

# VALOR

VETERAN ★ ALLIANCE

May 2022

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Colleagues and friends,

As the semester winds to a close, I am reflecting about how quickly it has passed. It always seems like it will be longer at the outset, but then things get busy and before you know it, the semester has slipped away. I have mixed feelings about this phenomenon, particularly as an "older" person. Time, regardless of how it feels in the moment, is in retrospect, predictably fleeting.



In a couple of weeks, we will say congratulations and so long to a cohort of students that started a journey with us years ago. I am sure there were times during their journey when they thought it would go on forever, but as they look back on their time at commencement they will likely marvel at how quickly it all went. Such is life, we move through time from season to season and from milestone to milestone.

I always have a tinge of melancholy to see them go, but that is the nature of our work - we are here to help prepare them to leave. They graduate and go off to their next chapter and we start with a new cohort. The cycle repeats over and over again.

This is the last edition of the VALOR newsletter this academic year. We take a hiatus over the summer and return with the September newsletter in the fall. That doesn't mean that we aren't available to address student veteran matters. Both Jim Stoddard and I monitor email and phone messages over the summer to ensure that we can help where and when we are needed.

Memorial Day is on May 30<sup>th</sup>, please remember and honor those who gave their lives for our country. There are multiple ceremonies in the Fargo/Moorhead area that you can attend. See the *Coming Up* section in this newsletter for a couple of local ceremonies.

Also, take note of the *Call to Action* this month. It urges you to consider the extent to which fireworks can trigger PTSD in veterans. The bright flashes and loud booms can be debilitating for some who have experienced combat.

Finally, check out Craig Schwinden's excellent article about Bison Strides on page 9. The work that Erika Berg is doing with horses and veterans (and with others) is awe-inspiring. This service is free to veterans, so please encourage our student veterans to check it out.

Thank you, as always, for your commitment to student veterans - you make a difference! Have a lovely summer.

Carol Cwiak, J.D., Ph.D.  
VALOR Faculty Liaison



**VCO Update**  
Jim Stoddard

You can visit Jim on campus at the Veterans Educational Training Office in Ceres 329; or by phone at 701-231-9706; or by email at [james.stoddard@ndsu.edu](mailto:james.stoddard@ndsu.edu).



San Diego's GI Film Festival is scheduled for May 17-21, 2022 in Balboa Park. This "film festival is dedicated to presenting films and events for, by and about military and veterans, and is set to return to in-person screenings for the first time since 2019." The [online box office](#) is now open and the film lineup for this year's event is incredible. If you cannot attend you can watch the films on video on demand.

Spring Commencement is coming up soon, and this time we congratulate 55 of our veteran and military students on finishing their degrees! Great job, everyone! And thank you to all the supporters and allies for helping them succeed!

Of those 55 expected military-connected spring and summer graduates, 41 (75%!) currently show a GPA of 3.0 or higher, with one computer science major achieving a perfect 4.0! Watch for them wearing the red, white, and blue honor cords at the ceremony!



So, then we should be in to summer! Except for a few vacation days, I do work through the summer if you need anything. I'm on the 3rd floor, and it's really only the 2nd floor of Ceres Hall (Counseling Center area) that will be undergoing major renovation starting this summer, but it sounds like there will be some impacts to us that will require me to relocate or work from home during different stages of the project (expected to go until summer 2023!). You can always send me an e-mail, or call my same office number; I'll get an e-mail copy of any voice mails, and will respond as soon as possible from wherever I am.

Access to the veteran computer lab/study space in Ceres Hall may also be affected at various times, depending on the noise/dust/power and water situation. And don't forget that as part of this renovation, the GI Bill Certifying Official's office has already relocated down to the 1st floor of Ceres Hall, within the Registration and Records office suite. Todd Yackley will stay there even after the renovation, so just be aware of the new location. His phone number will be the same.

A couple things I'll be working on during the break: checking in with all military students that haven't graduated, but haven't yet registered for fall classes to see if there's something preventing them from registering that we can help resolve. This is in addition to the outreach that their academic departments and advisors are already doing, but we seem to have had good success with this. After spring '22 registrations opened in fall '21, there were still about 100 military students who had not graduated or registered for spring semester. After our outreach, by mid-December, 35 of those students had registered for spring.

