

DISCOVERING DVA

NEWS FROM WITHIN THE WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS DECEMBER 2023



Dear WDVA Team,

As we near the time when many of us get ready to celebrate the holidays, I want to express my appreciation to all of you who have worked so diligently on behalf of Wisconsin veterans and their families in 2023. I am proud of the dedication and commitment that each one of you has shown.

You are integral to everything we do — extending a hand to struggling veterans who need and deserve our help, serving members at the veterans homes, telling and curating veteran stories at the museum, creating and maintaining dignified spaces at our cemeteries, and conveying eligible benefits and claims assistance. For all this and more, I say thank you.

I also want to express my appreciation to all our employees who work behind the scenes to keep the WDVA engine running smoothly. Your efforts are what drives the team, allowing us to best serve our veterans and their families.

I hope you will take some time to reflect on the great collective work we've done this past year. During the holidays I encourage all of you to make time to recharge your mental batteries, relax, and enjoy some quality time with your loved ones.

Once again, thank you for everything you do at WDVA.

I wish you all a wonderful holiday season and a happy new year!

Yours in Service,



James Bond

Secretary-designee, WDVA

ALL-STAFF DAY AT CENTRAL OFFICE



WDVA staff gathered at the central office in Madison for an all-staff day of collaboration and training, but with some festive holiday cheer in the mix! The day featured retirement celebrations, team trivia, a bags tournament, a baking competition, and more. Congratulations to the Veterans Benefits Resource Center for sweeping the competition – Melissa Baker and Charlie Reddemann were the bags champions, Beth Kasten was crowned the baking champion, and the VBRC team took home the top prize at trivia!









Secretary-designee Bond presented retirement plaques to Budget & Policy Manager Brett Coomber (*left*) and Financial Manager Steve Errthum (*right*). Thank you both for many years of dedication to the State of Wisconsin!

DARBY'S JOKES by Jeff Darby

I went for an interview today and they told me I'd start at \$3000 a month and then after six months, I'd get \$3500 a month.
I told them I'd start in six months.

The first five days after the weekend
are the hardest.

What did the computer do at lunchtime?
Had a byte.

I used to work for the paper business.
But then it folded.





WISCONSIN VETERANS MUSEUM

This Veterans Day, the Wisconsin Veterans Museum joined more than 100 museums across the world to premiere a special production from "History Rocks." The global premiere of "The War To End All Wars – The Movie" took place between November 4-19, 2023, in the two weeks surrounding the 105th anniversary of Armistice Day. The animated movie featured the music of Swedish heavy metal band Sabaton.

"History Rocks" is a result of the band's urge to help museums around the world. The mission of this charitable initiative is to amplify the visibility of museums worldwide and to encourage a fresh, untapped audience of metalheads and history enthusiasts to contribute to their local museums.



For the Wisconsin Veterans Museum, it did just that. More than 40 people filled the Education Center for the film and discussion afterward with curator of history, Kevin Hampton and education manager, Erik Wright. The event sold out in two days, and we wish we had a larger space to accommodate the interest in the movie. The event brought people to the museum who were fans of the band Sabaton, as well as history buffs. We appreciate all of them making the effort to visit and understand the significance of World War I to humankind.

THE FRIENDLY FACES OF WDVA

The Bureau of Programs and Services within the Division of Veterans Benefits is very pleased to announce that Charlie Reddemann has joined the Veterans Benefit Resource Center team. Charlie's primary duties will include processing applications, mail, and providing customer service via email, chat, phone, and walk-ins.



Charlie comes from the private sector where she worked as a paralegal intern. Her experience includes drafting communication and legal documents, developing and presenting educational materials for community outreach efforts, assisting clients and facilitating communication between attorneys, and researching judicial decisions. Prior to her private sector experience, she served at the UW-Whitewater veterans services office where she worked as a Benefit Specialist. Her experience included, customer service skills, reviewing legal statutes, and assisting student veterans with their educational benefits to determine eligibility for various state and federal benefits. Charlie is an active member of the Wisconsin National Guard where she serves as a light wheel vehicle mechanic.

Charlie holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science-Emphasis in legal studies from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, WI.

Charlie's first day was on December 4th. Charlie is excited to work for the Wisconsin Department of Veteran Affairs and is looking forward to serving veterans!

PARTNERS IN GIVING –

THANK YOU AND THERE'S STILL TIME TO GIVE THROUGH END OF DECEMBER!

