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## ATTENTION NEWSROOM—PRESS RELEASE

\*\*\*PHOTO ATTACHED\*\*\*

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For Immediate Release

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### **Elderly Veterans to Get new Skilled Nursing Facility at Union Grove**

**Federal and State Officials establish new health care unit at Wisc. Veterans Home**

(MADISON) — A formal groundbreaking ceremony took place on Friday, Aug. 20 for a new 120-bed Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF) for veterans and their spouses at the Wisconsin Veterans Home at Union Grove. Initial phases of construction have already begun on the facility, with a planned completion date in late 2005.

The Union Grove Wisconsin Veterans Home was opened in 2001 with two newly remodeled buildings, each with a library, activities room, exercise room and several modern, well-equipped lounge areas. The Home was recently expanded with the dedication in May of Gates Hall, a 42-bed residential care apartment complex for elderly veterans and their spouses.

"This facility will complete a continuum of care for veterans who are elderly or are in need of nursing care in the southeastern part of the state," said WDVA Secretary John A. Scocos, "and represents Wisconsin's continued commitment to those who have served in our armed forces."

The Southern Wisconsin Center originally opened in 1919 as a center for the developmentally disabled. Today the expansive Southern Center campus remains owned by the state, but its cream and red brick buildings, idyllically set amidst stately trees and rolling prairie fields, are shared by several entities new to the campus in recent years.

Numerous veterans-related activities are located on today's Southern Center campus, including the veterans Home, a state veterans cemetery, a federal Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) community-based outpatient clinic, and a WDVA Veterans Assistance Center for homeless veterans. Additional state facilities on Southern Center campus include the Southern Oaks Girls School, and the Robert E. Ellsworth minimum-security correctional facility for women.

In July 2003, Governor Jim Doyle announced that as part of the budget approved by the state Legislature, he was signing into law a provision approving \$1.3 funding to open a new 120-bed skilled nursing facility to serve veterans in southeastern Wisconsin. About 77,000 veterans over the age of 65 live within a 50-mile radius of the Southern Wisconsin Center.

The addition of the skilled nursing facility will allow the Southern Wisconsin Center to serve a full range of needs for veterans and their families throughout the region. In addition to the homeless center and veterans cemetery, the WDVA currently operates two community-based residential facilities and a new Residential Care Apartment Complex at Union Grove. The skilled nursing facility will provide a continuum of quality long-term health care for the veterans whose health needs exceed those that can be met in the two existing facilities.

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Key speakers at the groundbreaking event, briefly addressing the crowd of about 75, provided their own personal observations about the importance of the new unit and credited partnerships that made the new Skilled Nursing Facility possible.

Renee Oshinski, Deputy Director of the VA's Veterans Integrated Service Network 12 said, "I'm so proud of what has been accomplished here. I can't say enough about the partnership between the VA and the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs."

Also speaking were: Glen Brower, Commandant of the Union Grove Home; WDVA Executive Assistant Anthony Hardie as Master of Ceremonies; State Senators Cathy Stepp and Robert Wirsch; and State Representatives Bonnie Ladwig and John Lehman.

Department Secretary John A. Scocos acknowledged Mr. Edo Maccari, a 91-year-old veteran from Racine who "had a dream" for a place for veterans in southeastern Wisconsin that inspired the agency to lead the efforts towards creation of the facility.

With the opening of the 42-bed Gates Hall in May 2004, in addition to Fairchild and Shemanske Halls, up to 128 veterans can now receive care at the Home. The addition of the Skilled Nursing Facility in Fall 2005 will increase total capacity at the Union Grove Home to almost 250.

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