

Strings of Healing: Music Soothes the Soul

Guitars for Vets Chapter Opens at VFW National Home.

With many vets working to overcome PTSD and trauma they endure on a regular basis, Executive Director and veteran, Michael Wilson, opened a new chapter of Guitars for Vets at the VFW National Home this year.

Guitars for Vets was started in 2007 by a guitar teacher and Vietnam vet who found solace and restoration from music. This National Home chapter is now one of 160 nationwide.

Michael said, "It's clinically proven that music and the art of making music is therapeutic." In fact, he credits music as one of the primary agents that brought him calm and peace.

While Guitars for Vets provides the loaner guitars, the National Home recruits its own volunteer instructors. So, Michael and fellow veteran, Bob Hout and his son Dakota Wilson, provide guitar lessons.

"It's my honor," Hout says. "Playing music gives me a sense of calmness. And to me, I believe that every veteran would benefit from a sense of calmness."

Dakota Wilson, member of the rock band After Midnight, plays multiple



Residents and their children receive free music lessons and a loaner guitar.

instruments. He explained, "If you feel lost or confused, play the guitar. It's soothing, and when people get out of the military they may need something to aim toward and that something can be playing the guitar."

This new program offers ten lessons which culminate in a performance. Each veteran student who completes the program receives a new acoustic guitar from the organization.

So far this year, six veterans at the National Home have taken advantage of the program. "I have seen the veteran that I'm teaching have a smile of contentment and accomplishment when he plays his guitar and recognizes what he's playing," remarked Hout.

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Did you know...

The official flower of the military child is the dandelion. Just like the dandelion, military children are able to put down roots almost anywhere!

THE HOME FRONT

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Month of the Military Child Carnival

On Friday, April 14, the National Home held a spectacular **Month of the Military Child Carnival**. Because more than 1.6 million children sacrifice daily while their parents serve our country, we celebrated our littlest heroes. Held in conjunction with the Michigan National Guard Child and Youth Programs, the carnival was open to any military child who wanted to attend.



Peer to Peer: Kyle Tiffany Serves Fellow Vets

"We speak the same language, and civilians just don't understand it," says a veteran resident currently living at the VFW National Home.

"The gamut of emotions is hard to express unless it's to a fellow veteran," says the former Navy BM2.

She's talking about her interaction with Kyle Tiffany, the VFW National Home's Certified Peer Support Specialist who works with veteran residents to help them receive the services and benefits they're entitled to as well as any needed counseling.

"I'm the buffer between the veteran and the clinicians," says Kyle who just joined the VFW National Home Veteran and Family Resource Center staff in November, but has been working as a Michigan certified peer support specialist for the past five years.

"Some people come back from deployment and don't know how to deal with not having military in their life anymore. They served and can't serve anymore because they are injured in one way or another and no longer meet military standards. They're experiencing loss and they are not used to interacting with civilians," he adds.

He's Been There

Kyle advises from personal experience. He served eight plus years in the Army with involvement in multiple country and conflicts, as well as deployments in Afghanistan and Iraq.

"When I left the military, it was important to talk with someone when I was feeling anxious or



Kyle Tiffany serves the National Home residents as a certified peer support specialist.

depressed. Now I'm in a position to help those who are experiencing what I experienced. There's always a ladder out there and they may need help climbing it," he expressed.

Kyle meets with veteran residents one-on-one, but also offers peer group meetings where he facilitates a small group of three to five veterans to discuss VA benefits, past history, and how they are transitioning to civilian life.

Serves As a Bridge to VA Services

For those suffering from either physical or mental war wounds, Kyle helps them establish a "service connection" which enables them to receive a primary care doctor through the VA, and additional services depending on the severity of the injury.

"If they can't get a hold of a doctor, I reach out and try to get them connected. If a caseworker can't get a hold of a veteran, I reach out to that veteran," says Kyle who makes initial contact with VFW National Home veterans a few days after they move in and are settled on campus.

Kyle says at first they hesitate to talk with him and once they do, say "I wish you had been here months ago."

One veteran whose been at the VFW National Home over a year says of Kyle, "He helps with so many issues. He's a wealth of knowledge. He's not just a one hit wonder. He's a one-man band."



DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Donor Spotlight: Michael and Fran McGrath

Almost fifteen years ago, Michael McGrath visited the VFW National Home on the annual Illinois VFW State Day for the first time. As he toured the homes and talked to the residents during his initial visit, he observed that the campus was quite beautiful.

