

# NEWSLETTER

Honor, Educate and Heal... A Place for All

thehighground.us — 715.743.4224



Roundtable Interview attendees: Standing (l-r) are Matt Stevenson, Don Quicker and Ric Kesler; Sitting (l-r) are Randy Meyer and Jerry Simon

## From Bike-A-Thon To Heroes Ride

### 40 Years of Bicycling – The Highground History Roundtable Interview

In 1985, Vietnam Veteran and Founder of The Highground Tom Miller, rode his Trek bicycle 1,244 miles on a tour throughout Wisconsin. The number of miles was significant as it's the number of Wisconsinites who never returned from serving in the Vietnam War. There were several notable reasons for Tom's ride, the first "Bike-A-Thon" for the Wisconsin Vietnam Veterans Memorial Project, Inc. (the WVVMP – later known as The Highground). Foremost was to raise awareness and prompt funding for the WVVMP and its mission to establish a prominent, meaningful and accessible tribute to those who served in the Vietnam War. Additionally, this was Tom's time to pay personal tribute to his friend, Jack Swender, who died in Tom's arms during a firefight in Vietnam. Tom's memory of Jack and thoughts of all who perished in the Vietnam War were the impetus and driving force behind his efforts and the efforts of all who joined as supporters, board members and funders of the WVVMP in those early, difficult and rewarding years.

What started with Tom and a small group of fellow riders in 1985 has grown through 40 continuous years of an annual multi-day bicycle event to the "Heroes Ride" of today, The Highground's largest annual fundraiser. The bicycle tour has been organized and completed by groups of volunteer bicyclists and their support personnel. To honor this achievement, and as a chapter in The Highground's ongoing History Project, The Highground Museum sent invitations out to those who could be located who were instrumental in the formation and early years of the bicycle tour (**cont. on pg 7**)



## August 4 Will Be a Big Day to Reconnect

**On August 4, The Highground will host the Vietnam Veterans Reunion AND the 40th Annual Heroes Ride Bike Tour!**

Vietnam Veterans and a guest can RSVP for an immersive reunion with brethren Vietnam Veterans (includes lunch). And while you're here, help us welcome the unsung heroes of the Wisconsin Vietnam Veterans Memorial Project as they cycle in for year 40 supporting the mission!

**More about the reunion – page 5**

**More about the ride – page 11**

## What's inside

### 06. Featured Veteran

From the ashes..."Phoenix was the light that guided me."

### 08. New Museum Exhibit

The Museum is working on a new exhibit titled "Back in the World"

### 10. Friends Dinner

30 first-time contributors and long-time supporters gathered

# Honor Stones, Memorials & Honorariums

## Honoring Your Special Veteran or Service-Hearted Loved One and Even Their Beloved Patriot K9

Our scheduled stone ceremonies offer guests an opportunity to share their appreciation for a special Veteran or service-hearted loved one in their life and often inspire never-before-told stories to be shared. Consider gifting an Honor Stone and gather your friends and family for one of the available 2024 ceremony dates listed below.

**July 13: 11am** Persian Gulf Honor Stones

**July 13: 2pm** Legacy Honor Stones

**August 3: 11am and 2pm** Legacy Honor Stones

**September 21: 11am** Legacy & Military Working Dog Honor Stones

**September 21: 2pm** Legacy Honor Stones

**October 5: 11am and 2pm** Legacy Honor Stones

For more information about the Honor Stones, please email Bonnie at [donations@thehighground.org](mailto:donations@thehighground.org), call 715-743-4224 or visit [thehighground.us/honor-stones](http://thehighground.us/honor-stones)

All Honor Stone applications are available on our website at [thehighground.us/honor-stones](http://thehighground.us/honor-stones)

Apply online or print the application and mail it to:  
The Highground, PO Box 457, Neillsville, WI 54456



*Korean Honor Stone Update: Thank you for your patience! We are excited to announce we have expanded the opportunity to place Korean Honor Stones along the wall of the Korean Tribute. Beginning August 2024, we will be accepting applications for stones for your honored Korean War Veteran to be placed in June 2025.*

### IN MEMORY OF

Arnold Becker

Bob Berglund

Randy Hans

Gene Johnson

Deb Klabon

Thomas J Lawrence

Jehu Malone

Larry Matousek

Lois Maurer

David Meyer

Judith Mulroy

Donald Robert Pflughoeft

Shirley Rauscher

James Seufzer

Mike Smock

Gerold Speicher Scott

David Stoltman

Stephan F. Wagner

Ellis Walker

James A. Wilsmann

### IN HONOR OF

Dave Kemp



Confidential chat at [VeteransCrisisLine.net](http://VeteransCrisisLine.net)  
or text to **838255**

#### Vet Center – La Crosse

910 2nd Avenue  
Onalaska, WI 54650  
Direct line:  
608-782-4403

#### Vet Center – Madison

1291 North Sherman Ave  
Madison, WI 53704  
Direct line:  
608-264-5342

#### Vet Center – Green Bay

1600 South Ashland Avenue  
Green Bay, WI 54304  
Direct line:  
920-435-5650

#### Vet Center – Milwaukee

7910 North 76th Street, Ste 100  
Milwaukee, WI 53223-3916  
Direct line:  
414-902-5561

# Event Highlights



## ATV and Quilt Raffle Tickets

Exciting news – Tickets are here for our annual ATV and Quilt Raffles! Tickets are available at the Gift Shop. You can also call 715-743-4224 or email [store@thehighground.org](mailto:store@thehighground.org)

### ATV TICKETS

\$20 each or 3 for \$50

### QUILT RAFFLE TICKETS

\$5 each, 5 for \$20  
or 15 for \$40.

Get yours today!

## 2024 Event Calendar

**NOTE:** All Honor Stone Ceremony dates are firm; the Male & Female Veterans Retreats and Vets & Guitars dates are TBD; the PTSD Peer Support Group will meet monthly. All other event and exhibit dates are subject to change depending on construction.

