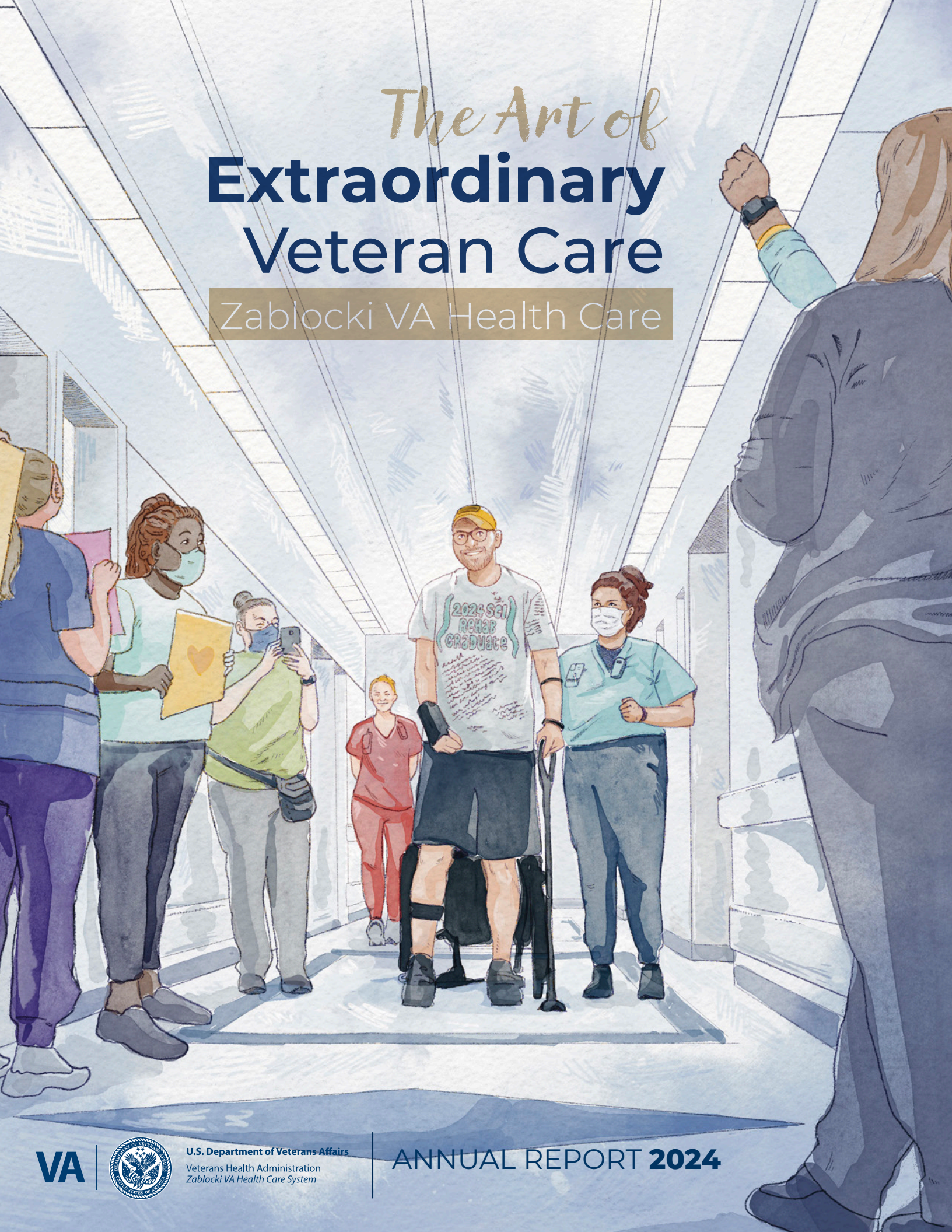


# *The Art of* **Extraordinary Veteran Care**

Zablocki VA Health Care



# Letter from the [DIRECTOR]

Another year has come and gone, and the Zablocki VA Health Care System is stronger than ever. We continue to find new and innovative ways to deliver world-class health care to our Veterans with a dedicated professional staff committed to our noble mission.

We have no shortage of accomplishments to celebrate here at Zablocki. From national accolades, awards, recognitions and designations that continue to demonstrate the incredible professionalism of our staff, to seeing spinal cord injury patients walk out of our facility on their own two feet, or helping Veterans overcome mental health challenges and beat cancer, we see our health care heroes helping and healing our nation's heroes every single day.

We opened a new outpatient clinic in Oconomowoc to better serve Veterans in Milwaukee's western

suburbs and outlying areas, and we opened a newly remodeled Medical Procedures Unit as well as our new Radiation/Oncology Unit to help deliver the most cutting-edge care to our Veterans.

You'll find it all in this annual report, the first we've published since the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.

We have much to look forward to in 2025. Our campus continues to serve as a community gathering place for Veterans. Since our last annual report, the Soldiers Home, or Old Main, as well as several other historic buildings, have been restored to their original beauty and intended purpose of housing and serving Veterans. Three more historic buildings — the Chapel, Ward Memorial Theater and the Governor's Residence — are slated for restoration in the coming years. We also hope to open a newly renovated Women's Health Clinic

in 2025 while beginning work on other improvements throughout the medical center.

