



VETERANS ASSISTANCE FOUNDATION

THE ALLIANCE

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

Spring 2011

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

HIRE A HERO, HIRE A VET!

Attention area employers...Here at the Veterans Assistance Foundation, a goal for each of our resident veterans is to find employment (for those who are able to work). After addressing their personal hurdles (be it health, teeth, glasses, legal issues, education, etc.) these vets are ready and eager to get back into the workforce again.

It's a very frustrating situation for them to have to go out every day for weeks or even months, trying to find meaningful employment in a time when jobs are so scarce. Sad to say, what once was excitement for them – finding a job and a chance for a new life – quickly changes into stress, depression and a sense of failure when their efforts to find work are fruitless.

We urgently need jobs for our veterans! We ask you to please consider our veterans when you need to hire new employees. We have many vets with a variety of previous skills, and also some that are presently taking college courses to refresh or build their resumes. If you are interested in giving our veterans a much needed job, please call 608-372-1280.

THE NATIONAL VETERANS CREATIVE ARTS FESTIVAL 2011

The Tomah VA Medical Center displayed the local Creative Arts Festival entries. The exhibit was held on the 1st floor of Building 407 in the conference room February 15, 2011. There were several different mediums to fill your artist's eye palette. Some mediums displayed were Metal Arts, Painting, Mosaic Arts, Woodworking, Iron Works, Photography, Color Pencil, Model Building, Assemblage, Knotting Art, Sculpture, Pencil Drawings and Charcoal Art, among many others.

As I and a couple of coworkers admired the art displays, I saw names that I recognized from our own VAF, past and present. Our very own Charlie S. entered a beautiful piece of painted ocean scenery. Reggie L., a resident of our Step-Up Program, won 3rd Place for his Pencil Drawing of Jesus, 2nd

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AODA TECHNICIAN JOINS VAF STAFF

The Veterans Assistance Foundation has hired an employee to fill the need for an AODA Technician within our program. This position offers a much needed service to our veterans.

We would like to introduce Janet Verthein, the AODA Technician at the Veterans Assistance Foundation. She has a Bachelors of Science Degree in Psychology, with an emphasis in counseling and a minor in Business Management. She also has additional education in Drug & Alcohol Prevention. Janet currently holds credentials with the Wisconsin Department of Licensure as a SAC-IT (Substance Abuse Counselor – In Training). She has experience with both individual and group counseling sessions for Substance Addiction, Anger Management and Smoking Cessation programs. Janet's strength is in cognitive/behavioral and Motivational Enhancement Therapy.

Janet will be offering group classes on AODA, Anger Management, Gambling, Relapse and other addiction-related topics.



In addition to the group classes, this position includes one-on-one session meetings with individuals. It is Janet's goal to give the veterans tools (skills) to use in order to live a healthy and positive life free of addiction.

This position will assist the veteran population work through addiction and gain tools they can use to stay clean and sober. This is a collaborative relationship with the individual to achieve their goals; we will work together to gain the life that each individual wants to achieve, free from addiction; a life with a home, job, friends, purpose and more.

*"I came with hope,
worked and learned.*

*I have a new life,
a life that I have earned."*

We welcome Janet and we are excited to have an AODA Tech on our staff. This will be a great addition to the services VAF provides to its program residents.

NEW ADDITION TO VAF STAFF

My name is Tom DeMille, and I am the newest Case Manager for the VAF, with emphasis on Employment and Training. I recently retired from the United States Army with over 20 years of service. As a veteran, it makes me very proud to help and assist other veterans, and hopefully make a difference in their lives.

I was born and raised in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan in the town of Stephenson. I joined the Army in 1985 and during my time in the service, my travels took me to Hawaii, Germany, Korea, Iraq, Bosnia, Kosovo, Panama, and several other countries and states. My Military Occupational Specialty was Military Police. I also spent three years as a Drill Sergeant.

My wife's name is Jill, and we've been married for over 20 years. She works out at



Ft. McCoy. We bought a house late last year in Tomah. We have two dogs, April and Daisy. I enjoy getting out in the community and talking with people about what veterans can offer to them. My biggest entertainment in life is the Green Bay Packers and I look forward to following them all year long. I also enjoy

sports like basketball, softball, baseball and golf. I really look forward to playing the local golf courses in the area.

