



VETERANS ASSISTANCE FOUNDATION

THE ALLIANCE

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

Fall 2009

Veterans Helping Veterans

1994

15 Years

2009

This year marks a milestone for the Veterans Assistance Foundation – 15 years of quality services to our Nation's homeless veterans. The Veterans Assistance Foundation (VAF) is a 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization, which is funded by a federal grant through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and was incorporated January 25, 1994. The Foundation was founded by Robert R. Piaro, who has been the volunteer president (and the heartbeat of the Foundation) from its inception to the present.

Robert's experiences and passion for the plight of homeless veterans started in the early 1990's when then-Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs, Ray Boland, asked if he would be interested in developing a program for homeless veterans in the state of Wisconsin. Mr. Piaro was sent to Boston, MA for three months training at the New England Shelter for Homeless Veterans. The first two months he spent living inside the shelter, basically as a homeless person. His room was unheated with exposed pipes, missing chunks of plaster and peeling paint. His bed was a mattress placed on four plastic milk crates. It was a humbling experience for him, one that he will never forget and one that has brought him to this point in time.

"It wasn't always an easy ride," says President Piaro. "Some mistakes were made, and many lessons were learned in the progress. I knew from the start, I wanted to create a program that was unique from other homeless programs in the country; I wanted the veterans we would serve

to be more than just a number or statistic. I wanted them to have a place to live that was safe, clean and comfortable – nothing less than I myself would live in. We have changed many veterans' lives through the past 15 years; often I get phone calls or letters from our former residents, years later, thanking us for giving them a new start. Some have gone on to higher paying jobs, buying homes, going to college, a comfortable retirement and even getting married, and that's what our program is all about."

To commemorate the 15 years, a celebration BBQ dinner was held on August 29th on the Tomah VA grounds for the Board of Directors, Tomah staff and their families, and for all the veteran residents of the program. The semi-annual BOD meeting, which rotates between Tomah and Bakersfield, California, (CVAf, sister program) was held August 27-29th, so that all board members could attend and help celebrate the event.

After the delicious meal that was catered by BP's Smokehouse, an awards presentation was held, honoring employees for their years of service and dedication to VAF. Those honored were Judy Piaro, Executive Assistant, 15 years; Deborah Johnson, CVAf Executive Director, 13 years; Faye Rainey, Operations Director, 10 years; Dawn Ollendick, Program Specialist, 6 years; and Colin Moten, VAF Executive Director, 6 years. The employees presented President Robert Piaro an eagle, in remembrance of the 15-year anniversary.

The veterans of the program challenged the B.O.D., staff and their families to a softball game after the meal and awards ceremony. Newly donated softball equipment allowed the residents to practice for weeks before the game, putting them at the advantage. They were very kind and allowed us to get on base by purposely missing balls,

overthrowing and laughing at our pathetic try at softball. The weather was windy and very chilly, especially for those from sunny California; but the fun and warm reception of the residents proved to make for a very memorable day.



Catered BBQ dinner by BP's Smokehouse.



The delicious anniversary cake!



Awards recipients, from left: Dawn Ollendick, Deborah Johnson, Judy Piaro, Faye Rainey, Colin Moten; in front, VAF President Robert Piaro.



Softball game participants – VAF residents, board members and staff.

VAF WELCOMES NEW STAFF



My name is Peggy Engen-Koresh and I have joined the team at the Veterans Assistance Foundation as a new case manager. This first month has been both challenging and exciting. My career path has been an interesting one. I have been a hairdresser, salon manager, in-salon trainer, prep cook and personal care worker with people that have mental and physical disabilities.

Having five children, I took 13 years off from the work force to raise and homeschool my five children – Emily P., Emily, Danielle, Joseph and Jonathan – the youngest – who graduated from Covenant High School this year. I have been married to my husband, Dan (a Vietnam veteran), for 27 years and we had our first grandchild, Kazzie, in 2006. My interests have included raising a variety of farm animals, rodeo, gardening, hobbies, music, mission trips, church activities, community involvement, and most recently, motorcycling.

I have stressed to my children that you can learn how to do whatever you wish if you really have the desire. I have tried to take up new endeavors whenever the interest and opportunity present itself. And, God willing, I truly look forward to the months and years to come here at VAF.



My name is Teresa Catherine Smith, a mother of six: five boys and one girl. I am a thirteen-year Army Veteran, with four years active and nine reserves. My oldest son is an OIF/OEF veteran and my second oldest son is stationed in Baghdad, Iraq. I am a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, with a BS in psychology and a minor in sociology. I am a peer support specialist, having experienced

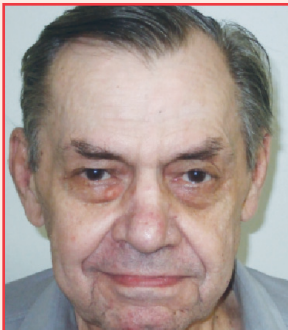
post-partum depression and being in recovery. I also facilitate a recovery support group in La Crosse. I am on two boards of directors, the Grass Roots Empowerment Project and Wisconsin Association of Peer Support Specialists. I am actively involved in the movement of self directed care and mental health advocacy.