Veterans' trust in the Milwaukee VA Medical Center is at an all-time high as it surged to 94.2 percent, based on a survey of Veteran patients in 2024. That's up from 90.5 percent in 2018, when the VA began conducting this survey. We don't take that trust lightly, and we are deeply committed to delivering on the faith our Veterans place in us and ensuring that every single Veteran receives the very best care available.

We're grateful for the thousands of Veterans who trust the Zablocki VA Health Care System with their medical care, our dedicated staff of more than 4,500 employees and the community that supports us. The past year has been a great one, but I believe that in 2025 we will take Zablocki to the next level.

**Thank you for your faith, trust and confidence as well as the opportunity to serve our nation's heroes and all those who have borne the battle.**



**James D. McLain**  
Executive Director

## From the cover...

There's an art to the practice of medicine, and that's depicted on our front cover. We created this watercolor-like illustration from the actual photo (at right) of U.S. Army Veteran Frank Wozniak graduating from the Spinal Cord Injury Center at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center on July 10. He walked out of the center, cheered on by his health care team and supporters. While the medicine and science were key to Wozniak's success, so too was the art of health care — the countless intangibles, from the support and encouragement of those around him to the internal determination that led to this moment.

*We celebrate all of that in this Annual Report.*



# Our [LEADERSHIP]



## Executive Director James D. McLain

James McLain was appointed Executive Director of the Milwaukee VA Medical Center in April 2023. The retired U.S. Army lieutenant colonel served in Operations Desert Shield, Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom. He has worked in a broad array of health care settings, coming to the Milwaukee VA as associate director in 2012 after five years at VA New Jersey.

## Chief of Staff Dr. Andreea Anton

Dr. Andreea Anton was appointed Milwaukee VA Chief of Staff in February 2024. She has been on staff at the VA and Medical College of Wisconsin since 2005 and has worked in several critical roles since then, most recently as chief of medicine. She is a professor in the Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine at MCW.



## Associate Director Laurie Vail

Laurie Vail was appointed Associate Director of the Milwaukee VA Medical Center in August 2023. She has been an employee of the Milwaukee VA for more than 20 years, starting in pathology and laboratory medicine in 1998. Before becoming associate director, she was division manager for Medical Information Services, where she oversaw all medical administration services and operations.

## Assistant Director Dr. Christina Orr

Dr. Christina Orr was appointed Assistant Director of the Milwaukee VA Medical Center in October 2017. She began her VA career as a physical therapist at the Hunter Holmes VA Medical Center in Richmond, Va., before coming to the Milwaukee VA, where she has worked as an acute care physical therapist, medical center ergonomist and a health system specialist supporting the medical center's deputy and assistant directors.



## Associate Director for Patient Care Services Tandria Williams

Tandria Williams was appointed Associate Director for Patient Care Services in December 2021. In this role, she is responsible for nursing practice throughout the medical center and community clinics. She came to the Milwaukee VA in 2006 as a nursing assistant and has served in a variety of clinical and administrative roles since then. She has also worked as an adjunct nursing professor for the technical college system.

# [COMMUNITY] Clinics

## Green Bay Milo C. Huempfer Health Care Center

2851 University Ave., Green Bay, Wis.

We opened the Green Bay Health Care Center in August 2013, nearly tripling the number of enrolled Veterans in the area. This state-of-the-art, 161,525-square-foot facility has 300 staff. We care for more than 20,000 Veterans, including those who travel from Iron Mountain, Mich., and the surrounding areas.

8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday-Friday  
920-431-2500



Photo Plunkett Raysich Architects LLP

## Appleton John H. Bradley VA Clinic

10 Tri-Park Way, Appleton, Wis.

Our Appleton Clinic serves more than 11,000 Veterans in the Fox Valley area, with more than 150 staff members. The clinic opened in 1994. The original site at Building 1 houses primary care as well as support and specialty services. Building 2 opened in 2008 and houses our mental health programs and case management services for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans.

8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday-Friday  
920-831-0070



## Cleveland VA Clinic

1205 North Ave., Cleveland, Wis.

Our Cleveland Clinic opened in 1999, and currently has 23 staff members. We serve approximately 3,500 Veterans from Cleveland and the surrounding area.

8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday-Friday  
920-693-5600



## Union Grove Clinic

Shemanske Hall, 21425 Spring St., Building C, Union Grove, Wis.

Our Union Grove Clinic is located on the same grounds as the Southern Wisconsin Center just west of Union Grove. We serve approximately 3,500 Veterans in the Racine County area. Our original clinic opened in April 1998, and we moved in May 2015 to our current location.

8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday-Friday  
262-878-7000



## Outpatient clinic opens in Oconomowoc

2024 saw the opening of the Milwaukee VA's fifth community-based outpatient clinic in Oconomowoc.

Serving Veterans in the region west of Milwaukee — known as Lake County — the clinic was inaugurated with a ribbon-cutting ceremony in March and began seeing patients in June.

