

MILITARY

SALUTE

2025

A SPECIAL PUBLICATION OF
THE VILAS COUNTY NEWS-REVIEW
AND THE THREE LAKES NEWS



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Memorial Day services set throughout North Woods

Memorial Day services will commence in communities across the North Woods to honor and remember individuals who died in military action while fighting for their country.

Veterans, area residents, government officials and North Woods visitors are invited to attend the ceremonies.

Veterans organizations in Eagle River, Three Lakes, Land O' Lakes, Phelps, Conover and St. Germain have provided the following information on Memorial Day weekend programs.

Eagle River

The Vilas County Veterans Service Office holds its annual Memorial Day Program Monday, May 26 at 11 a.m. in front of the Vilas County Courthouse in Eagle River.

The ceremony includes a guest speaker, presentation of colors and remembering the fallen.

Other highlights include recognition of the military's branches and performances by the Northland Pines band and choir, along with the Boys and Girls Scouts being in attendance.

Three Lakes

Memorial Day in Three Lakes will be observed Monday, May 26. The program will start at 10 a.m. with a traditional solemn procession from Gogebic Street down Superior Street to the Three Lakes Cemetery. The Three Lakes American Legion Post 431 Color Guard will lead with only the sounds of drum beats from the Three Lakes High School band. The ceremony will begin at 10:15 a.m. with the arrival of the procession, and a

To SERVICES Pg. 5



We support and thank those who have served and are currently serving.

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Memorial Day service to be held at Vilas Courthouse

BY VILAS COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE

The Vilas County Veterans Service Office asks that you join us for our annual Memorial Day Program on Monday, May 26, 2025, on the front lawn of the Courthouse at 11:00 a.m. By Presidential proclamation, we are called upon to observe Memorial Day by praying, according to individual religious faith, for permanent peace. Our community does an amazing job on this annual day to mourn and honor our deceased service men and women. We are honored to not only put this program together but also to serve as your County Veteran Service Officers (CVSOs). As CVSOs, we are advocates to ensure

that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) fulfills President Lincoln's promise to care for those who have served in our nation's military and for their families, caregivers, and survivors. We're here to help with any benefit questions or assistance you may need from VA Health Care to Compensation & Pension, and everything in between. It's been a pleasure working with so many of our veterans and their families to do everything we can to help in any way we can. If you're a veteran (or veteran family) in need, please contact Brian Thomas or Kevin Eades at 715-479-3629 or email us at veteranservices@vilascountywi.gov. We also like to remind people that if you've been turned down for benefits in the past or feel that you're not where you should be, let's try again. We're here to advocate for you and your loved ones and look forward to continuing to serve those who have served.



Vilas County Veterans Service Officer Brian Thomas



Because of the Brave

BY CONGRESSMAN TOM TIFFANY

This Memorial Day and every day, it is important to pause and honor those who have paved the way for the freedom we enjoy today: Our veterans and fallen heroes. Millions of brave Americans have been willing to put their lives on the line to protect our flag, our loved ones and our way of life. It is because of their heroic sacrifices that we are here today. Our nation's resilient spirit is a reflection of the resilient spirit of our veterans, and I will not allow that to be forgotten. Therefore, if you or someone you know is having trouble receiving benefits from the Department of Veterans

Affairs (VA) or obtaining military records, my district office is ready to assist you. Give them a call at (715) 298-9344 to see how we may be able to help. Although we may never be able to fully repay our nation's veterans, it is my goal in Congress to ensure that they are receiving the care and benefits they've earned. This is why I helped introduce the Major Richard Star Act, which would provide combat-disabled veterans with less than 20 years of service with both their disability compensation and retirement pay without reduction. Currently, veterans

serving fewer than 20 years and holding a disability rating below 50% experience a dollar-for-dollar reduction in their retirement pay corresponding to their disability compensation. These retirees put their lives on the line, and ensuring they receive their full retirement and disability benefits is a small, but important, token of our gratitude. So let us come together on this Memorial Day to not only honor the fallen but all service members who stood tall in the face of adversity — displaying valor and dedication to a cause greater than themselves. We are the home of the free because of the brave.