My goals as a case manager are to promote health, independence, and motivation to strive for one's highest potential. My future goal is to become a drug and alcohol, mental health counselor. I am very happy to be able to work with fellow veterans.

"VAF would like to extend a warm welcome to Peggy and Teresa. We are excited to have them as our newest VAF staff members. We look forward to working with, and getting to know them; they both seem to have already fit in, and are comfortable in their new positions."

HIGHLIGHT A VETERAN

I entered the Veterans Assistance Foundation in September of 2007. Prior to that date, I had been riding a roller coaster from about 2000. A series of events had gone on during that time. I



had a D.U.I., a death in the family and some health issues. At this time I was semi-retired; working part time and coping with what I now know was depression. I started to gamble in 2006 and fell into debt. Though I had quit drinking, I got the gambling bug. Needless to say, I lost everything and ended up on the street.

In 2007, I was introduced to Ed Zapala at the Madison VA Hospi-

tal. He helped me to get into the Veterans Assistance Foundation at Tomah, Building 407. While at Tomah, the staff (Russ, Dawn and Faye) got me the guidance I needed.

I soon started to pay off some debts and started a savings program. I also had to be responsible for my actions. The medical staff got my health issues resolved. After awhile, I stopped feeling sorry for myself and blaming others for my life. This I credit to the staff and some of the other residents; who in some cases, were worse off than I.

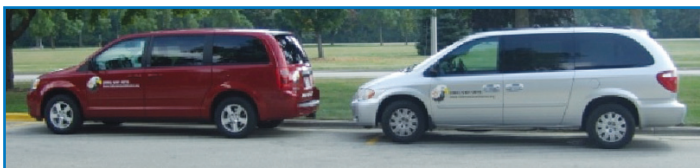
In February of 2008, I left 407 for the Madison Step-Up Program. Since then I have paid all my debts and have a nice savings account. At present, I'm looking to obtain and lease an apartment.

Bernie G.
House Manager of Madison Step-Up House

SPREAD THE WORD

All four of the minivans owned and operated by the Veterans Assistance Foundation now have lettering and decals installed on them. We took the vans to Sign Pro in La Crosse, Wisconsin where they completed the installation of the lettering and decals. All of the vans look very sharp (see photos).

The lettering on the vans, which consists of our toll-free telephone number and our Web site address, will enable the VAF to reach out to more Veterans and individuals who have not yet heard of our program. We hope this will help reach Veterans who otherwise wouldn't have heard of our program and have limited or no options at all in obtaining the assistance they require to reintegrate back into society and the workforce.





Hello all, it is that time again. The kids are back in school, the weather is changing (quickly here, I must say) and many changes are afoot at the Veterans Assistance Foundation. Since our summer newsletter, we have added two new case managers to our staff: Peggy and Teresa. Welcome aboard!

VAF celebrated its 15 year anniversary, which included a softball game between the Veterans and Staff. They took it easy on us – mostly. See the article on the Board Meeting and picnic for more information. We are also preparing for the annual Veterans Affairs Medical Center (Tomah) Stand Down, that will be held in La Crosse, WI on October 22. You can find out more information about this event under our HVRP article.

Another project that we have been working on is our local Step-Up Program. This program allows veterans to become more independent, while still receiving assistance in a structured environment. In late 2006, VAF was awarded a grant through the VA to acquire 12 additional beds to be used as a “Step-Up.” These are in addition to the 60 beds in the main program located in Tomah. Since the awarding of this grant, VAF has purchased three properties that provide nine beds for veterans making this move to greater independence. Since our last newsletter, we purchased the fourth and final property included in this project, to bring the total beds to 12. Donations have played a large part in bringing this project to fruition.

Donations to the VAF have been used to purchase items such as furniture, bedding and other household items for the Step-Up project, as well as our other sites. The staff and residents of the program extend their thanks to all who have sent in donations and/or donated time. It is your generosity that makes it possible for programs like the VAF to assist our nation's heroes in their time of need. Take care until next time.

Semper Fidelis,
Colin Moten
VAF Executive Director



IN THE SPOTLIGHT

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

BENT NAILS

Minister Darren Price (also known to us as the man behind the fabulous food from BP's Smokehouse) gives classes in reference to “*Bent Nails*” and has worked with the case managers of VAF to give daily living skills classes on this subject. His presentation is a rephrased excerpt of a sermon by Bishop Eugene S. Johnson, Madison Pentecostal Assembly (MPA).

Per one case manager: “The classes are motivational and have gone over well with the Veterans in our program.” The following is information provided to us by Mr. Price regarding the information he uses as the basis for his classes:

“Bent Nails Philosophy”

“Bent nails” is a metaphor for our lives. Millions of bent nails are cast aside by carpenters at construction sites and forgotten forever, because they are deemed to have no more use or value. The carpenter is the builder and maker of structures that shelter us from the weary storms of life. Straight nails hold these structures together; bent nails fall to the ground and are left to rust and decompose into the elements of Mother Earth.