Thank you to all employees who have generously donated to the Partners in Giving Campaign this season. As of December 11th, we have raised a total of \$1183.00 this year through your generous individual gifts, our office Chili-Cook Off, and a Silent Auction held with our colleagues from Department of Revenue. The silent auction featured three baskets of generously donated items that included coffee, facial treatments, Culver's certificates for butter burgers and frozen custard, as well as apparel and more. There is still time for you to donate to help more than 500 non-profits throughout Wisconsin. Make a one-time donation or an easy payroll deduction when you visit www.giving.wi.gov and click on the "State" tab at the top of the screen. Follow the prompts and then click on the area indicating you are WDVA employee. Your generous donation is also tax deductible as allowed by law. Thank you!



HUMAN RESOURCES

WELCOME!

We are excited to welcome many new employees to the department. Jason Satek (Veterans Benefits Specialist) joined us in the central Madison office and Christopher Tucker (Archivist) joined the Wisconsin Veterans Museum.

NWVMC welcomed Melissa Prieve (Office Associate) and SWVMC welcomed Steven Brunnelson (Cemetery Caretaker).

The Wisconsin Veterans Home at Union Grove welcomed Elizabeth Haney (Nursing Assistant), Lacrosha Harris (Custodian), and Casey Phipps (Therapy Assistant).

The Wisconsin Veterans Home at King welcomed Sheila Anderson, Jamie Beilfuss, Hillary Bowden, and Kari Edmunds (Nurse Clinicians); Tanisha Bloecher, Brian Bloecher, Amanda Serafin, Mely Sheely, and Alicia Stemwedel (Nursing Assistants); Karissa Bowman, Jhett Forseth, Heather Griswold, Kelly Kraklow, David Lind, and Susan Nowland (Food Service Assistants).

NEW ADDITIONS TO HR

Jeni Ginter-Lyght (*right*) will be joining the Region 4 Human Resources team supporting DVA and DOR as an Equity and Inclusion Specialist.

Jeni's first day will be December 18. She comes to us with over 15 years of experience in human resources with a focus on equity and inclusion. She was previously the Equity and Inclusion Officer at DCF. Prior to that, she worked in government, for profit, and nonprofit organizations as both an HR leader and individual contributor.

Outside of work, Jeni is passionate about serving her community. She sits on the DEI taskforce that informs her city council about ways to advance the community she lives in. She also loves to spend time with her family, walking her two dogs, and restoring her century-old home. Welcome Jeni!



Daniel Bare (*right*) recently joined the Region 4 Human Resources team supporting DVA and DOR as a Payroll and Benefits Specialist.

Prior to joining our team, Dan spent the last 6 years processing and supporting payroll functions for a local school district. We are excited that he decided to bring his expertise to the State of Wisconsin!

Dan spends his free time running, reading, watching movies, and exploring the outdoors. He enjoys spending his time away from work with his wife and their two children. Welcome Dan!



HR STAFF UPDATES

We are very excited to announce that Ashley Teasdale has accepted the Payroll and Benefits Program Supervisor position on the Region 4 Human Resources team supporting the Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Revenue. This position was recently vacated by Angela Herl who is enjoying her retirement. Ashley has spent the past 3+ years providing Payroll support to the Department of Revenue primarily but has worked very closely with the staff assigned to DVA as well. We look forward to watching Ashley continue to grow in this new role. Congrats Ashley!

ANNUAL

PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS

The Department of Veterans Affairs just wrapped up their annual performance evaluation cycle. Please remember that you should now be completing a planning evaluation for the next reporting cycle. That cycle should run from the day after the previous evaluation period ended through June 30, 2024.

Moving forward the Department of Veterans Affairs will complete annual evaluations in June of each calendar year. If a new evaluation has been created with the incorrect evaluation period dates, they can be changed by the supervisor within the performance system at any time during the goal setting and rating process.

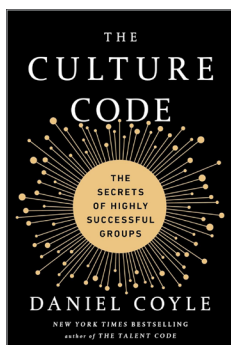
EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM UPDATES

The State's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) partner, Kepro, is now Acentra Health! While the name changes, all EAP benefits and resources remain the same. The EAP provides State of Wisconsin employees and their household family members with free and confidential support, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for a variety of concerns – ranging from everyday matters to more concerning situations, including:

- Work-life stresses
- Anxiety, depression, or other mood disorders
- Relationship or other family problems, including divorce and abuse
- Substance abuse
- Manager and Supervisor support
- Parenting/Caregiver support
- Legal and financial guidance
- Convenience services

Please see the [Division of Personnel Management](#) website for complete details on the scope of services offered through the EAP.