NAMES OF THE FALLEN VILAS COUNTY VETERANS

CIVIL WAR
Samuel Odell

WORLD WAR I
Lyman E. Barnes
Emil H. Gherke
Olaf Thompson
John S. Chicog
Joe Grazis
Frederick J. Walsh
Willow Trapp
Albert C. Goranson
George Micholowski

WORLD WAR II
Edward A. Weber
William C. Ament
Ervin Matteck
Earl M. Esque
Arnold E. Simon
Robert E. Brooker
William A. Manbeck
Heino F. Busch Jr.
William L. Neumann
Careld J. Blackburn
William J. Wepfer
Harry E. Karwoski

William H. Weber
Reynold Soquist
Cecil S. Snow
Louis R. Hall
George E. Strong
Walter R. Hermanson
Edward A. Croker
Chancy A. Rogers
Clayton O. McLain
Harold E. Evenson
Norman E. Wegner
Joe Skye
Edward B. Kalous

William E. Jolly
Lyle W. Hawks
Joseph C. Trinka
Herbert H. Walbruck
Martin L. Bloom
Joseph C. Rowinsky
Nilo J. Albertson
Norman C. Schlarp
Robert F. Sayner

KOREAN WAR
Roland W. Kubinek
Charles W. Newberry
Carlton C. Valliere

VIETNAM WAR
Paul S. Gee
James H. Page
Chester A. Myers Jr.
Larry S. Jensen
John A. Mietus
Sheldon J. Burnett

PANAMA
John M. Price

WAR ON TERROR
Tyler Kritz



VA Medical Center toured to meet Upper Peninsula, Wisconsin veterans

In a push to strengthen ties with local Veterans, the Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center hit the road in February of this year for a series of town halls across Wisconsin and Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

The three-day tour brought VA leadership directly to Veterans in five communities, offering face-to-face discussions

about healthcare services, benefits, and program updates.

"These aren't just meetings — they're a chance for real conversation," said John P. Shealey, Medical Center Director. "Whether you're currently enrolled in VA health care or not, we want to hear from you."

It ran from February 12-14, with the series

taking trips to Laona, Rhinelander, Phillips, Ironwood, Mich., and Chassell, Mich.

County Veterans Service Officers also joined VA Medical Center leadership at each stop, and were to answer questions about benefits and services. Veterans' family members and community stakeholders were encouraged to attend.

Services

FROM PAGE 3

memorial wreath will be placed at the foot of the flagpole. The Three Lakes High School band will provide music.

St. Germain

The town of St. Germain will hold a Memorial Day service on Sunday, May 25 at 1 p.m..

The service will include a guest speaker and other ceremonies.

Contact the St. Germain Area Chamber of Commerce at 715-477-2205 for more information.

Phelps

There will be a Memorial Day service in Phelps on Monday, May 26 at 1 p.m. at the cemetery.

There will be a roll call for the dead and flags will be presented to families of deceased service members.

For updated information, contact the Town of Phelps at 715-545-2270.

Conover

A memorial service will be conducted on Monday, May 26, at 10 a.m., at Hildegard Cemetery, located three miles east of Highway 45 on Highway K.

Land O' Lakes

The VFW Post 8400 will have a Memorial Day service at the Land O' Lakes cemetery on Monday, May 26, at 11 a.m. For more information, contact the VFW Post in Land O' Lakes at 715-547-3314.

Rhineland

Memorial services throughout Rhineland will take place over the Memorial Day weekend.

A service will be held at Union Grove Cemetery on Saturday, May 24 at 11 a.m..

A Memorial Day service on Monday, May

26 at the North Woods National Cemetery at 2:30 p.m.

Honors ceremonies will take place as follows on Monday, May 26: Northland Memorial Park at 8:30 a.m.; Forest Home Cemetery and Nativity of Our Lord Cemetery at 9 a.m.

Presque Isle

The American Legion Post 480 in Presque Isle will host Memorial Day services on Monday, May 26.

The services are as follow: 10 a.m. at the Winchester Memorial Cemetery, 1124 West Harris Lake Road; 11 a.m. at the Presque Isle Cemetery, 12080 Highway W and 11:30 a.m. at Wilderness Veterans Memorial Flame.

Attendees are welcome to visit American Legion Post 480 after the ceremonies.

For more information, contact 715-686-2541.

Veterans Service Offices are here to assist

BY TAMMY JAVENKOSKI
VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER

I write this as the Oneida County Veterans Service Officer for the last time. By this time next year, I will be retired. I can't believe how fast 19+ years have gone by, but what an honor, privilege, and blessing it's been to work my dream job serving veterans and their family members.

