COPS

Rest easy, Milwaukee VA, your police are on watch

Photo by Gary Kunich
A day in the life and then some

BY REBECCA OMICK
5000 West staff writer

For the last month I’ve shadowed the Milwaukee VA police. I was curious about what they do during the day, how they are different from the other local forces and do they really all love donuts, you know?

I went in to this totally excited but kind of nervous. In my experience, cops can be mean. What I found was these officers have some awesome personalities. They’re funny, they’re genuinely caring and they get to see and do some pretty cool stuff.

And they let me tag along everywhere with them! I don’t have an actual badge or certifications, but I’m legit part-cop now, and I’ve got the stories to prove it.

I’ve never fired a gun before, video games aside. But they gave me a firsthand view of their training. Suddenly I’m watching a guy with a knife, calmly slicing his already bloody hostage to pieces so I draw my gun and fire.

It was a dead shot … between the eyes of the hostage.

My redeeming fact: The system was not calibrated. Once it was ...

BAD GUY!
Bad cop takes a bullet.

Angry guy with a knife comes rushing at me?

BAD GUY!
I blow out his knee.

It was all done in an advanced computerized simulator called MILO, and all very cool.

Thanks to Sgt. Paul Bachmann’s patient and effective tips, I wasn’t horrible while trying it out. I even learned some tactics to try before drawing the gun?

Did you know the cops have to write a full report every time they draw their gun?

No wonder they do so much verbal judo training too. Just really take a second to say that out loud: verbal judo. How cool does that sound???

I picture words flying out of a cop’s mouth like an old-fashioned comic cloud to combat an angry person.

HI-YAH!

“Now we have something in common and you are magically calmer.”

Well, OK, something like that.

I also got to ride in the police cars while they did patrols and no, not in the backseat. Why does everyone always assume that first?!!

We got to ride around and laugh at how you can totally tell people get all proper with their hands at 10 and 2 on the wheel when a cop is behind them.

And oh man, are these guys funny! They’re serious when they need to be but they pick on each other all the time.

They’re relentless and it’s hilarious.

I got to witness some really touching things, too. A few calls involved veterans who were apprehensive about giving up their independence for care. You can’t fake the concern I saw in the eyes of these officers. They really, genuinely care about people.

It was moving to spend time with honestly good people who take the time to talk to each person like an individual, who wouldn’t hesitate to jump into a moving car to save someone or who keep a couple extra bucks in their back pocket just in case someone is short a few dollars for the bus or a meal.

They do these things every day without a second thought, which is probably why it seems so awesome to me. At the end of every single day, I hope each of them goes home feeling like the true hero I think they are. I hope you feel the same way after reading their stories.
"If I’m going to stop you, you probably deserve it …"

From traffic tickets to patient safety and serious crimes, VA police remain vigilant

BY REBECCA OMICK
5000 West staff writer

“I’m gonna pull this guy over and see where he’s going and if I can help him. He looks a little lost.”

Those aren’t words you expect to hear from a cop’s mouth, but for Milwaukee VA Police Officer Nick Sharbutt, it’s a big part of all in day’s work.

“It’s a courtesy that takes, what, five minutes to get them where they need to go on time?” Sharbutt asked. “It’s a simple thing that goes a long way.”

Officer Joseph Allen feels many people have an "unrealistic view of what police are." They are not just there to be mean. In fact, seemingly small courtesies are common from the 29 Milwaukee VA officers whose mission is to provide a safe and secure environment for veterans, family members and employees.

While they may be here to “Protect,” they take the “Serve” part just as seriously. Just ask Officer Kiana Johnson, who carries a big smile with her badge and gun. "I’m a people person,” she said while patrolling the hallways. “I like to say ‘Hi’ to everyone and get to know their names.”

Allen is also a fan of being social at work.

“Meeting new people is my favorite part of being a cop,” Allen said.

Patrolling the VA grounds is an around-the-clock job for the VA police. Although there’s always at least one officer patrolling outside, they do try to add extra focus on certain areas during high traffic times.

“From 6:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m., we try to focus a lot on the parking lots because that’s when a lot of people are coming in,” Sharbutt said.

Patrol officers aren’t expected to just drive around the grounds all day. They are frequently in and out of buildings for quick patrols and to help with various situations. They also have shift breaks every four hours.

“It’s nice because it breaks it up so that you’re not just driving in circles all day,” Sharbutt said.

While the VA police have all the same arresting and ticketing authority as any other police force, they aren’t here to make anyone’s life more difficult.

“If I’m going to stop you, you probably deserve it,” Sharbutt said. “We’re not trying to give out tickets. We don’t have quotas.

A lot of the people we pull over are people we work with every day. We want to maintain a good working relationship.”

That doesn’t mean they’ll let people get away with breaking traffic laws.

“I hate when people disobey traffic laws when I’m sitting right there,” Johnson said.

“When people see cops they think we’re just sitting there not paying attention, but we are.”

They’re not just watching to see who comes to a complete stop at the stop signs. They’re checking to see who is in which parking space.

“I hate when people disobey traffic laws when I’m sitting right there,” Johnson said.

“When people see cops they think we’re just sitting there not paying attention, but we are.”

They’re not just watching to see who comes to a complete stop at the stop signs. They’re checking to see who is in which parking space.

“Parking space is one of the biggest employee complaints but we have limited visitor space so employees just have to walk a little further,” Sharbutt said.

While he drives through parking lots, Sharbutt isn’t just watching the road; he’s paying attention to the decals on the cars to make sure people are parked in the right areas. In fact, paying attention to everything all at once is a skill police officers must have at all times.

“You have to be pretty smart to be a cop,” Sharbutt said. “You have to know exactly what you’re doing.”

He’s not just referring to memorizing laws. VA police prefer candidates already have college credits and experience prior to the VA. Police also need to have knowledge of laws and statutes in addition to the VA specific policies and paperwork that they need to become familiar with.

