



VETERANS ASSISTANCE FOUNDATION

THE ALLIANCE

VAF, P.O. Box 610, Tomah, WI 54660 608-372-1280

Fall 2008 – Issue 3

VETERANS HELPING VETERANS

FROM THE DESK OF THE PRESIDENT

Dear Reader,

As we are going into the holiday season, many of our thoughts are focused on the spirit of giving. I know with the economy right now, the giving level from everyone this year will probably be much lower than in the past. Being that we are a 501(c)(3), non-profit organization, it is those donations we receive from businesses and the general public that can bring us from barely making ends meet to being able to have some extras for our veterans for the holidays.

Many of our residents either have no relatives nearby or relatives that have disowned them, leaving them alone and left out of all the festivities of the holidays that they fondly remember from their past. Here at the Veterans Assistance Foundation, we try to provide some extra activities and goodies during this time of year, to help our residents stay busy and feeling good at a time which can be very depressing for them. During past holidays, we have experienced some of our vets going from doing fantastic

in their program to going into a depression and ultimately regressing and going back on alcohol and/or drugs. So trying to help them maintain a good healthy attitude by keeping them busy and filling their lives with the little extra things they normally don't have, is very important to help them make it through this time of year.

We try to, if funds permit, give every resident a Christmas present each year; phone cards, gift cards to department stores or movie theaters, etc. Several times we have also had persons, churches or organizations donate money, new clothing, food, soda or holiday goodies for our veterans. You will never know the appreciation and gratitude these veterans have for those unexpected donations that mean so much to them. Many veterans feel that they have served their country but their country has forgotten all about them, especially now, when *they* are in need of a helping hand from their country.

So please, during this holiday season, give

a thought to the veterans who have fought for this great country and express your gratitude for those heroes by making a donation to show that you care. There are many ways that you can donate, go to our Web site at www.veteransassistance.org and click on donate or send your check to VAF, 500 East Veterans Street, Bldg. 407, Room #3749, Tomah, WI 54660. You can also call our office during work hours 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday at 608-372-1280 about dropping off in-person donations such as food or other needed items. You will also find a list on the back page of this newsletter with ideas for donations to the program.

Please know that your gift, large or small, will be deeply appreciated and used solely by the veterans that we serve here at the Veterans Assistance Foundation. We thank you for your support and may you and yours have a Blessed Christmas and a prosperous 2009.

Sincerely,

Robert R. Piaro, President
Veterans Assistance Foundation

SEMIANNUAL BOD MEETING HELD IN TOMAH, WISCONSIN

The VAF/CVAF Board of Directors met in Tomah in August 2008, for their semiannual Board of Directors (BOD) meeting. The meetings are rotated twice a year between Bakersfield, CA and Tomah, WI. CVAF hosts the board meeting in Bakersfield the second week of February, and VAF hosts the meeting in Tomah, WI mid-August each year. Summer in Wisconsin is very pleasant and enjoyable, but the winter meeting being held here was highly discouraged by the CVAF BOD members, needless to say. All board members were present and the meeting was very productive.

A BBQ lunch was again prepared by SPAC

members (Special Projects Action Committee) for the BOD members, staff and all the VAF program residents. A good time was had by everyone; which included the warm sunny weather, the beautiful location on the VA grounds, playing cards, visiting, and a couple of residents even played some favorite tunes on their guitars, which everyone really loved. The board members enjoyed their lunch break, especially talking with the resident veterans and answering any questions they had about the program. Our next BOD meeting will be held in Bakersfield, CA the first weekend in February, 2009.



"FRIENDS OF VETERANS" HOST THANKSGIVING DINNER

On November 8th, Friends of Veterans club members and their families joined together to put on a Thanksgiving Feast for the residents of the VAF Tomah and Step Up Programs. The menu included turkey, ham, mashed and baked potatoes, vegetable side dishes, stuffing, salads and, of course, a selection of pies.

The number of volunteers (42) equaled the number of veterans who ate a fantastic meal and sat in fellowship telling their own personal stories and successes. The veterans claimed it was the best-tasting Thanksgiving meal that they have had in many years, since some will not be able to visit with their own friends and families during the upcoming holiday season.

A BIG thank you for preparing such a wonderful meal and for your time with the residents. It meant a lot to every veteran in the program.

VAMC GPD LIAISON TO VAF



Cindi Groskreutz, MSW

Cindi Groskreutz is a VA employee who was assigned in September 2008, as a Grant and Per Diem (GPD) liaison for the homeless veteran programs here in Tomah. In this role, she provides clinical services and case management for the VAF grant program. Prior to working as a GPD, she worked as a social worker in the residential substance abuse, dual disorder and PTSD programs here at the Tomah VAMC since 2006. Cindi has also worked in the public and private sector as a clinical therapist for the last 10 years.

