

DISCOVERING DVA

NEWS FROM WITHIN THE WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS MARCH 2024



SECRETARY BOND VISITS WDVA OFFICES, PROGRAMS, CEMETERIES, AND HOMES AROUND WISCONSIN

Greetings WDVA employees! Since the beginning of 2024, I've made it a priority to visit all of WDVA programs and facilities around Wisconsin. As you can see from the photos, I've had wonderful conversations with many of you. I hope you know how appreciated you are for what you do for veterans. I visited our Homes in King and Union Grove multiple times for special events such as Valentine's Day and enjoyed having lunch and talking with both staff and members. It is clear that we are providing a high quality of life for those living in our homes.

I visited our VHRP location in Chippewa Falls last month to talk with staff helping veterans and residents. They are doing great work helping homeless veterans receive the job training, education, counseling, and rehabilitative services they need to get back on their feet. I spent time with our Veteran Claims staff in Milwaukee to hear about the great work being done assisting veterans as they navigate their claims

processes. And I was able to meet with the hard-working staff at all three of our state's wonderful cemeteries, which stand as eternal monuments to those who've served our nation. I was honored to participate in a "No Next of Kin" ceremony at Southern Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemetery. It was an experience I will never forget.

WDVA cannot accomplish our mission without all of you and the dedication you bring every day to serving our state's veteran community. Thank you!

Yours in Service,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Bond".

James Bond, Secretary

Photos: Secretary Bond visits members at Union Grove (left) and Commandant Tammy Servatius at King (right).



‘NO NEXT OF KIN’ SERVICE ATTENDED BY SECRETARY BOND AND NEW BUREAU OF CEMETERIES AND MEMORIAL SERVICES DIRECTOR NORTHWOOD

A ‘no next of kin’ service was held on Wednesday, March 6th at Southern Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemetery for a deceased veteran, Sgt. Gordon A. Streich. This occurs when there is no family for a deceased veteran. Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) Secretary James Bond attended the service and received the burial flag in memory of Sgt. Streich. He was joined by WDVA’s Amy Millard, Deputy Administrator of Veterans Benefits, and Andrea Northwood, our new Director of the Bureau of Veteran Cemeteries and Memorial Services. The majority of our SWVMC staff and caretakers were also in attendance for the service. WDVA is honored to conduct these services for those who have served our nation.

IN MEMORY OF SGT GORDON A STREICH, US ARMY

Army Commendation Medal w/1 OLC | Army Achievement Medal w/1 OLC
 DOB: June 5, 1955 | DOD: February 14, 2019

A VISIT TO MILWAUKEE CLAIMS OFFICE

Secretary Bond visited with the Milwaukee Claims Office staff on Friday, March 15 and thanked them for the great work they do in helping veterans navigate the process of getting their claims started.

Pictured (l-r): Kathleen Kazda, OPA; Travis Peterson, Claims Officer 2; Bryce Dunn, Claims Officer 1; Luke Borchardt, Claims Officer 1, and Secretary Bond. Kathleen, Bryce, and Luke have been employed with WDVA since January 2024.





UPDATES AND UPCOMING PROJECTS AT SWVMC

Southern Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemetery (SWVMC) is the third busiest state veterans cemetery in the nation. The cemetery is open from sunrise to sunset every day if you wish to visit these hallowed grounds. We have several improvement projects in the pipeline that will prepare us for serving more veterans and families, and preparation for future burial needs. SWVMC is currently wrapping up its federally funded phase 5 project, which includes 2,000+ ground double-depth burial liners. Shortly following phase 5, the cemetery broke ground on phase 6, which included adding an additional 3,500 columbarium niches spaces. This project is approximately halfway to completion. Recently, Secretary Bond also toured our grounds, talked with our caretaker staff, and stopped by our maintenance areas as he received an update on the various projects underway at the cemetery.

