5000 West

Clement J. Zablocki Medical Center

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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

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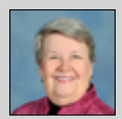

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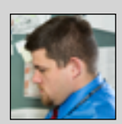

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Antony Kamps

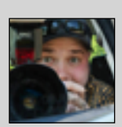

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Photo by Benjamin Slane

Ken Fisher (middle) is joined by other prominent Fisher House represenatatives and Milwaukee figures June 3 to make the ceremonial first dig at the groundbreaking ceremony.

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 65th 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 his lead.

Will Johnson, program manager of Equal Employment Opportunity at Milwaukee VA, sang the National Anthem. His deep, booming voice filled the air as the audience fell silent. Some Veterans saluted the flag as the U.S. Army Recruiting Battalion - Milwaukee posted the colors; others held their hand over their hearts. Before the echoes of Johnson's voice could be lost, Father Norm Oswald, chief of chaplains, began a prayer.

"To some, Lord, this might just be a place, but to those who come here at critical times of their lives this is a place of healing."

The Fisher House's importance to Veterans and their families cannot be measured in dollars and cents. Fisher House Wisconsin Chairman of the Board Dan Buttery talked about the hard work that went into the project.

"It takes a team of dedicated, loyal individuals. Logistics and support, everything that's all around that," Buttery said. "We're not done though. We have a lot more to do and once it's built Fisher House Wisconsin will continue to operate so we can offset the operating costs and make sure this home remains a beautiful home for those families that are staying here."

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) this feels like 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 let the crowd in on a conversation his oldest son, who is about to start his own collegiate baseball career, had with him before leaving New York for Milwaukee.

"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.

Photo by Benjamin Slane

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.

"What we do is critical. When you think about it and talk those men and women in uniform they will tell you they are not the only ones who served. Their families serve as well."

Fisher and the other speakers along with Milwaukee Brewers catcher Jonathan Lucroy, VISN 12 network director, Dr. Jeffrey Murawsky, Milwaukee VA medical center director Robert Beller, stepped over to the shovels. They sank the shovels deep into the mound of dirt and tossed it aside marking the official beginning to the building of the home.

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 what does work. 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."

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

Happy to help

Retiree thought about Veterans when he made the decision to volunteer

By Benjamin Slane
Staff writer

Photo by Benjamin Slane

David Miller enjoys the more than 30 hours he volunteers each week at the Green Bay VA Outpatient Clinic.

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 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.

Photo by Benjamin Slane

David Miller retired from the information technology field, and then came to VA to volunteer.

"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.

Volunteer Service director at the Green Bay Clinic, John Good, said Miller is one of the most dedicated volunteers.

"He is passionate about the quality of customer service that is delivered to our Veterans," Good said. "A true asset to VA and it is a privilege to have him as a volunteer."

At more than 30 hours a week, Miller says it's like a full-time job. Whether it is carrying a tray to a table or giving directions to a lost Veteran, Miller enjoys being involved. And as a bonus, he doesn't have to bring his work home with him.

"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.

Milwaukee 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 Vet'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 Wichlinski, 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," Wichlinski. "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.

Photos by Benjamin Slane

From top to bottom: Amy Thompto (right), dietitian, and Tracy Arnold, registered nurse, show enthusiasm while they walk around Lake Wheeler at the Milwaukee VA for the Fourth Annual VA2K Walk. Ed Lewis, nursing assistant, takes a break on his walk to hang out with American Eagle. Milwaukee VA employees are all smiles as they take take two laps around Lake Wheeler.

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.

Photo by Benjamin Slane

Art created by Veterans from all across the country will be on display when the National Creative Arts Festival comes to Milwaukee in October.

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.

The hundred or so stage show performers will rehearse morning and night before putting on a two-hour show at the end of the festival that is free to the public.

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. "Thing about driving semis, 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:

Music — McNeil, Rich Trueman, Robert Wojczak, Tom Weber, Steve Bavers, Karl Lott, East to West (made up of Weber, Gary Pochert, Pam Panniell and Kinthy Pourheydarian) and the Entertainers (made up of Panneill, Weber and Lott).

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

Drama — Joseph Knox, Melvin Ridgenal and David Rashleger

Dance — Edwin Olvera

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

Photo by Benjamin Slane

Jeffrey McNeil, a previous Creative Arts Festival winner, will once again compete on the national level when the National Creative Arts Festival comes to Milwaukee in October.

Career advancement made easy

Preparation for Career Advancement Series offers seminars for employees to help in four key areas of today's job market

Photo by Benjamin Slane

The Preparation for Career Advancement Series held in April gave employees the resources to expand their knowledge and profeciency in four key areas in today's job market including resume writing, the USA JOBS website, interviewing, and feedback.

By Antony Kamps
Editor

Everyone has a goal.

It may be to lose weight, finish school or to just become a better person. For some, the goal is to advance their career.

Milwaukee VA and the Black Employment Special Emphasis Program made that a reality in April with the Preparation for Career Advancement Series.

The Preparation for Career Advancement Series was a set of classes to teach employees how to overcome deficiencies in certain areas. The four subjects covered over a four-week timeframe included resume writing, the USA JOBS website, performance-based interviewing, and mock interviews.

"These four subjects are so relevant in today's job market," said Cynthia Hamilton, a program support assistant at the Milwaukee VA. "They are like the fingers on your hand, you need them. They all come together to get a grip on your next job opportunity."

