



VETERANS ASSISTANCE FOUNDATION

THE ALLIANCE

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

Winter 2012

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

FROM THE DESK OF THE PRESIDENT



Winter is almost over and spring is right around the corner once again. Many things have taken place since we last talked. We've transitioned through

the holiday season and entered into a new year, held the annual Christmas dinner for the Veterans, as well as made it through our first year of the Combined Federal Campaign (no word as to the outcome yet). VAF has also had some changes in the staff. We are grateful to welcome aboard Rachel as our new Alcohol and Drug Technician and Bridget as our Administrative Assistant in the Corporate Office. Both are highly motivated and make great additions to our team. We are also sorry to see Janet leave; we wish her well and the best in all her future endeavors.

The new corporate office is complete! Renee, Bridget and myself moved into the new office on February 20. The new office will allow for the future expansion of VAF programs and the consolidation of assets, as well as more visibility in the local community. The building has six office spaces, meeting and reception areas. We are also making arrangements to host VAF's April Board of Directors meeting and to have the ribbon cutting with the Chamber of Commerce at the same time. So, final improvements will be completed in the spring and summer. Phone numbers for the office are:

Main line: 608-372-VETS (8387)
Toll Free: 866-823-8387 (VETS)
Fax: 608-374-2859.

New Address: 312 Superior Avenue
Tomah, WI 54660

This year, VAF has applied for the Supportive Services for Veterans' Families (SSVF) grant offered through the VA. The SSVF program is a new VA program that awards grants to private nonprofit organizations and consumer cooperatives that will provide supportive services to very low-income Veterans and their families residing in, or transitioning to, permanent housing. This grant will allow VAF to provide a larger range of supportive services designed to promote housing stability. If awarded this grant, VAF will be able to provide full time employment for two additional staff members and provide services for veterans' families in an area covering 13 counties in Western and Central Wisconsin.

In 2012, we are focusing our fundraising efforts on the replacement of one, and possibly two, of our program vans. These vans are used in the transportation of our veterans to and from interviews, employment, meetings, appointments and functions throughout the community. They are also used for program functions such as picking up supplies. The vans that we are looking to replace are for the large 60-bed program in Tomah. As you can imagine, these vehicles put on quite a few miles each year in support of this operation and dependability is paramount. You can track our progress through the red thermometer located on our Web site at www.vafvets.org. As a reminder we can also be found on Facebook and Twitter.

Semper Fidelis,
Colin Moten

VAF ADDS NEW ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT TO STAFF



Hello! My name is Bridget Peterson and I recently joined the Veterans Assistance Foundation staff as an Administrative Assistant. I will be

working closely with Renee Pierce and President Colin Moten. Please allow me a moment to introduce myself.

I graduated last spring from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point with a Bachelor's Degree of Science in Communicative Disorders. Following graduation, I substituted throughout the Tomah Area School District. During my collegiate career, I held a humble job as a convenience store clerk in my hometown of Kendall, a position I continue to fill every weekend. Presently, I live just outside of Tomah.

My interests and hobbies are somewhat eclectic; I enjoy studying family and local history and am currently updating the family tree. I also watch classic films and collect odd news articles, such as "50-foot Bridge Stolen in New Castle, PA."

To relax, I bake cookies, cake or bread and listen to the Russian tenor, Ivan Ozhogin. Perhaps someday, I will treat the staff (to cookies, not music).

Everyone has been incredibly welcoming toward me and patient with me thus far! I will certainly do my best to assist as needed. I look forward to meeting all of you.

VAF BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEET IN BAKERSFIELD, CALIFORNIA

The VAF Board of Directors held their first board meeting of 2012 on January 28th, in Bakersfield, California. The location is that of VAF's sister program, the California Veterans Assistance Foundation (CVAF); VAF leases properties to CVAF for their programs in Bakersfield. Due to new mem-

bers joining the VAF Board in the past year, it was a good way for them to tour facilities, meet employees and understand how the CVAF program sites operate.

Chris Hanson, who joined the Board last year, was voted in as the new VAF Board Vice Chair. Renee Pierce, also new to the

Board, was voted in as VAF Board Secretary (non-voting). Mona Kane-Blaney, VAF Board Member, also joined the board last year; she flew in from Arizona, her "winter playground", to attend the meeting.

Along with the usual business of the board
— VAF BOARD, continued on page 2

VAF BOARD, continued from page 1

meeting itself, the Board members were treated to a day trip to the coast. Lunch outdoors (pier-side at Pismo Beach in January) was a real treat for them coming from cold Wisconsin. After lunch, they shopped and got a tour up the coastline to see the Elephant Seals, and other sightseeing along the way. They enjoyed the day and were so thankful they had the opportunity to have at least a "taste of California" while they were here for the board meeting.



