

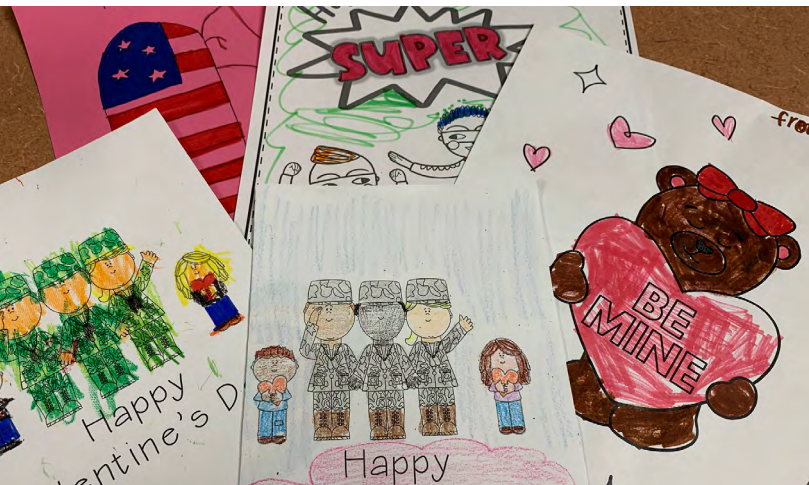
# DISCOVERING DVA

NEWS FROM WITHIN THE WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS FEBRUARY 2024



## VALENTINES FOR VETERANS

WDVA delivered cheer on Valentine's Day to members at all three of our Wisconsin Veterans Homes at King, Union Grove, and Chippewa Falls. Secretary-designee James Bond made a special trip to King, and our outreach team went to all three homes to deliver the 30,000 cards we received from across the country.







**CHECK OUT NEWS COVERAGE OF VALENTINE'S DAY DELIVERY  
FEATURING OUR VERY OWN SHANNON MILLER!**

[https://www.wqow.com/community/positively-chippewa-valley/area-veterans-receive-valentines-day-cards-from-across-the-nation/article\\_fc489db0-cabb-11ee-a03f-af66ccedf8aa.html](https://www.wqow.com/community/positively-chippewa-valley/area-veterans-receive-valentines-day-cards-from-across-the-nation/article_fc489db0-cabb-11ee-a03f-af66ccedf8aa.html)





# HONORING BLACK HISTORY MONTH

As we close out Black History month, we all should take time to honor the rich history of selfless service and sacrifice that Black veterans have made across our nation, and especially from Wisconsin.

Black veterans' service goes back to the days of the Revolutionary War fighting for our nation's independence and continued straight up to more recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. We shouldn't forget to honor the humble service of those Black veterans who served in peacetime. They are an integral part of the American story, our national identity, and our fight for freedom both in the battlefields overseas and at home.



As I hope you know, the Wisconsin Veterans Museum does the excellent and crucial work of collecting veteran stories from across generations. If you have a few minutes, please consider checking out one of the following excellent oral histories of Black veterans.

You can hear [the firsthand account of Anna Mae Robertson](#) (left), Milwaukee native who served in the 6888th (above) in England during WWII. After her time in France, she came home to work at a VA hospital in Milwaukee and raise eight children. She was recognized with the Congressional Gold Medal just two years ago with members of her unit who buoyed the spirits of soldiers abroad with news from home.

[Vietnam veteran William Sims of Milwaukee shares his story](#) of his time in Vietnam, where he recounts a Vietcong ambush during Operation Nathan Hale in the Trung Luong Valley on June 19, 1966. Sims (right) received a Bronze Star Medal with "V" Device (to designate valor) for his heroic actions.

His life of service continued when he came home. He advocated for Black Vietnam veterans to have the same access to the benefits and services they earned that other veterans received.

"I spent so much time in trying to correct some of the wrongs after Vietnam and seeing what had happened to us to make people aware that, you know, we got to do better than what we've been doing and I don't know what else to say... you're going to have to do better for your people... all of them too not just one," says Sims.





Sims went on to have a decades-long career as a veteran advocate in Wisconsin. He was one of the founders of the Center for Veterans Issues (CVI). He's also worked at the VA and WDVA, and he served as an outreach specialist for the Milwaukee Homeless Veterans Reintegration Project (HVRP) among many other roles. In 1990, William Sims received the Congressional Black Caucus Veteran's Braintrust Award in recognition of his outstanding service to African American veterans on a national and community level.



Maj. Gen. Marcia Anderson (*left*) was the first Black woman to achieve the rank of major general. [She shared her story with the Museum](#) about her time in the Army from May 1979 to August 2016. Her achievements meant so much to her family, including her father, who served in the Korean War just a few years after military desegregation.