It doesn’t hurt to be very articulate either.

“And that’s all in addition to Police Academy training,” Sharbutt said.

Milwaukee VA Police Chief, Tim Jantz, expects the best from his officers. Between the hospital, cemetery, regional office and Miller Park traffic that they deal with, Jantz said it really “adds to the complexity of responsibilities and issues” Milwaukee VA officers deal with daily.

“This is a small community and we have issues,” Jantz said. “But we’re built to deal with that.”

Photo by Rebecca Omick

Officer Nick Sharbutt runs some plates during his morning patrol.
They call it Judo, Verbal Judo

Police have some special speaking skills in their belts

BY REBECCA OMICK
5000 West staff writer

Really, they just want to talk.
A huge part of the training VA police officers go through is to try to focus on voluntary compliance.

“We take lots of communication and skills classes,” Officer Nick Sharbutt said. “We really want to handle a situation without having to use force. There may be times when a situation gets a little hostile and maybe someone’s yelling and screaming at you and calling you every name in the book, but in the end they’re walking out on their own.”

Verbal Judo is a term used to describe how the police attempt to redirect the conversation if it’s becoming too heated.

All but one of the 29 employees of the VA police force are veterans which helps them connect with people over shared military experiences.

“Being a vet helps you relate to them,” Sharbutt said.

In any incident, tempers can escalate quickly but the VA police don’t take the stereotypical hard cop attitude. They start with introducing themselves to the people involved, telling them why they’re there. Then the police make an attempt to understand all sides of the situation.

Anger and high stress aren’t the only situations the VA police handle. They also take a proactive type of care to heart.

“I can read people pretty well,” Officer Kiana Johnson said. “Sometimes they want someone to talk to but are unsure of how to start, so I just ask them if they’re OK.”

Oftentimes, veterans may be hesitant to talk, but using their communication skills has allowed many VA police to help a veteran find someone to talk to.

“We’ll even call their provider or bring them in for treatment if they need it,” Johnson said.

Officer Brian Brown loves working for the Milwaukee VA police because each time they respond to a call, they are able to go the extra mile and utilize the many resources of the VA to really help someone.

“We go see people when they’re at their worst,” Brown said. “But I just see someone who needs help, not color or any other label.”

Officer Nathan Johnson says his ability to befriend and relate to people has really helped him on the job. During one particular case, he was helping a younger veteran enter treatment during a rough time.

“It’s a sad thing when it happens to such young people,” Officer Nathan Johnson said. “Drugs and alcohol really messes up their lives and sometimes you just can’t imagine what they’ve been through.”

Confronting any issue can be scary, but the VA police are willing to help someone get started however they can. Sometimes they go out of their way to be extra helpful to the VA staff as well.

“I like to learn a department’s lingo because it can help us help them a lot quicker,” Nathan Johnson said.

The quickest way to help every department is by being there and being seen.

“The biggest thing is to make our presence known,” Sharbutt said. “That’s why we drive the cars around a lot, if people see us, they know we’re watching and there’s less crime.”

Less crime however, does not mean no crime.

“Break-ins do happen,” Sharbutt said. “People tend to leave their stuff out like their iPods, GPS, wallets or other valuables and it attracts attention.”

Paying attention to details is part of a cop’s job but sometimes they need a little help. That’s where the VA security system comes in.

Milwaukee VA Police Chief, Tim Jantz is proud of the state-of-the-art equipment they have.

“The camera system is exceptional,” Jantz said. “We are fortunate to have the cameras which are located at many places on the property. We can look at your license plates as you drive in, watch you park and follow you down any hallway.

“When you put both together — the high-tech equipment and a great group of officers, it makes a difference. We work hard to provide not just law enforcement, but friendly outreach and peace of mind and the officers here go out of their way to make that happen.”

“VA Chief of Police
Tim Jantz

“We work hard to provide not just law enforcement, but friendly outreach and peace of mind and the officers here go out of their way to make that happen.”

— VA Chief of Police
Tim Jantz

Photo by Rebecca Omick
VA Chief of Police Tim Jantz.
Detectives on the job until the end

Go-to guy for rules and regs puts finishing touches on police work

BY REBECCA OMICK
5000 West staff writer

Even after an arrest, a police officer’s job isn’t done.

That’s why Detective Mark Zamborini and Officer Joseph Allen found themselves driving to the Milwaukee Courthouse recently in case they had to testify about someone who allegedly brought a weapon onto the VA campus.

And when it comes to testimony, Zamborini said, it’s important to know all the nuances of laws, and go over every aspect of the case ahead of time, just to make sure they have all the details.

Allen and Zamborini made their way into the courtroom and sat on the other side of the bulletproof glass separating the court proceedings from the audience.

From there it’s a lot of hurry up and wait.

After VA police make an arrest, they may be called to testify or provide information to the courts during the preliminary hearing and appearances.

In this case, the person alleged to have committed the crime was facing his first hearing.

“In Wisconsin, you have to show probable cause, so the preliminary hearing is to prove a crime was probably committed by that person,” Zamborini said.

Despite the myth that all courtrooms are like the ones seen on TV shows, preliminary hearings are not usually very dramatic.

Assistant District Attorney Paul Hauer explained some of the differences between what is seen on TV, what happens when there is a jury present and why a preliminary hearing is different.

“It’s far more relaxed than a jury trial,” Hauer said. “It’s presided over by a commissioner, not a judge and really it’s about proving there is plausible probable cause.”

Probable cause is extremely important in any scenario a cop handles and is the arrest standard.

Zamborini defined it as, “When a reasonable cop believes a crime has been committed and the person you’re arresting probably committed it.”

If the defendant wants to fight the charge, the police are ready to provide testimony or witnesses but the defendant may also waive their right to a preliminary hearing, and the court will set a date for the case.

