

# DISCOVERING DVA

NEWS FROM WITHIN THE WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS MAY 2024



## CELEBRATING NATIONAL VOLUNTEER MONTH

As part of National Volunteer Month, Secretary James Bond spoke at volunteer banquets at the Veterans Home at Chippewa Falls (*above*) and at the Veterans Home at Union Grove (*below*). The banquets were an opportunity to thank the many volunteers who generously gave hundreds of hours of service.





**WIA250 Delegation** (above, l-r): Kevin Hampton, Curator of History, Wisconsin Veterans Museum & Program Coordinator for the America250WI Commission, Laurel Miller, Manager of PK-12 Education, Wisconsin Historical Society, Christian Øverland, Director, Wisconsin Historical Society & Vice Chair of the America250WI Commission, Angela Titus, Chief Program Officer, Wisconsin Historical Society, Chris Kolakowski, Director, Wisconsin Veterans Museum & Chair of the America250WI Commission

## UPDATE ON AMERICA250 SAY IT WITH ME, SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL (sem-ee-kwin- sen-ten-ee-uhl)

As the year 2026 approaches so does the 250th birthday of our nation, or the semiquincentennial. In March, more than 450 delegates who are planning the commemoration of America's 250th birthday met at Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia. Representing Wisconsin as the Chair of the America250 Wisconsin Commission was the Wisconsin Veterans Museum Director, Chris Kolakowski. Curator of History, Kevin Hampton also attended in his capacity as program staff for the Wisconsin America250 Commission.



At the conference Kolakowski advocated for state coordination to recognize the 250th birthdays of the Army, Navy, and Marines in 2025. Hampton led small group discussions on regional coordinating and public programming opportunities. He also participated in a panel discussion on inter-state collaboration and programming. As is true to the nature of Wisconsinites, our Wisconsin America250 Commission leads the overall coordination at the regional and national levels and were recognized at this conference for their efforts. More news about how Wisconsin will join the national celebration of America250 will be forthcoming.

**Fireside Chat:** Multistate Collaboration for 250th Programs Nationwide (above, l-r): Cheryl Wilson, Executive Director, VA250 Commission. Jonathan Lane, Executive Director, Massachusetts Revolution 250. Jonah Spivak, Communications Coordinator, Town of Bennington, Vermont. Kevin Hampton, Curator of History, The Wisconsin Veterans Museum. Photo credit: Brian Newson, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

*Written and submitted by Jennifer Stevenson, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, an educational activity of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs*



## EQUITY AND INCLUSION COMMITTEE SEEKS NEW LEADERSHIP AND MEMBERS

DVA's Equity and Inclusion Advisory Committee (EIAC) guides the implementation of the Equity and Inclusion (EI) Plan and has three active employee-led committees, Recruitment, Retention, and Diversity, to ensure that the needs of employees are being met through the department initiatives. All three committees play an important role in shaping the workforce at DVA by developing an inclusive environment that champions equity in the workplace.

This year, the EIAC has the unique opportunity to fill all leadership roles of the committee due to the end-of-term limits for the Chair, Co-chair, and Secretary. These positions work closely with the Office of the Secretary and HR to achieve the goals of the EI Plan. These positions are elected by the committee and terms are for 2 years.

All three committees are accepting new members! Committee meetings are held virtually. Each committee meets 1-2 times per month for about an hour each meeting. Employees interested in joining should discuss this time commitment with their supervisor.

These committees are a great opportunity to build relationships with colleagues across divisions and locations. Committee work also helps employees gain knowledge and skills that may be outside of their day-to-day role such as leadership, event planning, and project management.

Each committee is passionate about moving the agency forward and has identified focus areas:

- The Recruitment Committee is dedicated to improving DVA's recruitment, outreach, and onboarding resources.
- The Diversity Committee is creating an internal solution to employee conflict resolution. This committee is also committed to fostering a culture of open communication and transparency.
- The Retention Committee is advocating for DVA employees by truly finding out how employees are feeling about the department and working on solutions.