In the coming months, the SWVMC main administration will be starting a state-funded renovation project that will include various cosmetic updates, new family meeting rooms, and new Military Funeral Honors Program offices. The cemetery continues its discussions with division leadership and executive leadership about future projects. These projects include an expanded maintenance building, a new cold storage building, and new equipment, all of which are part of the preparation for the residency removal going into effect on March 25, 2024.

Lastly, I want to express my appreciation to our wonderful staff, caretakers, and dedicated groups of volunteers who ensure a beautiful and dignified resting place for our cherished veterans here in Union Grove.

Please save the date for this year's Memorial Day ceremonies at all of the Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemeteries, NWVMC on Saturday, May 25, at 1 p.m., SWVMC on Sunday, May 26, 11 a.m., and CWVMC on Monday, May 27 at 10 a.m. if you would like to attend.

By Lee Kelley, SWVMC Cemetery Director



VORP QUARTERLY MEETING

The Veteran Outreach and Recovery Program (VORP) held its quarterly meeting on March 6-8 in Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin. VORP staff, Division of Veterans Benefits Administrator Jeremy Lyon, Veteran Health Services Director Jenny Fahey, and Veteran Housing and Recovery Program (VHRP) Contract Specialist Trish O'Reilly participated in updating program policies and procedures, learning about housing resources, WDVA Skilled Nursing Facilities, community clinics serving those with traumatic brain injuries, and more.

DARBY'S JOKES *by Jeff Darby*

Where do polar bears keep their money? *In a snowbank.*

Why do cows wear bells? *Because their horns don't work.*

Why did the bicycle fall over? *Because it was two tired.*

What did the triangle say to the circle? *You're pointless.*



HUMAN RESOURCES



WELCOME!

We are excited to welcome many new employees to the department. Andrea Northwood (Veterans Affairs Manager) joined the central Madison office.

The Wisconsin Veterans Home at King welcomed Shantiana Lind, Paul Reichert, Teresa Story, and Nicole Weisbrod (Nurse Clinicians); Brian Bloecher, Kristen Brault, Sommer Hainzlsperger, Josephine Klapper, Seth Malueg, and Gabriella Steffens (Nursing Assistants); Lucas Holcomb, Avery Kempf, and Kelsey Weir (Security Officers); Brittanie Johnson, Sarah Schlie, Shannen Schlie, and Crystal Strautmann (Food Service Assistants); Jason Gurholt and Eric Kraus (Facilities Maintenance Specialists); Todd Hydinger (Laborer); John Reese (Locksmith); and Cheryl Winters (Laundry Worker).

The Wisconsin Veterans Home at Union Grove welcomed Rachel June (Nurse Assistant) and Justin Temprano (Nurse Clinician).

ePERFORMANCE NOTIFICATIONS FOR SUPERVISORS

Beginning 3/19/24, PeopleSoft ePerformance will begin sending two new automated e-mails reminders related to late evaluations.

E-mails will be sent to supervisors with open performance evaluations past the end date of the reporting period as defined in the evaluation.

The new notifications are as follows:

- *2 weeks after an employee's evaluation period end date, the supervisor will receive an automated email that an evaluation is past due for the employee*
- *1 month after an employee's evaluation period end date, the supervisor will receive an automated email that an evaluation is past due for the employee*

Supervisors who have questions on PeopleSoft e-performance notifications, please reach out to your Human Resources Representative.

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 acknowledgement. Staff who fail to complete the acknowledgement could be subject to discipline. Please get these done ASAP.

TEAM UPDATES!

Carla Bongard celebrated 35 years of State Service on Wednesday, March 6, 2024! Carla has spent all 35 years of her State Service providing payroll support to the Department of Veterans Affairs. We are so thankful for Carla's hard work and guidance. Be sure to stop down and congratulate Carla on this milestone. Congrats Carla!