As it turned out, the person who allegedly committed the crime in question waived his rights to the hearing and pleaded not guilty, which means the court will have to schedule future court dates.

Although he does not necessarily have to appear in court again for this case, it could happen, so Zamborini stays prepared.

Once back at the VA, he dissected two federal statutes down to the difference between “in” and “on” federal property to ensure all parties are on the same page.

While he’s considered the “resident expert” on statutes, Zamborini doesn’t have them all stored in his brain.

He pulls out a book with highlighted areas and signs of a lot of use.

“There are too many to memorize,” Zamborini said as he flipped through the book. “But I have a good idea of what most of them are or where to find them.”

Finding things, and people, is of course one of the big parts of the job description for a detective.

“I’m in charge of the investigation of complex criminal cases,” Zamborini said. “I’m responsible for every piece of evidence and maintaining their pristine integrity.”

Record keeping is another one of the responsibilities. Zamborini pulled out a file drawer full of color-coded cases.

“I draft subpoenas, search warrants and write many of the follow-ups,” Zamborini said.

Between investigations, meetings, court dates and record keeping, Zamborini also participates monthly in a review of all the tickets written that month from VA officers.

While this sounds like a lot, Zamborini says he dislikes the myth that cops aren’t the same as other humans.

“We aren’t machines,” he said. “We get up tired, we have kids, we have good days and we have bad days and we make mistakes.”

Mistakes aren’t very prevalent for the Milwaukee VA police thanks to their meticulous care and passion for justice.

For Zamborini, it’s not necessarily about going after the bad guys but helping those who need it.

“Helping victims of crimes,” he said, “is my favorite part of my job.”
They don’t stop when they drop

The VA officers take their training as seriously as their jobs — focusing on how to take down the bad guys and even how to fall if they hit the ground.

BY REBECCA OMICK
5000 West staff writer

It only takes a second for normal to become chaos.
Amidst alarms, screams of terror, gun shots and chaotic uncertainty, an officer bravely heads towards the scene, gun drawn, trying to keep his breathing even and eyes attentive to any movement.

Officers never know what they’re going to see or if they’ll be attacked the second they get through the doorway.
Prepping people to stay calm while running into danger isn’t

the easiest task.

This is why part of the training for the Milwaukee VA police involves using a shoot house -- a warehouse-like plethora of rooms, each containing an adrenaline-charged scene located at the Milwaukee Area Technical College campus.

Volunteers act out different scenarios that may include a hostage situation or a hostile person hidden behind the door or a piece of furniture. In any case, the officer must assess the situation and react accordingly.

“I stress them out as much as I can during training so that they’re prepared and inoculated to the real thing,” said Sgt. Paul Bachmann, who oversees training for the Milwaukee VA police.

Officers use bullets with soap-filled tips called sim rounds for shoot house training. Don’t think they don’t hurt though. Being shot with a sim round leaves welts and bruises and is said to feel much like being shot at a fairly close range by a paintball gun.

“Part of the goal is to quell that bravado that many have,” Bachmann said. “We want it to hurt enough that they always are thinking, ‘Hey, I don’t want to get shot again. It sucks!’ but not really injure them.”

Another bonus of this training is the rapport it helps the VA police build with outside communities as they train with their counterparts from Oak Creek, West Allis, and West Milwaukee.

Bachmann feels it’s important to train with the latter two departments because if the VA police ever needed outside backup, they would be the first responders. Training alongside them helps them all to get to know each other and how each department works.

“Something like eight or nine thousand people walk through the front door daily and we have to be prepared for anything,” Bachmann said. It’s crazy how quickly something that seems normal can turn bad.”

That’s why, even on their days off, the Milwaukee VA police are constantly training. Of his five recent vacation days, Bachmann spent more than half his time off on the job doing what he does best — training himself and others.

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See Training
“We are civilly and legally liable if we are not trained on any part of our jobs,” Bachmann said. “Almost everything we do is a perishable skill.”

To keep them on their toes, Bachmann does not just have officers go to training seminars or read things; he’s been known to give pop quizzes.

“If we identify something our officers are weak at or haven’t dealt with recently I try to develop some training in that for them,” Bachmann said.

The PowerPoints and quizzes he creates are in addition to the Law Enforcement Training Center’s written tests that officers must also pass.

Getting an A on an exam is only a fraction of what Bachmann expects. In the lesson plans he created for the officers, there are a total 149 hours of law enforcement training he requires each officer to complete this year which is an addition to the facility mandatory education.

Officer Nick Sharbutt summed it up well when he said, “If you’re not working, you’re training.”

While showing off the extra blank page of the mandatory training log that is already a quarter full with additional training hours, Bachmann stressed his reasoning behind so much training is officer safety.

With all of the unknown possibilities that could occur in any given situation they are a part of, it’s important for them to stay sharp and back each other up.

“There’s no reason any of our officers should have to do anything alone for more than a few seconds,” Bachmann said.

In addition to training online and off-campus facilities, the VA police also have a training house they use on the grounds. It’s set up similar to the shoot house, but also has heavy bags and an impressive, computerized training system called MILO.

MILO is an interactive training simulator that comes with more than 480 preprogrammed scenarios and the ability to create your own. A ceiling-to-floor screen covers the entire wall and a projector plays whichever scenario has been chosen.

The officer is armed with an actual police gun with a laser barrel and pepper spray can filled with a pressurized air container. During the scenario, the officer must react as they would in a real-life situation while the moderator decides how the scenario will turn out.

The moderator can make the suspect comply or make an assault happen just by clicking their choice. A mark will appear on the screen where the pepper spray or bullet would have hit and the whole thing is recorded for a debriefing afterwards.

MILO also offers various target practices which the police take advantage of in between their days at the shooting range.

