

DISCOVERING DVA

NEWS FROM WITHIN THE WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS JANUARY 2023



Q&A WITH CHRIS McELGUNN DEPUTY SECRETARY

Q: What did you want be when you were young?

A: A naval aviator. The original Top Gun movie had a big impact on me. Unfortunately, my eyesight wasn't good enough and there weren't the medical procedures that are available today that would have corrected it.

Q: Any fun details about your time in the Navy?

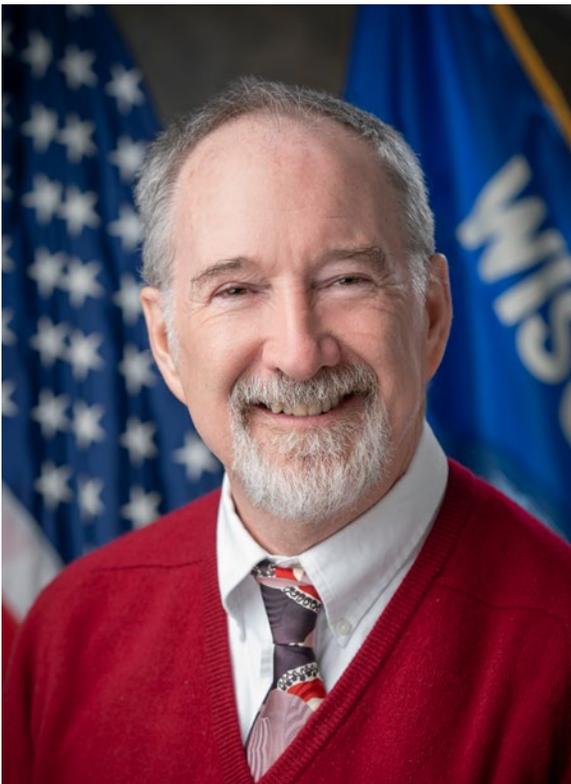
A: I learned how to surf when I was stationed in San Diego and had the opportunity to surf in Perth, Australia when my ship visited there on Westpac deployment.

Q: What is one of your favorite hobbies?

A: It's been a long time since I've been on a surfboard, but I am an avid snowboarder and enjoy traveling out west for ski/snowboarding trips with my family.

Q: How do you pronounce your last name?

A: I've been asked this question my entire life. People come up with some very creative ways to pronounce it but, if you break it down by syllable it's pretty simple, Mc-El-gunn. It's an old Irish name. I've actually had the pleasure of visiting Ireland twice. On my second trip, my father, uncle and I visited a cemetery dating back to the 1700s where are relatives are buried.



GET TO KNOW JOEY HOEY ASSISTANT DEPUTY SECRETARY

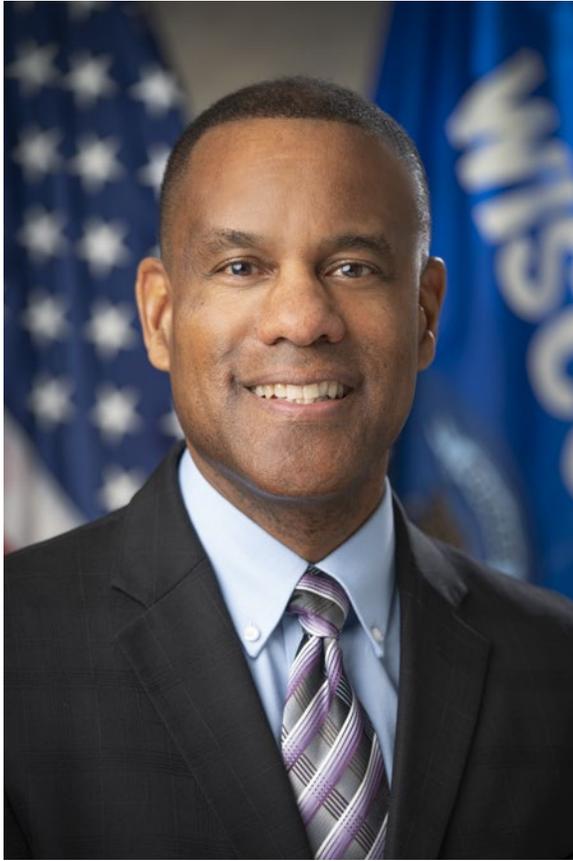
I grew up with four brothers in a small town at the mouth of the Connecticut River on Long Island Sound, only blocks away from a Coast Guard operated Lighthouse.