We'll also do a special outreach to all of our summer or fall inbound military students to see if they have any questions or require any assistance, and make them aware of some helpful resources (like the Bison Student Veterans) to get them off to a good start at NDSU.

Part of that new student outreach will be an invitation to another "Affinity Group Lunch" during Welcome Week to give our newest military students a chance to network with our faculty and staff allies, and the more senior military students. More info to come, but typically this will be a lunchtime gathering in one of the campus dining centers. Our hope is to do additional military community lunch gatherings like this periodically throughout the semester as well, so stay tuned!

Some of the VALOR members will get together soon to begin analyzing the responses to our spring Qualtrics survey of NDSU's military-connected student population. We look forward to sharing our key findings and associated recommendations with you all soon! Overall, we received about 30 thoughtfully written responses from students that will help us prioritize VALOR's areas of focus and goals.

Have a great summer! Take part in new experiences or old favorites, and come back healthy, reinvigorated, and wiser!

**NDSU Spring Commencement - Saturday, May 14, Fargodome, 10 AM & 2 PM**



## Veteran's Voice

Craig Schwinden

VALOR Student Veteran Representative

It appears that we are going to survive another school year. I am on the last page of the syllabus for all of my classes and that is a good feeling. There is still work ahead, but the end is in sight. As we wrap up another academic year, some of us will go to summer jobs or internships, some will stay on campus and continue their studies, and some will graduate and move on to whatever is next. Good luck to all regardless for what is next for you.

Remember that there are always people and organizations out there to help you...no matter what kind of help you need. NDSU doesn't shut down in the summer, nor does the VA. Please ask for help if you think you need it. Challenges do not stop when summer break starts.

Some housekeeping items:

- The NDSU Military and Veteran Certification Office is relocating to the Registration and Records Office, Room 110 Ceres Hall. This is Todd Yackley's office, our certification officer. This will be his new location starting Monday, April 25<sup>th</sup>.

- From Dr. Bill Burns, director of the NDSU Counseling Center:

"The NDSU Counseling Center is pleased to announce that it will be relocating to the Stop and Go Center (1919 N. University Drive, Suite 1) while its current location in Ceres Hall is remodeled to better serve our students.

The Center will be closed May 16-19 for the relocation process and will

reopen to clients on Friday, May 20<sup>th</sup>. Center staff will be available for emergency related situations during the May 16-19 time period. Please call the Center at 231-7671 for help during this time period.

Counseling Center services are available free of charge to all NDSU students, and the Center is open year-round. Academic year hours are 8 AM – 5 PM, Monday – Friday and summer hours are 7:30 AM – 4 PM, Monday – Friday. The Center's telephone number is (701) 231-7671. Free two-hour parking will be available for students using the Center during this relocation period. Students can also take bus 34, with routes every 15 minutes, to the Stop and Go Center."

There are no new changes to report from the G. I. Bill world. The policy that pays the full housing allowance for in-person, hybrid, or online learning expires June 2<sup>nd</sup>. Don't forget that when registering for your summer or fall courses. To get the full allowance, you must be registered for in-person classes, or as they are referred to on NDSU's Campus Connection, "face-to-face".

May is an important month for all veterans. Whether you are currently serving, separated, or retired, May is one of our most important months as it is *Military Appreciation Month*. There are several holidays or observances for military members and their families.

[Loyalty Day \(May 1\)](#): "...in 1958, President Dwight Eisenhower gave his approval to a House Resolution annually recognizing May 1 as Loyalty Day and a "special day for the reaffirmation of loyalty to the United States of America and for the recognition of the heritage of American freedom."

[Military Spouse Appreciation Day \(May 12\)](#): This day is set aside for us to pause to recognize the military spouses around us who have the greatest impact on our lives and our military communities.

[Armed Forces Day \(May 20\)](#): In an excerpt from the Presidential Proc-

lamation of Feb. 27, 1950, President Truman stated, "Armed Forces Day, Saturday, May 20, 1950, marks the first combined demonstration by America's defense team of its progress, under the National Security Act, toward the goal of readiness for any eventuality. It is the first parade of preparedness by the unified forces of our land, sea, and air defense."