My job has mostly been great, but over the years, many of my veterans have passed away, and that's been the hard part. I've never looked at my veterans as customers, they're all family to me. When they pass, it leaves a void in my life. There have been so many veterans who have told me their stories over the years, stories I never read in history books or learned in school. What makes losing a veteran even worse is when they pass from a disability that was directly related to their military service. So many veterans struggle with physical

and/or mental health problems they wouldn't have had if it weren't for their service. I can't take away their pain, but I can work hard to get them what they deserve and what this country owes them. Even when I was on active duty in the Navy, I didn't understand how much veterans have done for us but after meeting hundreds, if not thousands, over the years, I am not only so very grateful for them, I'm grateful I've been able to serve them while learning from them.

On Memorial Day, we honor the brave men and women who didn't make it home. There is no act more selfless than giving your life in service to your country. I never had the honor of meeting SSG Stephen Martin or SGT Ryan Adams, two Oneida County veterans who were killed in action, but I will always be eternally

grateful for their service and bravery. Since the Civil War, over 1.2 million men and women have paid the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom. That's more than Milwaukee's population doubled. That's a lot of bravery. That's the reason they deserve to be remembered on Memorial Day. It's the absolute least we can do for them.

After I retire next February, I will still continue to serve veterans. As a Board of Directors member of the Northwoods Veterans Homestead, a tiny home community we're building in Rhineland for homeless veterans, I will be able to devote more time to that. I will also stay active in the many Veterans Service Organizations of which I'm a member. My job has shown me my passion is serving veterans, and I will continue to do that until I no longer can.



Gaffney-Busha

NAMES OF THE FALLEN

ONEIDA COUNTY VETERANS

WORLD WAR I

Carl Aasland
 Alex Ahlborn
 Fred Anderson
 Alban Asmundson
 Charles Bissonnette
 Frank Blaschka
 Carl C. Boden
 Anton Botozeski
 Edward Carley
 George W. Chapman
 Sam J. Charpie
 Abner Dahlberg
 Raymond Dawson
 Calbert DeLapp
 Lloyd W. Dolan
 Arnie F. Duhn
 Frank Dziewiatkowski
 Walter Evenson
 Ernest J. Fay
 Harry W. Fenelon
 Henry Folker
 Emil H. Gehrke
 Louis A. Grill
 Leon Holewinski
 Alva Howard
 John Hughes
 Clarence Johnson
 Hjalmer Johnson
 Joseph F. Katarski
 Harry H. Labug
 Carl J. Madson
 Reginald Rice
 Arthur Rousseau
 Ray Rousseau
 Albet H. Rozell
 Edwin Samuelson
 Charles Saxe
 Maurice Stafford
 Joseph Szuminski
 Ingewald Tallackson
 Leno Tate
 Douglas A. Taylor
 Walter E. Thomas
 Ora N. Tidd
 Carl Weight
 Frank J. Wines

WORLD WAR II

Stanley Ahlborn
 William Ament
 Charles R. Ashton
 Joseph C. Belanger
 Orvia H. Belongia
 William F. Boelter
 Charles S. Brown
 John N. Brown
 Anton Burzynski
 Edward R. Cairnes
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 Roger Dery
 Warner B. Dinger
 Lloyd T. Dolan
 Edward J. Dolejs
 Alex J. Dominski
 Roy A. Dumas
 Donald Durkee
 Mark J. Ebert
 Raymond J. Edwin
 Donald A. Empey
 Erwin L. Erickson
 Joseph L. Eternicka
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 Edward F. Harvey
 Robert Hayhurst
 Edward E. Helgeson
 Forest Johns
 Harry Karnowski
 Clarence A. Keso
 Earl C. Khoury
 Robert J. Kuehn
 Erwin C. Kunze
 Merwin Laddusire

Gerald A. Lemke
 Gayhart Laroche
 Frank W. Luce
 Cleon G. Lucia
 Raymond Lyannas
 George Mahner
 Peter Makris
 George M. Mattson
 Samuel A. Melton
 William Nuutinen
 John J. O'Keefe
 Robert M. O'Melia
 Edward J. Panko
 Dennis Paquette
 Edward A. Perry
 Joseph L. Phillips
 David Rice
 Daniel Rice
 Melvin E. Richter
 Edward Riordan
 Robert W. Sager
 Ervin E. Schield
 John T. Schilling
 Gordon Schirmer
 Joseph P. Schock
 Joseph Jr. Schooley
 Robert Simons
 Harold Skottestad
 Joseph L. Skubal
 Andrew Slivinski
 Eugene W. Smith
 Paul A. Smith
 Robert M. Snyder
 Eino Soumi
 Charles G. Stelle
 Arthur Steiner
 Rene J. Stimart
 Leonard Swanmann
 Albert Swearingen
 Kenneth Thorn
 Russell Tilton
 Lafey Wales
 Glenn H. Ward
 Theodore Wardwell
 Harry Waubiness
 James F. Welk

