



VETERANS ASSISTANCE FOUNDATION

THE ALLIANCE

VAF, 312 Superior Ave. Tomah, WI 54660 866-823-8387 www.vafvets.org Visit us on Twitter & Facebook

Spring 2012

SERVING WISCONSIN'S AND THE NATION'S HOMELESS VETERANS FOR OVER 16 YEARS

NEW OFFICE GRAND OPENING

We were hoping for a warm, sunny day on Friday, April 20th, as we held our open house for the new Wisconsin Corporate office of the Veterans Assistance Foundation (VAF). What we got was an overcast, cool and windy morning.

Thankfully, the weather didn't deter the public and invited guests from showing up. We had a great turnout with individuals coming to learn about the VAF, tour the building and enjoy either a brat or hot dog from the fundraiser event held in conjunction with the open house.

We also had members of the Greater Tomah Area Chamber of Commerce present as the ribbon-cutting ceremony was held at the kickoff of the event. In addition, we had several area politicians (or representatives from their offices) present. Those who attended were able to meet with Senator Jennifer Schilling of the 32nd Senate District; Mark Aumann, Congressional Aide



for Ron Kind of the Third Congressional District; and Senator Julie Lassa and Representative Amy Sue Vruwink, who will be representing our area if the proposed redistricting of the legislative districts takes effect. Also present were individuals from Fort McCoy, Volk Field and the Tomah VA Medical Center.

WKBT-TV 8 provided television news coverage of the event. Reporter Pauline Le interviewed Colin Moten

– VAF President and also Thomas B., a veteran in the program for the story she told. She did a wonderful job of telling the story of the Veterans Assistance Foundation and what services we have to offer. This story aired on the 5pm, 6pm and 10pm news.

Brittany Linenberg of *The Tomah Monitor-Herald* and the *Tomah Journal* had provided news coverage in the form of a front-page article in the April 16th edition.

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President Colin Moten and BOD members at the ribbon-cutting ceremony.



Cindy, Cathy and Susan, VA Clinicians, check out the new VAF facility.



VAF BOD Member Mona Kane-Blaney and Mark Aumann, Congressional Aide, for Ron Kind of the Third District.



Bridget Peterson, VAF Administrative Assistant, tending to all the details of the big day.



Resident Thomas B., the "Grill Master", prepares brats and hot dogs for the day's event.



VAF CEO Robert Piaro purchasing a meal from VAF BOD Member Jackie Urban.

RACHEL SHEA – VAF'S NEW AODA TECHNICIAN



I am currently in the process of completing continuing education classes on substance abuse in Madison. The substance abuse

certificate program includes six classes held on the UW-Madison campus. I attended the first two classes on Monday, March 26th and Tuesday, March 27th. The first class covered the fundamentals of substance abuse and addiction. We discussed the definition of addiction, the implication of the brain in addiction and psychoactive substances. The instructor was very informative and I was able to gain a clearer understanding of what happens in a brain affected by addiction.

The second class focused on addiction within the family and trauma informed care. We discussed addiction within family systems and how to help families that are affected by addiction. We also listened to a guest speaker from ASTOP Sexual Abuse Services in Fond du Lac discussing trauma informed care. Trauma informed care involves incorporating knowledge about trauma in all aspects of service delivery. Being sensitive to a client's traumatic experiences increases recovery rates and improves client satisfaction with services.

I will be attending the third and fourth classes on April 23rd and 24th, and the fifth and sixth classes on May 21st and 22nd. After the conclusion of the sixth class, I will have to complete a written assignment on the topic of addiction and how I will apply the knowledge I acquired in the program to my work setting. I will receive the substance abuse certificate after the completion of all the classes and the written assignment. The goal of this program is to help professionals work more effectively with clients who have substance abuse and addiction issues. In just the first two classes, I have already acquired more knowledge about addiction, which I have shared with residents and other members of the VAF staff. I am looking forward to learning even more about substance abuse in the remaining four classes.

FROM THE PRESIDENT



Hello all, once again the staff and Veterans of VAF have been very busy. We started this year off with the annual Grant and Per Diem audits of the programs by the VA Medical Centers and our Annual Single Audit. I can report that there were no significant issues or findings in either case and we are moving forward for another productive year.

