Hundreds of bikers descend on VA

Fisher House gets boost from bikers

Benjamin Slane
5000 West staff writer

More than 250 motorcycle riders descended on Wood National Cemetery in August as part of a ride to raise funds for Fisher House Wisconsin.

Medal of Honor recipient Gary Wetzel led the riders from Greendale High School to the lakefront and finally to the cemetery. The Fisher House Motorcycle Ride is an annual event is supporting the Fisher House. Service members who have died serving the U.S. were recognized with a gun salute, playing of “Taps,” and a wreath presentation by Wetzel and Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker.

Dan Buttery, Fisher House Wisconsin Board President, said it was a success.

“It was great in two areas, raising awareness and raising funds,” Buttery said. “The number of Veterans who joined us resulted in a powerful and meaningful day.”

Dr. Kenneth Lee, VA’s Spinal Cord Injury Center director and Purple Heart recipient, spoke about how Fisher House provided for his family during his spinal injury in 2004, when treated at Walter Reed Army Center in Washington, D.C.

“I was concerned about where my family would stay,” Lee said. “The hospital told me not to worry, my family was staying at the Fisher House.”

Lee also said this is not just a motorcycle ride that coincides with the Harley-Davidson anniversary. It’s a ride to raise awareness and help Veteran families in need.

Buttery said the most powerful moment was the short stop at the VA’s Wood National Cemetery.

“The playing of ‘Taps’, the silence, it just speaks to all those who served. It honors our Veterans, past and present.”

Photos by Benjamin Slane
Voluntary Service hands out Silver Bowl

Marilyn Reese shows her Silver Bowl at the Volunteer Award and Recognition Ceremony in September, as recognition of her over 10,000 hours of volunteer work at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center.

BY ANTONY KAMPS
5000 West staff writer

It is not often you run across people who make an impression which lasts a lifetime. Marilyn Reese is one of those rare individuals, and after 25 years of volunteering she was honored at the Volunteer Award and Recognition Ceremony with the Silver Bowl, in recognition of the 10,000-plus hours she has worked at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center.

“She started here nearly three decades ago. Marilyn is just a wonderful person,” said Mary Jo Jankovich, voluntary service specialist at the Milwaukee VA.

Trying to coax a memory out of Jankovich about Reese was difficult. Not because she didn’t have any to tell, but because she had so many to tell it was too hard to pinpoint just one story which would best describe the good Reese has done.

“She is just another one of our tremendous volunteers who never hesitates to help someone else,” said Jankovich.

Reese is not a Veteran, but she is married to one. Her husband was in the Navy as a gunner’s mate during World War II. One day a friend told Reese she should come into the VA and volunteer, saying she would enjoy it.

“Then I just got to know everybody and kept coming in,” said Reese with a chuckle.

Her volunteer work began in Milwaukee on the ninth floor. She would come in working with Veterans and she brought along a good friend.

“That was with my Daisy, my Cocker Spaniel,” said Reese, explaining how she and Daisy participated in dog therapy treatment. She even remembered one Veteran in particular, who was bedridden and very fragile, where Daisy made a significant impact.

“I was afraid the dog would hurt her because she was very fragile,” said Reese.

“But she loved Daisy and I would put her right in bed with her.”

These are the moments Reese remembers, because those are the ones where she made a difference. Every volunteer walking into the Milwaukee VA Medical Center is here to help, trying to bring some happiness and joy in the lives of the patients here.

“I’ve always enjoyed my volunteer work,” said Reese. “It’s very important to the men (and women) to go up and visit and take care of them. Give them things that they need.

“I used to work 7 a.m. to noon, but I’m lazy now and start at 8 a.m.,” said Reese with a smile.

In the end what is stopping Reese from continuing her volunteer work is Wisconsin’s winter enemy -- snow. She and her husband are older now and rely on others to clear their driveway and sidewalks when it snows. Her retirement is not exactly a retirement as her volunteer work will continue; she is only decreasing from a “regular” to an “occasional” volunteer.