Pictured, L-R: John Margowski, B.O.D. Member; Robert Piaro, VAF/CVAF CEO; Mona Kane-Blaney, B.O.D. Member; Renee Pierce, Secretary; Jackie Urban, B.O.D. Member; Colin Moten, President; and Chris Hanson, Vice-Chair.

VAF EMPLOYEES RECEIVE AWARDS

During the Board of Directors meeting in Bakersfield, California an awards ceremony was included to honor two employees for their years of service to VAF. Judy Piaro and Renee Pierce both received a Dedicated Service Award Certificate and also a year pin from Robert Piaro, CEO and Colin Moten, VAF President.



Picture on left: Renee Pierce, her present position is Executive Assistant to VAF President Colin Moten. She has been with VAF for four years, and has presently been added to the VAF Board as Secretary (non-voting).

Picture on right: Judy Piaro is presently Executive Assistant to the Board and also the Editor of The Alliance, VAF/CVAF's quarterly newsletter. Judy has been with the Foundation for 18 years and has served in many positions over that time. She was a part of envisioning the Foundation's dream from the beginning along with her husband Robert Piaro, VAF/CVAF CEO.

HOLIDAY GIFT DONATIONS



For the last several years during the Christmas season, the American Society of Military

Comptrollers and the Fort McCoy Resource Management Office has donated gift bags and gifts for our veterans.

The bags were filled with various items, including hard candy, socks, hats and mittens. They provided gifts for the Step-Up House residents as well, that included games, movies, puzzles, towels and washcloths. These gifts were given to the Veterans during our annual holiday party that we have for them.

"A BIG thank you" to everyone from the American Society of Military Comptrollers and the Fort McCoy Resource Management Office. Your thoughtfulness continues to amaze the Veterans and is very much appreciated.

FRIENDS OF VALTON CHURCH...HOLIDAY SPIRIT OF GIVING

This year for the holidays the Friends of Valton Church from Wonewoc, Wisconsin presented the residents in our program with gift bags at Christmas time. The donations included candy, puzzle books, socks, hats, personal hygiene items and other goodies.

The veterans never stop being amazed by the generosity of this group, who continually bring in items for them. It's great to see the smiles on the veterans' faces when they walk away with a gift bag stuffed so full, it couldn't fit even so much as another piece of candy!

To the congregation at the Friends of Valton Church: thank you for always remembering our organization all year long and especially at this time of year; it is deeply appreciated.

ST. PETER'S SUNDAY SCHOOL CHILDREN PLAN SURPRISE

Nicole from St. Peter's Church in Shennington, Wisconsin (not far from our Tomah location) contacted us and wanted to do something for the Veterans in the program. She asked if we could bring some of the Veterans out to their church and the Sunday school children would put on a holiday play for them.

Several Veterans wanted to go, so we took them out on a Saturday, thinking

A CHRISTMAS TO REMEMBER



The VAF Christmas party for the Veterans was held December 20, 2011 in building 407. The evening started out with a wonderful meal catered by B.P.'s Smokehouse. The Veterans raved about the food and went back for seconds and thirds. For any of the Veterans who were unable to attend the party, meals were put into carry out containers so they could also enjoy the wonderful food.

Along with the gifts donated from the American Society of Military Comptrollers and the Fort McCoy Resource Management Office, the Veterans Assistance Foundation (VAF) used donated funds to purchase gifts for each of the Veterans, as well as prizes for the winners of Bingo.

The staff of the VAF and Kate Loethen, Tomah VAMC Clinician, stayed to facilitate the party by handing out the gifts to the Veterans and calling out the letter/number combinations for Bingo. Along with the Veterans winning gifts by playing Bingo, staff put the names of all the Veterans into a box and drew out names in groups of three to five, making sure that everyone received a prize gift.

Several of the Veterans commented that they hadn't attended a holiday party or received gifts in several years or had not received any at all. Everyone we spoke to said that they had a great time, loved the food and were grateful for the gifts they received. For a couple of weeks after the party, staff members were still being stopped in the halls by Veterans saying, "Thank you for the party and the gifts. I really appreciate it!"

Thank you to all for making this a wonderful and enjoyable evening for our veterans.

— SURPRISE, continued on page 3



After the cookie decorating, they brought in pizzas, salads and chips for the children and Veterans.