The 8,500-square-foot facility brings world-class health care to some 5,500 eligible Veterans in the area.

"Our dedication is to serving our Veterans — those who stand up and defend our country," said Milwaukee VA Executive Director, James McLain. "We're able to feel safe because of the individuals who are standing watch in foreign lands. And we're here to ensure that when they come back, they're cared for. Our mission never ends."

The facility joins the Milwaukee VA's other outpatient clinics in Green Bay, Appleton, Cleveland and Union Grove. It offers primary care,

mental health, women's health and telehealth services. There is also a full-service lab, a social worker and a dietitian for Veterans' needs.

"This clinic being here is wonderful, just because it gives these Veterans high-quality access to care closer to home, so they're not having to drive further to get the care and their needs met," said Micaela Hughes, the program manager for the new clinic.

The building project was headed by developer Wangard Partners. PRA (Plunkett Raysich Architects LLP) was the architect, and Kraus-Anderson Construction Company served as the construction manager.

Veterans interested in transferring their care to the Oconomowoc VA clinic who are already enrolled in the Zablocki VA Health Care System can talk to their primary care provider to put in a consult for a transfer. Veterans can also call 414-384-2000, ext. 44255, and leave a message.

**"Our staff is all about doing the right thing for Veterans, and that's why we're here — because it's the right thing to do,"**

— James McLain, executive director of the Milwaukee VA

1289 Olympia Fields Drive, Oconomowoc, Wis.  
8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday-Friday | 262-628-6969

# [FACILITY UPDATE] The best for Veterans



## Endoscopy Lab



The new Medical Procedures Unit opened July 30. Also known as the endoscopy lab, the unit hosts a variety of medical procedures, including colonoscopies and endoscopies. The new 11,000-square-foot unit on the seventh floor (Room 7200) provides more room for procedures, pre-operative services and post-operative recovery. It also gives staff more office and meeting space and relieves a burden placed on the operating rooms and other facilities on the second floor, which formerly housed the unit. The new space has eight rooms dedicated to pre-op and recovery. The project began in 2020.

## Radiation/Oncology

An open house for Radiation Oncology's new facilities in the basement of the Milwaukee VA Medical Center took place in December 2023.

The approximately 5,500-square-foot addition, along with renovation of 7,300 square feet of existing space, features two new linear accelerator vaults, a CT scanner, support spaces, exam rooms, provider offices and a new corridor and waiting area for the PET/MRI trailer.

### What makes Milwaukee VA's cancer care stand out?

- Participation by Veterans in clinical trials and having a clinical research program.
- Continued support of Veterans after their cancer treatments.
- Contribution to national clinical trials, so much so that Milwaukee often receives authorship credit on published studies.
- Partnership with the Medical College of Wisconsin, which expands the Milwaukee VA's connection with the best doctors and latest research.
- Providing cutting-edge treatment with the latest technology and patient-centered care.
- A multidisciplinary approach that goes beyond the surgeon or physician to include dietitians, audiologists, speech therapists and others.

## Unity Chapel



In a heartwarming gesture aimed at fostering spiritual togetherness and support for the Milwaukee VA's Veteran community, the Chapel in the medical center has been named Unity Chapel. This marks a significant recognition of providing a sacred space where all individuals can find solace, community and healing. The new name serves as a reminder of the power of unity and the collective action that is needed to maintain strong, resilient communities. Unity Chapel is located inside the medical center in Room 1705.

# Revitalizing our [HISTORIC DISTRICT]

Coming on the heels of the renovation and reopening of Old Main, it was announced in February that three historic buildings on the Milwaukee VA campus — the Soldiers Home Chapel, Ward Theater and Governor's Residence — will also be renovated and restored to use.

The Alexander Company, which spearheaded the Old Main renovation, is leading the project, with work expected to begin in the second quarter of 2025, with all buildings completed in the third quarter of 2026.

Milwaukee VA Medical Center Executive Director James McLain called the project a "once-in-a-generation opportunity to restore three of Milwaukee's treasured historic buildings back to their original grandeur."

Planned financing for the anticipated \$25 million project includes state and federal Historic Tax Credits, PACT Act funding, National Park Service Save America's Treasures Grant, New Markets Tax Credits and philanthropic funding.

## Plans call for three buildings to be restored and repurposed for Veterans



The Chapel will become a nondenominational worship space and conference space for training and mental health sessions.



The Governor's Residence will hold offices for Veteran support services.



Ward Memorial Theater will host community theater and musical groups, as well as conferences and lectures for VA Medical Center staff.

## PBS documentary spotlights Milwaukee VA's storied history

Meanwhile, the history of Old Main and its rejuvenation as a home for Veterans is featured in a Milwaukee PBS documentary titled "A Hallowed Home for Heroes."

Working closely with the VA, documentarians Maryann Lazarski and Scottie Meyers crafted an hour-long film, which premiered in November 2023 in Matousek Auditorium at the Milwaukee VA.

It tells the story of the iconic institution, from the female founders of the late 1800s to the Veterans at



risk of homelessness who now live on campus in Old Main.

