



VETERANS ASSISTANCE FOUNDATION

THE ALLIANCE

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

Spring 2013

SERVING WISCONSIN'S AND THE NATION'S HOMELESS VETERANS FOR OVER 19 YEARS

BUSINESS AFTER 5



A collection of Veterans Assistance Foundation (VAF) staff attended the Business After 5 function hosted by First Bank on Wednesday, March 20th. This Chamber of Commerce event is an opportunity to not only relax with colleagues, but to also promote your organization and its cause. VAF was asked to attend to receive First Bank's recognition as "Ordinary People, Extraordinary Citizens," an acknowledgment of an organization's contributions to the

betterment of Tomah and the community.

With first-rate catering by Burnstads in preparing and presenting delectable finger foods paired with First Bank's handsome lobby, Business After 5 had a comfortable and welcoming atmosphere. Good company filled the room, including the following who also received awards: staff from Chasing Daylight Animal Shelter, Tomah Area Veterans' Memorial Committee, organizers and students from Tomah Haiti Mission Team, staff from Tomah Memorial Hospital Hospice Touch and Life Choices Palliative Care, Family Promise of Monroe County and One Accord Performance Company.

Each organization gave a brief introduction and summary of their mission and performance. Groups were then given a framed photograph taken of staff and/or members to commemorate the contribution to the organization's goals and accomplishments. VAF President Colin Moten delivered a short and apt description of the organization's history, accomplishments and goals. VAF is honored to receive such recognition and proud to share it with staff and residents.

THE TOMAH CHAMBER OF COMMERCE 50TH BANQUET

There are many events that I have had the opportunity to attend that promised a fine meal, good company and an unforgettable evening, but I must say the Tomah Chamber of Commerce 50th Banquet rates as one of the best I have ever had the privilege to attend. I'm not sure if this was because of the atmosphere of the Chamber of Commerce 50th or being part of an excellent organization as the Veterans Assistance Foundation (VAF), Inc., who was recognized for (and I quote) "their efforts to help combat veteran homelessness". This statement really is humbling when we are at the forefront to assist those Veterans and their families who are in need. All the staff that dedicated themselves to this effort in each of the programs (Grant Per Diem, Step-Up and Supportive Services for Veteran Families) are a superb representation of the VAF in battle to end homelessness of our Veterans.

Some noteworthy segments of the evening were presented by the well-dressed and distinguished narrator Mr. Christopher Hanson, who



Picture courtesy of Jourdan Vian of Lee Enterprises of Tomah, Wisconsin.

was decked out in a tuxedo and made the event a great success.

The meal truly was grand and started with a delightful salad, then the main course consisting of steak, pork medallions, salmon and shrimp. The finishing touch was the cheesecake dessert that topped off the night with a complete desire to nap after the meal.

The nap desire quickly ended when, for the final treat of the night, we were given a laugh a minute provided by the comedian C. Willie Myles. He did bring one main point to mind and that is that freezing is 32 degrees...which sometimes it seems we forget, because to us it is just a little cool.

WELCOME LONI BURTON...



My name is Loni Burton, and I am a new VAF Case Manager for the SSVF program. I am a very recent transplant to Tomah from Chicago. I moved here because I wanted a change from the fast pace of Chicago for my three young children (ages 4, 5 and 7).

I have an extensive social service background. I have been working in social services since I graduated high school. I have earned a BA in Psychology from Roosevelt University in Chicago. I have worked with the homeless in shelters, those affected by HIV and also those who struggle with mental illness.

I enjoy working with people in the community, and am looking forward to making a difference in the lives of the Veterans and their families that I will service.

When I am not working, I am working my other job...being Mom, spending time with my sister's family or reading either a Stephen King or crime novel.

My brother-in-law is active duty Army, currently at Fort McCoy, and I am so glad that if he needs help at the end of his military service that the VAF will be there to assist.

I look forward to meeting all of the people who work with and for the VAF, and speaking with you all to help me navigate through.



Steve B. and Jasmine

By Steve B.

First of all, let me say that I have been fortunate enough (because of being homeless) to be staying at the Veterans Assistance Foundation

in Tomah, Wisconsin. There are a lot of opportunities here for my rehabilitation due to alcoholism, which has been an ongoing illness in my life as well as my family's.