“My goal is to make these guys better than me,” Bachmann said. “I don’t just stand there with my arms crossed yelling at them. You don’t ask people to do something you’re not doing yourself.”

That goes for the latest training push at the VA as well. The Active Threat Response and Ground Defense and Recovery training have cops falling, literally.

“As silly as it sounds, you’ve got to learn how to fall before you learn how to fight,” Bachmann said. “The main point in GDR is to not be on the ground.”

Being familiar with the names of the GDR moves is as important as knowing the move itself since it all has to be detailed in a report if it is ever used.

“What gets cops in trouble most often is not using the tools they’re given at the right times,” Bachmann said. “We want to know how to effectively use our tools.”

“My goal is to make these guys better than me. I don’t just stand there with my arms crossed yelling at them. You don’t ask people to do something you’re not doing yourself.”

— Sgt. Paul Bachmann
The quieter commander

Third shift dispatcher has eyes and ears on entire VA at once

BY REBECCA OMICK
5000 West staff writer

When an alarm sounds in the middle of the night, most people jump out of their skin and panic.

Not Komesha Blockton. She’s the overnight dispatcher for the Milwaukee VA police and this is just another night at work for her.

Although most people are asleep around 1 a.m., the hospital alarm continues to blare, and a wide-awake Blockton is on the phone, calling the floor in distress and almost simultaneously alerting every officer on duty.

“We’ve got a duress call from 3C, all officers report. Repeat, a duress on 3C, all officers report,” Blockton says calmly into the walkie-talkies.

As she learns more information from the floor there was no threat.

“We have to test every light, alarm, button in the hospital and response time monthly,” Callender said.

That may sound time consuming but the overnight crew have a little more time than officers on-duty during the day.

“At 8 p.m. all the doors are locked so we have full control of the building,” Blockton said. “At night we’re more about physical security like patrolling and making sure doors are locked.”

Since most doors of the Milwaukee VA are locked at night, Blockton’s face is one most everyone entering or exiting the building sees.

“Nothing goes on without me knowing about it,” Blockton said.

And that suits her just fine.

“I like to know what’s going on around me,” Blockton said. “I think it’s because I’m nosey. And let me tell ya’, I am nosey and I like telling people what to do.”

It’s a good thing then, since Blockton is responsible for keeping eyes and ears on four separate phone lines, maintaining contact with officers through the walkie-talkies at least once every 30 minutes, five intercoms, all alarm systems and 14 TV monitors of cameras all split into four or five areas per TV screen. Oh yeah, and the window too.

“When you sit here you’re the main communicator and nothing can happen without you. It’s an exciting job,” Blockton said. “I love it because you get to work with so many different people and it’s something new every day.”

In order to fill her seat, Blockton had to go through two months of training and read a “super thick” policies and procedures book. Then came the tests for clearance. Prospective dispatchers must score at least a 90 percent or the system will boot them out and make them retake it. If they do pass, they then spend two weeks alongside a current dispatcher for two weeks before working on their own.

“And you have to have customer service skills or you’re not gonna make it,” Blockton said.

Watching her chat with coworkers and greet everyone passing by the window, it’s easy to tell Blockton’s got great people skills and a big heart.

“Last year on St. Patty’s Day, one guy came in — we’re talking a big dude — with a plastic hat and those green waving shamrocks on top with green lipstick. He told me he needed to go to the ER and I asked why. He said, ‘A bee peed in my eye.’ ”

— Komesha Blockton
Third shift dispatcher

Continued on Page 11
See Dispatcher
Ready! Aim! Bake!

Life’s sweet for off-duty officer

BY REBECCA OMICK
5000 West staff writer

She may carry pepper spray during the day, but when Officer Kiana Johnson is off duty, she’s using a whole new spice rack.

When she isn’t fighting crime or keeping the peace at the Milwaukee VA, working on her local county executive board or spending time with her family, Kiana Johnson delves into her other love — baking.

“I’ve just always loved doing it,” Johnson said. “I could eat and sleep baking.”

The self-proclaimed chocoholic has been stirring things up in the kitchen since she was about 6 years old.

“Every holiday my grandma would throw a bunch of ingredients on the table and she wouldn’t tell me how to make anything, so I had to just keep testing and trying till I got it right.”

Johnson said their family specialties were sweet potato pies and pumpkin pies.

On her days off, Johnson runs her own made-to-order bakery, Simple Kaykes, with the help of her business coach and best friend since ninth grade, Brent Oglesby.

“When I talk to people, I try to find their passion and bring it out in them,” Oglesby said.

For Johnson, that passion was baking so Oglesby helped her get started.

“It takes support for other people to grow,” Oglesby said.

Johnson said Oglesby’s support is what helped her get in tune with herself and what she wants to do. Someday, Johnson hopes to open her own bakery.

Continued on Page 11
See Bake
After spending the better part of a month following around our police, it’s unfortunate that all the quotes, quips and personalities can’t make it into print.

But that didn’t stop our intrepid intern reporter, Rebecca Omick, who filed this final piece to give a few final insights from those who stand watch on the thin, blue line:

Guilty pleasure: “Eating too much ice cream on the back deck with the daughter unit.” — Tom Hanks from, “A Leage of their Own.”

Training Sgt. Paul Bachmann
Prior Service: Marines
Favorite food: Grilled salmon
Favorite song: Anything from the 80s.
Hobbies: Traveling, camping, cutting down trees for winter firewood and spending as much time outside as possible during the summer.

Believe it or not: “‘COPS’ is a pretty accurate cop show — for a reality TV show.”

Detective Lt. Mark Zamborini
Prior service: Air Force
Favorite food: Chicken wings.
Favorite movie line: “It’s supposed to be hard. If it were easy, everyone would be doing it.” — Tom Hanks from, “A Leage of their Own.”