In February, several of the staff moved into the new Administrative Offices located on 312 Superior in Tomah. The transition went smoothly. Since then, we have had the outside of the building painted and the new sign hung in the front. This has been a very big step for VAF; it has placed the face of our program in the community and provides the program with more exposure and easier access for veterans. Each week brings increased veteran traffic and interest in the programs. It has also provided VAF more room for expansion of services and partnerships to provide for the veterans that we serve. VAF held its Open House in the

new office in April followed by the April Board of Directors Meeting. There were many political and local figures present to support the function and VAF's mission. The local newspapers and Channel 8 News out of La Crosse covered the event and each were excellent in getting the word out. These can be seen on our Web page at www.vafvets.org. A special thanks goes out the Tomah Chamber of Commerce for their support and advertisement of the open house, as well.

Spring tends to be grant season and we have been very busy in preparing and submitting our proposals. So far this year, VAF has applied for the "Supportive Services for Veterans Families" grant, as well as a Grant and Per Diem transitional housing grant with a "Transition in Place" housing model. Both are offered through the Department of Veterans Affairs. The first would assist the Foundation in providing services to Veteran's families prior to them becoming homeless. The second grant would provide transitional housing to veterans similar to the current programs; however, the change comes when the veteran becomes self-sufficient and is able to assume the lease of the housing unit that they occupy while in the

transitional housing phase, eliminating the need for the veteran to relocate. Both of these programs work with the VA's initiative to end homelessness among veterans' programs. VAF has also applied to the Department of Labor for the "Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program", a grant that provides funding to assist homeless veterans in preparing for, obtaining and maintaining employment. And finally, we have placed a bid with the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs to gain the contracts in operating their transitional housing centers and single room occupancy housing at locations in Chippewa Falls, King and Union Grove. Like I said, the staff have been very busy this spring and all for a good cause.

As we mentioned in the Winter Newsletter, in 2012 we are focusing our fundraising efforts on the replacement of one (possibly two) of our program vans. These vans are used in everything from picking up supplies for the programs to ensuring the veterans have transportation to and from employment, appointments and functions throughout our community. The van(s) that we are looking to replace this year are used in the large 60-bed program located in Tomah. We have started to receive some donations in support of this goal, and look forward to seeing yours. Our progress can be tracked through the red thermometer located on our Web page at www.vafvets.org. As a reminder, we can also be found on Facebook and Twitter where we post updates of current events happening with the programs. Take care, have a great spring, and thank you for your support.

Semper Fidelis,
Colin Moten

SEE YOU LATER, MY FRIEND

Vietnam Veteran Vernon Valenzuela was a person that once you met him, you would always remember him. Dressed in his typical Hawaiian shirt and shorts, sporting a fu manchu mustache and a grin from ear to ear, Vernon exemplified what many try their lifetime to achieve...respect. On March 26th, Vernon, who spent most of his adult life helping struggling combat veterans as a MFT counselor, lost his battle with cancer.

What many people didn't realize was that Vernon didn't just advocate for veterans, he also helped children in the community with caps and gowns for graduation, clothing, and was always there to give you support when you needed it the most.

What I will remember, is that Vernon and Chuck Bikakis, two Vietnam Veterans from Bakersfield, California, approached me in Washington, D.C. back in the fall of 1999. The two men said there were homeless veterans in Kern County, and could I come out and see if they could start a transitional housing program for them in Bakersfield. Twelve years later, thanks to that day, we have three (3) transitional housing programs and a Resource and Referral Center for veterans in Bakers-



field, California.

In the months before he passed, several people had the privilege of being one of the recipients of Vernon's emails titled "Thoughts from the ledge". Without even realizing it, he gave all of the people copied on those emails hope, laughter, sadness and inspiration. One of the most memorable statements he made was "Never doubt your ability to make a difference or the importance of your pursuit; we are not powerless unless we quit."

Remnants of Vernon's life have touched us all. From the candlelight vigil, the flyover from the helicopter that medivac'd him out of Vietnam, the articles, speeches, congressional recognitions, to the V2 tattoo's his family and friends etched on their arms.

Farewell, my dear friend. You will be truly missed.

Robert R. Piaro
VAF/CVAF CEO

TEAM VAF PLACES 5TH AT TRIVIA NIGHT



On March 17, 2012 there was an even greater abundance of St. Patrick's Day spirit than to be expected, as Families First of Monroe County had their second annual trivia contest. The income raised from this event goes to help residents of Monroe

— TRIVIA, continued on page 3

READY, SET, BIKE!