Frank J. Wines
 William Zelechowski
 Harold M. Zerrenner
 Norman J. Zinda
 Arthur Zurt

KOREAN WAR

Roy S. Boach
 Lloyd J. Bosben
 Billy E. Buck
 Carlton G. Gahler
 William A. Gilson
 Gene M. Ingram
 Marvin J. Johnson
 John W. Longwitz
 Mannie L. Loshaw
 Kenneth Lundberg
 Robert Mervicker
 Edwin Mode
 Robert A. Olson
 Donald J. Priebe
 Eugene C. Rhode
 Colin F. Shultz
 Andre J. Swanmann
 Valent Warrichalet
 Martin E. White

VIETNAM WAR

William Bodenhausen
 Robert J. Davies
 Henry Duellman
 Harry W. Ehmann
 Donald B. Lowe
 Richard A. Roesler
 Gary B. Gehrke
 Gustave Gudleske
 Duane Helmick
 Arthur R. Henning
 James R. Taplin
 Donald D. Watson
 Wm. S. Hurkmans Jr.
 Robert Kotarski

WAR ON TERROR

Stephen G. Martin
 Ryan C. Adams



Three Lakes fundraising continues in 2025

Fundraising continues for a Veterans Memorial project in Three Lakes, which will be located between the town's municipal building and the Edward U. Demmer Memorial Library on School Street.

Town of Three Lakes officials recently said that roughly \$131,000 has been raised as they entered 2025 with a project total sitting at roughly \$480,000.

Officials said they are still in the process of accepting donations for the

memorial.

The memorial will include three granite monuments: an Entrance Monument, a Prisoner of War and Missing in Action Monument, and a Killed in Action Monument.

There will also be a granite Veteran's Wall with names of veterans and their branch of service, along with flags posted for each area of service, plus a U.S. and state of Wisconsin flag.

Donations are being accepted via credit card in person at the Three Lakes Town

Office or online at townofthreelakeswi.gov. Donations are tax-deductible.

According to the eight-person Three Lakes Veteran's Memorial Committee, the mission of the group is to honor past, present and future veterans, and to preserve the memory of those who have served their country.

Students at Three Lakes High School, under the guidance of Nathan Koch, created a 3D rendering last year.

Four granite benches and a

stamped concrete walkway are also planned.

The committee is working to finalize plans and specifications, with hopes to start the project in phases this summer. The project will be completed in three separate phases, with grading, concrete walkway and flags going up first, followed by benches and monuments, and then the veteran's wall of names.

Soil boring, which is the first step of the groundbreaking process, took place in July 2024.



The 3-D rendering of the planned veterans memorial was created with the help of students and staff at the Three Lakes School District fab lab.

—Contributed Photo



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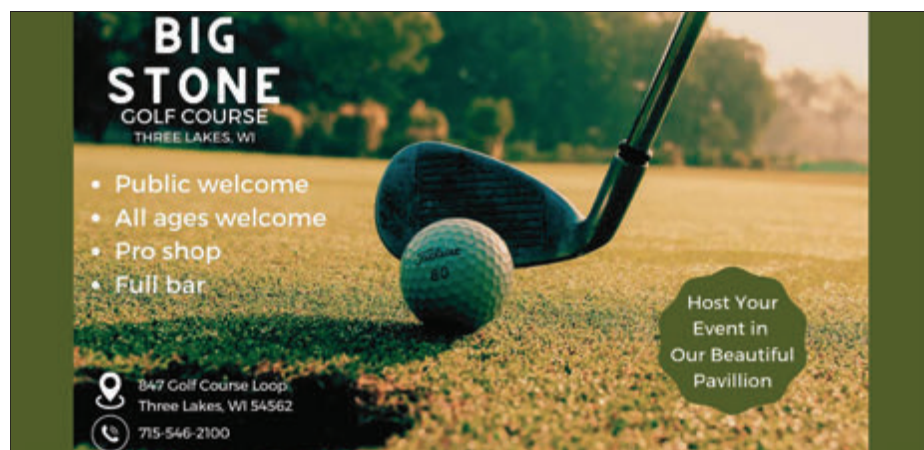
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455530

James Burhop



Three Lakes resident, Lieutenant Colonel James Burhop, joined the U.S. Army in 2018 as a 61J (General Surgeon) after retiring from a long term civilian surgical practice in Brookfield, WI.