[Memorial Day \(May 30\)](#): First established as Decoration Day after the Civil War, the holiday was set aside for families and friends to visit and decorate the graves of troops lost in the conflict. As time went on, the observance instead became known as "Memorial Day," until 1971, when Congress declared it an official holiday set to fall annually on the last Monday in May.

As I said, the entire month is *Military Appreciation Month*. Spread the word to your friends and family and remember to do the right thing on Memorial Day.

Congratulations to our graduates. Remember to pick up your red, white, and blue graduation cord. You've earned it, wear it! You can pick these up at Jim Stoddard's office during his regular business hours. They are: 8:30-11:30 AM & 1:30-4:30 PM weekdays in Ceres Hall (room 329).

Please remember to read about our Student Veteran of the Month for May, Andrew VonEschen. Andrew serves in the Security Forces as a member of the 119th Wing out at Hector International. He is majoring in psychology here at NDSU. Included in his profile is a beautiful family photo. Welcome to the Bison Student Veteran family, Andrew, and thank you for your service!

A note to our readers, please join VALOR in congratulating Craig on his impending graduation!



# THE SPOTLIGHT

Name: Andrew VonEschen

Major/Minor: Psychology

Originally from: Ortonville, MN

Current city: Fargo, ND

Career plans after college: I really want to help people by going into civilian law enforcement after graduation.

Military Service/Awards: Currently a full-time member of the 119th Security Forces Squadron, North Dakota Air National Guard.

NDSU activities/engagement: New member of the Bison Student Veteran Organization and a former member of Theta Chi fraternity here at NDSU.

Community activities/engagement: Various volunteer opportunities, especially when I was an active member of Theta Chi fraternity.

An interesting tidbit about the veteran: During my first semester of college (fall 2019) I lost 60 pounds, enlisted in the ND Air Guard, joined a fraternity, worked a part-time job, all while taking 18 credits. I've been tired ever since.

Favorite experience/memories/etc. at NDSU: The first day of living in the dorms, freshmen year. At 10 PM, almost every student in the entire building sprinted out of the dorm in the middle of a thunderstorm just so we could all take a picture with the bison statue on campus. The RA's and dorm director were understandably upset because we were all soaking wet walking through the dorm, but it was definitely worth it and was a great "welcome to college" moment.



Andrew VonEschen shown with his proud family

## CALL TO ACTION: **BE CONSIDERATE OF VETERANS WITH PTSD**

Combat veterans with PTSD can be triggered by fireworks. The bright flashes of light and the loud booms can negatively affect such veterans, causing distress and physical symptoms. Unfortunately, in the Midwest (despite laws to the contrary), fireworks tend to start days before July 4<sup>th</sup> celebrations and last for days after.

Veterans who struggle with PTSD may actively avoid celebrations where they are exposed, but with the increasing availability of more potent fireworks, the ability to avoid house-shaking booms is difficult. Please try and be considerate of veterans in and around your neighborhood during this holiday. Try to limit your fireworks to the evening of July 4<sup>th</sup> and refrain from setting off fireworks that are so loud that they can be clearly heard and felt (via vibration) inside others' homes. If possible, attend community firework events instead of lighting fireworks off in your neighborhood. Of note, these same fireworks also frighten many pets. Read more about this issue [here](#).



**Fire Watch**

*Brennan Lemar and Devon Patton, BSV*

It's hard to believe that we are already in May. Our last meeting for the semester is Tuesday, May 3<sup>rd</sup> at 5:30 PM in the Meadow Lark room of the Memorial Union. Looking forward to fall semester, we currently do not have anyone signed up to present to BSV. If you or someone you know may be interested in speaking at one of our upcoming meetings, we encourage you to contact us.

We are currently working with NDSU administration to have overseas military experience accredited to fulfill the global perspectives, and cultural diversity requirement. If you are currently registered for a class fulfilling this requirement, it may be worth your time to check back in with us before fall semester.

Our elections were held in April, and we are excited to say that we have several new officers fulfilling new positions. They will be beginning their new roles at the start of fall semester. We plan to have food and beverages at our first meeting to kick off the new school year.

We thank you for your support throughout this school year and look forward to returning in August!



Connect with BSV via [email](#) or [Facebook](#).

U.S. Veterans Magazine is a free online magazine focused primarily on supporting and advising veteran success in business and career. You can access the Spring 2022 issue [here](#) and past quarterly issues (from 2018 to current) [here](#). Below are a sampling of some of the issues.