I am doing well with all of my goals here; I have also been fortunate enough to find work at the Chasing Daylight Animal Shelter here in Tomah, a nonprofit organization. The people that work there are mostly Veterans like me. There is Paul/Army retired,

A GOAL NOT WASTED!

Gina/Army retired and Craig/Army retired. The people that work there are very, very nice and very helpful to me, as a whole. There are also people that volunteer their time there. I have put in quite a bit of time at the shelter since I started working there about two months ago, as I have a great love for animals – both cats and dogs.

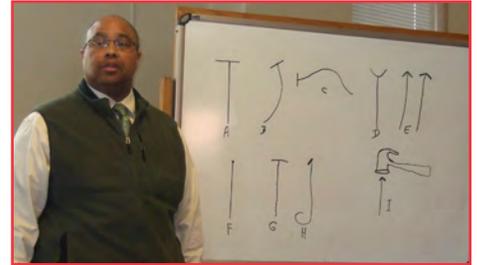
This is good therapy for me in my addiction recovery from alcohol abuse. I enjoy working at the shelter; it's a good environment for me. The shelter is clean, as well as in order and very top-shelf. The animals are well taken care of and loved to pieces each and every day of the week, rather than being abused. This is all done on a volunteer basis.

Donations are always welcome, as well as cat and dog food, along with paper goods. There are a few local contributors to the shelter, such as Burnstad's Food Mart here in Tomah.

I encourage any help that people can give; this will help me know my goal isn't being wasted, as well as my rehabilitation and therapy.

In closing, I am thankful for the opportunity to write this article for my wellness, as well as for the animals that help me cope each day.

BENT NAILS



Mr. Darren Price, "The Smoking Trooper", giving his presentation.

"Bent Nails" is the name of a motivational speech/tool created by Bishop Eugene S. Johnson. This was presented to VAF residents and staff by Mr. Darren Price, also known as the "Smoking Trooper" (as he is a Wisconsin State Trooper and owner of BP Smoke House).

The moral of the speech (please refer to picture of nails above), is that we all start out like nail "A"...perfect, unexposed to the darker things in life such as mental, physical and sexual abuse, addiction, depression, corruption, finances...and just reality, in general. These are the types of nails desired to build a strong foundation, literally and figuratively.

Throughout life, we each experience various tragedies that render us imperfect. Each nail above represents different events that a person has endured. When the nail/person is really bent out of shape, it's much more difficult to meet or exceed the expectations and goals that one is trying to achieve. Then, as we seek help to assist with the issue, we become straight again, with the hopes, ideas and dreams of living a happier and fulfilling life. To raise self-esteem, lead by example and reclaim the sense of being wanted, needed, etc.

When a nail/person has been seriously damaged, it is nearly impossible to be of the exact quality it once was. Each trial and tribulation we encounter is a memory. The memory stays with us, but we can learn and grow from the event and end up like nail "T", a rehabilitated and useful member of construction/society.

I highly recommend that if given the opportunity, you should attend a "Bent Nails" presentation. I believe this unique outlook on life, second chances and becoming a better individual after dealing with unfortunate aspects of life will stick with you forever!

T-SHIRTS OF LOVE



The Veterans Assistance Foundation received a remarkable donation Wednesday, February 13. Megan Montgomery, representing the 4-H Military Partnership staff at the University of Wisconsin-Extension Americorps *VISTA Initiative at Fort McCoy, delivered a box of T-shirts colorfully decorated by a group of children,

grades K through 8.

The children penned a plethora of creative designs on some T-shirts donated from Old Navy. Every shirt proudly displayed each artist's skill and individuality. The Veterans Assistance Foundation is happy to share such fantastic creativity and colorful works with the veterans.

The Fort McCoy 4-H group staff work diligently to promote character-building activities that also support the local community. Previously, the group has assisted the Monroe County Animal Shelter by making dog treats, socializing with the animals and organizing a supply drive to collect additional pet care-related items.

VAF is appreciative and honored to have received the decorated T-shirts. The veterans were delighted to know they were being thought of this year's Valentine's Day.

PER MAR SECURITY DONATION TO VAF

Per Mar's branch office in Madison does a project for charity each year during the holidays. In the past they've collected items for the Second Harvest Food Bank, rang bells for the Salvation Army, etc.