Being freshly out of active duty, I believe that I will be able to bring that current knowledge when assisting the veterans in their future endeavors here, and hope that I can make an impact in their lives.

We welcome Tom to the VAF Staff; his hands-on experience with veterans will be a big plus to the veterans in our program.

VAF RESIDENTS TREATED TO A SUPER BOWL XLV PARTY

What would the Super Bowl be without a party? Boring!

What would a party be without the Packers winning the Super Bowl? Boring!

On hand was homemade chili that a couple of residents offered their time to make, chips and homemade salsa donated by Michelle (Step-Up House Case Manager), a roll of summer sausage donated by Karla (407 Administrative Assistant), little smokies in BBQ sauce donated by Peggy (407 Case Manager), a shrimp plate, cheese, sausage and cracker plate, chips and dip, cupcakes and refreshments which were purchased with monetary donations from Wal-Mart and The American Legion Ladies Auxiliary.

Several of the veterans enjoyed the food and festivities including Richard W., Michael C., Bruce W., Paul P., Marty F., and Phillip U., along with many others. The good food, great people and, of course, the home team winning the Super Bowl made the night one to remember!

After days of talk about who would be the Super Bowl champions, everyone respected the right of others to cheer for whom they wanted; of course, the Bears fans stayed away

from the Packer fans (I believe the Packer fans were all in the 2nd floor dayroom, while the Bears fans stayed in the dayroom on the 3rd floor). Not everyone got to celebrate their teams' victory, but all agreed that the food served was enjoyed by all.



TRIVIA NIGHT TO SUPPORT "FAMILIES FIRST" OF MONROE

On March 19, 2011, area businesses and organizations gathered at the Tomah Recreation Park for a benefit to support "Families First" of Monroe County. If any readers are unaware of *Families First*, they are a nonprofit organization in Monroe County that assists people with various needs that include housing, food and transportation to medical appointments, just to name a few. Unfortunately, the tough economic times have affected their budget, even though the amount of people in need of their resources has not diminished.

To raise money, *Families First* had the first annual trivia competition. There were 15 teams, with 10 members on each team. The categories included the Packers super season, film villains, answers that start with the letter "A", comic book knowledge, timely songs, vitamins and minerals, answers that included people named Tom, Dick or Harry and famous redheads. You could also buy correct answers if you felt you needed them and use them in the form of a "bribe".

There was also a silent auction and door prizes given away. During intermission from the trivia contest, there was a delicious chili feed that featured many different kinds of chilies. If you like chili, chances are they had what you liked...and

then some! Of course, Andrew enjoyed the desserts the most!

We did everyone proud by the team VAF assembled. Our team included Faye, Dawn, Peggy, Andrew, former Case Manager Gina and significant others. Out of the 15 teams that entered, your VAF team placed 2nd; just one question out of a 1st Place tie. If there was an award given for the team with the most energy and team spirit, we would've won – hands down. I noticed other tables were glancing over at us when we were hoopin' and hollerin' it up.

We, as a staff, had an excellent time and it was a great group cohesiveness exercise. We are looking forward to next year already, with our sights set on bringing the trophy home to the VAF.



Seated around the table, the "AWESOME" VAF Trivia Team.

A TRIBUTE TO SALUTE HOSPITALIZED VETERANS WEEK

On February 14th and 15th, the Tomah VA Medical Center held a bowling tournament to kick off the beginning of "Veterans Week". Veterans in wheelchairs, as well as ambulatory bowlers, competed against each other. It was a fierce and fun competition. Each Veteran had a chance to bowl two games. The scores were kept by judges and after the two games were completed, the scores were added up and the highest score took home the top prize, which was a chance to meet and receive your award from Miss Wisconsin, Kimberly Sawyer.

There were six wheelchair participants and 13 ambulatory participants. The scores were very close, but in the end our champ was VAF's own, Louie G., who had a combined score of 448. Louie bowled a 210 and a 238 – what a terrific job of bowling! This was his second year in a row winning this tournament – great job!

We would also like to recognize all of the other veterans who participated. They all did a wonderful job; not only for the fun of the sport, but also to honor all Veterans around the globe!!



MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

**The Friends of Veterans
Annual Bike Blessing and Poker Run**

Spring is finally here and it's time again for the annual Friends of Veterans fundraiser for the Veterans Assistance Foundation (VAF). The Friends of Veterans 9th Annual Bike Blessing and Poker Run is scheduled for Saturday, May 21, 2011. The Bike Blessing and Poker Run sign-in time is 10 a.m. to 11:15 a.m. in the Tomah Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Building 400's parking lot.