Voluntary Service Program Manager Denise Jashinsky planned a surprise party on Sept. 25 for Reese celebrating her years as a volunteer. When Reese entered the room she was taken aback by all the love and support her fellow volunteers showered

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See Reese

Robert Beller
Medical Center Director

Chief editor — Gary J. Kunich
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Staff writer — Antony Kamps
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New Green Bay Clinic Opens

Facility to ramp up service to thousands of Veterans

BY BENJAMIN SLANE
5000 West staff writer

The Milo C. Huempfner VA Outpatient Clinic hosted more than 900 people for the clinic’s ribbon cutting ceremony in August.

A Veteran salutes the U.S. flag as the national anthem is played.

Hundreds of Veterans from the area showed up for the ceremony and tour of the new facility. Vietnam Medal of Honor recipient Gary Wetzel, Milo C. Huempfner’s VFW post, three Native-American tribes, the Military Order of the Purple Heart and Sen. Tammy Baldwin were among the few to participate in the ceremony.

The 161,000 square foot facility, two years in the making, will eventually serve up to 20,000 outpatient Veterans in future years.

“It is our honor to serve the vets,” said Milwaukee VA Medical Center Director Robert Beller during the ceremony. “Time to turn a page and start a new chapter.”

Within the next year the facility is expected to service more than 6,000 Veterans as the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan begin.

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See Green Bay

DAISY Award shines spotlight on top VA nurses

BY BENJAMIN SLANE
5000 West staff writer

Six Milwaukee VA nurses have received the prestigious DAISY award since it debuted at our medical center in December 2012.

DAISY, an acronym for Disease Attacking the Immune System, was created in 1999 to honor the exceptional nursing care provided to J. Patrick Barnes who died of an auto-immune disease. In Barnes’ memory, the family wanted to give thanks to the nursing staff who cared for him.

Beth Hammer, a nurse practitioner and program manager for nursing excellence, heads the award selection process.

“Some of the stories on these forms are really moving,” Hammer said.

Sometimes she has to take a breather from stories tugging her heart strings.

Awardees are nominated by anyone - family, friends and coworkers. At the Milwaukee VA, all nursing staff can be nominated. The nominations are reviewed by a DAISY spokesperson and evaluated considering the VA’s ICARE core values; integrity, commitment, advocacy, respect and excellence. Once a nominee is qualified, the winner’s name is kept secret.

“All I was told was meet in the break room and Mr. (Robert) Beller (Medical Center director), would be there,” said Sandy Luebke, a licensed practical nurse in Oncology at the Milwaukee VA.

“Then I get there and see it is the DAISY Award, but I didn’t know who it was for.”

Recipients of the award receive a DAISY banner, DAISY lapel pin, nomination pin, gift certificate, a hand-carved wood sculpture made by a tribe in Zimbabwe and a box of Cinnabons®.

“I’ve lost over 70 pounds by cutting out the carbs, but for this I will eat a Cinnabon,” said Luebke.

To read DAISY Award winners stories, go to page 10
Re-Creation brings song, dance show to Milwaukee VA

BY BENJAMIN SLANE
5000 West staff writer

From grooving golden oldies to disco and even current country, the Re-Creation performers played it all during an hour-long, high-energy performance, June 3 at the Milwaukee VA.

The traveling dance and song troupe hit the stage in Room 3435. This free event was open to Veterans and all those in the community.

“They are always really good,” said recreation therapist Sara LeClaire. “They are great. It’s like New York caliber.”

This year’s show, entitled “American Gold,” set the stage for great American music including a salute to the Armed Forces, with service song for each branch. The group took the stage singing golden oldies, big band, hits from the 50’s, 60’s and 70’s, classic country, Motown and pop.

LeClaire interacts with Veterans daily and believes in providing a good quality of life for vets.

Re-Creation is sponsored by several groups that make the show possible, including Bowlers to Veterans, which has raised nearly $40 million over the last 70 years, and the Elks National Veterans Service Commission, which provides housing and meals for the Re-Creation performers.

“I’ve been doing this for 15 years,” said Elks member Patrick Moore. “The vets have always enjoyed the show and are a dedicated group.”

Last year, Re-Creation performed in Union Grove and then at the Milwaukee VA.

Re-Creation has been performing for Veterans since 1983 and has helped raise money to keep the show alive. They perform more than 320 shows annually in all 50 states to give thanks to all our Veterans.

The event provides a therapeutic value to the morale and welfare of Veterans.

Center gets new emergency beacons

BY BENJAMIN SLANE
5000 West staff writer

New emergency poles have popped up around the Milwaukee VA Medical Center.

