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US Navy Veteran Connie Walker Named Wisconsin Woman Veteran of the Year

LA CROSSE – Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Daniel Zimmerman announced that US Navy Veteran Connie Walker, Verona, has been named Wisconsin Woman Veteran of the Year. Walker honorably served 23 years, retiring as a Captain.

“Connie is a tireless advocate for Veterans, active duty, and their families and the State of Wisconsin is a better place to live for Veterans because of people like her,” Secretary Zimmerman said. “Women have played a critical role in our military history and I am honored to present this award to Connie who has demonstrated time and again dedicated public service.”

Walker was chosen by a panel of women veterans to receive the award due to her passion for working to raise cultural competency of Veterans issues, especially in mental health and healthcare.

Walker is driven to effect change, she says, because of her son Michael, who returned from the War in Iraq with invisible wounds. In advocating for him, she learned first-hand what Veterans and families working to overcome TBI, psychiatric injury, psychiatric illness, and chronic pain have to deal with in trying to get back some semblance of their lives. And while Michael may be the reason she started down this path, she has become a widely respected mental health advocate for a very vulnerable population in this country that needs much better mental health treatment and access to care than it’s getting.

She dedicates a significant amount of time and energy into spreading knowledge and understanding of Veterans issues throughout Wisconsin. She worked to bring VA’s Community Clergy Training Program to Wisconsin for the first time in order to educate faith communities about how they can support Veterans and their families, as well as identify and support rural Veterans with reintegration challenges.

She has established training programs and provided training on many Veterans issues to raise cultural competency of Veterans issues. For instance, Walker is working with UW-Madison to include training on Veterans issues into their medical school curricula; she advocates for the same in nursing, social work and other medical sectors of education throughout the country.

Walker brings people together to create opportunities for individuals and communities to provide better services to Veterans and their families, working with groups like Journey Mental Health to roll-out a community education series on Veterans issues and hosting a workshop at the National Association of Social Workers Wisconsin Annual Conference on post-war recovery and reintegration outcomes.

Connie’s nomination reads, in part:



“Women Veterans don't often put themselves first - and Ms. Walker is a living testament to this. She doesn't ask for what she needs; she asks how she can help others and encourages others to do the same. She is, by far, one of the strongest and most humble Veteran advocates in Wisconsin - and she happens to be a woman. This award would serve as a token of the significant recognition she deserves - to say "Thank You" for the Servant Leadership Ms. Walker demonstrates advocating for Wisconsin Veterans.”

The Wisconsin Woman Veteran of the Year Award recognizes women veterans who have compiled a record of exemplary service as a military service member, a veteran, and outstanding member of the community.