Several of our residents, including Terry V. and Bernard L. have been working hard on getting our bicycles ready so the veterans in our program will have an opportunity to ride. We currently have nine bicycles that the veterans can check out and ride, two of which were recently donated by a prior resident. His donation included both male and female Schwinn bicycles. It is nice to have a female bike for the female veterans in the program.

Now is the never-ending task of keeping up with the repairs. There seems to always be some needed repair on one or more of the bicycles; if not a tire, then a pedal or handle bar, etc.

Hopefully some of our veterans will get a chance to explore the surrounding area and local bike trails offered in the Coulee Region.

If you are looking for something to donate to the Veterans Assistance Foundation the following items would be appreciated: adult bicycle helmets, back packs, bicycle lights, chain keyed locks, tires and tubes and bicycle tools. It would also be nice if, in the future, we would be able to have an adult three-wheel bike with a basket.



TRIVIA, continued from page 2

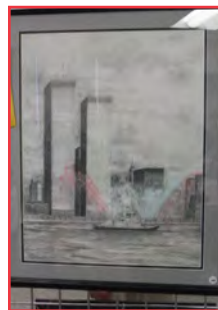
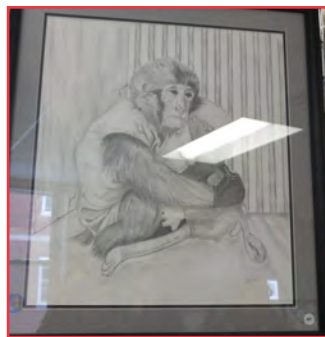
County in need.

The trivia contest was a huge success again this year, and much fun was had by all. Twenty-Seven teams took part in the action, which is almost double the amount of teams from last year, with each team consisting of a minimum of 4 to a maximum of 10 players.

There was more of a challenge this year as the categories were not announced beforehand, so no one could “study up” ahead of time, or “stack” their team with individuals who knew a lot about certain categories. Some of the categories this year included: art, Ireland, astronomy, female musicians of the 1980s, presidential trivia, famous nicknames, answers that started with C, and a category about Cheeseheads, which was trivia about the state of Wisconsin. There were also two audio categories that featured famous TV show and movie themes.

No one went away hungry from a chili feed and various desserts served at intermission. The fee to participate was

VAF'S GOT TALENT!



Everyone working at (or visiting) the Tomah VAMC enjoyed an extra treat on Valentine's Day this year: The 2012 Veterans Fine Arts, Applied Arts and Crafts Competition. It was held February 14th through the 16th in the Building 407 conference room. Veteran artists displayed their artistic skills through a myriad of mediums, including acrylic paints, sculpture and various craft items.

Innovative creations explored various mediums and techniques, such as cosmetic makeup cleverly crafted to recreate a portrait of Elizabeth Taylor by Scott S. Other mundane items were transformed into new and compelling pieces of artwork, like painted plates and saws. Traditional mediums displayed masterful skill, as demonstrated by sketched portraits and painted scenes. Iron sculptures, folk art pieces and other three-dimensional crafts filled the room.

Selected works were awarded 1st, 2nd and 3rd Place ribbons. Several current (and prior) Veterans Assistance Foundation residents received recognition for their submissions.

\$20 a person or \$200 per team. Money was also raised by having a silent auction and being able to buy bribes (a free answer) for \$10. The two big-ticket items in the silent auction were a Green Bay Packers signed football and a homemade quilt. Other prizes included hotel stays and products that were put together in baskets to be auctioned.

This year the Veterans Assistance Foundation team consisted of Colin Moten, Kris Moten, Faye Rainey, Robert Vega, Peggy Engen-Koresh, Dan Koresh, Andrew Stargard, Linda Stargard, Margaret Shay and Deena Linder. The VAF team did very

well finishing 5th out of 27 teams. 1st Place was won by, and awarded to, repeating champions Tomah Area School District. Gene B. was awarded a 2nd Place ribbon for his carefully crafted metal model. David W. placed 1st with his latch-hook piece and Reggie L. placed 3rd with his colored drawing and first with his monochromatic drawing. The entire show displayed abundant examples of admirable artistic talent.

Those possessing musical skill and a dramatic flair showcased their talent during the Performing Arts Competition. Vocal, instrumental, theatre and written pieces were submitted and awarded ribbons. Current and former VAF residents recognized for their abilities included Don D. placing 1st for a vocal rock solo, Joey A. placing 1st in instrumental solo jazz, pop and original composition and Scott F. placed 1st for his inspirational essay.