My parents had a great sense of humor and gave me a rhyming name—Joey Hoey.

I have been sober for 41 years.

I worked for two years after high school inspecting F 100 Turbine Engine Blades at Pratt & Whitney, and I worked in offices in all four wings and on each floor of the Wisconsin State Capitol.

CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY MONTH



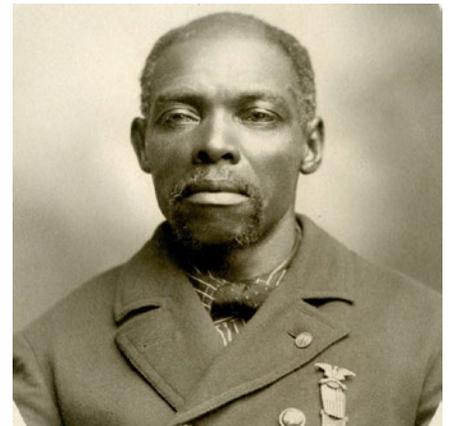
DEAR COLLEAGUES AND EMPLOYEES,

Our nation's annual celebration of Black history is taking place this month. This profoundly important time is a reminder to me of the selfless service and sacrifice that Black veterans from Wisconsin have made to our nation. As a Black veteran myself, I cannot help but also personally reflect on my time serving both stateside and abroad in the Marine Corps.

It is also not lost on me that I am one of only two Black individuals in the history of Wisconsin to serve as Secretary and advocate on behalf of our state's veterans. I am humbled and honored to serve in this role and I feel privileged to make a real difference for our entire extended veteran community.

My experiences, while unique, are but a small part of the storied history of African American veterans who serve our nation both in and out of uniform. America's larger story is also reflected in their sacrifices and contributions from recent times stretching back to the founding days of our country, and especially those divisive years of the Civil War. Our Wisconsin Veterans Museum is a wonderful repository of our state's African American veteran stories and I'd like to share a few with you to think about.

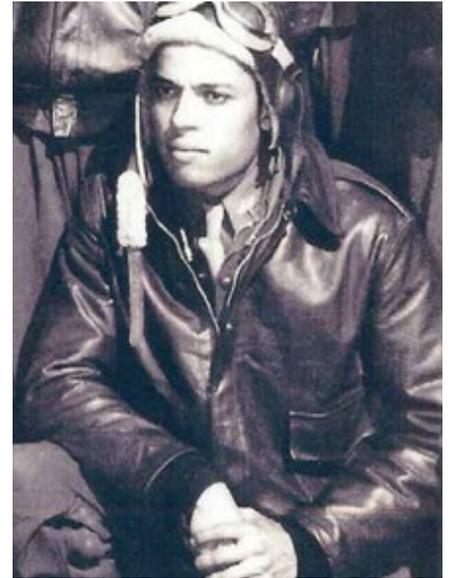
One such important veteran story is of Horace Artis (*right*) who served in Company F, 31st United States Colored Troops (USCT). Artis was a former slave from Norfolk, Virginia, who in the days following President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, joined the 31st USCT in Washington D.C. in 1864 serving with the unit through the remainder of the war, and was present at the Confederate surrender at Appomattox in 1865. After the war, Artis settled in Appleton, Wisconsin and was a member of Appleton's GAR (Grand Army of the Republic) veterans' post.



Wisconsin also has two important connections to the legendary Tuskegee Airmen of World War II:

Benjamin O. Davis (*left*), who eventually became the commanding officer of the Tuskegee Airmen, did his cadet training at Mitchell Field in 1935 in the summer before his last year at the US Military Academy at West Point. After the war in July 1948, President Harry S. Truman signed Executive Order 9981 ordering the racial integration of the armed forces. Then Colonel Davis, helped draft the Air Force plan for implementing this order and was one of the first services to full integrate. He was promoted and became the first African American Brigadier General in the history of the Air Force.