The film also follows the Tubesing family as they revisit the grounds where they grew up in the 1950s and '60s when their father became one of the home's chaplains.

In addition, Civil War experts, preservationists who led the recent restoration effort, Veterans of various generations and Milwaukee historian John Gurda share insight on why the Milwaukee Soldiers Home is so much more than a bunch of beautiful old buildings.

The documentary can be viewed by going to [www.milwaukeepbs.org/Milwaukee-Soldiers-Home](http://www.milwaukeepbs.org/Milwaukee-Soldiers-Home)

## AMA president gets colonoscopy at Milwaukee VA: 'I believe in the VA system'



Dr. Jesse Ehrenfeld, right, president of the American Medical Association, chats with Milwaukee VA Medical Center gastroenterologist Dr. Juan Trivella prior to Ehrenfeld's colonoscopy on March 29.

As president of the American Medical Association, Dr. Jesse Ehrenfeld is the face and voice of the nation's largest association of doctors and medical students.

But he's also a U.S. Navy Veteran who relies on the Milwaukee VA Medical Center for his health care. He recently turned 45 years old. And on March 29, he did what we should all do at that age: Get a colonoscopy.

"I don't know if looking forward to it is the right phrase, but I know it's the right thing for me to do," Ehrenfeld said before the procedure.

"I trust in my doctors (at VA) to get me the care I need, and I encourage other Veterans to do the same," he said. "I have a lot of faith in my doctors and my team, and I know it will go smoothly."

Ehrenfeld's procedure coincided with the conclusion of Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, and he said it was important to send a message about the need for everyone to get screened.

"A lot of people put this off for lots of reasons, but frankly, that could be deadly," he said, noting that colorectal cancer screenings are recommended starting at age 45.

As an anesthesiologist, he said he has cared for "too many patients who had this disease, which is preventable. If caught early, colon cancer can be treated."

Colorectal cancer is one of the leading cancer killers, and it often has no symptoms, said Dr. Juan Trivella, Ehrenfeld's gastroenterologist at the Milwaukee VA.

"Someone could have polyps or colorectal cancer and not know it," he said. "That is why getting screened regularly for colorectal cancer is so important."

"It doesn't matter who you are, what your job is or what you look like: You need to get it done because it really prevents and decreases mortality."

Ehrenfeld has been a VA patient since returning from service in Afghanistan in 2015, first in Nashville, Tenn., and since 2019 at the Milwaukee VA.

He has commercial insurance and could get his health care anywhere, but he chooses to go with VA, saying, "It's not your granddad's VA."

"I believe in the VA system," he said. "It's been a great experience for me; they're just extraordinary clinicians. I feel privileged and fortunate to get all my health care through the VA."



Dan Buttery is shown with Iraqi children during his deployment in 2003-04.

## With help from the PACT Act and the Milwaukee VA, Veteran takes on new mission: beating cancer

Dan Buttery is all about the mission.

From leading his company in Iraq to leading the War Memorial Center, Buttery has spent most of his life fighting alongside and for Veterans.

But now he's fighting a new foe — kidney cancer. And because of the PACT Act, he has a head start on this mission and an army of Milwaukee VA doctors behind him.

"My mission statement doesn't change," said the 54-year-old Army Veteran. "I'm just going to take on a different capacity. I'm calling an audible on my operational tempo."

Like many Veterans who served in Iraq, Buttery was exposed to burn pits during his service, and that exposure falls under the provisions of the PACT Act, a law enacted in 2022 that expanded VA health care to millions of Veterans exposed to burn pits, Agent Orange and other toxic substances.

While Buttery stepped down from the Milwaukee County War Memorial Center in November to focus on his health, he said he will continue to serve Veterans in whatever ways he can. And that includes promoting the benefits of the PACT Act and VA care.

"Because of the PACT Act, kidney cancer is a presumptive (condition). So I immediately filed (for benefits)," he said, adding that all Veterans who experienced exposure to toxins should do the same.

"Get in the system and have them check you out. If they see something, they'll do a follow-up. And if you catch something early, you've just increased your chances for a longer, healthier life."

Though Buttery's active duty service ended 17 years ago, he remembers the stench of the burn pits and how it was carried through the air by the unstoppable dust that permeated everything.

"This stuff is real," he said. "When the burn pit registry became a thing, I went in (to VA) right away because I knew I was around this stuff. You're around it all the time."

Buttery's cancer was discovered in July 2022 when a CT scan showed a lesion on one of his kidneys.

That and the PACT Act led him to the Milwaukee VA, where the cancer was confirmed. That steered Buttery for his new mission.

"I have confidence in the docs who are doing this," he said. "The care here is amazing."

He said any Veteran who has one of the presumptive conditions covered by the PACT Act should sign up for the registry and get screened.

"You're literally playing Russian roulette, especially if you were exposed to this crap," he said. "If you're eligible, you have earned this benefit. ... There's no excuse for not going through this."

# There is always something happening at the Milwaukee VA



On Fridays, we wear RED to Remember Everyone Deployed.

