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John A. Scocos Column: Veterans Day – Honoring Veterans through Deeds Big and Small

One last wish – not all of us get a chance at one. The opportunity to do or see something we love before we pass is never a guarantee, but for one Vietnam-era Navy veteran at our Veterans Home at King a particular wish did come true. Fishing was his passion and the spring-fed waters of King's Chain 'o Lakes was where he dropped his lines. The abundant panfish in the clear waters made angling easy and enjoyable along the Marden Center shoreline. So when it came time for this veteran to be admitted to hospice care his thoughts naturally turned to fishing one last time in his beloved lake. One of his nurses went beyond her typical duties to ensure his wish was realized. Not only did she take him down to the lake, she helped retrieve the fish and clean them so that he could share them with his fellow members.

It is moments like this that separate what we do at our state Veterans Homes from our private sector counterparts. Our Veterans Homes are special places that provide care for veterans that goes beyond mere health care to include an environment that speaks to the veterans experience.

Long-term care is one of the things we do best at the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs. Our three homes provide outstanding care to veterans throughout the state, with facilities in Chippewa Falls, King and Union Grove, serving more than 1,000 veterans from World War II to the present day. We are honored to care for these heroes when they most need our help, whether it is assisted living or skilled nursing care.

Our staff is some of the best and goes above and beyond what is typical in most nursing home settings. We have received hundreds of letters of thanks from veterans and their families that show what a positive impact we have our veterans when they are at the stage of their lives when they need us the most. Sometimes it is something as simple as one of our staff fixing the brakes on a veteran's wheelchair to keep the veteran mobile and active.

This Veterans Day I not only want to thank the men and women of Wisconsin who have served our nation in the Armed Forces, but I want to remind them the WDVA is here to help them after their military service. Our young men and women sign up to serve our great nation out of a sense of duty and with the understanding the country that often asks much of them also upholds its commitment to care for them after their service, even if it is something as simple as fishing.

The State of Wisconsin is committed to providing veterans with the very best programs, benefits and services as they return home. Since the department's inception 70 years ago as World War II was drawing to a close, we have become one of the most veteran-friendly states in the nation – allowing our veterans to attain the goals they set for themselves upon leaving the military.

We honor our veterans not only with the tangible things we provide in the way of benefits and services, but also in the personal level of care we show to each veteran who calls upon us for help or makes one of our Wisconsin Veterans Homes their "home." That is who we are and that is what makes Wisconsin great.

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(John A. Scocos is the Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs. He is an Iraq War veteran.)