2nd Lieutenant Alfred Gorham (*right*) of Waukesha was the only Tuskegee Airman from Wisconsin. He saw action over Budapest, Hungary, and shot down two German fighters in August 1943. In 1945 his P-51 Mustang suffered engine problems over Munich. He was forced to bail out and was a POW until his release at the end of the war.



We must also remember the sacrifices of our more recent African American veterans who served in Afghanistan and Iraq such as Green Bay's Paul J. Atim (*left*). Originally born in Kampala, Uganda in 1983, he was living in Green Bay when he was deployed to Afghanistan and served with the 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, from Fort Drum, New York.

He died April 17, 2011 from wounds suffered in Ahmid-Khan, Afghanistan, when insurgents attacked his unit with an improvised explosive device. He is buried with honors at the Woodlawn Cemetery in Allouez, Wisconsin.

These stories, some hidden and some well-known, are important as we continually focus on WDVA's mission to ensure we serve ALL of our veterans, and that equity will continue to be at the forefront of everything that we do.

Yours in Service,

Secretary-designee James Bond,
Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs



THANK YOU

The Wisconsin Veterans Home at King thanks Jan Wendtland for the generous donation of these Never Forgotten Flight shadow boxes now on display in the tunnel between Stordock Hall and Ainsworth Hall.



Secretary-designee James Bond, Jim Larson, Cal Stammer

overcoming homelessness, unemployment, substance abuse, mental health struggles, and prevent more veteran suicides.

These additional biennial budgetary investments build upon the recommendations by the Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Veteran Opportunity from late last year that included an initial infusion of \$10 million dollars in support of our state's veterans.

GOVERNOR EVERS' 2023-25 BIENNIAL BUDGET SUPPORT FOR WISCONSIN VETERANS SERVICES & PROGRAMS

DVA was well represented at Governor Tony Evers budget address at the State Capitol last week. In addition to Secretary-designee James Bond, special guests included Jim Larson, a veteran and a successful graduate of WDVA's Veterans Outreach and Recovery Program (VORP), and VORP Program Supervisor Cal Stammer. The announcement budget includes a massive investment in Wisconsin veterans.

The Governor's proposed 2023-25 biennial budget includes an expansion of WDVA services such as VORP and more tax relief for disabled veterans. The increased financial support will allow WDVA to help more struggling Wisconsin veterans like Jim Larson succeed in

HIGHLIGHTS OF SPECIFIC ITEMS IN THE NEW 2023-25 BIENNIAL BUDGET FOR WDVA INCLUDE:

- Expanding the Veteran Outreach and Recovery Program (VORP) by 7 full time positions and with funding to provide increased outreach mental health services to veterans, substance recovery, lower the suicide rate among veterans, housing, and other services.
- An expansion of opportunities at all existing sites of the Veterans Housing and Recovery Program (VHRP).
- Providing funding to all three state veterans homes to address their ongoing needs so that each home has adequate resources and staffing to provide the best possible care to the most vulnerable veterans in Wisconsin.
- Increasing eligibility for the Veterans and Surviving Spouses Property Tax Credit by extending eligibility to those with a disability rating of at least 70 percent.

ALL DETAILS AND A FULL LIST OF ITEMS INCLUDED IN THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET BENEFITING WISCONSIN VETERANS [CAN BE FOUND HERE.](#)

HUMAN RESOURCES



WELCOME!

We are excited to welcome many new employees to the department. Brian Jones (Division Administrator) and Stevetta Scott (Human Services Program Coordinator) join the veterans benefits team. Karen Holcomb (Accountant) joins the enterprise services team.

The Wisconsin Veterans Home at Union Grove welcomes Bridgett Gaddy and Russell Wyman-Thiell (Nursing Assistants).