Have a relaxing summer!

# Career Corner

Jerry South, Assistant Director, Career Coaching, NDSU Career and Advising Center



It can be a bit of a challenge adapting to the work culture in a new job. There are all the new faces to get to know, discovering the chain of command, learning the expectations of work, and the approved level of social engagement, just to name a few. Here are a few tips to help ease the sometimes-awkward and sometimes stressful transition.



The first tip is to be flexible. Everyone knows you are new and still learning the ropes. Give yourself some grace while you explore the new environment. If you are in a brand-new position where you are just learning the job it is ok to make some mistakes. If you are familiar with the position but in a new company, remember to give yourself some buffer time on your deadlines. Your efficiency will suffer a little bit typically as you learn where things are in the office/work space as well as learning how to access all the computer programs you may be required to use.

Next, be sure to ask questions. Don't pretend you know exactly what is needed or how to do a given task. Ask for clarification on preferred office processes, best practices, and work expectations. In the process of learning, don't compare yourself to others. Everyone has their own learning style and speed, and everyone brings a different set of skills to the job. Find out

who is the subject matter expert for the given situation and seek out their wisdom and advice. If possible, see if they are willing to be your mentor to help get you up to speed.

It is always a best practice to be a team player as well. Even if you work in a cubicle, others around you can give you help or you can offer them help. We are social creatures and the best way to get to know the culture of the company is to observe and ask around. See how often breaks are allowed, where do people typically congregate on break, what is okay to talk about and what topics are taboo. Watch out for getting involved with any office clichés or politics though. These can cause you to get pigeon holed or stereotyped as part of a group that may not be looked well upon.

Finally, be yourself. Share your thoughts and ideas about a project in a professional and timely manner. If someone says or does something that upsets you, respectfully let them know. Remember, they know just as much about you as you know about them; everyone is on the same learning curve when it comes to getting to know each other, so give them and yourself the respect, grace, forgiveness, and time it takes to develop a solid working relationship. These things don't happen overnight, it takes time, energy and effort to become a successful part of the team.



## UPCOMING EVENT:

Financial Literacy workshop hosted by Gate City Bank; May 3<sup>rd</sup> from 2 - 3:15 PM; MU, Room of Nations



Do you need **money** for an emergency or **food** to get you through a rough patch? Check out [NDSU's Emergency Fund](#) and the [NDSU Food Pantry](#). These services are still available to you throughout the summer—reach out!

**You didn't come this far to only come this far.**



[valor.veteran.alliance.organization/](http://valor.veteran.alliance.organization/)

Verify Enrollment Monthly

Military and Veteran Certification Office



Todd Yackley

If you are a Chapter 33 (Post 9/11), Chapter 1606 (Guard or Reserve), or Chapter 30 (Montgomery GI Bill) then this is for you. Those receiving funding under the aforementioned chapters are required to verify their enrollment at the end of each month to receive their Monthly Housing Allowance (MHA) and/or kicker payments.

We want to help you meet this new requirement so you can continue your education without any interruption in benefits. By verifying that you are still enrolled in the same courses or training every month, you help avoid overpayments caused by changes to your training schedule and safeguard your GI Bill entitlement by preventing entitlement charges for training you did not attend.



We encourage students to opt into text messaging, which is a simple, quick option for verifying monthly enrollment and ensuring their receipt of MHA/kicker payments uninterrupted. All impacted students with a US mobile phone number on file should receive an opt-in text message after being enrolled in their courses. Students must respond to that text within 14 days.

If you do not receive a text, you can call 888-442-4551 and ask them to opt you in to text verification. After opting in, you can simply reply to a VA text message each month to verify your enrollment. If you opt out of text message verification or do not respond to the opt-in text, you will be automatically enrolled in email verification with the email address on file with VA. For more information, contact me.