This year they thought it would mean something to their security officers to do a drive for Wish List items for VAF. They attached a flyer that the corporate office stuffed in the Madison Branch paychecks. Their security accounts run from the state line South (Beloit/Janesville area) to Watertown and Jefferson in the East, to LaCrosse in the West and North.

Per Mar collected donated items from over seven individual sites and also had bins in the Madison office for officers to

drop off donations.

Toni, the manager from the Madison office, dropped off the donations they collected for our Veterans in Tomah at VAF. These donations were a well received surprise for our Veterans during the holidays and greatly appreciated by all.

VAF's
Faye
Rainey
with Toni
Furan.



TOMAH MIDDLE SCHOOL COLLECTION FOR VAF

By Jane Faella

The Tomah Middle School Student Council collected seven boxes of toiletry items and \$45 to donate to the Veterans Assistance Foundation for the homeless veterans. The Student Council works on a variety of projects for the school, for Tomah, for Wisconsin and for the world.

The students get together and pick the organizations they want to help and then together with the guidance of their advisor, Mrs. Faella, they come up with ideas in which they can make a difference. "I generally try to steer the students into projects in which they are actively involved in making or doing something concrete for the group that they want to help, as opposed to asking their parents or neighbors for money donations," said Mrs. Faella.

This project was initiated by Student Council member, Clara Krause,

and voted on by the group. The students first learned about homelessness and then raised awareness of the issue in the school through the morning announcements. Next, they held a school wide contest in which the Team Directed Study that collected the most toiletry items earned homemade pizza, delivered hot and fresh, to their room.

Basically, the students wanted to find a way to give back to those veterans who served for us. Thank you to all of the veterans who sacrificed to serve us!



THIRD ANNUAL TRIVIA NIGHT COMPETITION



On March 16, 2013 there was an even greater abundance of St. Patrick's Day spirit than to be expected, as Families First of Monroe County had their third annual trivia contest. The income raised from this event goes to help residents of Monroe County in need.

The trivia contest was a huge success again this year, and much fun was had by all. Twenty-eight teams took part in the action, which was an increase 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: answers with Jack and Jill, political controversy, music with heart in the title, answers with red, white and blue in the answers, and a category about the State of Wisconsin. There were also eight



rounds of five 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 \$20 a person or \$200 per team. Money was also raised by having a raffle ticket auction and being able to buy bribes (a free answer) for \$10 with a limit of sixteen bribes that a team could purchase. The items in the raffle ticket auction included a Green Bay Packers signed football, other Packer memorabilia, paintings, hotel stays, gift certificates to area businesses and products that were put together in baskets.

This year the Veterans Assistance Foundation team consisted of Michelle and Todd Hove, their son T.J. and his girlfriend Stephanie, Greg Hammer, Faye Rainey, Robert Vega, friend Gary and Andrew and Linda Stargard. The VAF team did very well, fin-

— TRIVIA, continued on page 4

HIGHLIGHT A VETERAN

By Trish K.



I have a future and hope now. I was so lost when the rug was pulled out from beneath me. I became homeless in August of 2010. I bounced around, going to and from shelters and

friends. Finally my daughter was willing to let me stay with her. It was against the HUD rules, but she still let me stay. I had nowhere to go. HUD found out about it and gave my daughter an ultimatum – either your Mom goes or you lose your apartment. I was not about to let my daughter lose her home.

I then thought there was no place I could stay and my only option was to be dropped off on the street. A stranger made some call on my behalf. I found out that, yes, I qualified for the program. On the day I was supposed to be dropped off on the street, the VAF said they had a bed for me. I had been blessed that it came through just when I needed it.

I had already gone through a couple of other programs and in my opinion, the VAF's program has been the best compared to all the other programs. I had a roof over my head, three meals a day and a bed to sleep in. Plus I was living in a safe environment.

Although there might be some grumbling about the classes in the morning, it did help to answer a number of questions I had. Yes, I know how to rent an apartment, but Rent Smart fine-tuned what I already knew. Having access to a benefits adviser and a legal team was an added bonus. I had a fantastic case manager. Thank you, Andrew Stargard, for pointing me in the right direction. It helped build my self-confidence. We took baby steps so I could work with my illness, instead of overwhelming me. The program worked for me. I believe that it can work for others if they allow it to.

I don't know where I would be if not for the VAF program. I will always be grateful for what the VAF has done for me. If a person keeps in mind what the alternative could be, then the program can work for them; it has for me.