### All Events

- Jan 28** 11th Annual Winter Bowl (Eau Claire)
- Feb 2-4** Winter Veterans Retreat
- May 8-11** Spring Work Week
- May 11** Volunteer Appreciation Lunch
- May 14** Hmong-Lao Veterans Day Ceremony
- May 18** Legacy Stone Ceremonies; Spring Bake Sale
- May 27** 14th Annual Honor Ride; Memorial Day Ceremony
- June 15** Legacy Stone Ceremonies
- June 29** Freedom Celebration Fireworks at Dusk
- July 13** Persian Gulf and Legacy Stone Ceremonies
- Aug 2-4** 40th Annual Heroes Ride Bike Tour (Ceremony Aug 4)
- Aug 3** Legacy Stone Ceremonies
- Aug 4** Vietnam Veterans Reunion
- Aug 17** 24th Annual Ride to Remember® Motorcycle Ride & Rally
- Sept 21** Legacy Stone Ceremonies; Military Working Dog Ceremony
- Sept 21** Day of Peace Community Event
- Oct 1-4** Education Days
- Oct 5** Legacy Stone Ceremonies; Fall Bake Sale
- Oct 11-12** Fall Cleanup Days
- Oct 18-20** Couples Retreat
- Nov 11** Veterans Day Ceremony; Honor Our Veterans Raffle Drawing
- Nov 4-Mar 31, 2025** Holiday Lights "Honor Stars" on the Plaza
- Nov 28** Season of Giving – Pledge your support for The Highground
- Dec 3** Patriotic Quilt Raffle Drawing (quilts displayed prior to drawing)

### Museum Exhibits

**Sept 14-Jan 31, 2025** "Back in the World" Exhibit of Veterans expressive art—poetry, writing, music traditional art formats and more

**NOTE:** Due to ongoing construction and potential closures, additional exhibit details are not available. We invite you to follow us on Facebook for current updates.

Visit [thehighground.us](http://thehighground.us)  
for more information

# Mission Recap

## "Vets & Guitars" & Ukuleles



2023 Vets & Guitars

At the time of this writing, we are in the middle of the Spring Vets & Guitars course! The Summer Vets & Guitars will be "Vets & Ukuleles" with beginning and continuing ukulele classes. Guitar classes will be back this fall. **The Summer Ukulele Courses start on Thursday, June 6.**

Music is a powerful tool in bringing joy to life. Peace and mental focus can be found almost immediately when we listen to and create music. The Highground's Vets & Guitars & Ukuleles course is a fun way for Veterans to learn a lifelong artistic skill in the company of fellow Veterans. All courses are instructed by local award-winning musician and instructor, Victoria Shoemaker. Victoria has partnered with The Highground to develop this music program for Veterans. *More information about Victoria and her music performances with Peter Phippen in their band, Virginia Steel, can be found at [virginiasteelmusic.com](http://virginiasteelmusic.com).* These 10-session courses

are free for Veterans. Thanks to generous donors, The Highground is able to supply the instruction, instruments and basic supplies needed for the courses. **The 2024 program sponsors are the WDVA (grant funding) and Joyce Bates. It takes \$150 to sponsor a Veteran for the program. If you would like to help a Veteran attend the program through a sponsorship, or for more general information, please email Theresa at [museum@thehighground.org](mailto:museum@thehighground.org) or call 715-743-4224.**

## The Annual Male Veterans Retreat

**We are thrilled to announce the Male Veterans Retreat, happening from Friday, September 27 – Sunday, September 29.** Step away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life and immerse yourself in a weekend dedicated to mindfulness, meditation and meaningful connections. During the retreat, we'll have activities which could include archery or equestrian therapy. Strengthen bonds and forge new friendships through team-building activities designed to promote collaboration, communication and trust among Veterans. Relax and unwind with delicious, nourishing meals and comfortable lodging accommodations provided throughout the retreat. Leave the logistics to us and fully immerse yourself in the experience. Please note that transportation to and from the retreat is upon the individual. Secure your place at this transformative retreat by booking today. A \$30 deposit is required to confirm your reservation with the deposit refunded upon arrival. Space is limited, so don't miss out on this incredible opportunity. Join us as we come together for a weekend of reflection, healing and renewal. We can't wait to welcome you to the Male Veterans Retreat at the Highground in Neillsville, Wisconsin. **Thank you to sponsors Harold Schmitt, Dreier-Bushee-Vanderboom American Legion Post 156, the National Society of the Dames of the Court of Honor and donations in memory of Deb Klabon.**

## Education Days – Two Events Designed for Different Ages

### 5th Grade Event: October 1 & 2 – Choose AM or PM session & day

Students tour the Park with a knowledgeable guide discovering the history and unexpected stories of The Highground, the Tributes and Veterans military service. A Flag Retirement Ceremony, conducted by the Ah-Da-Wah-Gam chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, will be held each day at midday (in the overlap of AM & PM sessions). Teachers, choose the half-day session that works for you! *Note: Picnic tables are available at both events for schools wishing to eat lunch onsite.*

### 9th - 12th Grade Event: October 3 & 4 – Full Day

This event will have several educational presentations on the countries and people involved in 20th and 21st century conflicts.

**To book a tour for your students, please contact Theresa by email to [museum@thehighground.org](mailto:museum@thehighground.org) or call 715-743-4224. A donation of \$3.00 per person is requested but not mandatory.**

**Thank you to the Optimist Club of Neillsville for sponsoring this event!**



2023 Education Days

# Mission Recap

## "Operation Re-Connect" Military Couples Retreat

Couples facing the unique challenges of military service, the Operation Re-Connect Weekend Retreat is waiting for you.

For the Veteran's partner who experienced active duty and deployments with their Veteran, they were a part of the process and saw the changes as they happened. For the couple who met after active duty or the deployments, the partner is sometimes oblivious to the process, the effects and even where to turn until the day their Veteran is triggered and their whole world changes in a minute. The availability of free Veteran couple retreats are on the rise, but still many people shy away from them because they are worried about self-disclosure or embarrassment in a group setting. Operation Re-Connect is structured to provide a calm and supportive environment where couples feel safe to share their experiences and know that they are not alone in the challenges they face. Through fun, interactive and insightful activities, couples can strengthen their connection and understanding of one another and their relationship.