The poles serve multiple purposes including calling 911 and Public Service Announcements for emergencies.

The poles are similar to setups at UW-Milwaukee or Marquette. The tall blue poles, with constantly lit blue light bulbs, make them easy to spot both day and night.

“I think the poles like this will be good,” Army Veteran Joe Pospichal said.

Pospichal works for Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and travels across the VA campus daily to work on the Hank Aaron Trail.

A 911 call goes directly to the VA police, giving the location of the emergency. The VA police can monitor the cameras, which are mounted on the pole.

“These are wonderful, perfect things,” Capt. Martin Runge of the VA police said. “It is out there for the visitors and employees.”

Runge said the VA grounds are generally quiet. The poles are encouraged to be used for any number of emergencies, including medical.

When Wisconsin weather takes a turn for the worse or the public needs to be notified of an emergency, the poles will inform all within hearing range a prerecorded message urging people to listen and react.

Photo by Benjamin Slane
Families say goodbye, again

BY BENJAMIN SLANE
5000 West staff writer

Families of fallen service members gathered on Aug. 18 to say another goodbye, this time with a message in a balloon. Wisconsin families attended the memorial at Wood National Cemetery, to honor loved ones killed in action. They released more than 400 balloons with a message for the dead.

The Patriot Guard riders escorted families from Lake Wheeler to the cemetery. “We are their protectors,” said the rider.

Kathryn Castner led the walk on foot, behind the riders.

It was a day of remembrance for Castner. Her son, 27-year-old Army National Guard Cpl. Stephen Castner, was killed in action after a roadside bomb exploded while convoying in Iraq. “My son was buried here,” Castner said. “It’s a very special day.”

Just about every time Castner is on the VA grounds she visits him. Today, she visited site to release a balloon in his honor.

Castner wears the army patrol cap her son once wore.

“I broke down when I released the balloon,” Kathryn said. “It never gets easier.”

There were more than 400 balloons released from the Wood National Cemetery, each with a message for a fallen hero, lost in the wars of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Judith Singer, of Wauwatosa, founded the group Being There-Reaching Out after meeting a woman widowed by the war in Iraq. At first it was just a gathering of widows of fallen service members. The group’s mission is to provide emotional, physical and economical support during the healing process of losing a loved one.

“What about the fathers, sisters, brothers and kids?” Singer said.

In previous years, family members would carry flags with the names of the fallen service members on each flag.

Singer said the event helps connect other families with the same loss. In Wisconsin some families who were part of Being There-Reaching Out have started new initiatives to honor their dead.

Singer makes clear although the event is for families of those who lost loved ones in the U.S. wars since 2001, it is open to all families who have lost a loved one as a result of war. Her first love is on the Wall in Washington D.C., killed in a helicopter crash.

Five families, who had a family member killed in action were also given U.S. flags once flown over the Capitol building in Washington, D.C.
Reese

Continued from Page 2

upon her. Jashinsky presented her with flowers, and Bonnie Jakubczyk, American Legion hospital representative, presented her with a plaque and attendance certificate.

The moment started to consume a teary-eyed Reese. “I told you guys not to make me cry,” she said.

Jashinsky, who herself announced her retirement at the Volunteer Award and Recognition Ceremony the day prior, summed it up best: “Marilyn you are a wonderful person and you will be truly missed here.”

In the end, awards and recognition are not why Reese gave close to three decades as a volunteer. It was the interaction with the Veterans, those little moments she was able to make a difference for them in the time they spent at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center. When asked what she will miss the most about not being a regular volunteer she didn’t even hesitate with her answer:

“All of the volunteers, because these are the people I see every day.

“It’s very rewarding and you meet so many nice people,” said Reese. “I don’t know, I hope I brought smiles to a lot of people’s faces, Veterans you know. If you can get them to smile, laugh or joke with you, it’s all worth it.”

Green Bay

Continued from Page 3

to wind down.

Katie Zuberbier and mother, Robin Sterletske of Brillon, Wis., toured the clinic.

“It looks like such a great facility,” Zuberbier said. The mother and daughter duo both married Marines, one an Iraq conflict Veteran and said the facility would be beneficial.

U.S. Army reservists, from Manitowoc, Christine and Josh Perkin also toured the facility.