Lt. Andre Callender
Prior Service: Marines
Favorite Color: Black
Favorite Food: Pasta
Favorite TV show: “The Walking Dead”

Officer Kiana Johnson
Prior Service: Air Force
Favorite Song: Mickey Mouse Clubhouse theme.
Favorite Color: Purple
Favorite Food: Chocolate
Hobbies: Baking

Officer Brian Brown
Prior Service: Marines and certified canine officer.
Favorite food: Lasagna
Hobbies: “Making my own soap, shaving cream and lip balm; woodworking and gardening.”

Officer Philip Brown
Prior Service: Air Force
Favorite Food: Italian
Guilty Pleasure: “Dunkin’ Donuts — coffee, that is!”
Hobbies: Traveling, playing softball, golfing, and riding his motorcycle.

Officer Nathan Johnson
Prior Service: Seven years in the Marines, Air Force and Army.
School Smarts: Degrees in criminal justice, psychology and currently obtaining a master’s in intelligence studies.
Addicted to: Cherry Chap-Stick.
Favorite part of being a cop: Investigations and getting people to confess.

Officer Nicholas Thorn
Prior Service: Air Force
Favorite Food: Chicken
Favorite Song: “Try Me,” by James Brown
Guilty Pleasure: YouTube videos.

Komesha Blockton
Prior Service: Twelve years as a casino security supervisor and eight years as a medical support assistant on 4C.

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See Facts
Dispatcher

Continued from Page 8

“...phones ringing, Blockton also gets to joke around with her coworkers and they seem all be very close. "It’s a fun, easy environment until it’s time to be serious," Callender said. Blockton agreed and said she’s not planning on going anywhere. “I like everybody I work with,” Blockton said. “You’re with these people more than your own family and all of them will have your back to the end.”

Bake

Continued from Page 9

“...lipstick,” Blockton said. “He told me he needed to go to the ER and I asked why. He said, ‘A bee peed in my eye.’” Blockton still finds this to be one of her most memorable moments at work. She

派特：环儿，Blockton said. “He told me he needed to go to the ER and I asked why. He said, ‘A bee peed in my eye.’” Blockton still finds this to be one of her most memorable moments at work. She

Officer Elisa Navarette

Prior Service: Air Force.
Favorite food: I love tacos and anything Mexican.
Hobbies: working out, playing sports and playing bingo.
Favorite cartoon dog: Definitely Brian from “Family Guy.” I could watch that show for hours!
Favorite song: “I Don’t Care,” by Icona Pop.

Hopefully you’ve eaten your lunch before we got you hungry for one more of Kiana Johnson’s delectable treats.

“The didn’t know he was getting it and she made this basketball jersey with his name on it on the cake,” Oglesby said. “To see his face light up when he saw the cake is my favorite memory.”

Some orders are a little too big for her to dream up however.

“I can do medium wedding cakes but a big wedding, that’s just too big of a responsibility,” Johnson said. That’s not her toughest batch of orders, though. “Anniversary cakes have got to be the hardest to make because I try to incorporate unique things about the couple into the cake.”

Once an order is done, Johnson even delivers the product, free of charge. “I just like seeing the end results, seeing people happy and having them come back because I was reliable,” Johnson said.

Until the day when Simple Kaykes becomes a walk-in café, Johnson takes orders and shows off some of her finished products on www.simplekaykes.vpweb.com.

Anyone who knows Johnson, knows she usually has a big smile on her face, and she hopes she can do the same with her bakery work. “I just do it for fun on my off days and to make people happy,” she said.

Facts

Continued from Page 10

Favorite Food: Tacos.
Biggest Pet Peeve of Job: “Cleaning up behind people or having to backtrack because people didn’t give me the full information I need.”
Hobbies: “Watching my daughter play basketball and soccer.”

Officer Ryan Komers

Prior Service: Air Force Reserves.
Also under his belt: Fourteen years as a cop and five years as a part-time firefighter in Chicago.
Favorite Food: Pizza.
Hobbies: Fishing, camping, anything outdoors.
Favorite song: “Paradise City” by Guns N’ Roses
Remember: “Ignorance of the law is not an excuse.”

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Until the day when Simple Kaykes becomes a walk-in café, Johnson takes orders and shows off some of her finished products on www.simplekaykes.vpweb.com.

Anyone who knows Johnson, knows she usually has a big smile on her face, and she hopes she can do the same with her bakery work. “I just do it for fun on my off days and to make people happy,” she said.
### Reporting Aboard

**Mary Avery**  
**Registered nurse**  
**Hometown:** West Allis, Wis.  
**Hobbies:** Cooking.  
**Why did you choose the VA?:** Told by other employees what a wonderful place the VA is!  
**First impressions:** Everyone is super friendly.

**Jeremy Anders**  
**Health technician**  
**Hometown:** Waukesha, Wis.  
**Prior military service:** Army, two years, Afghanistan.  
**Hobbies:** Motorcycling, hunting and fishing.  
**Why did you choose the VA?:** I wanted to help fellow Vets.

**Jennifer Bartlein**  
**Medical support assistant**  
**Hometown:** Greenfield, Wis.  
**Prior military service:** Army Reserves, six years.  
**Hobbies:** Volleyball, crafting and cooking.  
**Why did you choose the VA?:** Because I am a Veteran myself and enjoy the idea of giving back to my fellow Veterans.  
**First impressions:** More to it than I expected.

**Bryan Boland**  
**Supervisory Contract Specialist**  
**Hometown:** Grand Rapids, Mich.  
**Prior military service:** Navy.  
**Hobbies:** Gold, bowling, volleyball, reading.  
**Why did you choose the VA?:** To service our Vets and my family.  
**First impressions:** Squared away.

**Kelly Brand**  
**Registered nurse**  
**Hometown:** Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Hobbies:** Motorcycles and weight lifting.  
**Why did you choose the VA?:** Veterans served us, I want to serve them.  
**First impressions:** Friendly.