**Limited space available. Registration and a \$50 refunded registration fee is required (registration fee is refunded upon your arrival) Lodging, meals, and workshop supplies are provided for registered couples. Transportation to/from the retreat is not provided. For more information, contact Bonnie at 715-743-4224 or email [donations@thehighground.org](mailto:donations@thehighground.org)**

## VIETNAM VETERANS REUNION - 4 AUGUST 2024

The Highground will host the annual Vietnam Veterans Reunion on Sunday, August 4, combining Vietnam exhibits, Huey helicopter displays and an opportunity to meet fellow Vietnam Veterans.

### ITINERARY:

**10AM (est)**

UH-1H Huey landing (weather permitting)  
Sponsors needed for landing & lunch

**10AM-2PM**

"Vietnam Experience" Exhibit  
Carl Bogar Jr with Historic Military Impressions

**10AM-2PM**

Static Display UH-1H Huey Helicopter – Courtesy of VVA 331

**11AM-1PM**

Lunch will be free to Vietnam Veterans who RSVP before July 31. Veterans can include one guest. To RSVP, please email Theresa at [museum@thehighground.org](mailto:museum@thehighground.org) or by calling 715-743-4224.

**1PM**

Author Doug Bradley  
*We Gotta Get Out of This Place: The Soundtrack of the Vietnam War, named the Best Music Book of 2015 by Rolling Stone Magazine*

If you would like to be a sponsor, or for more information, email Theresa at [museum@thehighground.org](mailto:museum@thehighground.org) or call 715-743-4224.

### The Highground Welcomes Doug Bradley, Author, Educator and Vietnam Veteran



Doug is an author, educator and Vietnam Veteran from Madison, Wisconsin. Doug is the author of three books grounded in the Vietnam experience, including *DEROS Vietnam: Dispatches from the Air-Conditioned Jungle*, *Who'll Stop the Rain: Respect, Remembrance and Reconciliation in Post-Vietnam America*, and co-author of *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: The Soundtrack of the Vietnam War*, named the Best Music Book of 2015 by Rolling Stone magazine.



After graduation from college in 1969, Doug was drafted into the U. S. Army in March 1970. He served at the Army's Hometown News Center in Kansas City, Missouri, and as a combat correspondent with U. S. Army Republic of Vietnam headquarters at Long Binh, South Vietnam, from November 1970-November 1971.

**HO-CHUNK GAMING**  
BLACK RIVER FALLS

**THANK YOU** to the sponsors ( as of May 23 ) of the reunion:  
Ho-Chunk Gaming Black River Falls, Central Wisconsin Broadcasting, Gary Koenigs, Ardell & Julie Schmidt, Brown's Bar, Thrivent and Patrick & Sharon Schaefer

# Phoenix's Legacy



*JT and Phoenix*

## JT picked Phoenix out of a litter of fluffy lab pups

After just under 10 years in the Army, JT's Soldier to Civilian transition proved to be one of the toughest battles in his life. There was no connection or purpose and JT found himself longing for the camaraderie of his brothers. He was diagnosed with severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) a long year after being medically discharged from the Army.

None of the treatment options seemed to work for JT and he began isolating himself more and spiraling into darkness. His psychologist recommended a service dog. Having grown up around dogs, the idea was appealing and before long, JT was paired with Phoenix.

**Phoenix: a mythical creature that obtains new life, rising from the ashes of its older self.**

JT picked Phoenix out of a litter of fluffy lab pups. A friend of JT's, who had served as a military dog handler, trained Phoenix and in late 2012, Phoenix became JT's service dog. With his "beautiful, big, black lab" at his side, JT continued to struggle each day with his PTSD and unabating physical pain from past injuries. Seeking an end to the physical and emotional pain, JT developed a "powerful opiate-use disorder". The FBI would be too late in arresting and charging his prescribing physician for illegal prescribing practices that led to several fatalities.

Due to his opioid addiction, JT lost all he had and became homeless. Throughout this despondency, Phoenix was right by his side. "He never judged me. He was the only brightness in my life at the time...no matter if he was sleeping on the bare ground, hadn't eaten recently or it was so cold at night that we both relied on each other for warmth."

The darkness was overtaking JT's life. Where he was once a member of an elite reconnaissance platoon and had a constant high operating tempo, the darkness was now consuming him. Just a few cuts to test the threshold led to cutting until his life flowed from both forearms. As JT waited for the end to take him quietly, Phoenix, alerted to his stress, nudged his way between JT's legs and gentle laid his head in JT's lap letting him know he wasn't alone.

From the ashes..."Phoenix's actions woke my warrior's spirit. I started my climb out of the darkness and Phoenix was the light that guided me." JT spent the next 2 years rehabilitating his soul with the ever-faithful Phoenix by his side.

Thanksgiving of 2019, JT started noticing something was off with his companion. After several veterinarian visits and tests, Phoenix's symptoms were getting worse, and they had no answers. He was off balance and dragging his back left paw. JT took him to a veterinary neurologist who recommended an MRI. That MRI was to take only 60 minutes but ended up taking three long hours.

On December 31, 2019, Phoenix was diagnosed with a tumor at the base of his brain on his spinal cord. Phoenix was JT's lifeline, his light in the darkness, his soulmate. There wasn't anything JT wouldn't do to save his life. The only option to combat the tumor was radiation therapy. JT had spent everything he had on the MRI and other vet bills. Desperately and relentlessly, JT sought financial assistance from over 50 organizations to no avail.

JT was willing to give up all his possessions and he continued working to help pay for the ongoing radiation therapy. Phoenix could no longer go to work with JT and he spent his days in the country with a family member.

Although Phoenix's health was deteriorating more each day and it was difficult for him to get around, he loved being out in the woods. Phoenix "never let his illness slow him down." JT was met each evening by a tail wagging, happy Phoenix. "I couldn't stop fighting for him, he was too special of an animal to me. He was my warrior spirit and so I fought on. Even when everyone else around me wanted me to give in and accept defeat, I fought on. I was never going to surrender, how could I? Phoenix had saved my life multiple times. There was no way I would stop short of doing everything I could for him. If it meant giving up everything I had and would ever have in the future I was prepared to do it."

One day, Sally Williams reached out to JT. She was with a small group from New Jersey called The Brodie Fund that helped fund lifesaving cancer treatments for pet owners. Sally and the Board of Directors were so moved by Phoenix's story that they contacted another organization, Sidewalk Angels, and together they helped fund Phoenix's therapy.