"It was a big deal for him to have a daughter who was a lieutenant, because those opportunities were not—they weren't as big when he was in the military," Anderson recalls. "[W]hen I got promoted to colonel, my dad was able to come to the ceremony and pin my rank on with my husband and my commanding general. And, of course, he was over the moon. He was so excited."

She shares many stories, including the many challenges and barriers she faced as a Black woman in the army. She discusses how much things have changed for the better since she enlisted in the 1970s, but that there are still changes to make and fights to be had for equality. Representation and leadership make a big difference in making things better, according to Anderson.

"I think, like the famous postal battalion, the 6888th, that served during World War II, the women in that unit recognized that their efforts and their excellence is its own protest... I love that. I think their excellence, and the work that I tried to do to demonstrate that I deserved to be there, and that having me at the table improved parts of our discussion... [Every] step forward we take makes it easier for that next person."

Maj. Gen. Anderson's words resonate with me. As I walk down the hallway at WDVA with portraits of all the former secretaries, it means something to see Secretary Kenneth Black up on the wall as the department's first Black leader. I have been inspired in my life to take up the mantle of leadership and service, and I hope to inspire the next generation.

Yours in Service,

James Bond, Secretary-designee



## VORP SPOTLIGHT

We continue to hear incredible stories from veterans who have gotten through very difficult times with help from our Veteran Outreach and Recovery Program (VORP). In case you missed it, we wanted to share one recent story from a veteran who worked with VORP Region 5 Coordinator Nikki Sherman (*left*). Nikki works with veterans residing in Barron, Burnett, Polk, Rusk, St. Croix, and Washburn counties.

“I was having a huge mental crisis, and my PTSD symptoms were pretty much out of control. It was a nightmare. Nikki came to my rescue and saved my life. She is an angel, as far as I’m concerned. Her compassion and knowledge of how to help me was amazing. She got me into the right place and programs. She followed through on everything and was with me throughout my ordeal. If not for her and others, I don’t know what would have happened to me. People like her and programs to help veterans like me are essential and definitely needed.”

Shoutout to all the incredible work the VORP staff is doing on the ground to help our state’s veterans!

## DARBY’S JOKES *by Jeff Darby*

**Learn to spell...** *AutoCorrect isn’t always write.*

**What’s the difference between Black Eyed Peas and Chick Peas?** *Black Eyed Peas can sing us a song. Chick Peas can hummus one.*

**What’s a foot long and slippery?** *A slipper.*

**The boss told me that as a security guard, it’s my job to watch the office.** *I’m on season 6 but I’m not really sure what it’s got to do with security.*

**Why would a pig dressed in black never get bullied?** *Because Batman has sworn to protect goth ham.*



# HUMAN RESOURCES

## WELCOME!

We are excited to welcome many new employees to the department. Gina Fernandez (Financial Manager), Michelle Gauger (Budget & Policy Manager), David Hartl (Human Service Program Coordinator), and Alexis Madson (Communications Specialist) joined us in the central Madison office. Abigail Allcox (Operations Program Associate) joined the Wisconsin Veterans Museum.

The Milwaukee claims office welcomed Luke Borchardt and Bryce Dunn (Veterans Claims Officers) and Kathleen Kazda (Operations Program Associate).

The Wisconsin Veterans Home at King welcomed Kristoffer Sproul (Power Plant Operator Senior); Brian Hause (Facilities Repair Worker); Crystal Strautmann (Inventory Control Coordinator); Isaiah Berner-Milner (Therapist); Lily Mineau, Eugene Moerschel, Rebekah Stuebs, and Lydia Weed (Nursing Assistants); Lisa Funk, Aiden Gust, Tammy Hering, Heather Holton, and Larisa Ploeg (Nurse Clinicians); and Tristan Latraille, Landan Plata, and Peggy Wetzal (Food Service Assistants).

The Wisconsin Veterans Home at Union Grove welcomed Willie Franklin and Taneisha Wilson (Nursing Assistants).

## WDVA EMPLOYEE WORK RULE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT REMINDER!

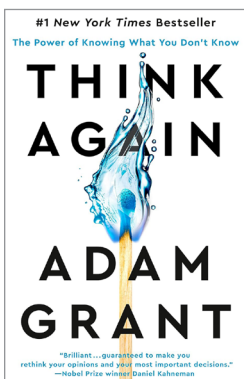
All WDVA employees received the following message last week on the new annual process to acknowledge the State of Wisconsin Work Rules.