**Jason Brencic**  
**Human Resources assistant**  
**Hometown:** Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Prior military service:** Army, five years.  
**Hobbies:** Hunting, fishing and being outdoors.  
**Why did you choose the VA?:** I wanted to help Veterans.  
**First impressions:** I’m impressed with the way employees carry themselves. They seem to truly enjoy what they do here at the VA.

**Jessica Buelow**  
**Secretary**  
**Hometown:** Bartlett, Ill.  
**Hobbies:** Cooking, crafts, and furniture refurbishing.

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**In Service**

Congratulations to the following Zablocki employees who reached career milestones, March through June:

**40 YEARS**
- Rosa Williams  
- Edward Zuperku

**35 YEARS**
- Calvin Lucas  
- Sharon Mitchell

**30 YEARS**
- Susan Framberg  
- Diane Kilian  
- Kay Haddenham  
- Rickie Kelly  
- Jeffrey Neylon  
- Schuyler Ramsey  
- Russell Schneider  
- Robert Schumacher  
- David Wagner  
- James Wallace  
- Nancy Washington

**25 YEARS**
- Robin Bautzmann  
- Cindy Beck  
- Joseph Blaney Jr.  
- Carla Brockman  
- Kim Chapman  
- Renee Charterand  
- Lisa Byron-Worzalla  
- Lori Haerle  
- Lois Hawkins  
- Johnny Hickman  
- Dean Kroll  
- Kristine Kulas  
- Theresa Kurkiewicz  
- Mary Otterson  
- Thomas Petaja  
- Jeffrey Preiser  
- Monica Saggio  
- Robby Schopen  
- Robert Shumaker  
- Jill Snider-Meyer  
- Michael Stark  
- Arlene Susk  
- Daniel Toutant  
- Alan White  
- Jane Whitehouse  
- Jackie Zigan

**20 YEARS**
- Dagny Aiken  
- Roberta Beland  
- Sally Biedenbender  
- Ivira Davis  
- Sonia Dumit-Minkel  
- Nelia Ferrer  
- Kevin Gray  
- Patricia Griffin  
- Jennifer Herald  
- Leon Jutrzonka  
- Mark Kremer  
- Denise Landmeyer  
- Laurie Lange  
- Debra Lind  
- Bonnie Logfren  
- Steven Maier  
- Sandra Maren  
- Shirley Probst  
- William Prudlow  
- John Rogers  
- Carla Schubert  
- Roberta Sharbutt  
- Judith Weber  
- Janet Williamson  
- Mark Zamborini

**15 YEARS**
- John Bertschinger  
- Lizabeth Bradett  
- Cory Brea  
- Anthony Carr  
- Asiani Chiu  
- Tiffany Cook  
- Denise Costello  
- Shirley Gebhard

**10 YEARS**
- Allison Altorre  
- Monica Andres  
- Adama Bah  
- Joseph Brown  
- Tamara Burkee  
- Cheryl Butz  
- Shannon Cera  
- Kimberly Cherry  
- India Crawford  
- Frankie Dabney  
- Jennifer Delacruz  
- Edwin Downing  
- Margaret Edelstein  
- Lauren Elling  
- Katie Fells  
- Ann Flera-Klein  
- Jill Hansen  
- Peggy Hardy  
- Michael Herrick  
- Nicole Horstneyer  
- Cheryl Hughes  
- Vera Hughes  
- Juwauna Johnson  
- Patrick Jozwiak  
- Linda Kano  
- Evelyn Kehan  
- Yolonda Klabunde  
- Daniel Lange  
- Kathleen Lemere  
- Kay Marsicek  
- Phylis Mills  
- Elise McGhee  
- Angela Nelson  
- Ellyn Newman  
- Jennifer Posenes  
- Mary Perez  
- Gail Pestotnik  
- Rachel Prodeohl  
- Rudolph Ralian  
- Lynn Rezachek  
- Vicky Russell  
- Carin Steinbrenner  
- Caryn Stueber  
- Sharon Ternouth  
- Amy Thompto  
- Sheila Walden  
- Roger Williams

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Why did you choose the VA?: After five years with the Department of Homeland Security I was looking to move into a career that supports Vets, like my fiancé.

First impressions: Large and very busy.

Lana Buttke
Nurse practitioner
Hometown: West Bend, Wis.
Hobbies: Travel, sewing, and volleyball.
Why did you choose the VA?: To give back to men and women who have given so much to me and my family.
First impressions: Large organization that’s interconnected.

Mary Degenhardt
Registered nurse
Hometown: Brookfield, Wis.
Hobbies: Culinary arts and vacations.
Why did you choose the VA?: I heard it was a great place to work; closer to home.
First impressions: Welcoming place; everyone seems happy.

Anthony Dentice
Medical supply technician
Hometown: Milwaukee, Wis.
Prior military service: Air Force, four years.
Hobbies: Riding my motorcycles, autocross racing, and trap shooting.
Why did you choose the VA?: I want to continue to serve my country by serving those who have served.
First impressions: Very welcoming! Excited to be here!

Antoinette Easterling
Program analyst
Hometown: Milwaukee, Wis
Prior military service: Army, 16 years.
Why did you choose to work at the VA?: Advancement opportunity.
First impressions: Difficult to get hired.

Adam Follmer
Speech language path intern
Hometown: Beaver Dam, Wis.
Why did you choose the VA?: I chose to work at the VA for the variety of experiences that I plan on gaining.
First impressions: I have really enjoyed observing the high level of care by all different departments and look forward to becoming more involved.

Sarah Gray
Registered nurse
Hometown: West Allis, Wis.
Hobbies: Photography, working out, crocheting, and reading.
Why did you choose the VA?: My father worked here previously and enjoyed it. Plus I had a very positive experience when I had a clinical rotation here in the past.
First impressions: Warm, welcoming and friendly. Everyone has a smile on their face.