If you would like more information on joining any of these committees, please reach out to:

- Recruitment: Matt Niehaus
- Diversity: Leslie Busy-Amegashie
- Retention: Shannon Miller

If you have an interest in joining the Equity and Inclusion Advisory Committee in a leadership role, or as a committee member, contact the committee at [DVAMBCOEquityAndInclusion@dva.wisconsin.gov](mailto:DVAMBCOEquityAndInclusion@dva.wisconsin.gov).

# MEMORIAL DAY CEREMONIES

SATURDAY, MAY 25 | SUNDAY, MAY 26 | MONDAY, MAY 27  
NORTHERN | SOUTHERN | CENTRAL

HONORING  
THE MEMORY  
&  
THE LEGACY



WISCONSIN VETERANS MEMORIAL CEMETERIES



WDVA Administrator of the Division of Benefits Jeremy Lyon attended and spoke at the CVSO Spring Conference in Green Bay, Wisconsin. He gave remarks about the Division of Benefits and updates relating to veterans accessing their benefits and making claims and answered questions from the attendees.

## *Congratulations, Queen Kelly of King!*

After all of the highs and lows, we have come to expect from the NCAA Basketball Tournament, it is the honor of the Equity and Inclusion Advisory Committee to anoint Kelly Harrison as the reigning champion of this year's WDVA Men's Basketball Bracket.

Kelly assists our members as a Member Finance Specialist-Senior in at the King Veterans Home and the position offers her much job satisfaction! She joined WDVA in September of 2023. Kelly and her husband enjoy raising vegetables, fruit, flowers, foliage, and a wild Australian Shepherd puppy on their property in Waupaca.

Fun Fact: In 2019, Kelly and her teammates from the 1987 & 1988 Horlick Girls Track and Field team were honored by the Racine County Sports Hall of Fame for our back-to-back WIAA State Championships.



# GET TO KNOW NEW WDVA EMPLOYEES!

Dan Zabrowski recently joined the VORP team. Dan's role is unique in VORP as he will be covering the entire state for SOAR Claims, Education Referrals and Vocational Assistance. It's anticipated that Dan's primary role will be assisting enrolled VORP participants in applying for SSI/SSDI benefits. We are excited to have Dan join the team and look forward to the increasing VORP participant benefits.



We are pleased to announce Ryan Swantz has joined us as a Financial Management Supervisor with the General Accounting Section in the Bureau of Fiscal Services. Ryan will be headquartered at our Central Office in Madison. Ryan worked for the State of Wisconsin for 12 years in positions with the Department of Corrections, Department of Administration, Department of Revenue, and Department of Health Services before spending the last two years as the Controller for the City of Sun Prairie.

Ryan lives in Sun Prairie with his wife, Joy, and their two dachshunds, Lilly and Walter. His son and daughter-in-law are both City of Madison Police Officers, and his daughter is a social worker for Racine Correctional Institution. Ryan and his wife are both active with the Wisconsin Elks Association, enjoy travelling, are avid fans of all things Disney, and have a passion for cooking on the smoker.

Shannon Hardel, the new Executive Director for Ainsworth Hall at the Wisconsin Veterans Home in King, met with WDVA Secretary-designee James Bond during his visit to King on April 16, 2024. Shannon previously worked for King and has years of experience in nursing, administration and as a nursing home surveyor.

## VORP HIGHLIGHTS

Earlier this year, WDVA's Veteran Outreach and Recovery Program (VORP) outreach coordinators, Todd Marks and Josh Andreini, were invited by Forest County Veteran Services, CVSO Robert Koplien, to conduct two special training sessions for Forest County law enforcement and emergency personnel on veteran benefits/resources and trauma-informed care.

We appreciate Forest County CVSO and Forest County law enforcement personnel for their partnership in serving our veteran community in Wisconsin!

Pictured left to right: Todd Marks VORP, Robert Koplien Forest County CVSO, and Josh Andreini VORP.



# HUMAN RESOURCES

## TEAM UPDATES!

After over 35 years of incredible service supporting Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs, Carla Bongard is officially retiring on May 31, 2024!

Please join us to celebrate Carla on **May 23, 2024 at 1:00pm**, in the Rimrock events room (1st floor adjacent to the cafeteria). Feel free to share the details with other staff or individuals you know she worked closely with over the years.

Here is a [Teams link](#) for those that are unable to attend in person but would like to attend virtually.