*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 Acknowledgement](#). 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.*

The deadline has now passed and there are still a number of staff who have not completed the acknowledgment. Staff who fail to complete the acknowledgment could be subject to discipline. Please get these done ASAP.



## HR BOOK NOOK

[Think Again](#) by Adam Grant

Intelligence is usually seen as the ability to think and learn, but in a rapidly changing world, there's another set of cognitive skills that might matter more: the ability to rethink and unlearn. In our daily lives, too many of us favor the comfort of conviction over the discomfort of doubt. We listen to opinions that make us feel good, instead of ideas that make us think hard. We see disagreement as a threat to our egos, rather than an opportunity to learn. We surround ourselves with people who agree with our conclusions, when we should be gravitating toward those who challenge our thought process.

## 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.

## LEARN MORE ABOUT WDVA'S EQUITY AND INCLUSION PLAN – HR HOT TOPIC

HR will be hosting a Hot Topic presentation on WDVA's Equity and Inclusion plan on Wednesday, March 6 at noon. The presentation will be held via Microsoft Teams with an invite sent to all staff the week prior. The presentation is scheduled to last 30 minutes with time for questions.

WDVA's Equity and Inclusion Plan supports the agency in a variety of ways, from recruitment to retention, and supports equitable and respectful work environments for all by helping the agency identify and eliminate policies, practices, and behaviors that create barriers for diverse staff. It establishes a roadmap for goals and measures intended outcomes.

For more questions regarding the plan, email [dvambcoequityandinclusion@dva.wisconsin.gov](mailto:dvambcoequityandinclusion@dva.wisconsin.gov) or review the plan on WDVA's [Intranet site](#).

## INCOME CONTINUATION INSURANCE

The annual review for Income Continuation Insurance (ICI) premiums was finalized effective 2/1/2024. ICI premiums are determined by your annual salary and accumulated sick leave balance. Please review your 2/8/2024 paycheck to review your new premium. Any questions, please contact [DVAMBCOPayroll@wisconsin.gov](mailto:DVAMBCOPayroll@wisconsin.gov).



# WHERE IN WISCONSIN IS OUTREACH?



## RECENT OUTREACH EVENTS ACROSS THE STATE IN FEBRUARY

1. EAU CLAIRE  
VALENTINES FOR VETERANS

2. KING  
VALENTINES FOR VETERANS

3. UNION GROVE  
VALENTINES FOR VETERANS

4. MILWAUKEE  
IN HER BOOTS  
MILWAUKEE ART MUSEUM SPARK  
FROST FEST  
FIRST RESPONDERS RESILIENCY

5. MADISON  
STATE OF THE TRIBES  
SHE IS A VETERAN

6. WISCONSIN RAPIDS  
VFW CONFERENCE

# Employee Assistance Program

## Become an Influencer at Work



Developing professional influence comes with many benefits. Those with influence are often well-regarded and sought after for their input and insight, frequently serve as mentors, and find it easy to gain the support of others.

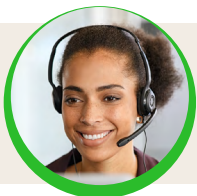


If you're interested in developing professional influence, consider investing in the following:

1. **Become an active listener.** Fully understanding the perspectives and insights of others demonstrates that you value their opinions, making it more likely they will value yours.
2. **Become an expert in your field.** Attend industry events, take part in development opportunities, and network with others in your profession. This will help you keep up with best practices and add value to your position.
3. **Develop your interpersonal skills.** Acknowledge the contributions of others. Be assertive when it comes to promoting your idea, but not egotistical.
4. **Build trust.** Trust is earned over time by following through on your commitments, meeting deadlines, producing quality work, supporting others, and developing a reputation for someone who is reliable.
5. **Share your contributions.** Make sure others are aware of what you bring to the table by sharing your work progress, innovative ideas, and unique perspectives.

**Developing influence in the workplace can be empowering and lead to professional advancements. If you're interested in career development or improving your interpersonal skills, your Employee Assistance Program can help. Contact us for recommendations and referrals.**

*"The Importance of Professional Influence to Unlock Your Career Opportunities". EU Business School. Accessed December 28, 2023 from <https://www.euruni.edu/blog/professional-influence/>*



### Your Employee Assistance Program

Anytime, any day, you have access to mental health professionals available to connect you with free and confidential services and resources to help you be your best. Simply call to get started today.

**24/7/365 PHONE:**  
1.833.539.7285

**WEBSITE:**  
[sowi.mylifeexpert.com](http://sowi.mylifeexpert.com)  
Code: SOWI