Sadly, Phoenix's fight for life was met with complications and on February 16, 2020, JT lost his life companion, his savior. This story of loyalty, determination, and love inspired the formation of The Brodie's Phoenix Fund whose mission is to offer funding for lifesaving and life-extending treatments to Veteran's pets fighting cancer. Out of the ashes once more, JT called upon the loyalty and determination Phoenix had shown him to become a Certified Recovery Coach and Peer Specialist. JT was involved in helping to create and implement a paraprofessional Veterans program providing psychotherapy for Veterans suffering from substance abuse and mental health disorders.

Phoenix continues to keep JT's warrior spirit alive and fighting on. "Because one never knows when even the simplest, smallest gesture, like a dog laying his head in his handler's lap, could save another person's life."

**JT will be honoring Phoenix with a Military Working Dog Stone at The Highground on September 21, 2024 for his service to his Veteran. Thank you Phoenix, for keeping the watch.**

# BAT Roundtable

(cont. from page 1)

to take part in a roundtable recorded interview. Unfortunately, several founding members of the Bike-A-Thon are no longer with us including Howard Sherpe, Al Jenkins, Ted Fetting, and many past leaders and riders.

This group interview took place on Saturday, April 13. The roundtable group included: Randy Meyer (former leader of the Western Route and long-time rider), Jerry Simon (a leader of the Western Route and 39-year rider), Don Quicker (original and current Board member as well as The Highground Treasurer), Matt Stevenson (original Board member and involved in the early years of the bicycle tour), Mike & Kathy Gleisner (current 20-year leaders of the Northern Route and long-time riders), Tom Kingsbury (sole rider of the 2009 and 2019 Heroes Ride 1,000-plus mile bicycle rides around Wisconsin and long-time bicycle tour rider), Ric Kesler (original Board member and involved in the early years of the bicycle tour), Tom Miller (founder of The Highground and who attended virtually), and Scott Schultz (interviewer, involved in the early years of the WVVM and current Board member).

The interview brought together people who had not seen each other for decades and the memories flowed. For current staff members of The Highground, it was important to hear the struggles of the early days as well as many present-day hurdles that the Heroes Ride (the name of the event changed to Heroes Ride in 2020) leaders have to overcome to have a safe, enjoyable and successful event for their route's bicyclists. It was also very important to hear the reasons why people ride; their dedication to honoring Veterans, and their support of The Highground.

**This event is a result of year-round planning, training and fundraising by the volunteers involved. The Highground is truly grateful and, when we stop to consider all the people and personal efforts involved, truly humbled and thankful.**



From l-r: Don Quicker, Matt Stevenson, Mike & Kathy Gleisner and Tom Kingsbury

## Request Information

The Highground Veterans Memorial Park is a grassroots, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. The private facility, which receives no ongoing federal or state funding, is supported by private donations and grants. It has a very small operating budget and exists because volunteers and contributors have given The Highground their time, talents and personal/financial resources.

**Please accept my donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_**

**I would like the gift to be used for:**

**and/or the printed newsletter subscription \$25**

**Please mail to:  
The Highground  
P.O. Box 457 Neillsville, WI 54456  
or call 715-743-4224 to make a donation.**

**I would like more information about:**

- Upcoming events and the fundraising calendar
- Honor Stones
- Adding someone to the mailing list  
(please include the name and address of the person you want to send a gift subscription to)
- Capital Campaign
- Endowment Fund
- Booking details for "We Were There: Korean War" and "My War" exhibits

**I would also like to volunteer for the following events and activities. Please reach out to me!**

- Porch Greeter
- Spring Work Week / Fall Cleanup Days
- Heroes Ride Annual Bike Tour
- Honor Ride/Memorial Day
- Ride to Remember®

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Questions or Comments \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Museum News

## The Museum is Staying Busy During Construction



Museum archiving project

**The Museum may be closed to the public during construction, but that doesn't mean there is nothing going on!** Currently the large collection of artifacts is being audited for condition and to see if any conservation measures are needed. Everything is being properly packed and readied to be moved to the highly anticipated new climate-controlled collections storage area and exhibit gallery. Not only was this a great opportunity to go through the entire collection to see what needs repair, further identification, etc., but there was a lot of inspiration for future exhibit creation to be had from personally handling every item and story that resides within the Museum!

**Contributors to Museum archiving and project supplies for The Highground History project include Wiley Sparks, Tom Miller, John & Maryann Vedder, Janet & Allan Raatz, Ray Johnson and Julie Diesing.**

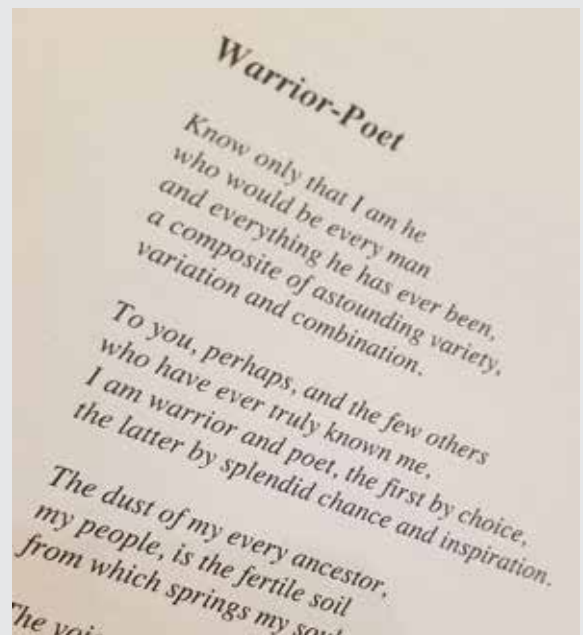
## "Back in the World – Veterans Expressions on Life After Coming Home" Exhibit on Display Starting in September

For many Veterans serving overseas, perhaps most notably during the Vietnam War, going home was referred to as getting “Back in the World”. “The World” was a place of normalcy, family, everyday acceptable and calm conditions...a place to forget the nightmare of combat. However, the reality of getting back in the World did not meet with these expectations for a great many Veterans. The war hitched a ride back home with them in the form of nightmares, post-traumatic stress, ruined relationships, survivor’s guilt and some destructive behaviors.

