

THE FIELD REPORT

CONTACT | CAMARADERIE | COMMUNITY | COLLABORATION

VOLUNTEERING FOR VETERANS

HUNDREDS OF VOLUNTEERS AT WDVA'S THREE VETERANS HOMES REGISTER THOUSANDS OF HOURS

April 18, 2018 | By Chris Bucher



VOLUNTEERS CONTRIBUTE THOUSANDS OF HOURS: Volunteers at the WDVA's Veterans Home at King pose for a photo. During the past year, King had 277 active volunteers who put in 25,715 hours.

Necia Kessler still cherishes the dedication and commitment put forth by staff and volunteers at the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs' Veterans Home at King. Kessler's husband was a member at the home for years, and the around-the-clock care he received won't soon be forgotten.

So, in the years that followed his stay, Kessler established a special mission: To give back to those who helped her husband along and find a way to thank those who served in the military.

Kessler started volunteering at the Veterans Home at King in December 2013. More than four years later, she's logged an incredible 2,250 volunteer hours at the home, and there's no sign of slowing down anytime soon.

"I thought that the least I could do is volunteer to thank them for all they did for him," she said.

Kessler is one of the nearly 300 active volunteers at King

who help with daily activities and other things. She said the constant feeling of reward brings her back every Monday, Wednesday and Friday – oftentimes even more.

"They gave their lives for our country," Kessler said of the members at the WDVA's Veterans Homes. "It's only fair that in my retirement, I give back to them."

More than 600 volunteers combined generously share their time with Veterans at the WDVA's three Veterans Homes. They support recreational activities, visit with hundreds of members, read and write letters, escort them to religious services or appointments, and provide assistance on the many special

trips each home offers.

Debbie Kacvinsky has been a volunteer at the Chippewa Falls Home since it opened in 2013. For Kacvinsky, it was the want of being surrounded by people who have similar experiences that drove her to sign up to volunteer. Her son enlisted in the Marine Corps right out of high school in 2011 and was deployed to Afghanistan. She wanted to give back in a way that helped her mentally, too.

"I wanted to be around people who were going through the same kind of thing that I was," Kacvinsky said. "It was before the Veterans Home even opened, and I thought that I'd like to do some volunteering to take my mind off some of the issues my son was going through. It was the perfect opportunity when the home opened up."

Kacvinsky volunteers at the home at least once per week in



the evenings after her full-time job while also helping wherever and whenever needed. One of the things she's become known for with members – aside from bringing ice cream and cookies – are the comforting fleece blankets she hands out.

“It's pretty heartwarming to walk past rooms and see your blanket lying there,” she said. “It makes me feel so good.”

Through the past year, the Chippewa Falls Home had 75 active volunteers put in 5,120 hours. At King, there were 277 active volunteers who put in 25,715 hours, and Union Grove had 231 volunteers who contributed 12,296 hours.

“It's very rewarding,” Chris Spreda, who recently surpassed 750 volunteer hours at King, said. “It brings happiness to me to be able to even just say hello, or if I have a few minutes to talk about their day. It's a reminder of the sacrifice they gave for our country, and that means so much to me.

“It's a reality check, a reminder of their sacrifice by being in the service, protecting us and fighting for our freedom.”

Sprenda started volunteering at King about three years ago when her aunt was a member. Every week since then, she's spent about two days at the King Home, and also helps with any special events or activities. She said that volunteering in her spare time has given her an accomplished feeling.

“I've really enjoyed it so much, it's just wonderful,” Sprenda said. “When you're a volunteer, it gives you a different outlook on things. We're doing really fun things with all sorts of different experiences at King.”

Every April, in honor of National Volunteer Month, each home hosts a banquet to honor the hard work and devotion volunteers put forth to help the Veteran members. Last year, Kacvinsky was named the Volunteer of the Year at the Chippewa Falls Home. While the recognition is nice, she said it's not necessary.

“They deserve everything that can come to them,” she said of the members. “Their sacrifices and the things that they've done, they're immeasurable ... if I can do something that gives them a smile or makes them laugh, whether it's playing cards or going out on an outing, it doesn't get better than that, to see the smiles on their faces.”

Kessler agreed, saying that the incredible amount of time she's put in volunteering has become a passion of hers.

“I never think about the hours, but they sure add up quick,” Kessler said. “All I think about is that during the time that I'm there, they're having fun and I'm having fun. I don't think about how many hours it is. I just know that I enjoy being there with them.”