He was commissioned by his daughter, Army Captain Rebecca Butler. He attended Direct Commission Course at Fort Sill, OK followed by Basic Officer Leadership Course at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, TX. He graduated from the Army Trauma Training course in Miami, FL in 2019.

He was then deployed to Afghanistan in 2020 in support of Operation Freedom's Sentinel. In 2021 he served in Landstuhl, Germany at the Landstuhl Regional Medical Center. He has also been mobilized to Kenya for Operation Justified Accord in 2023 and to Ghana for Operation Flintlock 24 and to Alaska for Operation Arctic Warrior in 2024.

He is currently the lead trauma surgeon for the 911th Forward Resuscitative Surgical Detachment.

458504

Thomas Hurtado



LCDR Thomas Hurtado is a Physician Assistant in the US. Navy. He has been stationed at Naval Station Great Lakes, Illinois; Marine Corps Base, Hawaii; Naval Hospital Bremerton, Washington; U.S. Naval Academy, Maryland; and is currently stationed at NAVSTA in Rota, Spain. He also served with a medical trauma unit tending to wounded warriors while in Afghanistan from 2011-2012. Tom received Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medals.

Tom's family has a strong tradition of military service. His grandfather, Thomas A. Thiele, served as a Seabee in the U.S. Navy, and his uncle, Arthur Thiele-Sardina, is a retired colonel in the U.S. Army.

Tom and his wife Jenny (née Sobocke) have three wonderful children - Leo (11 years old), Penny (9 years old) and Josephine (11 months old). Jenny's parents live in Eagle River.

459261



Rep. Rob Swearingen Assembly District 34 (R-Rhineland)



Thank you!

to the brave men and women of the 34th District who proudly serve!

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459261



A day of remembrance

BY REP. ROB SWEARINGEN

Today is a day steeped in patriotism, a moment to cherish, but above all, an occasion to honor the sacrifices of our fallen soldiers who have ensured the preservation of the freedoms bestowed upon us since our country's founding.

Memorial Day is a time for the country to come together and remember the heroes who protected our freedom and provided us with the possibility of living our lives with opportunity and hope.

Throughout our nation's history, Americans have answered the call of duty with courage and conviction. In the face of adversity, they stood firm, confronting the darkness of tyranny and oppression with unwavering resolve. From the beaches of Normandy to the jungles of Vietnam, from the deserts of Iraq to the mountains of Afghanistan, our soldiers have fought courageously to preserve the ideals

upon which our nation was founded.

But the legacy of our fallen heroes extends beyond the battlefield.

It lives on in the hearts and minds of those they left behind—families shattered by loss and communities forever changed by their absence.

On this solemn day, we stand in solidarity with them, offering our unwavering support and gratitude for their sacrifice.

The annual traditions on Memorial Day are drastically different from one family to the next; however, whether it is going to a parade, visiting a cemetery or memorial, or hosting a large family gathering, this day unites Americans and allows us to recognize a tradition we all have in common. It gives us an opportunity to pay our respects and reminds us of how grateful we are to have brave soldiers who place their lives on the line every day to protect our

families and freedom.

This day allows us to celebrate our triumphs across the world. We celebrate those who put an end to communism during the Cold War, silenced fascism in Japan and Germany and continue to fight terrorism today.

If it were not for our veterans and the United States military, the opportunities that we have as Americans on a daily basis might not be a reality today.

To our active-duty service members and veterans from Wisconsin and the North Woods, we stand with you in remembrance of your brothers and sisters who are no longer by your side. Their sacrifices will never be forgotten, and their legacy will continue to inspire generations to come. Furthermore, we offer our deepest appreciation for your selfless dedication and unwavering courage.

God bless America.



The presentation of colors at a Veteran's Day ceremony held at Northland Pines High School last November. —STAFF PHOTOS





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Memorial Day

BY STATE SEN. MARY FELZKOWSKI

This Memorial Day, as we gather with friends and family to celebrate the unofficial start of summer, let us all pause to reflect on the true meaning of this solemn holiday. Memorial Day is not a holiday of celebration, but a time of remembrance. It is a day to honor the brave men and women who have given their lives in service to our beautiful country. Their sacrifices form the foundation upon which our Republic stands.