I am thankful for all the wonderful people I have met on the way. Some I know I will keep for the rest of my life. The VAF helped me through a tough time. I will be forever grateful.

CPR TRAINING

A crucial part of the Veterans Assistance Foundation (VAF) is to ensure that the best services are maintained and provided to our staff in the best interest of the Veterans we serve and each other should the need arise. One of the best programs available to us is to get involved with the American Red Cross through Adult First Aid/CPR/AED classes.

Each year, millions of people will learn life saving skills through the Red Cross and March 2013 was VAF's time. By splitting the staff from Tomah and Security into two groups,



training was held March 13th and March 27th. All of our staff is now certified for two years in Adult First Aid/CPR/AED.

Regardless of our age or occupation, our health and physical conditioning, these lifesaving courses offer peace of mind to all who participate. No one expects to be faced with an emergency situation. Rest assured that VAF Staff and security is prepared with the right knowledge and skills to respond when the time comes.

Congratulations to all who participated.

VITERBO ALUMNI VISIT VAF

By Brooke Murdock

As a Viterbo Alumni and a past student of Tom Thibodeau's, it was rewarding to be part of the Viterbo students' visit to the Veterans Assistance Foundation homeless program.

My experience that day was unique. I received my undergraduate degree from Viterbo in May 2011 in Social Work and I continued on to graduate school at UW-Madison to receive my Masters in Social work. I have been doing an internship in the VAF program through the Tomah VAMC since August 2012 to complete the clinical field hours for my degree.

I have found it to be very educational and gratifying working with homeless veterans and within this program. Being part of the presentation for the Viterbo students brought my experience full circle. It helped me realize the importance of the work we are doing and how far I have come as a

professional, a student and in my knowledge about the homeless population.

My experience working in this program and working with the veterans who volunteered was a neat opportunity, listening to them sharing their stories with the students. It was moving to witness the veterans openly share their life stories with a room full of strangers. They shared their journey through homelessness, trial and tribulations through life and their ability to overcome obstacles to get where they are today. It was very rewarding to hear them share the lessons they have learned and how grateful and thankful they are for the program and its staff.

I think the visit from the Viterbo students was a rewarding, educational and an overall beneficial experience for the students, veterans and staff alike. Everyone was able to gain something from the opportunity, especially a greater understanding of the struggle of homelessness and the people who face it.

WISH LIST

Personal Care Items:

Toothbrushes/holders, Toothpaste, Dental Floss, Toilet Paper, Foot powder, Disposable Shavers, Lotion, Shampoo, Conditioner, Brushes, Combs, Shaving Cream, Bar Soap, Liquid Hand Soap, Baby Oil, Kleenex, Denture-Bath, Cleaner/Adhesive, Deodorant, Vaseline, Bath Towels/Washcloths, Fingernail/Toenail Clippers, 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, Craft Kits, Phone Cards, Board Games, Movies, Crossword Puzzles, Pens, Pencils, Envelopes, Stamps, Pool Sticks and Red Chalk, Nine Ball Rack, Pool Stick Repair Kit, Stationery,

Books, Greeting Cards, Exercise Mats, Bicycles (26"), Bicycle Tire Repair Kits, 26" Tire Tubes for Bikes, Bicycle Racks

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

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

Household Supplies:

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

While donations of any kind are always welcome, please call us at 608-372-VETS (8387) 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.

TURN AGAIN TO LIFE

By A. Price Hughes and Mary Lee Hall

If I should die and leave you here awhile, be not like others, sore undone, who keep long vigils by the silent dust and weep.

For my sake, turn again to life and smile, nerving thy heart and trembling hand to do something to comfort weaker hearts than thine. Complete those dear unfinished tasks of mine, and I perchance may therein comfort you.

In Memory of:
Thomas N., U.S.M.C.
06/23/58 – 03/29/13

TRIVIA, continued from page 3

ishing 8th out of 28 teams with a score of 731 (the winning team had a score of 791). The Sparta Kiwanis Club won 1st Place.

We would like to thank these individuals for donating their time and funds to participate in this event. VAF Case Managers Michelle Hove, Greg Hammer and several Veterans in the program assisted Mary Masters of Families First with setting up in the building the Friday prior to the event and clean up the Monday after.

Overall, it was a very good time and another great team building 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.