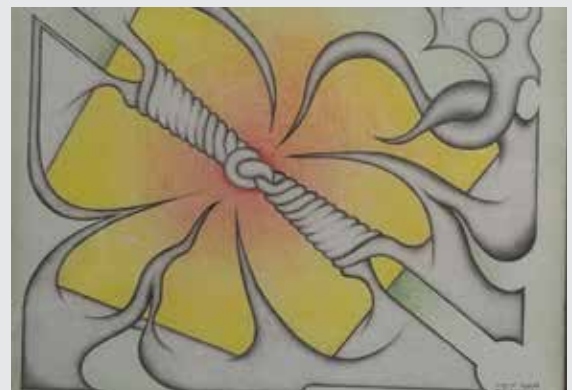
For these Veterans, getting back in the World was the beginning of a new struggle. Veterans of decades past and present-day Veterans have similar journeys of recovery, learning to live in a way that does not forget the past and those buddies that they may have lost, but of developing a new life of hope and strength. For many Veterans, spending time writing poetry, putting stories on paper, painting, playing music and involving themselves in other creative arts has helped to honor the past, remain in the present and bring a stronger, more focused and well-rounded “self”.

The Highground Museum is creating an exhibition titled “Back in the World” of Veterans' expressive art - poetry, writing, music, traditional art formats and more - focusing on the aftermath of coming home after service and/or their thoughts on their military service.

**We are now accepting submissions of the art listed above by Veterans for use in this exhibit which will run from September 14, 2024–January 2025. For more information, or to sponsor this exhibit, please email Theresa at [museum@thehighground.org](mailto:museum@thehighground.org) or call 715-743-4224.**



Back in the World – Veteran Writing - Steve Maddox



Back in the World - Veteran Art



# Museum News

## The Highground Outreach Efforts

The Highground has partnered with the Everett Roehl Marshfield Public Library for two important presentations. Executive Director Chris Pettis goes “on the road” several times each year when he is invited to give outreach presentations about The Highground’s mission. The Everett Roehl Marshfield Public Library invited Chris and Theresa, Museum Curator, to give a presentation on The History of The Highground on March 13. According to Theresa, “It was great to be able to talk about The Highground to people in our community, especially as we are currently learning so much while compiling and digitizing four decades of The Highground history.”

**On Saturday, October 26, Chris will return to the library with a very important presentation on “Suicide Awareness and Prevention”. More details about this public presentation will be available on our website, social media channels and through local press releases.**



## "We Were There: Vietnam War" Documentary Project

There are over 80 Vietnam Veterans and families involved in the “We Were There: Vietnam War” documentary exhibitions. Currently, their stories, images and memorabilia are being organized for physical and virtual exhibits. We are still looking for additional sponsors to help us cover the remainder of the expense for this project. **For more information, please email at Theresa museum@thehighground.org or call 715-743-4224. Thank you to the project sponsors (as of May 20, 2024): VFW Post 9202 – Germantown, Mike & Marcia Voorhees, We Energies, Gary Koenigs, Dennis & Jessie Meister and Diane Becker.**



*Dennis Schatt Schneider, hooch in Vietnam*



*Dennis Schatt Schneider, Medical transport to Da Nang*



*George Muchinski, Udon helicopter landing*

## The Highground Forest Therapy Trail Sign Project

**The Forest Therapy Trail Sign Project is nearing completion as this newsletter is being printed!** The series of 32 trail signs will enhance The Highground's 4.5-mile wooded trail system with messages and invitations to benefit good mental health and the enjoyment of hiking/snowshoeing the trails. Healing Oak Nature Therapy and members of The Highground’s Veteran & Family PTS Peer Support Group were instrumental in designing many of the signs and in determining the appropriate locations for the signs. The Peer Support Group will continue to work on projects to benefit Veterans during their monthly meetings. **To learn more about the Peer Support Group and meeting schedule, please visit The Highground’s website, email Theresa at museum@thehighground.org or call 715-743-4224.**

**Sponsors of this project are the Clark County Health Dept., Combat Parts, Inc., Kulas Body Shop and Healing Oak Nature Therapy.**

**Sponsors of the Family & Veteran PTS Peer Support Group are the WDVA (grant funding), John & Deborah Breneman and The Military Order of the Purple Heart – Viola Fund – Chapter 162.**



# Event News

## The Highground is grateful to the 14th Annual Honor Ride Sponsors



Wisconsin District 7



American Legion Post 73  
Neillsville



Combat Veterans  
Motorcycle Association



VFW Riders District 7, VFW Riders– Department of WI, Bonnie Henchen; Ruth Novak; Mark Kramer; Wisconsin Timber Rattlers, Dunham's Sport and CycleFish.

## The 20th Annual Friends of The Highground Recognition Dinner

Fifty-eight first-year contributors joined longtime supporters in bolstering the organization's continued efforts to support Veterans and their families. Supporters of The Highground from Wisconsin and surrounding states spent the evening of April 13, 2024 with members of The Highground staff and Board of Directors at Castle Hill Supper Club in Merrillan, Wisconsin. for the Friends of The Highground Dinner to recognize supporters for 2023.

In his State of The Highground Address, Executive Director Chris Pettis reflected on the events from 2023 and provided glimpses into 2024. Most pivotal is the ever-growing Veterans programming that the nonprofit offers to Veterans and their families as well as the great need to provide a welcoming environment for program attendees. The Highground was able to offer two new programs in 2023—the Spouses and Partners of Veterans Support Group and the "Operation Re-Connect" military couples retreat. "With the expansion, we anticipate more opportunities to offer different resources for Veterans and their families," says Veterans Program Coordinator Theresa Hebert. This annual recognition dinner is intended to show appreciation for the generous donors who give monetarily (over \$1,000), provide services that save The Highground over \$1,000 or assist in raising over \$1,000 in the year prior to the event.