From the battle of Prairie du Chien in the War of 1812 to the Wisconsinites who serve on the front lines of today's global conflicts, Wisconsin has played a proud role in our nation's military history. Thousands of our young men and women have stepped forward to serve, often at great personal cost. In nearly every city, town, and rural community across our state, you'll find the names of fallen

service members etched into memorials- stark reminders of the price others have paid for us to live in peace.

This Memorial Day, we should all honor their legacy with both words and actions. Many communities host Memorial Day ceremonies, and these are meaningful opportunities to expose our younger generations to the importance of honoring those who have served. This is also an apt time to discuss military history within our own families,

sharing this knowledge with younger generations. Passing this knowledge and legacy on to the next generations is crucial to appreciating and respecting our veterans and active-duty service members.

In the Legislature, we continuously honor those who have served our country. Whether it's expanding employment opportunities for former service members,

increasing tuition grant programs for veterans, or providing financial support for new projects to honor those who have served, we are always working to support and memorialize those who have kept our nation safe and secure.

This holiday is not about glorifying war, it's about honoring those who were lost to it. To the Gold Star Families across Wisconsin: we stand with

you and we will continue to honor the memory and sacrifice of your loved ones. Your strength and resilience embody the very best of our state and nation.

On this Memorial Day, let's renew our promise to remember our nation's heroes, not just once a year, but always. May God bless the families of the fallen, the communities that support them, and the United States of America.

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Memorial Day services are planned throughout the North Woods on Monday, May 26.

—STAFF PHOTO



Eagle River will again stage its annual Memorial Day program at 11 a.m. Monday, May 26, on the Vilas County Courthouse grounds. —STAFF PHOTOS

Honor Flights for veterans occur four times annually

The Never Forgotten Honor Flight hosts four one-day trips to Washington, D.C. each year for World War II, Korea and Vietnam veterans to honor their service.

Recently, Mission No. 51 departed on April 14, bringing over 100 veterans, many of whom served in Vietnam.

Mission No. 51 departed on May 19, and two flights will follow later in the fall.

The Never Forgotten Honor Flight is a Wausau-based volunteer organization that flies out of northcentral Wisconsin to Washington, D.C. to visit memorials honoring the veterans' service.

The organization is a part of the national Honor Flight Network, which connects veterans with regional "hubs" with opportunities to visit the memorials in Washington, D.C.

As of Dec. 31, 2023, the Honor Flight Network has flown 295,787

veterans, with 4,399 of them flying through the northcentral Wisconsin hub, Never Forgotten Honor Flight.

To be selected for a flight, veterans who served before May 5, 1975, must first apply through an application form or via online ([https:// neverforgottenhonorflight.com/application/](https://neverforgottenhonorflight.com/application/)). The flights are run during two seasons: spring and fall.

Veterans selected for the April and May honor flights will be notified in January and February, and those chosen for September and October flights will be notified in June and July by postcard.

Upon returning, family and friends are encouraged to honor the veterans with a "Welcome Home" celebration at the Central Wisconsin Airport in Mosinee. Family and friends must arrive at the airport between 8 - 9 p.m. on the day the veterans return. It is recommended to bring chairs to the "Welcome Home" celebration.



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Iron Mountain VA to host several celebrations to commemorate its 75th anniversary

The Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center (OGJVAMC) will celebrate its 75th anniversary throughout 2025. To mark this occasion, several events for veterans, employees, volunteers and retirees will be held.

"On behalf of Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center employees, it has been an honor and a privilege to serve Veterans for the past 75 years. We are grateful to our community partners, staff and volunteers for their continued support," Medical Center Director John P. Shealey said.

On March 14, 1948, construction began on 31.5 acres that had once been the site for a large sawmill and lumberyard. At a cost

of \$6.5 million, it was the largest building project ever to date in the Upper Peninsula. The six-story, 265-bed hospital with 360 staff was dedicated on March 5, 1950.

Today, OGJVAMC has 57 beds, employs approximately 830 people at its main campus and clinics, and provides primary, specialty and inpatient care to approximately 22,000 Veterans each year. The facility is the most rural VA in the nation, serving 24 counties across 25,864 square miles. OGJVAMC oversees eight Community-Based Outpatient Clinics located in Gladstone, Hancock, Ironwood, Manistique, Marquette, Menominee and Sault Ste. Marie,



Iron Mountain VA is celebrating its 75th anniversary throughout 2025.