“It’s just amazing,” said Christine Perkin.

Josh Perkins said the grandness of the clinic was hard to explain.

“This is really good for the Veterans, the hospital and the VA,” said Perkins.

The clinic is located at 2851 University Avenue in Green Bay.

For more information or clinic services, please call 920-431-2500.

DAV updates logo design

BY BENJAMIN SLANE
5000 West staff writer

The Disabled American Veterans organization has implemented a new logo and color changes after a proposal at its 2012 national convention.

Patty Davis, DAV transport coordinator at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center, said it provides an updated look.

“Marilyn you are a wonderful person and you will be truly missed here.”

Distinguished guests and VA officials turned out for the Aug. 15 ribbon cutting. From left to right, Tim Deacy, clinic administrator; Jacki Schneider and Wayne Huempfner, daughter and son of Milo C. Huempfner; Senator Tammy Baldwin, VA Under Secretary for Health Dr. Robert Petzel; Jeri Huempfner-Gatz, also a daughter; Dr. Jeffrey Murawsky, VISN 12 director, and Green Bay Mayor James Schmitt.

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For more on the Milwaukee VA’s shuttle service visit page 11.
Veterans snag day on the water

BY BENJAMIN SLANE
5000 West staff writer

Veterans from around the area took to the waters of Lake Michigan in June for a full day of events. Local fishing captains volunteered vessels to accommodate about 80 Veterans on 36 boats.

The weather was sunny and clear as the day started out at the Port Washington Marina with a gathering of volunteers from the American Legion - Andrew Van Ells Post, in Port Washington.

As vets showed up to fish they were reeled in by captains and crew to hit the waters.

We jumped on board a vessel with ‘We’re Done Sport Fishing’ charter, out of Port Washington.

In all, four Veterans boarded the boat; Ed Menal, John Zielke, Alan Rhodes, Harold Hack.

This was South Dakota native Rhodes first time seeing Lake Michigan.

About two miles out from shore, Captain Dan Champeau orders his volunteer crew, made up of his grandkids, to set up 15 rods.

Jessica Ross, a twenty-year old UW college student, normally is a hired hand on We’re Done, but today she is helping out.

“This is a good thing for the vets,” Ross says as she hands out plastic swatters to combat the swarm of flies. “I’ve never really thought about what it means to them, but as I get older, it is obvious.”

Two hours in we still haven’t caught anything when out of the blue, Captain Champeau yells “fish”. Everyone springs up, and Zielke makes the first catch. He reels in the fish for what feels like “forever,” his catch is a 7-pound salmon.

Rhodes, ends up catching a lake trout weighing 4.25 pounds, taking third place for largest lake trout caught.

Returning to the marina about noon, where the vets got photos taken with the day’s catch and then headed to the American Legion Post for a salmon lunch.

The Veterans caught a total of about 600 pounds of fish. Port Washington’s Ewig Bros Fish Company donated services to clean and smoke the fish before delivery to the VA, where it was enjoyed within the week.

It was a great day for fishing for Captain Champeau, even though the boat caught only two fish.

“It’s a great thing we have here,” says Champeau. “This is good for our vets.”
In and Around the VA
A lot goes on inside and outside the Milwaukee VA with our Veterans and employees. Here’s a brief look at some of the significant happenings over the last few months. The Milwaukee VA Medical Center received new Stars and Stripes (above) earlier this year. The new U.S. flag replaced a weathered, two-year-old flag and weighs about 50 pounds. It took the Poblocki Sign Company about two hours to install the flag on the custom-made frame. Waukesha Scout Troop 159 retired the old colors. Jack Schunk (top right), a U.S. Navy Veteran, gets a heartfelt “thank you” from Cincinnati Reds pitcher Manny Parra. Parra is a former Milwaukee Brewers pitcher and stopped by the medical center when his team was in town. The Rev. Daniel Fitten (right) says a prayer with a Veteran biker during the annual bike blessing.
Dan Rose (right) reaches for the ball during a quad rugby demo at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center. Dr. Ken Lee, Spinal Cord Injury center director, hosted an all-day event for Veterans and staff to show options available to those with spinal cord injuries.