Milwaukee VA's Farmers Market



Centenarian celebration: World War II Veteran George Poleske



Donations to help Veterans at risk of homelessness



U.S. Army Veteran and food service worker Greg Russell



Ashley Banks-Snow, Tania Hollinshed, Haley Sonneman and Julie Panzenha take part in Diva Day, honoring female Veterans.



Vietnam War Veterans Day at Wood National Cemetery March 29



Lung cancer awareness event



Safely viewing the partial solar eclipse on April 8



Progressive Care Unit 10-year anniversary

# [AWARDS AND ACHIEVEMENTS] Honoring the Milwaukee VA's outstanding performers

## HIGH RELIABILITY ORGANIZATION: HeRO Award Recipients



Three Milwaukee VA employees — **Robert Olson, Ariel Wenstadt and Diane Mosey** — received national **HeRO awards** for their work in exhibiting the values of a High Reliability Organization.

Olson, a medical technologist, was recognized for detecting a mycobacterium outbreak in patients receiving bronchoscopies. Wenstadt, a registered nurse, was lauded for

flagging two look-alike vaccines that could easily be mistaken for the other. Mosey, a performance improvement coordinator, was honored for her work in creating a naloxone trainer and bringing a harm reduction vending machine to the Milwaukee VA.



## HERO OF MILITARY MEDICINE: Darcie Greuel



**Darcie Greuel**, who heads the Milwaukee VA's Post 9/11-Military2VA Case Manager program and also served in the U.S. Army Reserve, was honored in her military capacity during the annual **Henry Jackson Foundation's Heroes of Military Medicine awards ceremony in Washington, D.C.**

Greuel served for more than 40 years, rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel. She was the only nurse recognized during the program.

Greuel helps lead Milwaukee VA's Tour of Duty, a military culture course designed to orient federal civilian employees to Veteran culture.



## VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR: Dan Jakubczyk



**Dan Jakubczyk** was named the **American Legion's Veterans Affairs Volunteer Service Worker of the Year.**

Jakubczyk became a volunteer at the Milwaukee VA 15 years ago and has become a mainstay at the hospital ever since. "He's a standout," said Jessica Serdynski, who heads the volunteer program at the hospital. "He's here weekly, and he's a fixture, a face that people recognize in the hallway. He's just amazing."

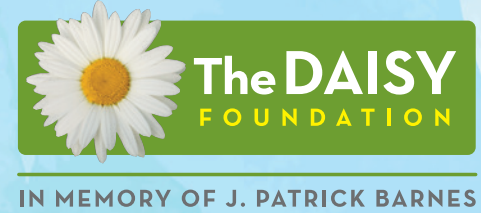


## NATIONAL DAISY AWARD: Meghan Lorbiecki



**Meghan Lorbiecki**, an assistant nurse manager, was nationally recognized with HealthImpact's **DAISY Nurse Leader Award in Advancing Compassionate Care in Policy.**

She received her award during a ceremony in June in Washington, D.C. She was honored for leading an interprofessional team to revamp the Milwaukee VA's alcohol withdrawal symptom management policy while she was the clinical nurse leader on the unit.



## PATHWAY TO EXCELLENCE: Zablocki VA Nursing



In September, the Milwaukee VA joined a premier group of organizations that have received the **Pathway to Excellence designation from the American Nurses Credentialing Center.**

The designation shows that the system supports Pathway's six framework elements for nurses: shared decision making, professional development, well-being, safety, quality and leadership. The Milwaukee VA is just the 13th VA organization nationwide to receive this prestigious designation.



## EXCELLENCE IN PATIENT EXPERIENCE: Emergency Department



In January, the **Milwaukee VA Emergency Department** received the **Press Ganey Human Experience Award.** The award, Guardian of Excellence for Patient Experience, designates that the ED reached the 95th percentile for patient experience. This honor exhibits the excellence in care delivered on a daily basis. Press Ganey is the leading provider of experience measurement, data analytics and insights for health systems and health plans, and it partners with health care providers to improve experiences for their patients, consumers and workforce.



# [NOTEWORTHY EVENTS] Special outings, programs and services for our Veterans

In February, the Milwaukee VA joined with the War Memorial Center and the BRAVE program at the Medical College of Wisconsin to host the **"First Responder Resilience Event."** The event, which took place at the War Memorial, was aimed at first responders, their families and supporters, in an effort to improve their wellness and provide valuable resources for those who are exposed to traumatic events almost every day.



The Milwaukee VA campus — specifically Wood National Cemetery — once again hosted a **Memorial Day ceremony** on May 27, with special guest Kimberly Jackson, who at the time was U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Chief of Staff. Despite chilly, cloudy weather, hundreds turned out for the ceremony to pay tribute to fallen Veterans. "We can never underestimate, or over-appreciate, the costs they bore for us," Jackson said.



Female Veterans came together in April for the inaugural **"Women Veterans Retreat"** at the War Memorial Center. The event, led by the Milwaukee VA Chaplain Services, brought female Veterans together to revel in their camaraderie and boost their physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health. "Having an event like this is so important just for us to be recognized and validated," said Marine Corps Veteran Dona Drew, community engagement and partnership coordinator for the Milwaukee VA.