The Wisconsin Veterans Home at King welcomes David Dassow (Food Service Supervisor) and Krystal Hoffman (Food Service Assistant); Tracy Eickstaedt, Marianne Flom, and Laurie Lohafer (Nurse Clinicians); Jerrica Lider (Pharmacy Technician); and Sabrina Peterson, Brenda Pyneberg, Catrina Rabe, and Rune Wilson (Custodians).

ICI AND DEFERRED ENROLLMENT UPDATE

Payroll is working through the Income Continuation Insurance (ICI) Annual and Deferred Enrollment process which looks at employees newly eligible for a higher category and/or supplemental coverage. If you are affected by this change you will be notified.

TIMESHEET REMINDER

Timesheets should be completed by 2:00 p.m. on Mondays. Timesheet approvals should be completed by 4:30 p.m. on Mondays. Thank you for your help with ensuring this is done on time.

W-2S ARE HERE!

The last of the 2022 W-2s were mailed out to employees on 1/25/23. You can access your electronic W-2 in STAR employee self-service.

2023 HR HOT TOPICS IN 30

The Human Resources (HR) team is excited to offer our HR Hot Topics in 30 series again in 2023. All presentations will be held on Microsoft TEAMS and links to attend the training will be provided shortly before each session. These sessions are geared towards all employees, not just supervisors, and are a great learning opportunity for employees who want to know more about a variety of HR topics.

Attendance is optional but, highly encouraged for those who have interest in a particular presentation topic. If you would like to attend on work time, you should get approval from your supervisor prior to attending.



Ricki Ilion (*above*) has joined our team as the new Human Resources Supervisor at the Wisconsin Veterans Home at Union Grove!

Ricki spent over nine years performing Human Resources work with the Department of Corrections prior to her arrival. Ricki is the proud mom of 4 teenagers. In her spare time, Ricki loves exploring boutiques, and unique restaurants with family and friends. We are so happy that Ricki chose to work with us!

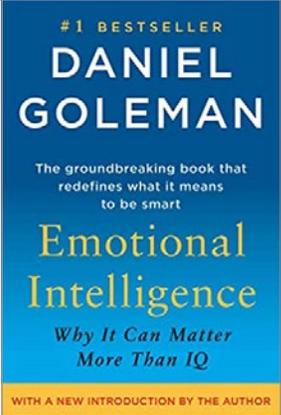
Welcome, Brooke! Brooke Albers (*above*) joined the Payroll Team in late January. Brooke comes to us with her degree in Human Resources and experience in the private sector performing payroll duties for large organizations. She will join Carla Bongard, Ashley Teasdale and Jennah Wolf in providing payroll and benefits support to DVA and DOR employees. We are so excited that Brooke has joined our team!



HR BOOK NOOK

[Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ](#)
Daniel Goleman

Research has shown that your emotional intelligence (EQ) is key to success in the workplace and in your personal life.



WEAR RED!

The HR team was encouraged to wear red on February 3, 2023, to promote women’s heart health! Thank you, Linda Weber and Holly Wallock (*above*), for sharing your red!

THE FRIENDLY FACES OF WDVA



We are fortunate to have Kristy Hartke at Northern Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemetery. Kristy has been with WDVA since 2017 as an Operations Program Associate. Kristy is a valuable member of the Northern team as well as the bureau as she is quick to help other cemeteries with whatever is needed. Kristy does an amazing job of supporting families and ensuring that services are presented with honor. Kristy says, "It's an honor to assist veterans and their families through one of their most difficult days."

Kristy has been a lifelong resident of Shell Lake, just minutes away from NWVMC. She enjoys spending time with her husband, son, and daughter. She keeps very busy with her family, pets, working out, and being a fulltime college student! When she has free time, you can find her enjoying the outdoors—kayaking, golfing, or skiing. Thank you, Kristy, for all you do!