Following the Bike Blessing, those participating in the Poker Run will head out for a day of bike riding (hopefully the weather will cooperate). The evening will end with a fundraiser event at Eagle's Nest Resort (10 miles east of Tomah on Highway 21; just past Shennington, then North on County Highway "H") which starts at 6 p.m. They will have a pig roast, camping and music by *Divided Highway*.

HIGHLIGHT A VETERAN



My reason for coming to the Veterans Assistance Foundation (VAF) was to become qualified for dental work, which I badly needed to improve my health and self-esteem.

The staff at the VAF was very helpful and considerate of my needs and goals. They supplied all the comforts of home, albeit in a structured mode, similar to a military operation.

I was able to accomplish my dental work, as well as qualify for the HUD VASH program. The VAF staff kept me focused and informed at every step, including keeping track of my personal savings in order to meet all my financial needs.

I am now semi-retired in a beautiful apartment, while still being employed part-time at the Tomah VAMC. I'm very glad I came to the VAF, as their program works for those who are willing to work at being a success – no matter what the goal.

Toni W.
U.S. Army Veteran

MY TESTIMONY



I arrived here at the Veterans Assistance Foundation on February 2, 2011 and progressed nicely with the assistance and guidance of all pertinent staff. I was taken to the Job Fair by Case

Manager Tom K. and was offered a position as a welder at Oshkosh Truck. I have since taken the welding test and a physical and passed both with passing colors. I am now awaiting my starting date, which I should be receiving in two weeks.

I came from DOC with absolutely nothing and the VAF has put me on the right track with all their help and their caring approach. They have never once told me that I could not reach my goals; in retrospect, they have encouraged me to persevere and never think pessimistically. There has never been a time when the staff didn't encourage and assist me with all their avenues of resources and micro-managing. In fact, this has aided my reintegration back to ultimately becoming a productive member of the before-mentioned. Without this program, I would have surely regressed to a pariah and most likely failed.

By VAF Veteran Mark P.



SPOTLIGHT ON OUR BENEFACTORS

DONATION APPRECIATION

The Veterans Assistance Foundation was very fortunate to be the recipients of donations from five very generous entities.

Dodge County 40 & 8-Voiture and Cabane & Mayville American Legion Unit 69 donated lap robes, small afghans, laundry soap, a large variety of hygiene items, games and puzzles, stamped envelopes, candies and fourteen 125-minute phone cards.

Mr. Christian donated a men's 7-speed bike with extra tires and tubes, pool cue

sticks with a repair kit and cue balls, sugar for coffee and he was able to visit the local recruiters and get coffee mugs with lids.

Pop Weaver donated eight cases of chocolate-covered caramel popcorn.

Soldiers Angels donated a variety of peanuts and trail mix.

The veterans and the Foundation thank you all very much for your desire to help make sure our veterans are taken care of.

2011 STAND DOWN UPDATE

Just a small update on the upcoming 2011 Stand Down to be held in October. Last year we realized that we have now outgrown The American Legion Building in La Crosse. With the number of veterans we service, we now need a bigger space to accommodate everyone. So this year we are looking at using the La Crosse Civic Center, which should have more than enough room for what we need. We still have to work out some small details about the meal and what they have for us to work with.

The announcement has come out about the Stand Down grant, and with that we have started to write a draft. So, when it's

due, we just need to tweak the format and send it in. This money has gone from being included in the HVRP Grant to becoming a separate grant, and now is a first-come, first-served type of situation. We will be submitting for it as soon as we have all other information about the Stand Down gathered and in grant application form.

All in all, I think this will be our best year yet. We have a lot of Veterans that utilize all the services we provide at the Stand Down, and we will continue with all those services, plus even more this year.

Dawn Ollendick
Program Director, VAF Step Up

VETERAN DONATES MOCCASINS TO ABUSE VICTIMS

Army veteran Paul S. wanted to help domestic abuse victims, so he did what he knew – make moccasins. The 53-year-old donated 62 pairs to Monroe County's *Brighter Tomorrows* and LA Crosse's *New Horizons*. "I just wanted to give back to the women," he said. "Somehow, I hope that by doing this, it will brighten up their day." Paul said his passion for abuse victims came from his being a victim himself.