On Medal of Honor Day March 25, the Milwaukee VA hosted a meet-and-greet with **Wisconsin Medal of Honor recipient Gary Wetzel.** Veterans and staff alike lined up to chat with Wetzel, who received the Medal of Honor for his extraordinary heroism aiding his fellow crewmen during the Vietnam War.



Port Washington's fishing community opened its arms again to disabled Veterans served by the Milwaukee VA during the annual **Disabled Veterans Fishing Outing** in June. Fishing boat captains took Veterans onto Lake Michigan for a day of fishing, and the event was capped with a sumptuous seafood buffet and awards ceremony. "It was great," said Army Veteran Otis Johnson, 78, who said he hadn't been on a boat since 1965 and hadn't been fishing since 1958.



Jeff "Doc" Dentice and his many helpers delivered **\$35,000 worth of Christmas gifts** to the Milwaukee VA Medical Center in December. The gifts included clothes, treats and more, along with \$7,000 in gift cards. This was the 37th annual "Christmas with the Vets," and the donations were distributed throughout the hospital. "This means bringing joy, happiness and Christmas spirit to the Veterans, their families and friends," Dentice said.

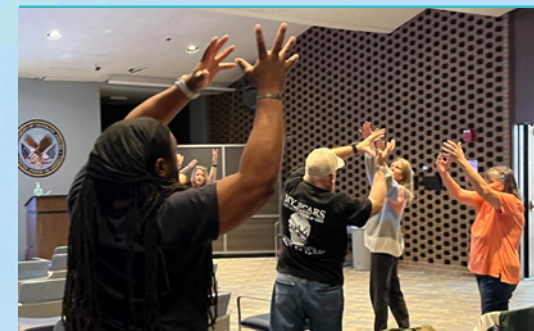


Wisconsin Lt. Gov. Sara Rodriguez, who was a nurse before she got into politics, capped the Milwaukee VA's annual Nurses Week celebration in May as the **Nursing Grand Rounds 2024 Expect Excellence Invited Speaker.** She encouraged the nurses to advocate for their profession and work to influence public policy. "You are on the ground floor, looking at our health care system, and you know it can be broken," she told the nurses. "So coming with that perspective into a policy arena is really invaluable."

In November 2023, hundreds of Veterans in need received **free laptop computers** through coordination with the Milwaukee VA's U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program, allowing them to stay connected in an increasingly digital world. The devices directly benefit low-income Veterans, making it easier for them to look for work and housing, and to communicate in a digital environment.

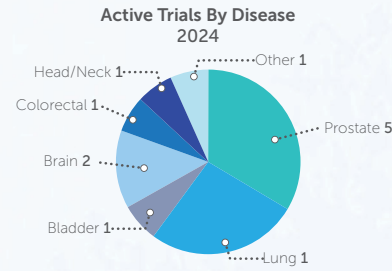


To mark Oral Cancer Awareness Month, the Milwaukee VA's dental team offered free **oral cancer screenings for all Veterans** as well as Milwaukee VA staff on April 3. Veterans tend to be at higher risk of oral cancer than the general population, mostly due to higher use of tobacco and alcohol, which are the biggest risk factors for oral cancer. "We want to do whatever we can do to have an earlier diagnosis, which leads to better treatment outcomes," periodontist Dr. Kandice Klepper said.



The benefits of Whole Health for Veterans were on display during the **Whole Health Retreat** April 17, which took place at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center. The day included breakout sessions, a panel discussion, resource tables and plenty of opportunities for Veterans to get hands-on instruction in Whole Health skills and practices. "Whole Health equips you with self-management and self-healing skills," said Stacy Olson, Whole Health Program Manager.

# Cutting edge [RESEARCH & INNOVATION]



**The Cancer Clinical Trials Program (CCTP)** at the Milwaukee VA was officially designated as an independent section within the Medicine Division in FY24. In 2024, 15 treatment and screening clinical trials were selected for activation, and the CCTP has successfully integrated in various clinics throughout the facility. This evolving program represents a vital commitment to Veteran-focused cancer care and the ongoing mission to improve cancer treatment outcomes.



**The Milwaukee VA's 3D printing lab** has become a valuable national resource: As one of only six hub sites in the nation under the umbrella of the Office of Advanced Manufacturing, it serves VA medical centers across the country. The lab is at the forefront of creating pre-procedural models — anatomically correct models that help Veterans better visualize an upcoming surgery and help surgeons plan for the procedures.



**Milwaukee VA Medical Procedures nurse Kristin Olson** was named as one of 100 national semifinalists in the **Veterans Health Administration's annual Shark Tank Competition** for creating an innovative solution to a vexing problem: a pseudo-outbreak of mycobacterium in Veterans receiving bronchoscopies. After learning that the source of the outbreak was ice from an ice machine used to chill saline for procedures, Olson turned to ice packs, which immediately solved the problem.



**Jean Borck**, a Milwaukee VA nurse and simulation education specialist, is pursuing a patent for an innovative clip she created for post-operative patients dealing with drains. While safety pins are typically used to attach these drains to a patient's clothing, those often lead to pokes that can draw blood. Borck's clip — refined with help from the 3D printing lab — requires no pins and eases mobility for patients.