While the name change transition is still in process, you may continue to see references to Kepro EAP. These will eventually be transitioned to Acentra Health.



HR BOOK NOOK

[The Culture Code: The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups by Daniel Coyle](#)

Where does great culture come from? How do you build and sustain it in your group, or strengthen a culture that needs fixing? Culture is not something you are—it's something you do. *The Culture Code* puts the power in your hands. No matter the size of your group or your goal, this book can teach you the principles of cultural chemistry that transform individuals into teams that can accomplish amazing things together.



HAPPY HANUKKAH

December is a month of celebration for diverse cultures and religions. Many people in the United States are familiar with Christmas festivities and their meanings, but are you aware of the differences between the celebrations of Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwanzaa?

WHAT IS HANUKKAH?

The Hebrew word Chanukah means “dedication,” and this holiday commemorates the recovery of Jerusalem at the beginning of the Maccabean revolt in the 2nd century BCE and dedication of the Temple of Jerusalem. In Modern Hebrew, Hanukkah may also be called the Festival of Lights.

WHEN IS HANUKKAH CELEBRATED?

Hanukkah is normally observed between late November and December, although the dates differ every year as Hanukkah begins on the 25th day of Kislev on the Hebrew Calendar. This year the Festival of Lights began at sundown on December 7th and ended at sundown on December 15th.

WHAT ARE HANUKKAH TRADITIONS?

Hanukkah is celebrated with a series of rituals that are performed every day throughout the eight-day holiday: some are family-based and others communal.

- The festival is observed by lighting a candle on the menorah (a 9 branched candelabra) each day until the final candle is lit on the last day. One candle is typically positioned higher than the other eight candles —this is known as the shamash, or attendant, and is used to light all the candles marking the days of the celebration.
- There are special additions to the daily prayer service, and a section is added to the blessing after meals.
- During the festival people enjoy playing dreidel, giving of Hanukkah gelt, and singing Hanukkah songs.
- Fried foods such as latkes (potato pancakes) and sufganiyot (jelly doughnuts) are eaten to commemorate the importance of oil during the celebration of Hanukkah.

IS HANUKKAH LIKE CHRISTMAS?

Christmas and Hanukkah are holidays celebrated in the winter that are very different celebrations. While Christmas celebrates the birth of Christ, Hanukkah is in remembrance and rededication of when Jews reclaimed their temple from the Seleucid Empire and the rejection of Hellenistic influences.



HAPPY KWANZAA

WHAT IS KWANZAA?

Kwanzaa is an African-Americans celebration of life and is a cultural holiday, not a religious holiday. The Seven Principles of Kwanzaa include: Umoja (Unity), Kujichagulia (self-determination), Ujima (Collective work and responsibility), Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics), Nia (Purpose), Kuumba (Creativity), Imani (Faith). Kwanzaa is based on African harvest tradition from various parts of West and Southeast Africa and was first celebrated in 1966. The name Kwanzaa derives from the Swahili phrase *matunda ya kwanza*, meaning “first fruits”.

WHEN IS KWANZAA CELEBRATED?

Kwanzaa is celebrated from December 26 to January 1.

WHAT HAPPENS ON THE 7 DAYS OF KWANZAA?

The weeklong celebration may include songs, dances, African drums, storytelling, poetry reading, and a large feast on December 31, called Karamu. On January 1, there are usually gift exchanges between the parents and children, known as Kuumba.

Inspired by Hanukkah, during the observation of Kwanzaa a candle is lit daily in the kinara, Swahili for candle holder. In the kinara there are 3 red candles, 3 green candles, and 1 black candle to represent the Seven Principles of Kwanzaa. The colors black, red, and green are symbolic colors of the holiday, black stands for the people, red represents their struggle, and green is for the future and hope that comes from their struggle.

WHAT ARE TRADITIONAL KARAMU MEALS?

Traditional Kwanzaa meals include catfish, collard greens, macaroni and cheese, gumbo and accras.