

# DISCOVERING DVA

NEWS FROM WITHIN THE WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS JANUARY 2024



## WINTER ARRIVES AT SOUTHERN VETERANS MEMORIAL CEMETERY

As winter weather has finally made its presence known at SWVMC earlier this month, our administrative staff took some beautiful pictures when the sun came out before the big snowstorm on January 12, 2024.

We'd like to recognize and express our heartfelt gratitude to all our cemetery caretakers who work in all seasons, both hot and cold. Please send warm thoughts to our staff who tirelessly help us deliver interment services for grieving families and their loved ones.



# WELCOME!

Please join WDVA in welcoming Jeremy B. Lyon (*right*) to the position of Administrator of WDVA's Division of Veterans Benefits. Jeremy joined WDVA on Monday, December 4, 2023. We are fortunate to bring a proven leader on board with an extensive background in service. Jeremy has served in the US Army since 2007, joined the Wisconsin National Guard in 2010, and received his law degree from the University of Wisconsin in 2013. He worked as a civil litigator before returning to full-time military service with the National Guard in 2018. He is a recipient of the Bronze Star Medal, three Meritorious Service Medals, and the Combat Infantryman Badge.



Jeremy is honored to continue serving those who have served and advocating on their behalf for the benefits, programs, and services they earned through their service to our community and nation. He lives in Sun Prairie with his wife, Briony, and their two children.



We are pleased to announce that Michelle Gauger (*left*) will be joining the Department of Veterans Affairs as the Budget Director, replacing Brett Coomber, starting on January 29. Michelle has extensive experience in this role at other agencies, most recently as the Budget Director at the Department of Justice for almost eight years following three years at the Department of Military Affairs. She has previous experience as an Executive Policy and Budget Manager at the State Budget Office with responsibility for the Department of Veterans Affairs budget, and started her budget career as a nursing home rate analyst at the Department of Health Services Medicaid program.

Michelle attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Lakeland College and holds a bachelor's degree in accounting and business management. She lives in Windsor with her husband and teenage son.

Please join in congratulating Gina Fernandez (*right*) in her new role as Finance Manager for the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs. She will be replacing Steve Errthum who retired earlier in January. Gina brings her years of WDVA procurement and supervisory experience in Central Office Finance to the new position. You can look forward to a smooth transition and continued excellence in financial services provided.



## DARBY'S JOKES *by Jeff Darby*

**What do you call a joke that isn't funny?** *A sentence.*

**What did one ocean say to the other?** *Nothing, they just waved.*

**You know what they say about a clean desk:** *It's a sure sign of a cluttered desk drawer.*

**I think they picked me for my motivational skills.**

*Everyone always says they have to work twice as hard when I'm around!*





## WISCONSIN VETERANS MUSEUM STORE HOLIDAY SALES

Congratulations to the team at the Wisconsin Veterans Museum Shop, who executed a successful sales campaign this holiday season. The staff crushed all past sales numbers in the month of December with total sales that were almost 50% higher than December 2022 and 100% higher than in 2021. For the fiscal year, shop sales are up 15% over FY 2023 and 30% over FY2022.

The staff attribute the success to enlisting products from veteran-owned businesses, many of which are in Wisconsin. They also employed a storytelling tactic about their vendors, the unique products they sell, and the inspiration for their products. Customers love to learn about the “why” behind the “what” while supporting veteran-owned business and programming about Wisconsin veterans.

Pictured above is Chris Wysong, a retired captain in the U.S. Army now living in the LaCrosse area, with his Bucket of Bread product sold in the Wisconsin Veterans Museum Shop.





## NORTHERN VETERANS MEMORIAL CEMETERY CONDUCTS NNOK SERVICE

On Thursday, January 25, our cemetery staff conducted services for six unclaimed, or 'no next of kin' (NNOK), veterans held in the chapel of the NWVMC. We had five services for the US Army and one service for the US Navy. Each veteran was given a service with an introduction, military awards, and a reading. The service was then turned over to military honors where active-duty personnel folded and presented the flag to individuals that volunteered to receive the veteran's honors. The local Shell Lake Honors Team (American Legion Post 225) volunteered their time for all six services, providing the rifle salute and playing of taps. The offices of US Congressman Tom Tiffany and Wisconsin State Senator Romaine Quinn each sent a representative to attend the services. There were approximately ten people in attendance for each service. I am thankful for our dedicated cemetery staff, caretakers, and military honors volunteers who helped us give one last tribute to these veterans this week. – *Joel Clapero, Director, NWVMC*



# HUMAN RESOURCES



The HR team took some time to celebrate the end of the 2023 calendar year and the start to the holiday season. We are looking forward to 2024 and our continued work with WDVA.

## WELCOME!

We are excited to welcome many new employees to the department. Jeremy Lyon (Division Administrator–Veterans Benefits) and Charlie Reddemann (Veterans Benefits Specialist) joined us in the central Madison office. Jacob Esselstrom (Archivist) joined the Wisconsin Veterans Museum.