Julie Humphries (below) of Granton, Wis., attempts to launch a shot put at the Valor Games Midwest in Chicago. The games are designed to build camaraderie and show Veterans they can still have an active lifestyle despite any injuries or disabilities.
Holly Emmer, Registered Nurse

“Advocacy -- Holly takes the time to really listen to her patients. Even when it seems like her day cannot get any busier, she’ll take the time to find an extra sugar packet for a patient’s oatmeal or locate an additional creamer. One day during the summer she had a patient who had been in the hospital for weeks. It was apparent that he was becoming depressed and losing hope. Holly took the time to arrange for him to be taken outside and spend an hour in the sun. The turn his attitude took after that experience was very inspiring. Holly realizes that things that may seem small to us can mean the world to a patient.

Holly received the first DAISY Award presented at the Milwaukee VA.”

Valecia Suide, Registered Nurse

“Very excellent in so many ways. I had high blood pressure and dizzy spells. Also, I fell and broke my ribs, not fun. While I was in the emergency room they told me to see my heart doctor. I said, ‘No, I want to switch to the VA.’ She coordinated the switch and told me what to tell the heart doctor’s office. She is very conscious and helpful. She is a big plus in my health care and I would like to thank her and the VA. I appreciate it very much. She also told me to drink more water to protect my kidneys, cut the sodium, eat things with sodium in moderation; to workout to get more healthy. My wife was with me and thought it was very good and I thank you again.”

Angie Kinter, Registered Nurse

“Angie was assigned to work with a new nurse in caring for my sibling. He was very ill with congestive heart failure, was intubated, restless and uncomfortable. It appeared that the nurse she was working with was relatively new to the Intensive Care Unit, and Angie was excellent at teaching various techniques for ease of patient care. Angie was very respectful of both my brother and myself, and tirelessly worked to make sure my brother Ed was comfortable. She always explained the hows and whys for Ed and us (family). She was encouraging and supportive and was present during a family conference, great having her in our corner.”

Michelle McCormick, Registered Nurse

“Michelle makes you feel as if you are her only patient, she cares, she takes the time, she asks a lot of questions. Michelle is supportive of the patient and listens to what the patient has to say. She takes the time to write any changes of instructions or dosage of medications. Michelle is a caring nurse, her hearing is very good. She cares, she listens, she understands. She has compassion; she will go out of her way for you.”

Sandra Luebke, Licensed Practical Nurse

“Although Sandy demonstrates all of these qualities, those of commitment and respect stand out in my mind. My father receives two shots, once a month from Sandy. She has built such a special bond with him and works so hard to make him comfortable. She makes him feel special and has gone to great lengths to make sure he receives his shot on time. Dad says she also gives the ‘best shot’ of any nurse he has known, and he knows a lot. Sandy deals with his dementia so well and keeps him smiling. Please recognize Sandy for the excellent service she provides to one of the most important men in my life.”

To nominate a Milwaukee VA nursing staff ask at the check-in desk or follow the link, milwaukee.va.gov/docs/daisy.pdf
Mission Driven

*DAV shuttle is like Humvee therapy*

**BY BENJAMIN SLANE**

5000 West staff writer

Think back to the days of riding in a military vehicle, off to the motor pool, mission or field training exercises. The trip then was probably typical routine, but the conversations took place on those four wheels — that is the atypical.

Riding in a Disabled American Veterans van from the Milwaukee VA Medical Center is a lot like going to jumping in a Humvee with another Joe and heading to the motor pool, or home.

From the outside, the vehicle is just another minivan with a DAV sticker on the side.

Step foot in the passenger seat next to driver Gary Krolikowski, and the camaraderie of riding in the old Humvee seems all too familiar.

There are six DAV vans that service the Milwaukee County area for transportation to the Milwaukee VA. In Wisconsin, more than 23,000 Veterans and patients are served. Funding for the Veteran transport is a result of donations by individuals, corporations and organizations. The drivers are all volunteers.

Once inside the van, Krolikowski makes the introductions, while pointing toward the passenger seat.

“I’ve known Gordy over here for six years,” said Krolikowski.

“We sing Christmas carols together with all the other Veterans. “

Gordy Dembowski, a Marine rifleman and Korean War era vet, was all smiles on the trip back to Oak Creek, after his hospital appointment. Each noticeable landmark along I-794 sparked a conversation of something new or changed since his five years on the shuttle.