The yearly Creative Arts Festival allows Veterans to share their skills with family members, other veterans, staff members and the public. The viewing public undoubtedly enjoyed and appreciated the fine craftsmanship. We look forward to attending the event again next year.

VAF Case Manager Bill Melton and several Veterans in the program assisted Mary Masters of Families First with the set up of the building, the Friday prior to the event and clean up the Monday after everything was completed. Overall, it was a very good time and another great teambuilding experience. This year we improved our record and have gotten closer to 1st Place. Next year we hope it will be our year to bring the traveling trophy home to the VAF.

SETTLING IN

The flourish and renewal of this year's early spring saw equally refreshing changes in the Foundation's office structure. Following several months of extensive construction, new office space was completed in downtown Tomah. Administrative staff including the Foundation President, Executive Assistant and Administrative Assistant, with the help of generous volunteers, spent two whirlwind days disassembling, transporting and reassembling office furniture and wares.

Moving began February 16th and con-

tinued into February 17th. Office pieces were shuttled from the third floor of Building 407 to an awaiting U-Haul truck. Braving steep inclines and precariously perched office wares, administrative staff is happy to report minimal damage to property and persons.

The entire process is a continuously smooth transition. Administrative staff is still settling into the new building, putting the finishing touches on décor and work areas. The staff will be hosting an open house fundraiser in April.

FIRST "GRADUATION PACKET" GIVEN TO AL W.

The Veteran Assistance Foundation is very pleased to announce, Al W. as their first recipient of the "Graduation Packet", which includes many essentials for beginning housekeeping such as dishes, pots and pans, a toaster, a coffee pot, casserole dishes and some cleaning supplies, to name just a few of the items. The packet should be very helpful in providing basics to the Veterans when they move out on their own. We are hoping that we have many more Veterans qualifying in the future.

The VAF developed the requirements for the Graduation Packet over the last two years. We started with a curriculum called, "Rent Smart", which is a series of 11 classes covering topics necessary for a successful tenant experience. There were also requirements for budget counseling and good discharge planning. The resident had to be compliant with the program; meeting their own goals and our program requirements in every area and never

have a relapse with substance issues.

Al W. completed all the requirements for the packet before he successfully discharged from the Tomah Step Up program and transitioned into his own apartment. He should be very proud in his achievement.

We see him regularly whether it's just to visit or to get help with questions he might have dealing with "life" beyond the foundation. He is doing well in his new environment.

Congratulations, Al!



Al W. and Peggy Engen-Koresh admiring contents of the "Graduation Package".

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This great article helped spread the word regarding our program and the services we provide as well as letting everyone reading the article know the date and time of our open house event.

We have been in contact with several individuals who have either read the newspaper article or viewed the news story on television who have asked what they can do to help, have donated items to the Veterans in the program or who have called to

inquire more about the program.

Despite the weather, the fundraising event went over very well with several large orders for brats and hot dogs having been placed. We also had a great turnout of local business and residents who stopped in to pick up lunch and to see what the VAF is all about.

We would like to thank everyone who attended for helping to make this day such a success!

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP?

Providing services takes money; foundations and corporations fight hard for a share of big federal and state grants. The Veterans Assistance Foundation relies on the generosity of people like you to help end the national disgrace of homeless veterans who are (MIA) Missing in America.

Please send your tax-deductible donations to:

Veterans Assistance Foundation, Inc.
312 Superior Ave.
Tomah, WI 54660

Please help us to continue our efforts to help those veterans who need a "Handup and not a hand-out."

VAF MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to help homeless veterans or at risk of becoming Homeless veterans regain, maintain and improve their status in society by providing an alcohol and drug-free, secure environment through which a wide array of human services can be accessed in an atmosphere of dignity and mutual concern.

REMEMBER ME

By Christina Rossetti

Remember me when I am gone away,
Gone far away into the silent land;
When you can no more hold me by the hand,
Nor I half turn to go, yet turning stay.

Remember me when no more day by day
You tell me of our future that you planned;
Only remember me, you understand.
It will be late to counsel then or pray.

Yet if you should forget me for a while
And afterwards remember, do not grieve;
For if the darkness and corruption leave
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had;
Better by far you should forget and smile,
Than that you should remember and be sad.

IN MEMORY OF:

Larry B. – USAF
12/16/61 – 02/16/12