Mich., and Rhinelander, WI.

Veterans and the public are encouraged to visit the Iron Mountain

VA Facebook page for upcoming event information. Retirees, volunteers and employees are invited to several

events throughout 2025 being promoted through the Oscar G. Johnson VA Employee Association Facebook page. For more

information, please contact Megan Barglund-Rodman, Public Affairs Specialist at 906-774-3300, ext. 32012.

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Volunteer writers tell stories for Wisconsin's WWII fallen

BY JEAN COOKLE
WISCONSIN WWII
PROJECT DIRECTOR,
STORIES BEHIND
THE STARS

During World War II, there were twenty-nine fallen service members from Vilas County. The day they died, their stories died too. For many, even the how, when and where they were killed was lost.

Now, a statewide writer's group headed by Jean Cookle is telling their stories. For the past three years, her volunteers with Stories Behind the Stars have been researching, writing, and posting stories of the 8,600 fallen from Wisconsin. These

memorial stories are posted on the veteran website Fold3.com. More than 2,300 of Wisconsin's WWII heroes have been remembered by these dedicated volunteer writers. Cookle hopes to double her group of volunteer writers and complete the project soon. Many of her volunteers have strong patriotic and family bonds.

Navy veteran Jeff Veesenmeyer joined Stories Behind the Stars after researching and writing about his own family member. "My Uncle Louis was killed by a kamikaze at Okinawa in 1945.

We were told he was buried at sea. Nobody in our family knew much

more about how he died."

Through research, Veesenmeyer was able to tell the story of a 95-minute air-sea battle at Okinawa. Destroyer USS Hadley nearly sank after being hit by two bombs and four kamikazes.

Thirty crewmembers were killed, and 151 were wounded. His Uncle Louis had been manning a quad 40mm gun. The nine-man gun crew continued firing at a kamikaze plane until it crashed into their mount. The gun and all the men were blown out to sea. No remains for Louis were ever found. The action report listed the nine men on Mount Forty-four as "Outstanding in performance of duty." Veesenmeyer posted the story on a Fold3.com memorial.

"Now my family finally knew the story. They thanked me," recalled Veesenmeyer. "I knew I wanted to honor other service men and women the same way. I've told over a hundred stories like this one. And I've been thanked by many of their family members."

One response to a Stories Behind the Stars story was "As my family's amateur genealogist, I was delighted to read about PFC Howard E. Penniston, Jr... These stories are to be treasured during our lifetimes so that people like PFC Howard E. Penniston, Jr. will never be forgotten."

This important project is part of a national non-profit organization called Stories Behind the Stars. The goal is to tell the stories of all 421,000 Americans who died during WWII. Their memorial stories are posted on Fold3.com and will be linked to a phone



This project is a part of a national non-profit organization called Stories Behind the Stars, with the goal to tell the stories of all 421,000 Americans who died during WWII.

app. Grave site visitors will be able to scan the name on a headstone and read the fallen's story on their phone.

Jean Cookle is the Wisconsin WWII Fallen Project Director. She is looking for more help. Her goal is to complete the remaining 6,300 fallen from Wisconsin. But she needs more volunteers.

"Eighty years ago, thousands of brave Wisconsin sons and daughters fought and

died for our freedom. Telling stories for those who never could is very powerful," says Cookle. "They deserve to be remembered."

Cookle points out that volunteering is fairly easy. Writers work from home at their own pace.

This could also be a group project for a history class, a historical society or genealogy project.

A bonus benefit is the free access to

research sites, Fold3.com, Ancestry.com and Newspapers.com. This three-site package would normally cost \$479.00 per year. But, it is free to members who can also use it to search for data on their own families.

For more information Jean Cookle can be contacted at jean@storiesbehindthestars.org or visit the project website at <https://www.storiesbehindthestars.org>.



The WWII Fallen Project is seeking more volunteers, with the goal of telling the stories of the 6,300 Wisconsin soldiers who lost their lives during WWII.
—STAFF PHOTOS



Camp American Legion in Lake Tomahawk provides a paradise retreat for veterans and military, as well as their immediate families.

—Contributed Photos

Camp American Legion provides paradise retreat for veterans and military

BY JACKI GOEBEL
CORRESPONDENT

On the shores of Big Carr Lake in Lake Tomahawk lies a secret paradise. Camp American Legion (CAL) is a healing retreat built in 1925, open to Wisconsin veterans and active military and their immediate families.