It was a great way to spend a Saturday and the Veterans all had fun. Some even brought their cameras and took pictures. The children asked each veteran what branch of service they had served in and what they did while they served. The

LHI HOSTS HOLIDAY DINNER

Logistics Health Inc. (LHI) hosted a holiday dinner for area veterans on December 6, 2011. The veterans took a bus from the VAF to downtown La Crosse, Wisconsin. CEO Don Weber gave a speech for all of the veterans and thanked them for their service to this country. He also spent quite a bit of time walking around and visiting each table; speaking to many veterans individually, as well. LHI provided the veterans with a delicious dinner, an LHI jacket and a bag of goodies, which included a gift card to Walmart.

Afterwards, the bus took everyone through the Rotary Lights (a Christmas lights display) before heading back to Tomah. Everyone said they enjoyed the dinner, the generous gifts and the lights.

The following is an article written by one of the Veterans, Steve C., who attended the dinner hosted by Logistics Health Inc.:

"We, at the Veterans Assistance Foundation, would like to express our warmest heartfelt "Thank You" to Don Weber, Logistics Health Inc. (LHI), and the volunteers who helped make this night special for all attending. Mr. Weber hosted an evening "Honoring our Veterans" filled with fun, superb dining, a delightful performance by the LaCrosse Boys Choir and, of course, we can't forget Santa Claus and Mrs. Claus. During the entire event, Mr. Weber personally made an attempt to socialize with every veteran in attendance. He made sure everyone walked out of there feeling comfortable, full and with a very nice gift bag full of wonderful items."

Once again, from the veterans of the

veterans thanked the children and Nicole for having us and said if they get the opportunity, they would like to come back. Nicole invited all the veterans back for Sunday's sermon if they wanted to attend. In addition to hosting the Veterans for the play, lunch and cookie decorating, the church congregation collected many items for the Veterans in our program. We received clothing, scarves and gloves, books, puzzles, hygiene items, movies, food items and more, as well as a cash donation.

We extend a heartfelt "Thank You" to the congregation of St. Peter's Church, for inviting our veterans to take part in the wonderful play, cookie decorating and pizza party – they totally enjoyed it. Also, thank you to all those who contributed the many donations that were collected. It made a grand Christmas for all our veterans – one they will never forget.

Veterans Assistance Foundation, we would like to make a special recognition to Mr. Weber and Logistics Health Inc. for "Honoring our Veterans". We all had a fantastic evening. THANK YOU FOR REMEMBERING US!



Pictured are the VAF residents that attended the LHI holiday dinner event. VAF CEO Bob Piaro and VAF President Colin Moten were also at the gathering.

HOMELESSNESS AWARENESS

The month of November is Homeless Awareness Month across the United States. That month found both the Monroe County Homeless Coalition and the La Crosse County Homeless Coalition looking for ways to inform the public of the plight at hand.

In Monroe County, school statistics on homeless teens ran as part of a week's worth of stories on the local television stations, as well as several articles in local papers. In the Tomah School District alone, the teenage homeless student count is over 100 individuals. Monroe County does not currently have a homeless shelter to offer those in need of one. Recently, Tomah community members gathered at First Congressional Church to discuss homelessness in the county.

—HOMELESSNESS, continued on page 4

HIGHLIGHT A VETERAN



My name is Thomas B., I'm from Chicago, Illinois; however, I lived in Arkansas from 2006-2010. In 2010, I found that my life was going nowhere. I was in a very dysfunctional marriage, I was

self-medicating with drugs and alcohol to cope with my PTSD and anxieties. I decided I had to take control of my life and chose to make it better. I sold my belongings and relocated to Lake Bluff, Illinois to stay with my son until I was accepted into rehabilitation in Chicago, Illinois.

After I completed rehabilitation, I realized that I still was not ready to face the temptations of the world on my own yet, so I requested to be transferred to the aftercare program at the VA Hospital in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. There I received more informational classes and counseling to cope with my issues, without using drugs or alcohol. I felt my life was finally starting to get back on track, but I still felt I needed more assistance on how to change my life for the better. While in Milwaukee, I heard from other veterans about the VAF in Tomah, Wisconsin. After discussing it with my caseworker, she agreed it would be a positive move for me.

I arrived at the VAF in Tomah, Wisconsin in May of 2011. At first it was a culture change for me, as it was a very small town compared to what I was accustomed. I found the staff at the VAF to be very helpful, concerned and informative regarding any issues or questions I may have had. I have accomplished a great deal and grown as a person since arriving. My physical health and mental health have improved, as well as my employment status. I am currently employed by Burnstad's European Restaurant and Pub as a Saucier. I find this to be a challenging and exciting position where I have to show a great attention to detail, yet need to work at a fast pace. One of my most fulfilling honors to date was having the opportunity to prepare dinner for the VAF Staff Christmas Party.

My future goal is to go on to school for Culinary Arts possibly in La Crosse, Wisconsin or Madison, Wisconsin to help me achieve Executive Chef status.