We are pleased to announce that Sara Jansky (*right*) joined the Payroll Team as a Payroll and Benefits Specialist, effective March 11, 2024. Sara will be primarily supporting the Department of Revenue but will provide backup, as needed, to support payroll functions for the Department of Veterans Affairs. If you are in the HR space at the Madison Office, be sure to stop and welcome Sara!

Sara comes to us from UW-Milwaukee. She has over 25 years of HR/Payroll experience with a degree in Science in Communications. We are excited to have Sara on our team. Welcome Sara!



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.

FINANCIAL WELLNESS

April Fool's Day brings its share of harmless pranks – think rubber spiders in your coffee mug and whoopee cushions on your office chair. But remember, not all surprises are innocent fun, especially when it comes to finances.

Financial scammers are becoming increasingly sophisticated in their tactics, and their latest method is chillingly personal. Imagine receiving a call from a family member, saying they're being held ransom and urgently need money. Of course, you panic and give in immediately—only to find out your loved one's voice has been cloned using AI.

This isn't science fiction—there are several [reports of this elaborate scam](#), indicating that the threat is not only real but also growing.

So, how can you protect yourself and your loved ones against these AI-driven deceptions?

- **Immediate verification:** If you receive such a call, resist the urge to act immediately. Call the person back on a number you trust or ask questions only they could answer.
- **Secret code:** Establish a family code word. This can help confirm the identity of a family member over the phone, adding security against voice-imitation scams.
- **Financial red flags:** Be wary of any request to send money quickly, especially through methods that are difficult to trace or recover, such as wire transfers, gift cards, or mobile payment apps.
- **Education and awareness:** Share information about these scams with your family, especially with members who may not be as tech-savvy. Awareness is the first step towards protection.
- **Report suspicious activity:** Should you encounter or fall prey to such a scam, immediately report it to the authorities to help track down the perpetrators and prevent future incidents.

By staying informed, vigilant, and connected, we can protect our financial health and the well-being of our relationships. Let's stay scam-savvy in the unseen threats of the digital age.

We look forward our continued work together!

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.

HR BOOK NOOK

[Win Your Time](#) by Alla Kokina

“Win Your Time” offers a holistic solution, weaving together insights on nutrition, mindset, and lifestyle with actionable strategies for effective time management. This book equips you with the tools to navigate the complexities of modern life, ensuring your productivity leads to real satisfaction and balance, not just more tasks completed.

By embracing the strategies within “Win Your Time”, readers will:

- Unlock a comprehensive understanding of how to manage time efficiently.
- Achieve a harmonious blend of productivity and personal well-being.
- Master the art of prioritization.
- Reduce stress through effective planning.
- Reclaim your time for what truly matters.
- Get full analyses of all well-known classic time management methods.

This guide promises not only a boost in productivity but also a profound sense of balance and fulfillment in both personal and professional spheres.

PAYROLL TRANSITIONS

All payroll and benefit functions for the Department of Veterans Affairs have now been transitioned to the Madison Office. There will no longer be a Payroll and Benefits representative onsite at either of the Homes locations, but the remainder of the Human Resources Department onsite is not changing.

IF YOU NEED TO CONTACT PAYROLL, THE FOLLOWING OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE:

- Email DVAMBCOPayroll@wisconsin.gov with your questions or information regarding your situation.
- Visit the Human Resources office onsite and the team can get you in contact with one of the specialists in Madison.
- Call one of the assigned Payroll and Benefits Specialist directly via Teams or phone.

COMMON QUESTIONS AND SCENARIOS THAT WOULD BE DIRECTED TO PAYROLL AND BENEFITS INCLUDE:

- Paycheck inquiries
- Errors updating tax withholding or direct deposit information.
- Benefit changes
 - Life events (birth, adoption, marriage, divorce, moving, etc.)
 - Loss of coverage
 - New coverage option
 - Premiums
- Retirement planning
- Resignation questions
- Paid leave time
- Timesheet issues (please direct questions towards your supervisor first)

We look forward our continued work together!