Krolikowski said the van ride serves as an outlet for Veterans. Some Veterans use the time for conversing with fellow service members.

Contrary to some beliefs, loss of independence is really not a concern to some vets.

Walter Hart, former Korean War Marine rifleman, suffered a stroke a few years back and as a result resigned his car keys.

“It doesn’t even bother me,” said Hart, poking at the driver. “I didn’t lose my independence, I have more not having to worry about getting to the VA. Besides, I would have never got to see Gary here. He’s a good man.”

Twelve minutes in the van and Hart is in front of his residence.

“I’ve been all over the world,” said Hart, getting out of the van. “Now I live on a dead end street, but you know what, you got to have heart. Without it, you’re dead.”

At times, the van is a place of deep conversation and thought. Vets gingerly strike up conversation by discussing their military job and different duty stations to make the connection.

Krolikowski feels out each Veteran, with the utmost respect and dignity. If they don’t want to talk then the conversation goes somewhere else. At the same time, Krolikowski doesn’t make the trip about himself. He said the other Veterans are the priority, but if it comes up he will talk.

He is a Vietnam Veteran in the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team, and a M-60 machine gunner. He drives, as he has for more than six years, because he wants to give back to the country and to the Veterans. His new mission - driving Milwaukee’s Veterans. His only duty station was Vietnam, only stationed stateside for basic and infantry training, which was fine with him, because shining jungle boots in garrison was not on his agenda.

“My black jungle boots were white,” Krolikowski said. “Who wants to shine boots stateside?”

The “Humvee” pulls back into the motorpool of National Avenue. Mission complete and ready for new orders, picking up a new set of troops for transport.

For more information on the DAV shuttle services to the Milwaukee VA Medical Center, call 414-384-2000, ext. 41811 two weeks before the appointment. Veterans must be ambulatory to get out and into vehicles. If escort is needed, consult your primary care physician for registration. To ensure a ride both ways, make appointments between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m.
Vet handles the streets of Milwaukee

Weather or disabilities doesn't stop team from marathon trek

BY BENJAMIN SLANE
5000 West staff writer

A cold, rainy, 27-mile long ride is not what Eric Fife had in mind when signing up for Milwaukee Zoological Society’s Bike on the Wild Side.

“I was thinking on the way down here,” said the Army Veteran Fife. “I really put my foot in my mouth. I more or less just joked, ‘Oh, 27 miles, that is no problem.’ So I was surprised when Doc Lee said we were doing the full 27.”

On Sept. 15, he was one of 16 Milwaukee VA Medical Center Veterans, volunteers and staff who took to the streets and trails of Milwaukee as part of the Ride on the Wild Side organized by the Milwaukee County Zoological Society as a fundraiser. The rides were 2.5, 17 and 27 miles.

Fife had not travelled more than 8 miles on a bike, ever.

The day of the ride, neither the rainy weather, nor the cold, hampered the spirit of the riders.

Fife was a infantryman in the 3rd U.S. Infantry Unit at Ft. Myers, Florida, known as the Old Guard. In 2007, Fife suffered a spinal cord compression and was subsequently paralyzed after a balcony collapsed that he and a group of buddies were standing on.

“My biggest worry,” Fife said, “was not being able to be in the Army. That is what I lived for, that is what I knew.”

Fife lost confidence in his abilities to accomplish tasks and would not do tasks that required him to be mobile in a wheelchair. The Milwaukee VA’s Spinal Cord Injury Center are helping injured Veterans make changes and find a comfort zone.

“The SCI staff are really great. They call me at least two, three times a week about some event coming up,” Fife said. “We had a great turnout by our Veterans despite the weather,” said Dr. Ken Lee, director of Spinal Cord Injury Center. “Good camaraderie, many exercise potentials and great endurance training.”

Lee was not worried about Fife’s ability to complete the ride and said he would have expected him to ride more miles, if the environment was favorable.

Fife and the rest of the VA crew entered the parking lot at the end of the race under a full downpour, ready to come out of the weather they had been in for the last two hours.

“It was a lot longer than I expected,” Fife said. “I was worried about my joints hurting, being in a wheelchair makes me strong up top, but the joints are something else.

“Bring on the 50-miler.”

“My biggest worry was not being able to be in the Army. That is what I lived for, that is what I knew.”