Some anonymous feedback from attendees included:

- "The seminar really helped me to understand how the interview (process) works."
- "I would recommend this committee share (future) opportunities with employees to encourage stronger attendance."
- "I will remember all of the recommendations. Update my resume, correct a few grammatical errors, talk a little more about being part of a team, and the positive part of my job and its impact on the patients."

Hamilton hopes to continue to put on more seminars to help employees bridge the gap from the job they have to the job they want.

"The next series will be called, "Meet and Greet the VA Mentors," said Hamilton. "It will be for those who would like to move up but don't have the necessary skill set. We hope one-on-one support will be the key to that next move."

Hamilton said the goal is to have the next series within the next three months. The focus right now for her, and the Black Employment Special Emphasis Program, is the Diversity Fair July 28 to Aug. 1 in the Matousek Auditorium.

"Even in this environment, there are always those who are looking for answers on how to move up and do more, and be better," said Hamilton. "It is not limited to any culture, age or class of employee."

Most of the information covered in the seminar will be available July 31 during the fair.

For more information on Diversity Fair or the Black Employment Special Emphasis Program, call Hamilton at 414-384-2000, ext. 47129.

Find us on Facebook
facebook.com/MilwaukeeVA

Dietitan keeps it fun, while making serious point

By Antony Kamps
Editor

"Laughter is the best medicine." – Unknown

There are many ways to treat and talk to a patient. There are providers who are straight-shooters, telling it like it is without sugarcoating the news, good or bad. Then there are providers who like to take a softer approach.

No judgments are being passed on either side, as some people like a more friendly approach, while others prefer to be told the situation in cold, hard facts.

Amy Thompto, dietitian in the Gold Clinic, tries to use both sides when working with patients. Her smile is infectious, as she walks around the clinic people can't help but smile back. Her laugh is just as contagious as her smile. She doesn't take herself seriously, she keeps it light and fun. Not one to shy away from showing off her lyrical skills, Thompto can be heard spitting out a freestyle rap in the halls of the third floor.

She uses her fun personality, along with the facts as the best way to convey her point.

"I can see the services I provide making a difference in the veterans I work with on a consistent basis."

Thompto started with VA more than 12 years ago. Thompto saw a need for a dietitian in the clinic where Veterans with Lou Gherig's disease, also known as ALS, are treated. So, she created one in the clinic.

"I really enjoyed that a lot. When I saw the need I just knew something had to be done."

In 2012, she joined the National Nutrition and Food Service Patient Aligned Care Team sub-committee. Just like what she tells her patients, Thompto continues to be active as she expanded her role and became the chairperson of the NFS PACT Sub-Committee. Along with dietitians across the country, she is trying to create the new model for Primary Care. She had a presentation on the subject at a conference in Florida in June.

Photo by Antony Kamps

Amy Thompto (right) works with Nicolette Fuller, a Veteran, using a bioelectrical impedance device that measures a person's body fat percentage.

"It's an honor to be able to help other dietitians nationally. The big drive is to improve access to nutrition services."

Even with her busy schedule Thompto keeps her focus on her patients at the Milwaukee VA.

"Amy takes time to spend with me, and she never lets me leave her office until we've talked about everything I want to talk about," said Larry Hill.

Hill is a Vietnam Veteran diagnosed with diabetes. He receives his care at the Milwaukee VA, with Thompto as his dietitian.

"She's not just my dietitian," Hill stressed. "She goes beyond that, and gets involved on a whole new level. Amy helps me put together the right meals to deal with my diabetes. She's one of the people keeping me alive."

Hill looks forward to his meetings with Thompto.

"Amy keeps you smiling, because she enjoys her job. Her happiness is just electric, and when you leave her office you're happier than when you arrived."

Veterans, like Hill, are why Thompto works at VA.

"I enjoy serving those who served. I value their experiences; they all come from different backgrounds and experiences," said Thompto. "They make this job interesting every day, in a good way."

Dietitian services at VA usually come at little to no expense to the Veteran. This is something Thompto said could not be done at a hospital outside VA.

"I could never do what I do here at the VA on the outside at a private facility, because insurance just doesn't cover it."

Outside of work Thompto dabbles in music. She was a part of a rap group while attending Riverside University. She formed a group called the "Brew Crew." The group consisted of three rappers, a horn player, drummer, and a keyboardist. Thompto was one of the rappers.

"I was really good," Thompto said. "I'm the only one from the group without a career in music."

Instead of music, Thompto gets up every day and comes to the Milwaukee VA to help Veterans lead better lives through a healthy diet and exercise regimen. And she's happy with her choice.

"I get to talk about food all day. What could be better?"

For more information on dietitian services, ask your primary care provider.

Photo by Antony Kamps

Mary Brunn (left), acting associate director for patient and nursing services for the Milwaukee VA Medical Center, presents Rada Kaltenbach (right), a registered nurse in the Intensive Care Unit, a DAISY Award from VA on behalf of the DAISY Foundation. It was a special moment for Brunn, as she hired Kaltenbach.

Employee of the Month

Photo by Amanda Urrea

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."

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 Tharpe-Love
Stephanie Wenzlick

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

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 "Intergallatic 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?
Hydraulic fluid, circa 1987.

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

VA VOICES

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."