VA GRANT AND PER DIEM ASSIGNS CATHY ROUTH LIAISON FOR VAF STEP-UP HOMES



Cathy Routh has worked as the Grant and Per Diem Liaison since January of 2007. Now that the VA has added Cyndi Groskreutz to the staff, Cathy is now Liaison for the Step Up Wisconsin homes in the community. Cathy has been in the Tomah VA for 15 years and before that, Salt Lake City, Utah for 10 years. She has worked as a clinical social worker and worked in both residential and outpatient counseling, in the areas of PTSD, MST and substance abuse.

She is very much enjoying her work with VAF veterans and their staff. Cathy is married and has two children in college. When not at work, Cathy is very involved in Natural Horsemanship with her two horses; Harlan (an 18-year-old Thoroughbred gelding) and Matrix (an 8-year-old Oldenburg gelding).

HVRP UPDATE



By Colin Moten, VAF Program Developer

In September, HVRP wrapped up the 1st Quarter of Program Year 2008 and the 5th Quarter Follow-up of Program Year 2007. We are well on the road to another good year with the program. To date, we have assessed almost 70 veterans for employment assistance and services.

In October, Colin, Nadine and Chantel (HVRP Volunteer) attended the annual Tomah VA Stand Down held in Onalaska. Our HVRP grant has \$5,000 set aside for this special event. Through the grant we are able to purchase and prepare a lunch for veterans attending the Stand Down, as well as provide many other items such as clothing, hygiene

and personal items, and reading glasses. There were over 200 veterans served during this year's event.

In the summer edition of "The Alliance" we informed you that through HVRP we were able to purchase computers with Internet access for the classroom. Today, this is a reality and the veterans in the program are able to conduct employment searches, check credit reports, view VA and WDVA Web sites and more. We will also be teaching basic computer classes to aid the veteran in computer applications.

During the past quarter, we also bid farewell to Heather and welcomed aboard Nadine Thundercloud as our new Program Assistant. Nadine will be assisting with the day-to-day operations of the grant, providing classes and follow-up services to enrolled veterans.



New HVRP computers.

TIM WERNER ON VETERANS' BENEFITS



USDVA Federal Benefits Representative Tim Werner provides weekly on-site counseling and services to veterans of the VAF Tomah facility. Veterans in the program are able to apply for VA Compensation or Pension and have those claims expedited because of their current living situation.

Disability compensation for veterans is not subject to federal or state income tax. Veterans are rated at increments of 10 percent reflecting degree of disability. Where a veteran has more than one disability, the percentages are not simply added together to produce a new rating. Instead, a formula in the federal regulations calculates the overall rating. A veteran may be rated at zero percent, meaning there is evidence of the service-connected condition, but it does not impair the veteran. The zero percent rating, though not compensable, can be beneficial since it may raise the veteran's priority in other VA programs.

VA Pension is a benefit paid to wartime veterans who have limited or no income, and who are age 65 or older; or, if under 65, who are permanently and totally disabled. For further information regarding veteran's benefits, see your County Veterans Service Officer, or go to the VA's Web site at www.va.gov



SPOTLIGHT ON SUPPORTERS



The following organization and individual are recognized for their special contributions to the veterans residing in VAF-operated programs in Wisconsin.

LENSCRAFTERS GIFT OF SIGHT PROGRAM

Ten of our residents that are not eligible for glasses through the VA hospital are thankful to LensCrafters of the West Towne Mall in Madison, WI. LensCrafters has been working with our veterans for years through a program they have called, "Gift of Sight."

Our residents are able to get an exam and a prescription from the VA. Residents then bring their prescription to their case manager to complete the application to LensCrafters. Their eligibility is reviewed and quarterly, LensCrafters will contact us and let us know of the date that the veterans need to be there.

Upon arriving, they pick out the frames they would like and see a technician who completes the measurements for the glasses to be made. LensCrafters also puts out coffee, bagels and breakfast bars for them to snack on while they wait. This year they were also giving away winter

hats and gloves. Within hours, all 10 of our veterans were able to leave the store with their new glasses.

A BIG thank you from VAF and our veterans to LensCrafters for making this program available for our residents. It is deeply appreciated and very needed.



VAF residents who received new glasses from LensCrafters "Gift of Sight" program are Michael F., Michael K. and Mark C.

VAF VOLUNTEER EXTRAORDINAIRE

My name is Chantel Decorah and I am a volunteer with the VAF and HVRP programs for the Fall/Winter semester 2008. My career path is in Business Management and Development, which the experiences with these programs are supportive of this goal.

It is amazing what the people involved with the VAF and HVRP grants help the veterans with, so they do not truly feel homeless. They are valued and supported by the determination of the HVRP and VAF staff to succeed, which is a trait that will help me in future endeavors. Thank you for letting me be a part of this program!