**The Million Veterans Program**, launched in 2011, reached its goal of **enrolling 1 million Veterans** in November 2023, and Dr. Sumitra Muralidhar, MVP program director, celebrated the milestone in April at the Milwaukee VA, which played a major role in the effort by enrolling more than 20,000 Veterans. MVP has created one of the world's largest databases, leading to significant genetic discoveries and valuable research, Muralidhar said.



**The Bravo pH test**, introduced in May at the Milwaukee VA, helps Veterans dealing with chronic acid reflux. The procedure requires embedding a small capsule to the esophageal lining during an endoscopy. The capsule records pH data over 96 hours, and that data is transmitted wirelessly to a monitor worn by the Veteran. The collected data helps doctors figure out what is happening in the stomach, which leads to the most appropriate treatment.

# [HARM REDUCTION] Helping vulnerable Vets

Harm reduction stepped into the spotlight in 2024 at the Milwaukee VA, with a trio of initiatives designed to help Veterans struggling with addiction and self-destructive behavior. Harm reduction is an evidence-based approach to help drug users and those grappling with other addictions to live healthier lives by showing ways to prevent overdoses or contracting infectious diseases. It also emphasizes mental health and social well-being, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.



## Harm Reduction Safe Box

On May 7, the Milwaukee VA marked International Harm Reduction Day by premiering the innovative Harm Reduction Safe Box.

Inspired by the Finnish baby box — a box filled with baby necessities that Finland gives to all expectant mothers — the boxes are for Veterans to fill with whatever medications or other tools they might need.

The box could take on different forms for different Veterans, depending on the scenario, said Hannah Von Behren, harm reduction coordinator for the Milwaukee VA. A Veteran battling suicidal thoughts could use it to keep a firearm out of reach, or someone addicted to drugs could keep fentanyl testing strips, Narcan or clean needles in it. It could also be used to store vital medications or even condoms, Von Behren said.



## Naloxone trainer kit

In August 2023, Milwaukee VA performance improvement coordinator Diane Mosey recognized a lack of teaching tools for administering naloxone nasal spray. So she created her own, using silicone noses purchased online and supplies from a hardware store.

After premiering the prototype during International Overdose Awareness Day, she connected with the Milwaukee VA's innovation coordinator and 3D printing program to mass produce a self-learning naloxone kit that included a lifelike nose and simple instructions connected to the demo device.

Since then, the naloxone trainer has taken off. It was picked up by the VA's Office of Advanced Manufacturing as a national product for other VAs. To date, there have been more than 1,400 orders for the trainers across the country.



## Harm reduction vending machine

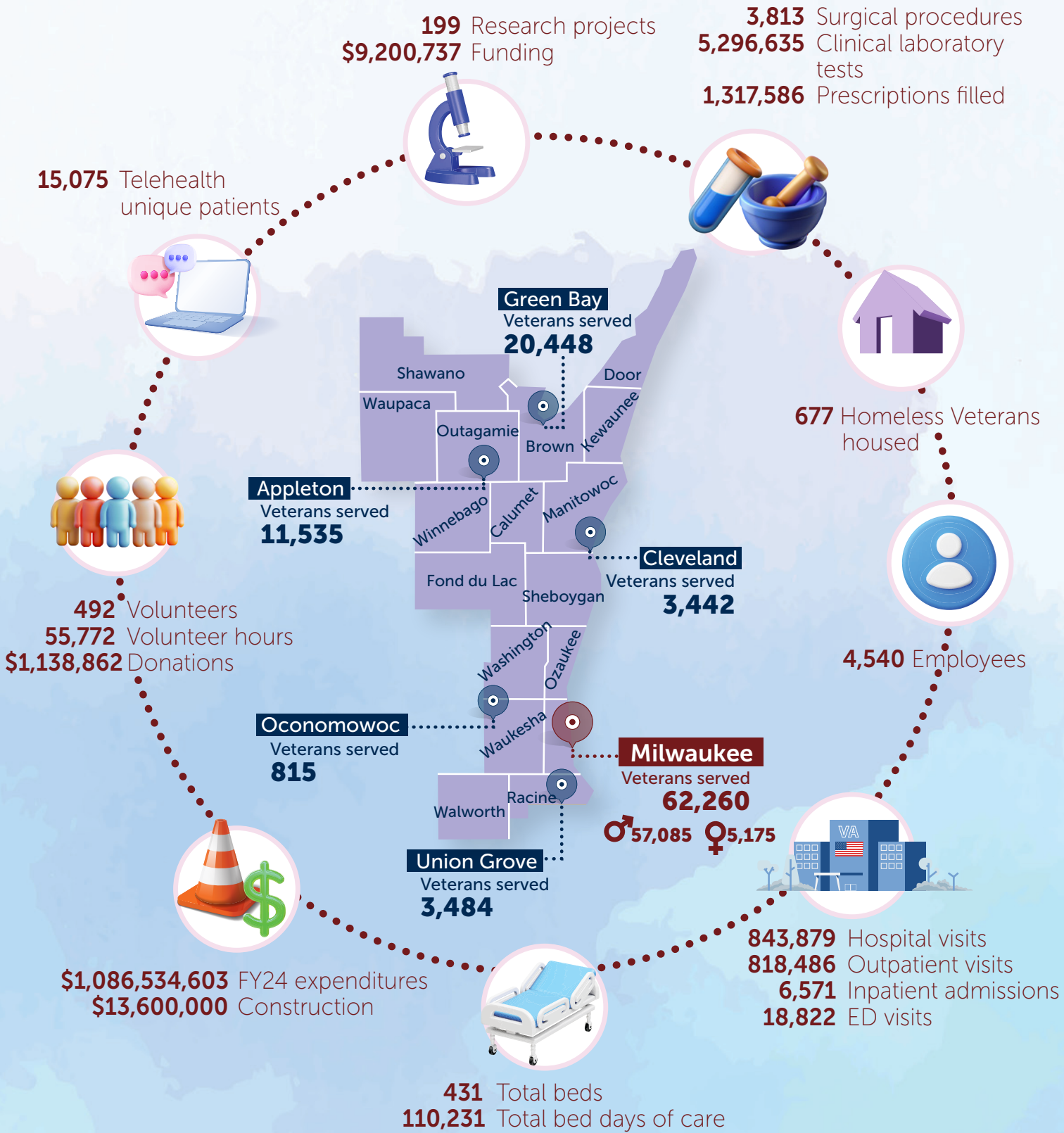
Mosey was also key in bringing a harm reduction vending machine to the Milwaukee VA.