He started making moccasins during his downtime as a resident with the Veterans Assistance Foundation. He wanted to make a pair for himself – but has yet to do so, because he keeps giving them away. He's given away more than 100 pairs so far. "I just started making them and just got addicted," he said. At first, it took three hours to create each pair, but now he has it down to 45 minutes.

Brighter Tomorrows' Cecilia Poe said it's the first donation of moccasins. "They'll

be great for gifts, especially with Mother's Day coming up; a lot of the kids don't have anything to give to their moms."

This is from an article by the Tomah Journal – Thursday, March 10, 2011.



Pictured in front, L-R, are: Paul S. (The Moccasin Guru) and Andrew Starguard, VAF Case Manager. Pictured in rear, L-R, are: Brighter Tomorrows' Cecilia Poe and Jan Bruder and VAF President Colin Moten.

WALK TO WASHINGTON, D.C.

Mike C., a former VAF resident, is walking from Tomah, Wisconsin to make people aware of homelessness among veterans. While on this trip to Washington, D.C., he is on a mission to help end Veterans' homelessness and his plan is to let others know about the VAF program. He is going to try to post VAF flyers in every town he visits.

His plan is to arrive at his destination around the end of May 2011. When he arrives in Washington, D.C., he has two appointments scheduled with legislators there to discuss homelessness and what the VAF has done for him. Once he has completed his trip, he plans to return to the Midwest. Hopefully we will have further information on his trip for the next newsletter.



FREE-THROW COMPETITION

On March 22nd and 23rd, I participated in the free-throw competition held at the Tomah VA Medical Center, which was held prior to the grand opening of the newly remodeled gym.

I was lucky enough to take 2nd Place in the patient's category. It felt good to be a part of the competition, having just arrived

in Tomah five days earlier. It was great to see the wheelchair Veterans participate, as well as the staff.

In conclusion, thank you to the Recreation Department and especially Jen (staff) for being upbeat and professional.

VAF Resident Tony S.

VAF MOVIE NIGHT

Friday night is movie night at the Veterans Assistance Foundation (VAF). We have a projector set up in our classroom, where the residents can play a DVD and watch the movie on the overhead screen. Each week the movie is ordered online, chosen from the VAF movie library or rented from the Tomah VAMC library. We then post fliers around the VAF, announcing which movie will be viewed that week.

There is a movie request sheet on hand for the veterans to write down movies that they would like to watch in the future. We usually get a good response and try to accommodate each request when possible, but we do have guidelines to follow.

We have had a very positive response to our movie nights and it seems to be enjoyed by all of our program residents.

RELUCTANCE

By Robert Frost

*Out through the fields and the woods,
And over the walls I have wended;
I have climbed the hills of view,
and looked at the world
and descended;
I have come by the highway home,
and lo, it is ended.*

The following are those who have passed away, whom were either present or past veteran residents of our program.

IN MEMORY:
Ronald K. – U.S. ARMY
AGE 64 YEARS
12/25/46 – 03/27/11

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Place for his Color Pencil piece, which featured Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and President Barack Obama and 1st Place for his pastel creation of a bluebird on a limb. Scott S., a prior resident of the VAF, received two 1st Place awards. One was in a pencil medium, a detailed drawing of John



"Celestial Dreams"
by Paul S.

Wayne; the second was a Color Pencil drawing of Evil Knievel. Gene B. (Step-Up House) entered the Metal Model category with his Convertible Cadillac El Dorado and won 2nd Place. Paul S. (Bldg. 407) entered the String Art Kit

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.



"Moonlit Paradise" by Charlie S.

and Knotting divisions and won 2nd Place for his "Celestial Dreams" dreamcatcher. Larry A. (Bldg. 407) won 1st Place in the Mosaic Arts division for his "Portland Headlight Woodscape". Others who entered the competition (whom also all happened to place) included: Scott F., Nileen S., Chris S. and Michael R.

While the visitors roamed around to choose their "People's Choice" vote and admire all of the beauty that was presented at the exhibition, a video of the Creative Arts Festival 2010 (hosted by the Tomah VAMC and held at Viterbo College La Crosse, Wisconsin) was playing in the background.

It was a wonderful sight and sound experience for all who attended.

By Michelle Hove