



STATE OF WISCONSIN, DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

30 West Mifflin Street, P.O. Box 7843, Madison, WI 53707-7843

PHONE: (608) 266-1311 1-800-947-8387 (WIS VETS)

WEB SITE: <http://dva.state.wi.us>

Jim Doyle, Governor

John A. Scocos, Secretary

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Contact: Andrew Schuster, Cell: (608) 217-6963, or  
Kathleen Scholl, Cell: (608) 576-1622

### **1,000 attend *Supermarket of Veterans Benefits* at the Wisconsin Veterans Home at Union Grove**

(UNION GROVE) – Veterans of WWII, the Korean War, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf War, and current military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq attended a state government hosted “Supermarket of Veterans Benefits” to learn about and apply for an array of federal and state veterans benefits and programs.

“The *Supermarket* is a great event for serving veterans,” said Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary John A. Scocos, head of the agency that hosted the one-day information fair at the Wisconsin Veterans Home –Union Grove (WVH-UG), at the Center for Residential Services and Programs. “We’re here to help our state’s veterans, to make sure they receive the information and assistance they need to apply for benefits they may have earned and are entitled to.”

This *Supermarket* was the ninth one hosted by the department, as part of a broader WDVA outreach and marketing campaign called “I Owe You” that is aimed at educating and assisting more state veterans in accessing federal and state veterans programs for which they may be eligible. Over 16,000 veterans and family members have attended the *Supermarkets*. Previous events have been held in Milwaukee, Eau Claire, Racine, Madison, Green Bay, and Schofield, as two-day events, and last Saturday as a one-day event at the Alliant Energy Center in Madison.

“This is such an important effort,” said Secretary Scocos. “The department is continuing the legacy in creative ways to reach out to veterans and their families to help ensure they receive the benefits and services they may not even know they’re entitled to,” he said.

The Supermarket was hosted in conjunction with a dedication ceremony to open Gates Hall, a new 42-bed Assisted Living Center on the grounds of the WVH-UG, naming the center in honor of World War II Army Nurse Marcia Gates.

The “I Owe You” program has also generated successes in particularly measurable ways. Data released by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and WDVA in late January showed VA funding for Wisconsin veterans has grown from \$721 to \$975 million since the program began in 2000 – or almost \$250 million more in annual federal benefits coming in to the state. Prior to the “I Owe You” program’s inception, the level of federal VA dollars coming into Wisconsin had stagnated, with a \$4 million decline in the year immediately preceding the beginning of the “I Owe You” campaign.

(more)

More than 1,000 veterans, from the most recently returned to the most elderly veterans, along with their family members, came to the Union Grove *Supermarket* to receive information about federal VA health care benefits, state and federal home mortgage and home improvement loans, education and job training grants, and a host of information about other services and benefits.

As a case in point, Arnold and Doris Volz of Racine found the *Supermarket* very helpful. Mr. Volz is a World War II veteran who fought in the Battle of the Bulge in the 75<sup>th</sup> Infantry, suffered frostbitten feet and other health conditions. He said, “The *Supermarket* event is very, very informative. I just recently joined the American Legion. They said to stop out, and I’m very glad I did.”

Volz is typical of some WWII vets from the “Greatest Generation” who never asked for a free ride. “They always looked down, felt you need to earn your way. As I have gotten older, I realize that you can’t keep doing things by yourself any more.” Volz came to the *Supermarket* to see what he may be eligible for. Volz commended the men and women responsible for this event.

Karen Cage, Team Leader of the Milwaukee Vets Center, said, “These Supermarkets provide us with an opportunity to let veterans know of the services we offer and also the opportunity to meet with other providers who assist veterans. The *Supermarket* was very successful.”

Bill Walters, from the Retired Services Officers out of Fort McCoy, said, “These venues give retirees, a special group of veterans, the opportunity to learn about a full array of benefits and services. It also provides the forum for veterans to get together.”

Brian Feltes, VFW State Service Officer said the event is “very beneficial to all who attend.” Feltes said, “Many questions are asked and veterans now know where they can go for assistance.”

Many of those who worked the close to 40 booths from federal, state, and local governmental agencies and veterans service organizations, were veterans. Other providers find the *Supermarkets* rewarding experiences as well.

Beth Ann Smith, a Medical Administration Specialist from the VA Medical Center-Milwaukee, said, “Today the VA Medical Center has reached out to many veterans not currently using the VA Health Care System. These vets were encouraged to enroll so they would have access to the VA Health Care System.”

Chris Jordan, Walworth County Veterans Service Officer, said, “This is an excellent opportunity for southeastern area veterans to find out about their veterans entitlements. I personally had the opportunity to visit with veterans who will visit my office following the *Supermarket*, for more follow-up in regard to disability claims development.”

Veterans and their spouses and survivors who were unable to attend the Supermarket can obtain information by contacting their county veterans service officer (CVSO), by visiting the WDVA website (<http://dva.state.wi.us>), or by calling WDVA toll-free at 1-800-WIS-VETS (1-800-947-8387).