

THE FIELD REPORT

WORKING TOGETHER TO SERVE WISCONSIN'S VETERANS COMMUNITY

TAKING ACTION TOGETHER

Wisconsin Veterans Chamber of Commerce, other organizations taking steps to empower women veterans

To accomplish a collective goal of better serving our military veterans and their families in Wisconsin, collaboration is vital. In doing just that, though, an important need continues to grow, and groups and organizations across the state are taking action.

According to a recent study, the largest growing population of veterans in the United States is women. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that about 9 percent of veterans today in the U.S. are women. By 2045, that figure is expected to double to 18 percent.

With a current estimated women veterans population of about 29,000 living in Wisconsin, Milwaukee-based Wisconsin Veterans Chamber of Commerce recognized the need and launched its **Women Veterans in Action Program** earlier this year. Its mission is similar to that of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs' Women Veterans Program and various others: Identify women veterans living in Wisconsin, determine what needs must be met and develop benefits, programs and initiatives to better serve them.

"We're trying to find women veterans and pull them together into a more cohesive group so they can find each other and start a conversation," Wisconsin Veterans Chamber of Commerce Events and Marketing Director Kris Moran said. "We've learned that veterans do well when they feel like they have a unit to turn to like they used to have when they were active duty.

"They mostly want someone looking out for them, someone to turn to if they have questions or need help, someone who will say, 'Hey you weren't at that last event, where have you been?'"

Moran's inspiration to get involved came as

a military spouse. Her husband served four years active duty — including two tours in Iraq — which

took them all over the nation. Eventually, though, they started the next chapter of their lives back at home in Wisconsin.

Knowing the challenges military spouses and families often face, Moran said she and her husband set out to help find solutions. So, they started volunteering for the Chamber, and she was eventually hired on as a full-time employee.

"We're trying to build that community," she said of the women's program.

Upon launching the program, the Chamber planned several events throughout the year with the main goal of bringing women veterans together to let their voices be heard.

"We know women veterans are here, we're just wondering where they are and what challenges they face," Moran said. "We want to draw those female veterans out of the woodwork, have them come to events and let us know how the Chamber can better serve them...we want to be here for each other and specifically for other female veterans to find each other and have that camaraderie within their own community."

Moran said there seems to be some disconnect in identifying as service members or veterans not only for females, but males, too.

"We know they're out there, so why aren't they self-identifying?" Moran said. "Why don't they take pride in their service? Do they think that being a veteran comes with a different stigma, a negative connotation that makes



them not want to identify?

"We're all about building community and combining efforts with partner organizations around the state to answer those questions."

The Women Veterans in Action Program will host its second event Saturday, March 23 in Waukesha. This one consists of a unique concept of assembling vision boards, which act as motivational tools to inspire and achieve a long-term goal.

"We're all in a room working on it together and discussing things," Moran said. "You come out with your goal on your board that you take home. The vision board helps you remain focused; it's the first thing you see in the morning and the last thing you see before you go to sleep."

The Women Veterans in Action Program is one of many around the state aimed at empowering women veterans and encouraging discussion of challenges they may face and exploring possible solutions. The WDVA's Women Veterans Program works to provide advocacy for women veterans, encourage and support the recognition of women veterans' contributions and provide outreach opportunities.

For more information on the Women Veterans in Action Program, visit WIVeteransChamber.org. For additional information on the WDVA's Women Veterans Program, visit WisVetsWomen.com.