**Of the 200 individuals and organizations that were recognized, The Highground welcomed back 30 first-year contributors. They were joined by faithful advocates Dr. John & Rebecca Scaletta, Donald Quicker and Central Wisconsin Broadcasting (WCCN/WKPG). These champions have supported The Highground for many years, including the 20 years that this recognition dinner has been around. The Highground's WWII Globe Tribute was chosen as the image for the 2023 award certificate and as tradition guides, the "Spirit of The Highground" awards were presented to four individuals for not only their 2023 contribution but also for their ceaseless devotion through their volunteer service throughout the year. The "Spirit" recipients were Scott Schultz, Laura Culver, Jim Henchen and Dennis & Sharon Herzberg.**

The Highground staff is a very small but tight group of ten that would not be able to accomplish so much without the endless help of so many volunteers and contributors. The Highground Staff and Board of Directors are eternally grateful for the ongoing support. **The article with the complete list of those who received "Friends of The Highground" certificates is available on our website "News" page at: [thehighground.us/the-highground-hosts-20th-annual-recognition-dinner](https://thehighground.us/the-highground-hosts-20th-annual-recognition-dinner)**



Attendees mingling during the Friends Dinner



Guests stand for the Pledge of Allegiance



State of The Highground by Chris Pettis

# Event News

## From WVMP Bike-A-Thon to Heroes Ride: 40 Years and Counting

**“Saddle up...and Move ‘Em Out” was the call to action in 1986 as the second Annual Veterans Memorial Bike-a-thon got underway.** The year before, Tom Miller, whose vision came to fruition with the creation of the non-profit Wisconsin Vietnam Veterans Memorial Project, biked 1,244 miles (representing the number of WI service men and women Killed In Action during the Vietnam War) around Wisconsin to bring recognition to the project creating a place where burdens would dissipate, and memories soften.

The Annual WVMP Bike-A-Thon, which has since gone through several changes, is now known as The Highground Heroes Ride. With so many enthusiastic supporters, Veterans, and civilians alike, the 1985 BAT morphed into a three-day, multiple-route ride. As the years passed, additional routes were established, and the BAT continued the first weekend of August. During the 25th anniversary of The Highground Bicycle Tour in 2009, another Veteran by the name of Tom Kingsbury saddled up to ride his bicycle along the original 1985 route around Wisconsin. Tom increased the number of miles to 1,500 to include the men and women from Wisconsin who were Killed in Action serving after Vietnam to 2009. His ride was known as The Heroes Ride and was coordinated with Gold Star Families along the route in memory of the loved ones they had lost. The Heroes Ride then culminated to join the six other routes, on the 3rd day of their ride, to arrive at The Highground as one. Ten years later, Tom Kingsbury rode The Heroes Ride route again, all while remembering the fallen, honoring Veterans and bringing recognition to The Highground for its support of Veterans.

**Each year, the number of riders has increased to currently over 120 who join one of five routes and the funds raised have gone from \$18,000 to \$95,445 in 2023. The event has seen older generations inspire the next to participate, with riders as young as 10 years old taking on the full three-day, 170-mile journey. It has seen long-time riders and friends retire from the physical aspect and it has also seen some rest in peace.**

This isn't a one-day, six-hour event! The riders spend months preparing, training, and gathering their sponsors to endure the 2-3 days of blisters, sore muscles, fatigue, sunburn, windburn, chaffing, and of course the WI weather. They arrive at The Highground on that first Sunday of August, quietly with only their fellow riders welcoming them. They gather on the plaza for the “Heroes Family” meal, and they welcome the short ceremony that follows, allowing them the time to return home and rest before tackling their work week. **It is, without a doubt, the most understated event of the year.**

**But 2024 marks its 40th anniversary and The Highground is preparing to welcome these unsung heroes with the welcome they deserve! WE CALL ON YOU! Vietnam Veterans: RSVP for the Vietnam Reunion; Guests: Join us to welcome each rider and help us show our appreciation for the efforts they put into supporting The Highground’s mission!**



*The early years of the annual Bike-A-Thon*



*Joyce Jansen leads the Heroes Ride Southern Route as they arrive at The Highground in 2023.*

# Our Continuing Need – Gary Weirauch, Board Chair



**Progress continues on the new Welcome Center with an anticipated move-in date near the middle of July.** The goal is to have the Center open for the Vietnam Veterans Reunion on August 4. Last year we fed 300 service members and their families at the reunion. Let's make it 500 this year with a tour of the new facility. Although we have made good progress on donations for construction, we are \$1 Million dollars short of needed funds resulting in a loan to complete construction. Total cost including architectural will run \$2.9 Million and donations have covered \$1.9 Million. Soon we will be converting from a capital campaign to a debt retirement campaign.

We have had approximately 180 donors who have contributed \$1,000 or more toward the campaign and their names will appear on the Wall of Honor just inside the entrance to the Welcome Center. If you have not as yet contributed, there is still time to have your name placed on the wall. If you have contributed but at something less than \$1,000, please consider a contribution that will bring your total to that amount so your name will be prominently displayed with the other donors. Your contribution

will ensure that we can implement a monthly speaker program focusing on issues germane to the Veterans community. It will also assist us in working toward expanding the healing objective of The Highground as we look into the possibility of offering individual and group counselling sessions in the future.

**We have spent 40 years expanding our goal of honoring Veterans and now we're expanding our two other goals of educating and healing. Won't you consider helping us with a contribution today?**

**The staff and Board appreciate every donor that has contributed to this project and to the cost of our ongoing operations. You are the reason The Highground exists. And WITH YOU, we will insure that Veterans issues stay in the forefront of the public domain. Thank You.**

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## Spring Work Week Recap



*Working on the bridge*

This year's Spring Work Week was a tremendous success, marked by the dedication and hard work of our amazing volunteers. From bridge repair to landscaping, every task was tackled with enthusiasm and a sense of community spirit. Volunteers worked tirelessly to repair bridges, ensuring they remain safe and accessible for all visitors. Trail grooming was another key focus, making our scenic paths even more enjoyable for hikers and nature lovers. Tree trimming and landscaping efforts have given The Highground a fresh, vibrant look, just in time for the warmer weather. Teams managed to complete crucial road and concrete repairs, enhancing the overall infrastructure. And painting projects added a fresh coat of charm to various structures around the grounds.