The Wisconsin Veterans Home at Union Grove welcomed Natasha Kreuser (Director of Nursing), Amanda Ross (Assistant Director of Nursing), Kimberly Maki (Laundry Worker), and Casey Phipps (Therapy Assistant).

The Wisconsin Veterans Home at King welcomed Brian Dean and Jacqueline Paulson (Nurse Clinicians); Kathi Steffens (Nursing Assistant); Corey Bukouricz and Rachel Paulson (Custodians); Gunner Berry (Cook); and Lora Zemple (Food Service Assistant).

## WDVA EMPLOYEE WORK RULE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT REMINDER!

All WDVA employees received the following message last week on the new annual process to acknowledge the State of Wisconsin Work Rules.

*In an effort to ensure that all Department of Veterans Affairs Employees are familiar with the State of Wisconsin Work Rules, you are required to review and sign-off on WDVA's [Annual Employee Acknowledgment](#). We are asking that all WDVA employees acknowledge these no later than January 31, 2024.*

*Please use the link embedded above to acknowledge.*

*Once you have completed the acknowledgment, a copy will be uploaded to your personnel file. This will be an annual process moving forward. New employees will continue to acknowledge these policies during their orientation period.*

Please be sure to complete the acknowledgment prior to the January 31, 2024 deadline!

## WDVA'S EQUITY & INCLUSION PLAN

WDVA's Equity and Inclusion plan for 2024-2026 is approved and posted to our [external facing site](#) and the [Region 4 HR intranet site](#).

We are excited to work collaboratively with WDVA employees to implement the plan and assist the agency with achieving their Equity and Inclusion goals.

We want to thank all of WDVA employees on the Equity and Inclusion Advisory Committee for their hard work to get this plan developed and approved.

## MANDATORY ENTERPRISE TRAININGS

2024 Annual mandatory enterprise trainings have been assigned to all WDVA employees. Please be sure to complete these trainings by March 29, 2024.

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.

## EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM REMINDER

The State's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) partner, Kepro, is now Acentra Health! While the name changes, all EAP benefits and resources remain the same. The EAP provides State of Wisconsin employees and their household family members with free and confidential support, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for a variety of concerns – ranging from everyday matters to more concerning situations, including:

- Work-life stresses
- Anxiety, depression, or other mood disorders
- Relationship or other family problems, including divorce and abuse
- Substance abuse
- Manager and Supervisor support
- Parenting/Caregiver support
- Legal and financial guidance
- Convenience services

Please see the [Division of Personnel Management](#) website for complete details on the scope of services offered through the EAP.

While the name change transition is still in process, you may continue to see references to Kepro EAP. These will eventually be transitioned to Acentra Health.

## WDVA OFFERS DIVERSITY INTERNSHIPS!

The Wisconsin Student Diversity Internship Program (SWSDIP) offers opportunities for students across the state in various agencies and career areas. This internship program explicitly targets students across culturally diverse groups with different lived experiences, representing the global spectrum of ethnicity, gender, and ability. The goal of the program is to provide those students with an opportunity to experience the professional work environment of the Wisconsin State Government, including Department of Veterans Affairs. The program provides students with a paid internship, valuable work experience, and training. Students who are veterans are also strongly encouraged to apply.

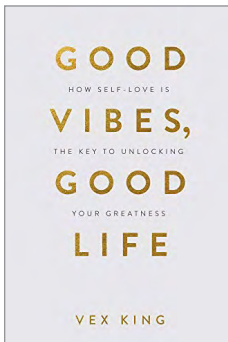
To be eligible for a WDVA Diversity Internship, applicants must be:

- Legally authorized to work in the United States (i.e., a citizen or national of the U.S., a lawful permanent resident, an alien authorized to work in the U.S. without agency sponsorship)
- At least 18 years of age at the time the internship program begins (May 22, 2024)
- Currently enrolled in, recently graduated (2022/2023) from, or planning to attend (2023/2024) a 2-year, 4-year, or graduate school
- Living in Wisconsin during the internship program

DVA encourages employees to share these opportunities with eligible friends and family by sharing this [link](#) to the Wisc.Jobs Student Diversity Internship Program.

All applications must be submitted by 11:59 pm on February 26, 2024.

To learn more about this program, please visit the [SWSDIP homepage](#).



## HR BOOK NOOK

[Good Vibes, Good Life: How self-love is the key to unlocking your greatness](#)

Join the self-love revolution with Instagram visionary Vex King. This audiobook features inspirational messages and universal wisdom to help you manifest positive vibes.

Vex overcame adversity to become a source of hope for thousands of young people and now draws from his personal experience and his intuitive wisdom to inspire you to:

- Practice self-care, overcome toxic energy, and prioritize your well-being
- Cultivate positive lifestyle habits, including mindfulness and meditation
- Change your beliefs to invite great opportunities into your life
- Manifest your goals using tried-and-tested techniques
- Overcome fear and flow with the universe
- Find your higher purpose and become a shining light for others