― Eric Fife
Discussing his spinal cord injury

Photo by Benjamin Slane

Eric Fife takes on a 27-mile ride on a cold, rainy day for Milwaukee Zoological Society’s Bike on the Wild Side.
Niki Kinkade
Suicide Prevention
Program Support Assistant

Niki is an Army Veteran. Her hometown is Hubertus, Wis. and she has two daughters, Falyn and Jadence.

Any pets? Because of allergies, I could only imagine having a Boxer!

What are your favorite songs? Crush by Dave Matthews, the version live in Central Park

What are your favorite movies? Full Metal Jacket, Good Will Hunting, Love Actually (embarrassing), Top Gun and Dirty Dancing

Favorite sports and teams? Cliché, Brewers and Packers

What are your hobbies? Softball and running (whenever my foot feels like healing from surgery).

What’s your favorite ethnic food? Mexican

Do you believe in ghosts? YES!

What is your biggest pet peeve? People chewing with their mouths open.

What is your worst habit? Smoking.

Waffles or pancakes? Pancakes.

Favorite type of exercise? Running, followed by kettle bells

What book are you reading right now? Smut — 50 Shades.

What clique were you part of in high school? None, hung out with everyone.

What song do you sing on karaoke night? Proud Mary

Who is your celebrity crush? Ryan Gosling and Colin Farrel.

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

If you won $20 million, what would you do with it? Pay off my parent’s, Oma’s and siblings’ homes.

Does your bologna have a first name, and if so, how’s it spelled? N-A-S-T-Y.

Favorite Elvis song? Fools Rush In

A little bit country, or a little bit rock n’ roll? Diverse, both.

Motto you live by: This too shall pass.

VA’s White Cane Safety Day offers independence options

BY ANTONY KAMPS
5000 West staff writer

Technologically advanced aids, like “Scrip Talk,” which speaks the info on a prescription bottle, were on display Oct. 18 for White Cane Safety Day.

Vendors demonstrated some of the latest technologies in helping visually impaired and blind Veterans gain more independence in day-to-day activities at the annual event inside the Matousek Auditorium.

More than 500 visually impaired Veterans receive care at Milwaukee VA, but many of the aids made to make life easier are under-utilized, officials said. Leon Haith, Visual Impairment Services Team coordinator, said there is a push to get these and other items into the hands of Veterans.

“One of the biggest services VA offers is sending Veterans to the Central Blind Rehabilitation Center at the Hines VA near Chicago.

The center provides the highest quality blind rehabilitation services through a broad range of education and research programs. VA offers the stay free of charge to every legally blind Veteran.

“Not just pay for their way down, they will come to the door pick them up at their door and drive them, put them on a bus, put them on a train, (and) put them on a plane, whatever their preference is,” said Jean Qualler, who has worked in the Low Vision Clinic. “(The center) will teach you everything you need to know to be independent as a visually impaired person.”

Haith and Qualler said they hear excuses all the time why the Veteran can’t go to the center.

“They don’t want to leave home, (they’re) stuck in their way, stuck in their comfort zone, (they’re) afraid, (they’ve) been pampered, or in some instances (they’re) caring for their spouse,” said Haith. “They can come up with a thousand excuses until we can alleviate that in their minds, and this is why we keep working on them through as many venues as we can encouraging them to go.

“I know a lot about the life of a visually impaired person,” said Qualler. “Because I am a visually impaired person, if I can do it, you can do it.”

For more information on these and other services available to visually impaired Veterans, call Haith at 414-384-2000, ext. 41832.
Korean War Vet battles new enemy

BY ANTONY KAMPS
5000 West staff writer

Hero.

The word gets tossed around a lot these days, some justified, some not so much. For one man the word might not do him justice. His name is Bert Maudie.

His story is one of bravery, mixed with a little crazy, on a cold winter’s night in Korea.

Maudie was awarded the Army’s Distinguished Service Cross for stopping an ambush attack by North Koreans. The self-described S.O.B. battles a new enemy now -- Parkinson’s disease.

He grew up during the Great Depression as the youngest of 10 children in his family. His father died six days before Maudie’s birth.

“After his father died, his four older brothers quit school and went to work in the coal mines,” said Carol Maudie, Bert’s wife. “They then went on to fight in World War II.”