**We are incredibly grateful to Subway and Pizza Hut for their generous provision of lunches, which kept our volunteers energized throughout the week. A big thank you goes out to Don Anibas, Wes Waterman and Wayne Guenther for bringing in their equipment, which was essential to completing many of our projects. We also extend heartfelt thanks to Bonnie Henchen and Betty Nemitz for preparing the food for lunch.**

**In addition, we recognize Bob Barth for donating the planks for the bridge and arranging for the names to be routed out by Gunner Barth and the Neillsville High School Technical Education class under the guidance of Adam Kren.** Their contributions made the bridge project especially meaningful. We are ever so grateful to all the volunteers who dedicated their time and effort to make The Highground an even better place for our community and visitors!



**Now is a great time to become a volunteer at The Highground—Sign up to be a porch greeter, help with events during the "busy season" and more!**

# Veterans Programs

## **Veteran & Family PTSD Peer Support Group 2024**

Meets the 3rd Sunday of every month  
at 2pm.

For info, email [museum@thehighground.org](mailto:museum@thehighground.org)

## **Summer Ukulele Classes 2024 ("Vets & Guitars" & Ukuleles Program)**

**Preregistration Required**  
Meets every Thursday starting June 6  
for 10 weeks

Beginning Ukulele Class: 4:30-5:30pm  
Continuing Ukulele Class: 6-7pm

For info, email [museum@thehighground.org](mailto:museum@thehighground.org)

## **Spouses & Partners of Veterans Support Group 2024**

Meets every 2nd Wednesday of the month  
from 5-6pm *in person and virtually*

For info, email [donations@thehighground.org](mailto:donations@thehighground.org)

## **Board of Directors**

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### **Donations & Stones Coordinator**

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### **Museum & Education Coordinator**

Theresa Hebert  
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### **Maintenance**

Mike Purgett  
**Gift Shop Staff**  
Roxane Purgett  
Judy Quicker



*Do good all year long. Please keep us in your thoughts while making your contributions. If you are looking for ways to support our organization, visit the "donations" webpage at [thehighground.us/about-us/donate](http://thehighground.us/about-us/donate)*



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# FEATURED ITEMS

**ARE YOU A NEW CUSTOMER? GET 15% OFF YOUR FIRST ONLINE ORDER!**

**GIFT SHOP HOURS: SUMMER 10-5 M-F; 9-5 SAT & SUN • WINTER: 10-4**

We carry a variety of products for all, designed with those you love in mind. Check out our t-shirts, sweatshirts, hats, jewelry, home decor and more in store and online.

**THEHIGHGROUND.SHOP**

The store that supports the mission



JUNE - AUGUST 2024



**Kimono-style Tie-dye Cover** **1080**  
**\$22.95**

White with shades of brown and tassels on the bottom.



**Be My Neighbor Book** **6023**  
**\$8.95**

A Global Fund for Children Book.



**Potbelly Mug with The Highground Logo** **830**  
**\$34.95**

Handmade potbelly mug with "Old Glory" red, white & blue design. Made in Wisconsin. 12 oz. Also available in other colors.



**You are Loved Heart** **3046**  
**\$15.95**

"Remember you are always loved" 3D wood composite heart with a display stand. Measures: 5" x 5" x 2.5"



**The Highground Playing Cards** **9151**  
**\$9.95**

Standard poker deck of cards with The Highground logo and tiny stars on a beautiful blue background.



**HG Gift Card**  
The perfect gift for anyone and any occasion. Available in any amount.

**Call us 715-743-4224**

Email: [store@thehighground.org](mailto:store@thehighground.org)  
[thehighground.shop](http://thehighground.shop)  
W7031 Ridge Rd, Neillsville, WI 54456

# Wish List

## We are in need of the following specific items:

- Tour guide volunteers that can give tours during the week and on weekends during the "on-season."
- Volunteers for events and porch greeting
- Sponsors for the Freedom Celebration Fireworks (June 29)
- Sponsors for the Vietnam Reunion Lunch (August 4)
- A working chest freezer

## We are in need of funding for the following:

- \$3,000 for Museum storage shelving
- \$800 for Museum picture rail/rod for wall exhibit displays
- \$100 for mini photo printer for Museum archiving
- \$25,000 for the expansion of the Korean Tribute for future Korean Honor Stones
- \$2,200 for 2,000-2,500 lbs of fertilizer and 2,500 lbs of lime
- \$300 for fuel for lawn care equipment for the season

Thank you for the generous donations of drill bits, funds for drill bits, fuel and work week. Thank you for the incoming sponsorship for the Vietnam Reunion Lunch and funds for Museum archiving.

## Gifting opportunities to consider:

**Employee Matching Gift Program:** Some employers offer gift matching programs for qualified 501(c)3 nonprofits such as The Highground. This means your employer will match the amount of your donation or volunteer hours up to a certain amount, increasing your direct gift. Refer to your Human Resource Dept. or search [charitynavigator.org](http://charitynavigator.org) to see if your employer has such a program. If not, consider making the suggestion to your employer.

**Gifts of Stock & Securities:** The Highground does accept gifts of stock & other appreciated assets. These may be excellent options to consider gifting to The Highground as they can potentially result in savings for your reported income & capital gains taxes. Please consult your financial advisor for more information.

**To support any of these initiatives, please send a check to the address included to the right or submit your donation online at: [thehighgroundpark.givingfuel.com/general-donation-page](http://thehighgroundpark.givingfuel.com/general-donation-page). If you have any questions, email [donations@thehighground.org](mailto:donations@thehighground.org) or call us at 715-743-4224.**

Find us somewhere on Social Media!



## Newsletter Subscription

To help reduce the cost of our printed newsletter, please consider receiving the email newsletter. The signup form is located at the bottom of our website homepage ([thehighground.us](http://thehighground.us)). Please know that The Highground does not sell its lists or your information to anyone. If you would like to continue receiving a printed newsletter, a small donation of \$25 per year would help us cover the printing and mailing costs.

# THE BENEFITS OF A CHARITABLE BEQUEST

*Each year, the Wisconsin Vietnam Veterans Memorial Project (dba The Highground) receives bequests that help us meet our current funding needs, expand Veterans programs and plan for the future.*

**A charitable bequest is an amazing way for you to support the work of The Highground and its continuing mission. Here are some of the reasons why you may consider bequest giving:**

- Making a bequest today will cost you nothing.
- You can make a gift of any amount while retaining control of your assets during your lifetime.
- Bequests can be modified at any point in time.
- An outright gift from your estate is entirely free from federal estate taxes, permitting The Highground to utilize the full amount of your gift. Bequests made to individuals, in contrast, are usually heavily taxed.
- Enjoy the satisfaction of creating a legacy and having a lasting impact on the long-term health and recovery of our Veterans.