We would like to thank Chantel for her



hard work and passion while volunteering for our program. Her time and talents are deeply appreciated by the veterans of our program and by everyone with the Veterans Assistance Foundation.

NEW HVRP PROGRAM ASSISTANT

My name is Nadine Thundercloud and I recently joined HVRP as a part-time Program Assistant. I have a passion for training, learning and development, which supports my goal of assisting the veterans in this program to find employment.

I have a schedule of classes I have been, and will be, teaching to the veterans to help reintegrate them to the current expectations of career choices, which will assist them in obtaining employment. I am also doing the follow up for the HVRP program to ensure the veterans are successful in their employment.

I am open and flexible to suggestions of

topics or materials, so please e-mail me at vafpa@veteransassistance.org if you have any to recommend.

Thank you. It's nice to be here!



HIGHLIGHT A VETERAN



Walt Knox

I lost everything I had worked for in my life. Hopes and dreams were shattered because of alcoholism. I owned my own screen printing business, and I was successful commercially and in the fine arts field. After my divorce, I sold my business and moved to Wisconsin to try and make a fresh start. I found out quickly that a geographical change doesn't change the spirit, and spiritually speaking, I was a disaster. I had reached bottom. I spent more time in jails than out of them.

Finally I came to the Veterans Administration Medical Center (VAMC) in Tomah, WI for treatment and decided that thirty days away from my old haunts was not enough. I then entered the Veterans Assistance Foundation's program. Since I've been in the VAF program, I have learned to be tolerant of others and have found humility and gratitude in the daily business of living. I work in the CWT (compensated work therapy) department through the Tomah VA, saving money and getting involved in various fundraisers in the community. I have been screen printing for the CWT Department and I donated two paintings to raise money for the Guitars for Vets Freedom Run.

I feel like a functional citizen again. I now have plans for a future where as before, I just lived from day to day. The VAF has given me back pride in myself, self-confidence and self-esteem. I will be leaving here in the spring for either Eau Claire or Gatlinburg, Tennessee. In either case, I will be doing what I love – art.

Walt Knox
U.S. Army 1966-1968
82nd Airborne Division

NEW EMPLOYEE REJOINS VAF



Tracey Turner

As a new staff member for the Veterans Assistance Foundation, I would like to say I am very happy to be on board and am excited

to be working for the program.

I actually worked with the program when it initially started and am very excited to be back working with the veterans and the staff.

WISH LIST

Personal Care Items:

Toothbrushes/holders	Toothpaste	Dental Floss
Foot powder	Shampoo	Conditioner
Combs	Brushes	Disposable Shavers
Shaving Cream	Bar Soap	Lotion
Liquid Hand Soap	Kleenex	Fingernail/Toenail Clippers
Bath Towels/Washcloths	Deodorant	Bar Soap Holder/Container
Baby Oil	Vaseline	Denture – Bath, Cleaner, Adhesive
Mouthwash (alcohol free)		

Laundry Items:

Fabric Softener Sheets	Laundry bags (mesh type)	Sewing Kits
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Recreational Items:

Phone Cards	Movies	Board Games
Crossword Puzzles	Greeting Cards	Stationery
Pens, pencils	Envelopes	Stamps
Exercise Mats		

Clothing: *Good used clothing 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/Sugar Substitute	Coffee mugs (plastic)	Coffee
Pillows	Headboard lamps (clip on)	

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.
P.O. Box 610
Tomah, WI 54660

Please help us to continue our efforts to help those veterans who need a "Hand-up 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.

HATS, SCARVES AND LAP BLANKETS DONATED

VAF Executive Director, Deborah Johnson and Rebecca Barry look over the hats, scarves and lap blankets donated by the *Knitters for Obama*.

Ms. Barry is a member of the group, which has members from all over the United States, and they decided to donate the items to the veterans residing in the Veterans Assistance Foundation Program in Tomah, Wisconsin.

If you wish to learn more about the group, visit their Web site at www.ravelry.com



SANTA REALLY DOES EXIST

On December 15, 2008, Santa came early for the veterans of the Tomah program. Gerry C. (a prior resident) had contacted the staff in early December and asked what he could do for the residents of the program for Christmas. Faye Rainey, Operations Director, explained to him that if he would like to donate, something that would benefit the majority of the veterans would work the best. They discussed several ideas, one being to provide new games for the resident's recreational

area. Gerry, being a very generous person, decided that he would purchase not one, but two games that were brought in and set up by Stansfield Vending. They are a foosball table and an air hockey table.

Gerry has also donated tobacco for the tobacco fund. This tobacco is provided to the veterans who come into the program and have no income source. VAF and the veterans of the program would like to extend a special thanks to Gerry for his generous gifts!