Michael explained, "We met the Poppy Child and were surprised to learn that the National Home had been in operation since 1925 with great resources and programs for military and veteran families with children." Then when he toured the campus museum, he thought, "There's something really special about this place!"

Michael served as a platoon leader in The First Cavalry Division in Vietnam where he personally witnessed how war takes a terrible toll on military families and their children. During the time of his initial visit, our country was still involved in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which often led to service members serving multiple tours of duty overseas.

The expression "Freedom isn't Free" really hit home as he strolled through

the National Home campus. "I felt that the National Home was doing a great job in helping those families to get back on their feet," Michael remarked.

For almost 100 years, the National Home has worked to raise public awareness about the needs of our country's veterans. As a past National Home trustee and board president, Michael said, "The National Home continues to do a great job both for the residents and on the Helpline.

"Our military continues to guard the gates of freedom around the world for us, and I couldn't think of a more important cause than the National Home." The tireless efforts of VFW and Auxiliary members around the country allow the National Home to provide excellent care for our veterans and their families.

National Home Fundraisers

As Illinois National Home Program Chairman for the last several years, Michael recognizes and thanks the VFW Department of Illinois and Auxiliary for their great support, especially two Illinois Posts in



Michael and Fran McGrath have been faithful supporters of the National Home.

particular. Post 805 in O'Fallon and Post 3873 in Naperville have both conducted successful family-friendly fun-runs to benefit the National Home. While the runs are only .1K in length, they go a long way toward raising both awareness and funding for the National Home. Because these events bring Post and Auxiliary members and their families together for fun and friendship, they are well-received in their communities.

Interested in fundraising for current needs at the National Home? Reach Development Director, Sue Alverson, at salverson@vfwnationalhome.org or 517-663-7983. Your support is appreciated!



Where should we shine the Spotlight next?

If you would like to nominate another member of our community – or volunteer yourself – for a future Donor Spotlight, please contact Nancy Archambeau at 866-483-9642, or by e-mail to: narchambeau@vfwnationalhome.org.

DO YOU KNOW OF A FAMILY IN NEED?

The VFW National Home offers **families of veterans, actively serving military and members or relatives of the VFW and its Auxiliary** opportunities for growth and development in a nurturing, residential community.

The National Home focuses its efforts on providing long-term, comprehensive assistance to parent(s)/guardian(s) with dependent children who are facing hardships that jeopardize their family's stability and independence.

Learn more:

- by phone at our Helpline — 800-313-4200 (Mon-Fri. 8:00 AM-4:30 PM ET)
- by email at help@vfwnationalhome.org
- online at www.vfwnationalhome.org/get-help



The National Home staff dressed in purple to show their appreciation for all military kids on April 15.

Purple Up!

National Home staff “purpled up” for Military Kids on April 15. Purple Up Day is a day to commemorate the children of military families by showing our support and gratitude for their courage and bravery. We wear purple to represent a combination of the colors of all the branches of the U.S. Armed Forces.



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Did you know we carry men’s and women’s apparel in our online store?

To shop today, visit:

<https://vfnationalhome.org/shop>

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FREEWILL

Have an IRA, 401(k), life insurance policy, or any other non-probate assets?

The average middle-aged adult has over five major non-probate assets, and most Americans have not properly designated beneficiaries for one or more of them. If neglected, the consequences can be both serious and expensive. In the spirit of providing services and resources to help our entire community achieve their personal and family goals, we’ve partnered with FreeWill: a free estate planning tool.

FreeWill helps you name your beneficiaries for all of these assets. It also provides easy-to-follow instructions on how to update the institutions where your non-probate assets are held if you need to set or change designations from time to time.

Visit FreeWill.com/Beneficiaries/VFVNationalHome to make your plans today.

Become a Home Front Hero



Home Front Heroes take a leading role in our mission by pledging to make a recurring monthly gift to the VFW National Home.

As a Home Front Hero, you’ll be on the front lines to help ensure the strength and longevity of all our programs and services. Even better, you can:

- Determine the amount of your monthly donation
- Increase, decrease or suspend your gift at any time
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Why wait? Become a **Home Front Hero today** by checking the monthly gift option on the enclosed reply form, calling (866) 483-9642, or visiting www.vfnationalhome.org/hero

Thank you for your support.



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