The camp was designed for families to come together in a safe and comfortable environment for camaraderie, support, sharing and learning. Programs throughout the year offer different experiences, including sports tournaments, legion chaplains retreat, Healing Warrior Hearts and Camp Serenity.

The camp offers support groups and activities, but military families can stay at the resort just as a getaway. Applications can be filled out and submitted to reserve a cabin. American Legion posts throughout Wisconsin sponsor the cabins.

Most cabins are complete with kitchens and are on the lake. The camp offers paddleboats, pontoons, games and other recreations.

Veterans and military personnel find it easy to connect with each other because they often have shared life experiences. CAL is more than just a resort or fishing camp, although the point of the camp is to enjoy the outdoors and commune with nature. Around 65 guests visit the camp each week for 21 weeks starting in May.

Jim Klement, camp director, stated, "Our mission statement is helping to heal those who have served, continue to serve and their families through the Wisconsin Northwoods experience, which, when you look around, that's exactly what we do."

Qualifications to stay at the camp are that you must be a Wisconsin resident, honorably discharged or active duty;

their spouse or caregiver, and dependent-aged children, or immediate family of a fallen member. A schedule of programs available and more information on staying at this peaceful wonderland can be found at wilegion.org/camp-american-legion-2.

This year, CAL will be celebrating 100 years. An anniversary event welcoming all will be held Saturday, June 14, beginning at 11 a.m. Food, drink, live entertainment and tours will be part of the festivities.

"We are trying to recreate what happened exactly 100 years prior. We are working with the Lac du Flambeau Tribe to have them come up and bless camp like they did 100 years ago," said Klement. "Then we're going to have live entertainment, food and drinks are provided. It's going to be a great time. We're expecting quite a few people, and the more the merrier."

Although there are staff at CAL, the camp relies on volunteers and donations to continue. Veterans and their families are invited to

the camp at no cost to them. To find out what volunteer opportunities are upcoming, or to donate, email caloffice@wilegion.org or follow

their Facebook page by searching Camp American Legion.

The camp is located at 8529 CTH D in Lake Tomahawk.



Camp American Legion will be celebrating 100 years, with an anniversary event planned for Saturday, June 14 starting at 11 a.m.

Veterans Administration offers revised VA Caregiver Program

The Veterans Administration (VA) offers a VA Caregivers program that provides compensation, support and other benefits to people who support the health and wellness of a service-disabled veteran or a member of the Armed Forces.

Previously, a veteran had to be service-connected for a serious injury or illness incurred or aggravated in the line of duty on or after September 11, 2001, or on or before May 7, 1975.

As of October 1, 2022, this program expanded to include caregivers of eligible veterans of all eras.

According to the VA, to be eligible, the veterans being cared for must have a single or combined service-connected disability rating of 70% or more.

Veterans who have a single or combined 60% disability rating and are receiving Individual Unemployability benefits are not eligible, the agency said.

Veterans must also be in need of in-person care services for a minimum of six continuous months based on either an inability to perform an Activity of Daily Living (ADL) or they must require supervision, protection or instruction, which means a functional impairment that directly impacts their ability to maintain their safety on a daily basis.

To be eligible to be a veteran's caregiver, a person must:

- Be at least 18 years old
- A family member or someone who lives with the veteran full-time or will do so if designated as his/her caregiver

- Be initially assessed by the VA as being able to complete caregiver education and training
- Complete caregiver training and demonstrate the ability to carry out the specific personal care services, core competencies, and additional care requirements.

There are also plenty of benefits for approved caregivers.

They include:

- Education and training
- Access to health insurance, if caregiver is uninsured
- Mental health counseling
- Financial stipend
- Respite care
- Wellness contact
- Travel and per diem

compensation when traveling for veteran's VA health care appointments.

To apply for the VA Caregiver Program, download and fill out VA Form 10-10CG and mail it to Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center, Attn: Caregiver Program, 325 East H Street, Iron Mountain, MI, 49801.

Or people can go to <https://www.va.gov/family-member-benefits/apply-for-caregiver-assistance-form-10-10cg/> introduction and apply online; or call the office and they can assist in the online application.

For more information about the program, go to <https://www.caregiver.va.gov/> or contact our office.

Tammy Javenkoski, County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO), and Jason Dailey, Assistant CVSO, can be reached at (715) 369-6127 or cvso@oneidacountywi.gov.

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