## Here are the many ways you can make a bequest:

- Make a gift of cash, securities or property.
- Give a specific dollar amount or asset.
- Specify a percentage on your estate.
- Specify a gift from the balance of your estate.
- Designate the Wisconsin Vietnam Veterans Memorial Project as a beneficiary of your IRA, retirement account or insurance policy.\*

*\*To designate the Wisconsin Vietnam Veterans Memorial Project as the beneficiary (whole or part) of your life insurance policy/policies, you can request a beneficiary change form from your insurance company.*

## Our information:

The Wisconsin Vietnam Veterans Memorial Project  
W7031 Ridge Rd  
PO Box 457  
Neillsville, WI 54456  
Phone: 715-743-4224  
EIN/Federal Tax ID#: 39-1512902

**To learn more about bequest giving, please send an email to Chris Pettis at [director@thehighground.org](mailto:director@thehighground.org) or call 715-743-4224.**



**We are making good progress on the new Welcome Center** and anticipate a move-in date of mid-July. Have you been following the expansion plan updates? The new building will help us increase our capacity to serve our Veteran community and fulfill our mission. Together, we are forging a legacy that will resonate for generations to come. Will you join us? Visit our campaign website at [campaign.thehighground.us](http://campaign.thehighground.us) for details.

## Let Them Not Go In Silence

The Highground Veterans Memorial Park staff, visitors and supporters remember and honor all who have served; in times of combat and in times of peace. All Veterans of any era have, at one point in their life, written a blank check made payable to "The United States of America", for an amount up to and including their life. We recognize that they and their families have in many different ways been affected by their service. Many positive qualities and sometimes hardships result from signing that blank check. Over 26,000 Wisconsin men and women gave their lives during combat (KIA) service to our country. As a tangible reminder for us all, a **different selection of KIA names will be printed for each future ceremony and newsletter. Again, this is not the complete list but a selection of names from each war who gave their lives in combat areas.**

Let us remember and honor all those who perished during their service and let them not go in silence. We ring our replica Liberty Bell in their honor at each ceremony. We hope you will ring it whenever you are here.

### Korean War

Clarence E. Rickl  
Reginald F. Riviere  
Gerald Hugh Roark  
Gerald G. Robinson  
Francis J. Rochon  
Randolph R. Rogers  
Walter W. Roggow  
Charles W. Rollins  
Raymond J. Rosbeck  
Douglas W. Rose  
Gerald V. Rossiter  
William Francis Roy  
Ernest R. Roye  
Richard B. Roznowski  
Robert G. Rucinski  
William H. Rueger  
Duane Nelson Ruid  
Ronald P. Ruka  
Robert A. Ryan  
William Harvey Ryman  
Richard D. Salvatore  
Floyd A. Sandlin  
Neil M. Sather  
Gerald H. Saxton  
Paul R. Schanhofer  
Douglas F. Schauf  
Vernon Schermerhorn  
Raymond Franklin Schmidt  
Alphonse R. Schmitt  
Andrew Schneider  
Arley B. Schneider  
John C. Schneider

William G. Scholze  
Richard L. Schott  
Floyd M. Schroeder  
Gordon T. Schroeder  
Maynard R. Schroeder  
Clair C. Schuknecht  
Bertram E. Schultz  
Richard Joseph Schultz  
John Schwed Jr.  
Harold G. Schwemer

### Vietnam War

Gerald Joseph Bannach  
Michael Joseph Banovez Jr.  
Albin Anton Baranczyk  
David Gregory Barnes  
Robert Howard Barr  
Michael Paul Bartelme  
Richard D. Bartholomew Jr.  
Gregory Joseph Bartkowski  
Leonard William Bauer  
Thomas E. Baumgartner  
Robert Lee Baumgart  
Orland Orrin Bearwald  
Jeffrey Landis Beaty  
Wayne R. Bebo  
Robert James Beck  
Robert Milton Beck  
Terrence Daniel Beck  
John Paul Becker  
Thomas Lewis Becker  
Willie Bedford  
Joseph Lloyd Begotka

Gerald Dennis Behlke  
Richard Carl Behnke  
William Charles Behrens  
Mark Sylvester Behrent  
Edward Alan Beilfuss Jr.  
John Willard Beitlich  
William Marvin Bellile  
Leslie Bellrichard  
Dennis Michael Belonger  
Larry Warren Bender  
David Glen Bendorf  
Robert John Benedict  
James Milton Benicek  
Frederick Lee Benishek  
Dan Michael Bennett  
Gerald Allen Benson  
James Dwight Benway  
Charles Sylvester Beranek  
Dean Mitchell Beranek  
Raymond Rex Berger  
Larry Wayne Berkholtz  
Dennis Lee Bertschinger

### Gulf Wars—GWOT— Present Day

Jamie Jaenke  
Ben D. Jansky  
Ryan M. Jerabek  
Daniel Joel  
Daniel J. Johnson  
David A. Johnson  
Quinn Johnson-Harris  
Durwood "Hanks" Jones

Ryan D. Jopek  
Matthew R. Kadin  
Charles A. Kaufman  
Richard J. Kemp  
Charles A. Kiser  
Tyler R. Kreinz  
Tyler J. Kritz  
Amy Krueger  
Kevin M. Kryst  
John "Hans" F. Kurth  
Cheryl LaBeau-O'Brien  
Ryan J. Larson  
Matthew I. Leggett  
Jason F. Lemke  
Keith E. Lloyd  
Ryan P. Long  
Patrick L. Lybert  
Mark A. Maida  
Stephen G. Martin  
John J. Mattek Jr.  
Andrew G. Matus  
James McDonald

Michael A. McGlothlin  
Jacob A. Meinert  
Lance Monsen  
Nickolas A. Mueller  
Scott T. Nagorski  
Brian K. Naseman  
Ryan J. Nass  
Benjamin H. Neal  
Rocky Nelson  
Richard J. Nelson  
Michael C. Nolen  
Shaun A. Novak  
Adam J. Novak