I feel that since I arrived at the VAF it has been a rewarding and positive experience for me and I would recommend the program to any veteran seeking to improve their life.

Sincerely,
Thomas B.

HOMELESSNESS, continued from page 3 —

In La Crosse County, a fundraising concert and information-gathering event was coupled with a silent auction to raise funds for two different organizations; one being the Warming Center, run by Catholic Charities, which opened last winter and has opened for its second year this past November. The Warming Center allows individuals to get a hot evening meal and have a warm place to sleep at night, who otherwise wouldn't have. This organization is in addition to the Salvation Army of La Crosse and helps to get more people

off of the streets at night during the coldest months of the year. Both the Warming Center and the Salvation Army have limited bed space, but you do not have to be a Veteran to receive assistance.

You can help by spreading awareness of homelessness and what people can do to help those individuals in need. For more information on helping homeless veterans, please visit our Web site at www.vafvets.org or call us at 866-823-8387. You can reach the Salvation Army in La Crosse by calling 608-782-6126 or the Warming Center at 608-782-0710.

FOV HOST THANKSGIVING FEAST

This Thanksgiving, we were reminded of all that we should be thankful for, especially with the unexpected passing of a friend from the Friends of Veterans M/C Group (FOV). The organization pulled together the day after the funeral of their friend and remembered the veterans at VAF.

They put on their best faces and found it in their hearts to again prepare and serve a delicious Thanksgiving meal that all of the veterans enjoyed. They all sat, ate and enjoyed one another's company. After the pies were gone and everyone was ready for a post turkey nap, the veterans thanked the group and left feeling full and much appreciated.

We can't thank the FOV enough for the awesome Thanksgiving meal that they lovingly prepared and served. They have been faithful supporters of our veterans and our program for many years with fundraisers, donations, labor and meals. All we can say is THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!



The FOV shown here serving VAF residents a wonderful Thanksgiving meal.

WISH LIST

Personal Care Items:

- | | | | |
|------------------------|------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Toothbrushes/Holders | Toothpaste | Dental Floss | Toilet Paper |
| Foot powder | Shampoo | Conditioner | Brushes |
| Disposable | Shavers | Combs | Bar Soap |
| Shaving Cream | Lotion | Kleenex | Fingernail/Toenail Clippers |
| Liquid Hand Soap | Baby Oil | Vaseline | Denture-Bath, Cleaner, Adhesive |
| Bath Towels/Washcloths | Deodorant | Bar Soap Holder/Container | |

Laundry Items:

- | | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------|
| Fabric Softener Sheets | Laundry Bags (mesh type) | Sewing Kits |
| Laundry Detergent (Powder) | Plastic Clothes Hangers | |

Recreational Items:

- | | | |
|----------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Model Kits | Phone Cards | Pool Sticks and Red Chalk |
| Craft Kits | Movies | Pool Stick Repair Kit |
| Board Games | Crossword Puzzles | Nine Ball Rack |
| Pens, pencils | Envelopes | Stamps |
| Stationery | Books | Greeting Cards |
| Exercise Mats | Bicycle Tire Repair Kits 26" | Tire Tubes for Bikes |
| Bicycles (26") | Bicycle Racks | |

Clothing: *Used clothing, in good condition, is fine.*

- | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| House Slippers (Sizes 8-13) | T-shirts (S, M, L, XL, 2XL) |
| Underwear (S, M, L, XL, 2XL) | Socks – Athletic (Sizes 8-13) |
| Men's jeans (Waist sizes 32 to 42) | Shower shoes/flip flops (M, L, XL) |
| Tennis Shoes | Winter Hats, Gloves, Boots, Coats |

Household Supplies:

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Sugar and/or Sugar Substitute | Coffee mugs (plastic) | Pillows and Pillow Protectors |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|

While donations of any kind are always welcome, please call the Center at 608-372-1280 before making any donations. Cash donations are always needed and welcomed. As always, the residents and staff thank you for your kind thoughts and generous support.

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.

WHEN I MUST LEAVE YOU
By Helen Steiner Rice

When I must leave you for a little while,
 Please do not grieve and shed wild tears
 And hug your sorrow to you through the years,
 But start out bravely with a gallant smile;

And for my sake and in my name
 Live on and do all things the same.

Feed not your loneliness on empty days,
 But fill each waking hour in useful ways,
 Reach out your hand in comfort and cheer
 And I in turn will comfort you and hold you near;

And never, never be afraid to die,
 For I am waiting for you in the sky!

The following Veterans were present or past veterans of VAF

Michael R.
U.S. Marines
08/03/64 – 11/11/11

Harry M., Jr.
U.S. Navy
11/28/54 to 12/14/11