

“Without Change, There Would Be No Butterflies:”

Life Lessons in Uncertain Times

For a short period of time, the Wisconsin Veterans Home at Union Grove was also home to a butterfly nursery. You might say it was meant to be: the Monarch caterpillars that made the second floor of Boland Hall their home weren't sent in a box or butterfly kit, they were found by Activities Assistant Diana Venus just outside the walls of the building. “We walked by them every day and never gave them another glance,” she says. But then Diana carefully collected the caterpillars and set up a cozy home, and for a little more than two weeks members and staff in the building watched as the caterpillars transformed into beautiful butterflies.

The project started as an educational activity with members learning about migration patterns and the lifespan of the caterpillar. They participated in discussion groups and question-and-answer sessions, used technology to watch YouTube videos, and even traded photos with their grandchildren who were inspired to raise their own butterflies. For many, it was a completely new experience, for others it provided new perspective: one member on the floor who had been a farmer for most of his life said he lived a life close to nature and would often see butterflies on his land, but never took the time to stop and appreciate them until this experience put them up close.

The project became much more than

a science activity. It created a positive energy among both members and staff and provided hope and symbolism during uncertain times. “If a tiny caterpillar can change into a beautiful butterfly within confinement, we can survive and we can change while staying home, too” said Diana, referencing the COVID-19 Safer at Home policies that have kept members

on campus. “I tell people, this isn't forever. This is a temporary thing. Let's be strong about this, like the butterflies. What a wonderful life lesson!”

Members at Union Grove often call the activities team the “teachers,” but Diana says that after spending a quarter of a century in the nursing home industry and 13 of those years at Union Grove, she has learned more from the members than she could ever teach them, especially

about how to handle tough times and living life to its fullest.

Diana gives back through service, by making each day the best day possible for the members she works with: “Recreation keeps them sharp and engaged in living life. It's an outlet for when things get stressful and it's a very therapeutic means to heal and try different skill sets, different sports and try something new.” It also improves emotional well-being, she says: “You have choices when you wake up in the morning. Either today is going to be a good day or today is going to be a bad day and I think the Recreation Department here does their best to make it a good day.”



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-Diana Venus



The day the butterflies were released was definitely a “good day.” Milkweed, an important food source for Monarchs, were in bloom at Union Grove and the sun was shining as a group of members set them free. The butterflies flew away having been given the most fitting names by the veterans of Boland Hall, names that described what these veterans had once put their lives on the line fighting for: Liberty, Honor, Glory and Freedom.