Nathaniel Vondran has served Wisconsin veterans for two years with the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs. Nathaniel works in the Veterans Benefit Resource Center (VBRC). Nathaniel's primary duties include processing applications, providing customer service via email, chat, phone, and walk-ins. Nathaniel always maintains a positive attitude and is always willing to go the extra mile for anyone he serves. The success of the VBRC is due in no small part to Nathaniel's contributions. Veterans have the best care out of all fifty states because Nathaniel is working directly for them each and every day. Nathaniel is an outstanding asset to the VBRC and for the entire Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs.

DARBY'S JOKES *by Jeff Darby*

My friends think I'm a magician when I make chocolate disappear...

But little do they know, I've got a few Twix up my sleeve...

Do you know where you can get chicken broth in bulk?

The stock market.

What do you do if you get the bird flu?

Tweetment.

What's brown and sticky?

A stick!





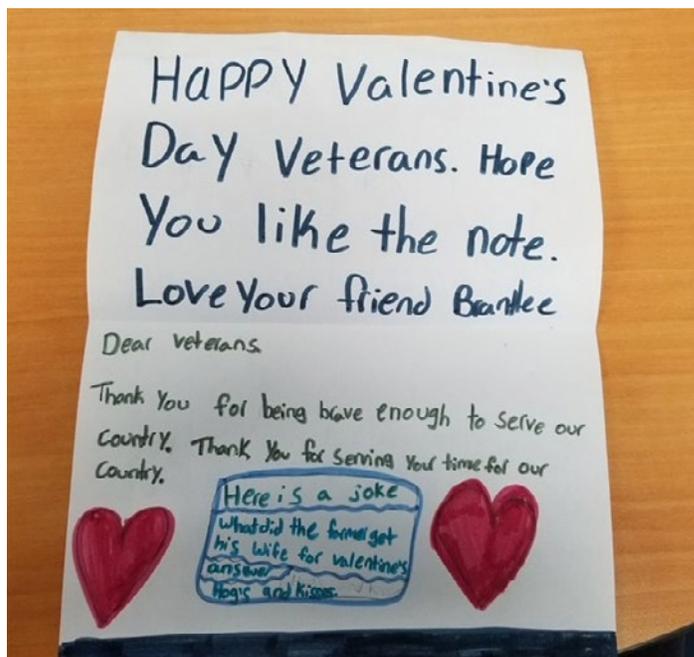
VALENTINES FOR VETERANS

With almost 20,000 valentines to deliver to members at the Wisconsin Veterans Homes, the outreach team has been busy this month sharing the love. This year the department asked the public to send in “Valentines for Veterans” on social media, and the response was astounding.

Hundreds shared posts on social media, dozens of media outlets picked up the story, and veterans organizations banded together, all working towards one goal. The outreach team was excited to carry out the mission of making this Valentine’s Day special. More than 700 individuals and families mailed in cards, and about 200 organizations and schools took the time to write a kind message, draw original artwork, and craft projects. The department received cards from all over the country, including Alaska, Florida, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, and New Mexico.

“Thank you to everyone who took the time to make or write cards for our veterans and mailed them,” said Shannon Miller, Marketing and Outreach Program Supervisor at WDVVA. “It was wonderful to see how much it meant to each member who received these valentines and the joy and smiles on their faces as they read them. These small acts of kindness truly mean the world to our veterans.”

Outreach is looking at a similar program in November and December called “Holidays for our Heroes”.



WHERE IN WISCONSIN IS OUTREACH?

1. UNION GROVE, CHIPPEWA FALLS, KING – VALENTINES FOR VETERANS
2. OSHKOSH – VFW MID-WINTER CONFERENCE
3. APPLETON – UNI UNI BUBBLE TEA WOMAN VETERAN OWNED BUSINESS INTERVIEW
4. MILWAUKEE – FROST FEST



UPCOMING EVENTS

MAY 27 – MEMORIAL DAY AT NORTHERN WI VETERANS MEMORIAL CEMETERY
 MAY 28 – MEMORIAL DAY AT SOUTHERN WI VETERANS MEMORIAL CEMETERY
 MAY 29 - MEMORIAL DAY AT CENTRAL WI VETERANS MEMORIAL CEMETERY
 JUNE 2-3 – WOMEN VETERANS RETREAT IN EAU CLAIRE