CONSULTATION SERVICES FOR SUPERVISORS

Through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), supervisors have access to unlimited telephonic consultation services. By calling the toll-free number, you can connect directly with a member of the EAP's Management Services Team, composed of highly knowledgeable experts regarding organizational and personnel issues.

Supervisors can receive expert advice and guidance regarding issues such as:

- Enhancing team dynamics
- Fostering employee morale and engagement
- Maintaining a positive, productive work environment
- When and how to personally refer an employee to the EAP and the supervisor's role in the process
- Addressing challenging personalities
- Recovering after a critical event

Based on a comprehensive assessment, the EAP will work with you to develop a customized plan and coach you through the steps of implemented the plan. A member of the Management Services Team will be your point person throughout the entire process and will follow up with you to check on the progress of the plan, as well as offer suggestions for further steps to achieve the best outcome.

Members of the EAP Management Services Team are licensed counselors, with an average of over 20 years of clinical experience and 13 years of organizational experience. They are adept at offering solutions to even the most complex of workplace situations and are here to support you in your role.

To learn more or to speak with a member of the Management Services Team, please call the EAP at 1.833.539.7285.

WHERE IN WISCONSIN IS OUTREACH?



4



1



2



3



RECENT OUTREACH EVENTS ACROSS THE STATE IN MARCH

1. PORTAGE
WI ISFAC

2. MILWAUKEE
MILWAUKEE STAND DOWN

3. MADISON
HELLO GIRLS MUSICAL AND LECTURE
WISCONSIN VETERANS CHAMBER OF
COMMERCE
MILITARY ALL STAR HOCKEY
BADGE OF THE BADGES

4. CRANDON
WINTER'S END POWWOW

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Webinar Series 2024

January – June

Sessions are from 12:30pm-1:30pm CST

January 10: Stress Reduction Toolkit 2.0- In our fast-paced world, it seems like the one constant is that we are always under pressure. From tension at home to deadlines at work, fighting stress can feel like a never-ending battle. In this powerful and informative seminar, participants will learn the key strategies to reduce physical tension, manage automatic negative thoughts, and increase self-care so that their day is more productive, enjoyable, and less stressed.

February 14: The Sandwich Generation: The Ultimate Balance- Caring for an elder is an enormous challenge by itself; combining elder care with care of children or adolescents and attempting to balance the demands of a career can seem overwhelming to even the most organized individual. In this session we will focus on establishing balance, recognizing negative emotions, adhering to priorities, and reducing stress.

March 13: Eating Right for Life- Do you find yourself constantly making impulse decisions around food intake? Participants in this seminar will learn the benefits of nutrition, including the importance of making informed food choices to develop and maintain sound eating habits. Expect to leave this interactive session understanding what your body needs for optimal health and the key nutritional guidelines to follow.

April 10: Working and Living with Someone with Neurodiverse Challenges- Neurodiverse individuals (ADHD, Dyslexia, Autism Spectrum) may not have the resources and tools to best facilitate their capabilities. How then, can you help family members or colleagues feel comfortable, and find evidence-based strategies to help them to thrive? Join us as we explore this critical topic and share concrete strategies for helping to maximize their talents, goals, and passions.

May 8: Handling a Family Crisis- This class was created for those experiencing a family crisis, as well as managers who would like to learn how to support their employees. Managing expectations and emotional exchanges that may occur while having challenging conversations will be covered. Participants will learn healthy coping mechanisms during times of transition, as well as how to address and get support with potential financial challenges.

June 12: The Fine Art of Giving and Receiving Feedback- Simply hearing what someone says, and actively listening are two very different things. Active listening skills are critical to business success. In this session we will explore the three basic listening modes, we will discuss how individual communication styles affect listening, and we will practice active listening strategies.

CALL TOLL-FREE, 24/7
1.833.539.7285

WEBSITE:
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Scan this QR code to
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website to register