Premiering in August, the machine sits next to more standard vending machines in the Canteen and dispenses fentanyl test strips, naloxone, gun locks and other items for those struggling with addiction or self-harm. And everything is free.

The goal is to provide a safe, easy and confidential method of distributing these valuable items, Von Behren said.

"Stigma is one of the things that stops individuals from seeking care," Von Behren said. "The vending machine ... allows them to get the supplies for free, with no questions asked. That decreases that barrier and the shame that someone might have when trying to get these supplies."

# STATS [2024]



## Zablocki VA Health Care System

### [ABOUT US]

With a legacy spanning more than 150 years, the Milwaukee VA remains committed to providing world class health care to our Veterans.

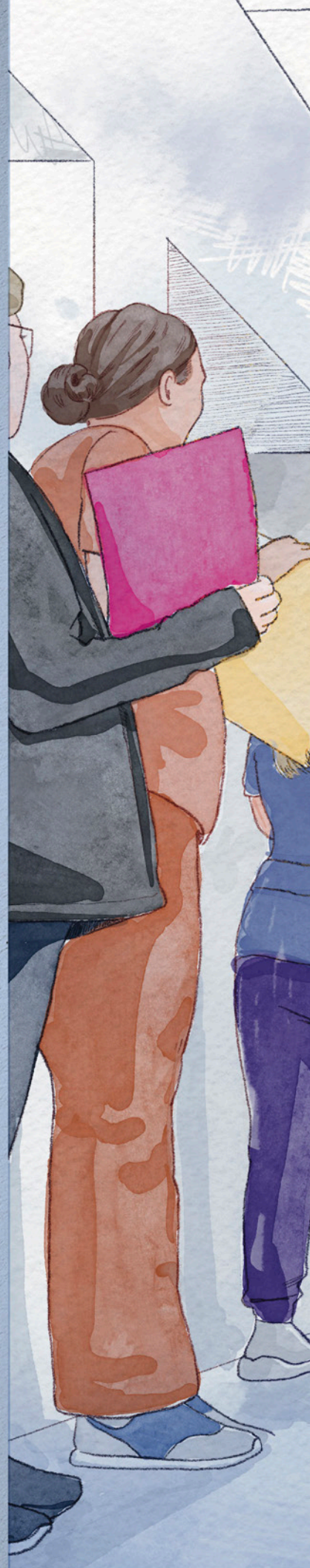
Thanks to the work of a local women's group, in 1865, when Congress passed the National Asylum for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers Act, Milwaukee was chosen as a site for one of the first three national soldiers homes.

By 1867, the chosen location — 475 acres of rolling farmland located 3 miles west of the city — was housing Veterans in temporary buildings. By 1868, work had begun on the first permanent structures, including Old Main, the majestic building intended to house and serve all the needs of the residents.

The current Zablocki VA Medical Center opened in 1966. It was named in honor of the late U.S. Rep. Clement J. Zablocki, a strong supporter of legislation benefiting Veterans.

Today, the Milwaukee VA serves a 17-county region of more than 8,500 square miles that is home to more than 234,000 Veterans. The Milwaukee VA also has community clinics in Appleton, Cleveland, Green Bay, Oconomowoc and Union Grove.

Old Main still stands on the Milwaukee VA grounds. Though deteriorating conditions led to its closure in 1989, years of fundraising and organizational collaborations led to a complete renovation of the building. It reopened in 2021 as permanent housing for Veterans at risk of homelessness.



Learn more at  
[www.va.gov/milwaukee-health-care](http://www.va.gov/milwaukee-health-care)



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