John, Steve, and Frank served in the Army, while Edward served in the Navy. Frank was killed in Normandy in June of 1944. This didn’t deter Maudie. He enlisted in the Army straight out of high school in 1949.

“Everybody should have to do a minimum two years of service for your country,” said Maudie. “Keep your nose clean, stay out of trouble and you’ll learn respect.”

Staying out of trouble wasn’t in Maudie’s genes. He didn’t get into the kind of trouble involving the police, but he volunteered for everything, often putting himself in harm’s way.

“I volunteered to go to Korea,” said Maudie. “Instead they sent me to Germany. Finally I volunteered again and it was accepted.”

Volunteering almost got Maudie a job no soldier would envy.

“I was told one day, ‘Maudie, you’re on land mine detail’,” said Maudie. “I got lucky on that one as I ended up not having to do that.”

In Korea, on a cold January night in 1953, Maudie and his squad just returned from a patrol, trying to warm up when the sneak assault began.

“Grenades started dropping down from the top of the bunker,” he said.

He rushed out of the bunker and opened fire with his M1 Grand, killing four of the enemy. His weapon jammed, but Maudie, never hesitating charged the North Koreans with his bayonet fixed to his rifle. Thwarting attacks from the enemy, and literally dodging bullets, he single-handedly ended the attack with a jammed rifle and a few hand grenades, while yelling:

“MAUDIE COMING THROUGH!”

Maudie did all of this while still recovering from wounds he received from a previous mortar attack less than a month earlier. Those wounds opened up during his assault on the enemy. When explaining why he did what he did, Maudie simply states: “I’m crazy.”

The Army’s Distinguished Service Cross was awarded for his valor that night, but it is of little consequence to Maudie. His service was not for awards, but for a higher calling.

“Honor and respect,” said Maudie.

What the North Koreans couldn’t do in that night in 1953, Parkinson’s disease has, whittling away this great man. He’s still there at times, remembering everything you ask him, all with a big smile on his face.

While answering questions he sometimes slowly slips away, looking straight at you, going into great detail of a story, then slowly turning toward the window and just like that -- he’s gone.

“It’s the Parkinson’s,” says Carol. “It takes away your ability to focus.”

She touches Maudie’s hand; he turns back toward her and the dimming light burns bright once again. Every time Maudie drifts away Carol brings him back during our conversations. It’s heartwarming, but at the same time heartbreaking.

Their story is one of love spanning almost 60 years. They met in May of 1954; three months later they were married.

The encounter with his wife was never even supposed to happen.

“I met her at a dance,” said Maudie of how he met his wife at the Roof Ballroom in 1954.

“It was a blind date -- just not with her.”

Don’t be fooled by the exterior of Maudie. He may look like an old, frail man but shaking his hand is like putting
Volunteer never stops

BY BENJAMIN SLANE
5000 West staff writer

Rolls of laughter fill the hallway if you go down to the basement and head toward the credit union at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center.

Nick Habersetzer, a volunteer escort, is the source of all that laughter. He’s sitting in the escort room waiting for patients’ names to spit out from the printer. In the time waiting, he keeps the room of about 20 other escorts and VA staff on their toes.

"See Ben over there," he points to me. "We met at the Newburg Fireman’s Picnic last weekend while he was serving beer. Ben says he met me this last weekend, but I don’t remember; I must have had a lot to drink!"

The room erupts in laughter. Nick is 77-years-old and has been making this crowd laugh for the better part of 13 years at the VA Medical Center.

Nick Habersetzer, a volunteer escort, tells jokes while sitting in the escort room waiting for his next assignment.

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People all around Washington County and at the VAMC say great things about Nick and his motivation is everyone else.

"I admire the kids who join now that I see at the recruiting station," Nick said. "Well, Nick, here’s to you, we admire you for all you have done."
Phylena Fowler, Air Force, Iraq Veteran: “As an Iraq Vet, extending a hand to them and let them know the programs. More outreach.”

Kristian Vaughn, graduate student/volunteer: “Create some mentoring groups having Veterans of the same age groups.”

Mike Laska, Army, Vietnam Veteran: “They are better served then we were. I think a lot of Vets don’t know what is out there for them.”

Ian Kutner, Marines, Milwaukee: Dental care is really hard to get and really needs some change.”