Brigida Grochowina
Medical support assistant
Hometown: Somewhere in Germany
Hobbies: Singing and watching my daughter dance.
Why did you choose the VA?: Both parents are disabled Vets and two brothers are active duty in the Army.

First impressions: People are very nice.

Nicole Heinritz
Food service worker
Hometown: Milwaukee, Wis.
Hobbies: Reading, antiquing, and football.
Why did you choose the VA?: I wanted to help those who helped to protect me and my benefits.
First impressions: It is a very busy place.

Justin Howell
Registered nurse
Hometown: Castroville, Texas.
Prior military service: Air Force, four years.
Hobbies: Rock climbing, camping, snowboarding, sailing.
Why did you choose the VA?: The VA

Memorial Day

Despite the rainy day, more than 300 turned out for our annual Memorial Day ceremony in Wood National Cemetery. Color guards (above) post the colors. Charles Fiddler VFW Post 9469 stand ready for the traditional rifle volley.

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is my home for health care and I want to give back to Veterans.

First impressions: I have had a great experience with the VA as a Veteran, student, and hopefully as an employee.

Allison Jahn
Psychologist
Hometown: Mequon, Wis.
Hobbies: Running and volleyball.
Why did you choose the VA?: An opportunity to use my skills to serve Veterans.
First impressions: I have been training in the VA and enjoy both the challenges and rewards of this work.

Judy Klaver
Nurse
Hometown: Dubuque, Iowa.
Hobbies: Camping, walking, reading and gardening.
Why did you choose the VA?: I know several people who recently came to work at the VA and they love it. I am impressed with the quality improvement efforts and the Magnet Journey the nursing department is undertaking.
First impressions: I love the mission of the VA. I bring my father here and I have been impressed with the care.

Kevin Kohlhagen
Police Officer
Hometown: Waukesha, Wis.
Hobbies: Work, computers, video games, R/C airplanes.
Why did you choose the VA?: Transferred from Madison, Wis. VAMC.
First impressions: Everyone seems friendly. Everyone seems to know a lot of history of this VA.

Julia Kozireva
Radiology technician
Hometown: Wauwatosa, Wis.
Hobbies: Read, knit, sew, and crochet.
Why did you choose the VA?: Good reputation and very friendly environment.
First impressions: The city in the city.

Jeffrey Krzyminski
Food Service Worker
Hometown: Evanston, Ill.
Hobbies: Minecraft, Warhammer 40K,

Sadie Larsen
Psychologist
Hometown: Presque Isle, Wis.
Hobbies: Running, cooking, baking, reading, Frisbee.
Why did you choose the VA?: I’m proud to work for an organization that cares for Veterans and strives to be at the forefront in providing the newest and best treatments.
First impressions: I loved my experiences at the Madison and Boston VA’s, I’m sure I’ll love it here too!

Brett Lieungh
Medical support assistant
Hometown: Racine, Wis.
Prior military service: Navy, four years.
Hobbies: Fishing, camping, and volunteering.
Why did you choose the VA?: Stability in an unstable economy. The friends that I have working here like working here.
First impressions: Time will tell! So far so good.

Seth Longley
Food service worker
Hometown: Milwaukee, Wis.
Prior military service: Army, six years.
Why did you choose the VA?: I went to the job fair downtown.
First impressions: Great!

Photos by Rebecca Omick

One for the history books
Robert Beller, medical center director (right), unveils the National Historic Landmark plaque April 26 for our Milwaukee Soldiers Home, along with Mike Reynolds (left), the midwest regional director of the National Park Service and Michael Stevens, the State Historic Preservation Officer. More than 100 people were on hand for the event, including several who dressed in period garb to mark the special day.

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Tina Mansoorabadi
Medical support assistant
Hometown: Wind Lake, Wis.
Why did you choose the VA?: Endless possibilities.
First impressions: Historical.

Bradley Mengel
Plasterer
Hometown: Gilman, Ill.
Prior military service: Marine Corps., four years.
Hobbies: Reading, fishing and sports.
Why did you choose the VA?: It was an excellent opportunity to combine customer service and plastering skills at the VA hospital. It was a positive place to work with opportunities for advancement.
First impressions: Friendly, positive, professional atmosphere.

Kandy Nemetz
Food Service worker
Hometown: Brookfield, Wis.
Hobbies: Cooking, collecting antiques.
Why did you choose the VA?: I love working with and helping people. It’s what I do!
First impressions: Excellent!

Angela Nyenhuis
Registered nurse
Hometown: Grafton, Wis.
Hobbies: Outdoor activities.
Why did you choose the VA?: Looking for an opportunity to further my career.
First impressions: Exciting!

Mary Piorier
Medical support assistant
Hometown: Milwaukee, Wis.
Hobbies: Traveling, wine tasting, reading, and spending time with family and friends.
Why did you choose the VA?: I wanted to work somewhere that offered a great future.
First impressions: Awesome!! Great people!! Great place to be!!

Brigitte Pohren
Nursing assistant
Hometown: Omaha, Neb.
Hobbies: Volunteering and soccer.
Why did you choose to work at the VA?:
To honor my grandfather’s memory by continuing to serve America’s heroes, just as he did.
First impressions: The staff is very friendly, especially the volunteer greeters at the front entrance!

Charles Puerzer
Medical records administrator
Hometown: Milwaukee, Wis.
Hobbies: Bike riding, golf and fishing.
Why did you choose the VA?: To be part of an organization that provides quality service to military Veterans.
First impressions: Organized and professional.

Carrie Robinson
Medical support assistant
Hometown: West Allis, Wis.
Hobbies: Crafts, photography, watching professional indoor soccer.
Why did you choose the VA?: The patient diversity.
First impressions: I think the VA is fascinating and the stories behind each patient must be amazing.

