara Brister
Susan Bubolz
Angela Craig
Steven Denson
Sandra Frinzi
Judy Lee
Susan Malak
Jenna McNally
Kimberle Orre
Stanley Rintelmann
Michael Sullivan
Timothy Sullivan
Krystle Thom
Lorraine Utech
Janice Watkins

PEOPLE

Dossier

Photo by Benjamin Slane

Hometown: Florida, city is classified.
Years of government service: 3
What Are Your Favorite Song(s)?
“Mr. Roboto” by Styx and “Intergallactic Planetary” by Beastie Boys.
What Are Your Favorite Movies?
“Terminator,” starring Arnold Schwarzenegger
Favorite Sports And Teams?
Basketball, San Antonio Spurs
What Are Your Hobbies?
Playing video games, mostly “Gears of War.”
What’s Your Favorite Food?
Do You Believe In Ghosts?
Not logical.
Who is your role model?
Cleatus, the Fox Sports robot.
Who Is Your Celebrity Crush?
Eva from “Wall-E,” or any of the “Stepford Wives.”
What is your biggest fear?
Decepticons.
Does your bologna have a first name, and if so, how’s it spelled?
Hate the stuff.
If a war broke out between man and robot, who would win?
Google.
What’s the best advice you were ever given?
Never trust a printer-fax-scanner machine hybrid aka the Ricoh.
What is your biggest pet peeve?
People standing in front of me.
If you won $20 million, what would you do with it?
Invest in Microsoft.
What is your worst habit?
Sometimes I smoke.
Do you know anyone famous?
Not to brag but I do hang out with C-3PO, R2-D2, and Number 5.
What’s your biggest achievement?
Becoming self-aware.
Motto You Live By: “Mankind is the worst danger for its own security.”
If you have a suggestion for a Dossier, call Tony Kamps at 414-384-2000, ext. 43895

VACOICES

Which Milwaukee summer festival are you most looking forward to attending?

Yvonne Mitchell-Phillips, patient services assistant: “State Fair. I just want to go and buy things, I love to shop.”

Keith Woyach, PIV coordinator: “Festa Italiana. It’s where have my family reunion every year, and you just can’t beat the food at Festa.”

Marcel Coleman, medical support assistant: “State Fair. The food and just the experience of walking around. And the corn is so good.”

Angela Niemi, medical support assistant: “State Fair. I go for the music mostly, and the food. I also enjoy people watching.”

 Jerl Johnson, PIV coordinator: “Summerfest. I’ve never been to any festival here in Milwaukee, but everyone talks about Summerfest. So, I’d love to check it out.”