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Coffee coalition

New UW-Madison group working to build community among women veterans

BY VICTORIA DAVIS

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TRENDING

Five (actually six) vegan entrees you need to try in Madison, Wisconsin

No animal products? No problem! These six dishes took top honors for “favorite vegan dish” in our 2019 reader poll.

Thank you, Scott Fitzgerald

Republicans in the state Senate have so completely rigged the system through gerrymandering and voter suppression that they believe they don't have to act even on popular



VICTORIA DAVIS

Anders (left) at an October coffee meet-up with veteran Carla Winsor.

There are some not so obvious things that separate civilian from military life. Take chewing gum and talking outside on a cell phone.

“We all would get in trouble for doing that and no civilian gets why that’s weird to us,” says Carla Winsor, a U.S. Coast Guard veteran who is pursuing her doctorate in mechanical

proposals or bother to tell the public why. It could be their downfall.

Indigenous Wisconsin

A new exhibit at Overture Center features art from members of Wisconsin’s Ho-Chunk tribe.

A place to vend

Grasshopper Goods, the forward-looking mobile boutique, has met the challenges of not being able to vend on Madison city streets. Now, owner Karen Tardrew has opened a second location that stays still, in downtown Stoughton.

The rules

Wollersheim Winery & Distillery has produced its first bourbon, which is only the second “bottled in bond” bourbon in the state. Its single-origin ethic is very 2019

engineering at UW-Madison.

“Or people loading onto buses here,” adds Leah Henning, a freshman at UW and a U.S. Marine veteran. “In boot camp, we could fit like 100 people onto one bus and here nobody wants to sit next to anyone so there’s all this space or they just stand in the middle. It drives us nuts.”

Winsor and Henning are venting about the oddities of civilian life at the Women Veterans Coffee Club, a monthly gathering. Jolene Anders, UW’s Veteran Services Coordinator since January, started the group this fall. The get-togethers also allow women veterans to talk about significantly more pressing concerns than chewing gum.

“There’s a pool of struggles a lot of veterans have going back to school and civilian life,” says Anders, who served in the Army National Guard while attending UW-Madison. “On top of it all, this campus is huge. Even going to the student org fair, there’s at least 200 booths. It’s tough to navigate that on your own, especially as a non-traditional student.”

Anders served in the guard for nine years, including stints in Afghanistan in 2014 and Iraq in 2016.

The camaraderie Anders craved while studying at UW-Madison was difficult to find. The university has resources for veterans, but Anders knew that not all veterans would relate to her experiences. “I experienced a lot of toxic masculinity during my deployments and it’s why I didn’t initially seek out the veteran community when I came back,” she says.

In her new job, Anders has worked to make the campus a more welcoming place for women veterans. “I want the idea of making friends to not feel overwhelming or uncomfortable for other veteran women,” she says.

Henning says the coffee club has helped her.

“I had a lot of guy veteran friends right away, but I missed having girlfriends because there’s more you can relate to with each other,” Henning says. “Plus, you can talk to women veterans about anything, they’re less judgmental.”

VICTORIA DAVIS



Jolene Anders: “I want the idea of making friends to not feel overwhelming or uncomfortable for other veteran women.”

There are just about 400 student veterans among the more than 44,000 students enrolled at UW-Madison. That can make connecting on a 936-acre campus challenging.

University Veteran Services is one resource for military-connected students as it aims to foster “personal transitions” and the “pursuit of academic success.” The UW chapter of **Student Veterans of America** also helps connect veterans on campus, but Winsor says she felt out of place as one of the few women in the group.

“I’ve been to other veterans events here and the guys were super welcoming, but they mostly talked about drinking and the glory days and cussed constantly,” says Winsor, who has attended all of Anders’ coffee club meetings so far. “SVA wasn’t a place I felt super comfortable, but Jolene is amazing and has really made an effort for us.”

When Anders joined the staff of Veteran Services, she invited as many female veterans as she knew to a meeting to chat about how to create a stronger community. Eight women showed up, and the conversation lasted two hours. The women discussed struggles with adjusting to civilian life, balancing relationships with career goals, as well as the difficulty of connecting with other women in the community.

“That’s where I got the idea to start the coffee club,” says Anders. “To create an intimate space where female veteran students could come together in support. It’s not even about keeping men

and women separate. I'd like this coffee group to be a coalition, or a bond, that makes it easier for these women to bridge the gap between these veteran communities."

Anders says she hopes the group one day branches out to include not just students, but also faculty and the broader community in Madison.

"It's something I certainly would have benefited from," says Anders. "The first two years of college, I made friends easily, but all of those people graduated by the time I came back from deployment. So I'm sitting in class, age 24, with very different life experiences and couldn't relate to anyone. I wanted to give these girls a resource I never had."

The next Women Veterans Coffee Club meeting will be at Memorial Union on Dec. 12, 9 a.m. to noon.

VETERANS



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DAVID MICHAEL MILLER

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Harold Schmitz, a Milwaukee-based artist, was drafted into the Army Air Corps as an artist in World War II. "In My Spare Moments" at the Wisconsin Veterans Museum displays his art and his tools, giving a special glimpse into an unusual assignment.

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