## MANDATORY ENTERPRISE TRAININGS

2024 Annual mandatory enterprise trainings have been assigned to all WDVA employees. **These trainings were due by March 29, 2024. If you have not completed them, you should be doing so right away.**

Job aids on how to launch an online course can be located using this link: [Launch an Online Course \(wi.gov\)](#)

## WISCONSIN PUBLIC RECORDS LAW (2024)

Public policy of the State of Wisconsin is that all persons are entitled to the greatest possible information regarding the affairs of government and the official acts of those officers and employees who represent them. This online module (approximately 15 minutes) helps employees and officers learn the basics that will help them do their part to comply with the Wisconsin Public Records Law, providing an overview of their public records responsibilities.

## 2024 STATE OF WISCONSIN IT SECURITY AWARENESS TRAINING

The state's mandatory training on IT Security Awareness for calendar year 2024 has been released in LEADER. This training provides employees the knowledge and tools to recognize, avoid and report cyber-attacks and security incidents.

## RESPECTFUL WORKPLACE: HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION PREVENTION IS EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS (2024)

The state's mandatory training on a Respectful Workplace for calendar 2024 has been released in LEADER. The State of Wisconsin is committed to a work environment in which all employees are treated with dignity and respect. This training will provide employees with the foundation needed to maintain a work environment free from harassment and discrimination.



## HR BOOK NOOK

[Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High](#)

When stakes are high, opinions vary, and emotions run strong, you have three choices: Avoid a crucial conversation and suffer the consequences; handle the conversation poorly and suffer the consequences; or apply the lessons and strategies of Crucial Conversations and improve relationships and results.

## WELCOME!

We are excited to welcome many new employees to the department. Daniel Zabrowski (Human Services Program Coordinator) and Evan Thompson (IS Technical Services) joined the central Madison office. Sandra Marcum (Military Funeral Honors) and Gregory Swatkowski (Office Associate) joined the cemeteries.

The Wisconsin Veterans Home at King welcomed Taylor Modrzewski (Licensed Practical Nurse); Jamie Wandrey (Nurse Clinician); Ryleigh Anderson, Cindi Grove, Kim Jansen, Jenna Krueger, Lydia Weed, Jenna Wolosek (Nursing Assistants); Arthur Cordy (Carpenter); Kevin Sitter (Groundskeeper); Tanner Nett (Security Officer); Robert Delgado, Elijah Feezel, and Heather Griswold (Cooks); and Nathaniel Anderson and Abigail Martinez (Food Service Assistants).

The Wisconsin Veterans Home at Union Grove welcomed Shelly Smith (Assistant Director of Nursing), Tracy Osahon (Nursing Assistant), and Beth Isermann (Operations Program Associate).

## OUTSIDE EMPLOYMENT/ VOLUNTEERING/HONORARIA

The Human Resources team prepared a new automated Outside Employment/Activity Approval form. The new form is electronic and routes automatically for approvals. It is DVA policy for an employee to complete this form when:

- Gaining employment outside of an employee's position with the Department
- Starting a business/being self employed
- Service on a council, committee, or board
- Presentations, Speeches, Appearances for fees, honoraria or reimbursement of expenses.
- Volunteer activities

This list is not exclusive. If you have questions about whether you should be completing the form, please contact your local HR team.

## DARBY'S JOKES *by Jeff Darby*

What day of the week is an egg's least favorite? *Fry-day.*

You know what can really ruin a Friday? *Remembering it's only Thursday.*

When an employment application asks who is to be notified in case of emergency, *I always write, "A very good doctor."*

What do you call 12 people doing the work of one? *A committee.*





## OUTREACH EVENTS ACROSS THE STATE IN APRIL

1. GREEN BAY  
WI CVSO ASSOCIATION SPRING CONFERENCE

2. ONEIDA  
TRIBAL VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER  
QUARTERLY MEETING

3. MILWAUKEE  
MATC VETERANS RESOURCE FAIR  
VETERAN MEET UP FEATURING R&R HOUSE

4. RACINE  
IN HER BOOTS

5. MADISON  
MADISON COLLEGE VETERANS EXPO  
WISCONSIN WOMEN IN GOVERNMENT GALA  
MADISON COLLEGE POWWOW

6. SUN PRAIRIE  
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OUTREACH