Martha Runge
Psychologist
Hometown: Thiensville, Wis.
Hobbies: Yoga, guitar, hiking.
Why did you choose the VA?: I feel it’s an honor to work with people who are protecting us and have given so much to all of us.
First impressions: Welcoming.

Alicia Sanchez
Registered nurse
Hometown: Milwaukee, Wis.
Hobbies: Family time, movies.
Why did you choose the VA?: Many great things.
First impressions: Little city of its own.

Laurel Schach
Medical support assistant
Hometown: Greendale, Wis.
Hobbies: Watching football, photography, and camping.
Why did you choose the VA?: I needed a change of direction in my career and wanted to do something meaningful. This was my chance to “give back” to our Vets and their families.
First impressions: Busy! For as busy as it is, it’s a very friendly place.

Cindy Schindelholz
Medical support assistant
Hometown: Glendale, Wis.
Hobbies: Gardening, reading, family activities.
Why did you choose the VA?: To get back in the medical field.
First impressions: Very big-overwhelming.

Jennifer Scott
Registered nurse
Hometown: Mayville, Wis.
Hobbies: Jewelry making, reading, kid’s sporting events.
Why did you choose the VA?: To serve those who have served us.
First impressions: Friendly, proud.

Chelette Simmons
Nursing assistant
Hometown: Milwaukee, Wis.
Prior military service: Army, four years.
Hobbies: Watching WWE.
Why did you choose the VA?: I wanted to work with people I had something in common with and give back to those that have served our country.
First impressions: Everyone was friendly and inviting.

Tammy Smart
Nursing assistant
Hometown: Oak Creek, Wis.
Hobbies: Hunting, fishing and gardening.
Why did you choose the VA?: To be able to give back to the Vets for what they have done for me.
First impressions: Very friendly and inviting.

Maixiong Thao
Medical support assistant
Hometown: Milwaukee, Wis.
Hobbies: Priority now is spending time with my daughters.
Why did you choose to work at the VA?: I am a spouse of an active service member. I want to do my part and give back to our Veterans.
First impressions: A great place to work.
A place to expand my knowledge but also to gain new abilities and skills in order to help me help the people who need me most.

Trent Thom
Maintenance and operations supervisor
Hometown: Hartland, Wis.
Prior military service: Army, three years.
Hobbies: Aviation.
Why did you choose the VA?: Have always wanted to work at a VA hospital.
First impressions: Impression good.

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Arleen Thukral
Biomedical engineer
Hometown: Germantown, M.D.
Hobbies: Reading, movies, documentaries, tennis.
Why did you choose the VA?: Serve the veterans, great learning opportunity, great benefits.
First impressions: Impressive.

Jerry Turner Jr.
Vocational rehabilitation counselor
Prior military: Navy, four years.
Hometown: Kinloch, Mo.
Hobbies: Movies, music, reading, basketball.
Why did you choose the VA?: I understand the aspects of the VA and my wife is employed here (North Chicago).
First impressions: Great. What I expected.

Benita Vásquez
Registered nurse
Hometown: Puerto Rico
Hobbies: Reading and crafts.
Why did you choose the VA?: I love my Vets. It is an honor to take care of them.
First impressions: Always liked it and wanted to work here. I feel fortunate.

Jessica Walls
Dietician
Hometown: Kenosha, Wis.
Hobbies: Cooking, knitting and salsa dancing.
Why did you choose the VA?: I transferred from Hines VA to be closer to family and friends. Love working with the Veteran population—it’s very rewarding.
First impressions: Friendly.

Nancy Wheatley
Registered nurse
Hometown: Kenosha, Wis.
Prior military service: Army, four and a half years.
Hobbies: Spending time with family.
Why did you choose the VA?: I worked here as an intern on 9C and loved it! I am a Veteran and enjoy working with Veterans and hope to enjoy a long career here.
First impressions: Welcoming.

Todd Witt
Social worker
Hometown: Menomonee Falls, Wis.
Prior military service: Navy, four years.
Hobbies: Wrestling, skydiving, hurling (the Irish field sport) and soccer.
Why did you choose the VA?: Wanting to work with combat Veterans to provide mental health and case management services.
First impressions: Great. What I expected.

Katie “Wizzy” Wisniewski
Registered nurse
Hometown: West Milwaukee, Wis.
Hobbies: Shopping and spending time with family and sports.
Why did you choose the VA?: The opportunity to work with the men and women that serve our country. All the wonderful feedback from current employees.
First impressions: The open and friendly environment.

Heidi Young
Registered nurse
Hometown: Muskego, Wis.
Why did you choose the VA?: Opportunity for advancement and I really enjoy working for Veterans.
First impressions: Very friendly and welcoming.

Eric Zuelke
Nursing assistant
Hometown: Milwaukee, Wis.
Prior military service: Army National Guard, six years.
Hobbies: Gym and staying fit.
Why did you choose the VA?: Wanting to give back.
First impressions: Dedicated.

VA Voices

Question: Who is your favorite super hero cartoon character and why?

Carlos Ramos, Veteran
Pipefitter, Facility Management: “That’s easy. The Incredible Hulk. He’s the man and he’s huge. Nobody messes with The Hulk.”

Jim Schuh, Veteran
“Dogbert, the evil director of Human Resources from the ‘Dilbert’ comics because he makes me laugh.”

Noble Brown, Veteran
“Believe it or not, I like Charlie Brown the best because Snoopy is the man.”

Nimrod Allen Jr., Veteran
“Definitely Superman. I was raised with him and all the old school stuff. Old school is better than new school but I’m excited to take my grandkids to see the new Superman movie this summer.”

First impressions: Huge facility much like the aircraft carrier I had been on. It felt like being back in the Navy.