Except that some young child or some poor itinerant carpenter may rescue them

by scavenging the soil or construction scrap heap and take them home to to straighten them out for future use – to construct structures that they value. The child and the poor carpenter know where to find these nails because they are cast aside near the extravagant emerging beautiful structures of life.

Humanly speaking, these bent nails are juvenile delinquents, abused individuals of society, those ravaged by alcohol and drug abuse and other mental dementia. Some nails (and some humans) were bent because they were hit. Those of us who have picked up bent nails are also among those who have become caring professionals to straighten out the imperfections that we often see in our facilities. We try to reshape them into their original straight condition, although flaws may still exist either in the head or body of the nail. We see the value in these nails – though not perfect, they are reused when straightened and help to build fabulous structures in life.

Most people admire the beauty of the structure, but they will never know whether it was held together by a straight or bent nail.

HVRP UPDATE

In July of this year we entered our 6th year of administering the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) grant. At the end of September, we completed the 1st quarter of the grant and are well on our way to another productive and exciting year.

Currently, we are in full swing of preparing for the annual VA Stand Down to be held in La Crosse, WI. This year the event will be held on October 22 at The American Legion Post 52, located at 711 South 6th Street. Each year the VAF, along with agencies from all over West Central Wisconsin, gather to provide services to indigent or at-risk veterans throughout the La Crosse area. During these Stand Downs, VAF, through the HVRP grant, is able to provide veterans with clothing, a hot meal, hygiene items and assorted other items.

On a regular basis HVRP services

range from assistance in obtaining state IDs and drivers licenses, birth certificates, resumé writing, work clothing, basic tools and interviewing skills, funding CDL training through the local technical colleges and much more. We have added a couple more guest speakers and employment specialists to our training roster: Darrin Price with his “Bent Nails” presentation and Ashley Poelling with Olsten Staffing Services who assisted with mock interview training.

For those that are new to our newsletter, HVRP is a competitive grant program provided by the Veterans’ Employment and Training Services (VETS) of the U.S. Department of Labor. HVRP focuses on reintegrating homeless veterans into meaningful employment within the labor force. It also utilizes effective service delivery systems that address the complex problems facing homeless veterans.

WISH LIST

Personal Care Items:

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

Laundry Items:

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

Model Kits	Phone Cards	Pool Sticks and Chalk (red)
Craft Kits	Movies	Pool Stick Repair Kit
Board Games	Crossword Puzzles	Nine Ball Rack
Pens, pencils	Envelopes	Stamps
Stationery	Greeting Cards	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)	Snack foods/Baked goods
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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.

MOCK INTERVIEWS A PART OF LIVING SKILLS CLASSES

As part of the Veterans Assistance Foundation (VAF) program, Monday through Friday the case managers of the VAF and the case managers for the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) give daily living skills classes.

On Wednesday, August 26, 2009, the class got involved in "Mock Interviews," with the help of Rick Larson from the Department of Workforce Development; Ashley Poellinger from Olsten Staffing Services of La Crosse, Wisconsin; Tom Kunz, case manager with the HVRP program; and Tracey Turner, case manager with the VAF. They conducted "Mock Interviews" with six VAF residents. The purpose of the class was to provide some real life experience with the interview process and to provide constructive feedback on what areas the Veterans may need to adjust or "polish up" on, as well as telling them what areas they were skilled at.

Tom has received positive feedback from all of the Veterans who participated. One of the Veterans commented, "It was very helpful to get feedback from a professional human resource person.



Pictured from left: Tom Kunz, Ashley Poellinger, Tracey Turner and Rick Larson.

Maybe we can use this experience in the future to gain employment for the Veterans."

We are happy this was a positive experience for all involved and look forward to working with Rick and Ashley again in the future for more interview training.

BOWLERS TO VETERANS LINK – VA BOWLING TOURNAMENT

Tomah VAMC Veterans had a chance to recognize each other for competing in the 63rd Annual Bowlers to Veterans Link (BVL/VA) Bowling Tournament. The Veterans Assistance Foundation had six Veterans participate in the event which ran from March 3, 2009 to March 27, 2009.

This is a nationwide event and VA hospitals from across the country participated. The event consists of nine divisions, with two of the divisions being new this year. One of the new divisions added this year was the Wii Bowling division. A VAF Veteran participated in this division and received a medal.

The BVL, founded as the Bowlers Victory Legion, was formed on September 26, 1942 in the midst of WWII when the men and women bowlers of America sought to make life more bearable for the service personnel overseas. It later directed its focus and efforts to care for those wounded and disabled soldiers coming home to a new way of life. Having gone through two name changes, the organization is now known by its current name of the Bowlers to Veterans Link (BVL). This name more appropriately describes the BVL bowlers close association with Veterans across the country.

The BVL is a long time sponsor of the four national veteran recreational events consisting of the Winter Sports Clinic, the Golden Age Games, the Wheelchair Games and the Creative Arts Festival.



Glenn B. shows off his medal and certificate from the 63rd Annual BVL/VA Bowling Tournament. He participated in the ambulatory division on a team with six other Veterans and they took 3rd Place out of all VA Medical Centers from across the nation.

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.