Remember & Honor

## MEMORIAL DAY

ESTABLISHED AFTER THE CIVIL WAR BY UNION VETERANS AND NAMED

### DECORATION DAY

1st celebrated at Arlington National Cemetery on

# MAY 30<sup>th</sup> 1868

Waterloo, N.Y. is considered to be the birthplace of MEMORIAL DAY

1971 Year that Memorial Day was established as an official holiday

NOW CELEBRATED ON THE LAST MONDAY IN MAY

IN 2010, CONGRESS PASSED AND THE PRESIDENT SIGNED AN ACT CREATING A

## NATIONAL MOMENT OF REMEMBRANCE

WHICH ENCOURAGES PEOPLE TO STOP AT 3 P.M. FOR A MOMENT OF SILENCE

Memorial Day pays tribute to those

### AMERICAN SOLDIERS WHO LOST THEIR LIVES

4,435 American Revolution	2,260 War of 1812	est. 1,000 Indian Wars	13,283 Mexican War	498,332 Civil War	2,446 Spanish-American War	116,516 World War I
405,399 World War II	54,246 Korean War	90,220 Vietnam War	1,948 Desert Shield/Desert Storm	4,422 Operation Iraqi Freedom	66 Operation New Dawn	2,220 Operation Enduring Freedom

# 1,196,793

Total war casualties, over 300,000 of which are buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C.

An average of 28 burials occur each weekday at Arlington – 6,900 annually

220,000

FLAGS PLANTED AT ARLINGTON FOR MEMORIAL DAY IN 2012

3

U.S. ARMY INFANTRY REGIMENT, OR THE "OLD GUARD," HAS PLACED FLAGS ON ARLINGTON GRAVES SINCE 1948

Sources: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, U.S. Department of Defense, Arlington National Cemetery

THE HUFFINGTON POST

*"Our nation owes a debt to its fallen heroes that we can never fully repay." ~Barack Obama*

## COMING UP

**Local Events**

On **Wednesday, May 11<sup>h</sup>**, from **10 AM-12 PM**, veterans and their families can visit the **Fargo Air Museum's Veterans Coffee Hour** for free Sandy's Donuts and coffee. This event is held every second Wednesday of each month at 1609 19<sup>th</sup> Ave. N., Fargo.

On **Monday, May 16<sup>h</sup>** (and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday of every month), from **1-4 PM** visit the **free, walk-in legal clinic** for help for low-income veterans with civil legal matters at **Fargo VA's Community Resource and Referral Center (CRCC)**. The CRCC is on 1st Avenue N. in downtown Fargo, next to the Federal Courthouse.

On **May 30<sup>th</sup> (Memorial Day) at 10:00AM**, there will be a parade and short memorial ceremony at **Riverside Cemetery** located at 2102 5th St S, Fargo.

**Fargo National Cemetery** located at 8711 40th Ave N, Harwood will also hold a **Memorial Day** ceremony, as will other veteran organizations (e.g., VFW, American Legion, etc.) in the area. Monitor local news and social media platforms for more information.

**Connect Locally via Facebook****NDDVA**

[facebook.com/NDDVA/](https://facebook.com/NDDVA/)

**DAV North Dakota**

[facebook.com/davnorthdakota/](https://facebook.com/davnorthdakota/)

**American Legion Post 2**

[facebook.com/americanlegionpost2/](https://facebook.com/americanlegionpost2/)

**American Legion Post 21**

[facebook.com/legionpost21/](https://facebook.com/legionpost21/)

**North Dakota American Legion**

[facebook.com/NDAmericanLegion/](https://facebook.com/NDAmericanLegion/)

**Dilworth VFW Post 1223**

[facebook.com/VFW-Post-1223-106022496155155/](https://facebook.com/VFW-Post-1223-106022496155155/)

**Fargo VFW Post 762**

[facebook.com/fargovfwclub/](https://facebook.com/fargovfwclub/)

**West Fargo VFW Post 7564**

[facebook.com/VFW7564.org/](https://facebook.com/VFW7564.org/)

**North Dakota Veterans Educational Training**

[facebook.com/VeteransEducationalTraining/](https://facebook.com/VeteransEducationalTraining/)

**Bison Student Veterans**

[facebook.com/BisonVeterans](https://facebook.com/BisonVeterans)

**VALOR**

[facebook.com/valor.veteran.alliance.organization/](https://facebook.com/valor.veteran.alliance.organization/)

**DATES TO REMEMBER****May**

Month of the Military Caregiver	Month of May
National Military Appreciation Month	Month of May
Silver Star Service Banner Day	May 1
Military Spouse Appreciation Day	May 6
VE Day	May 8
Children of Fallen Patriots Day	May 13
Armed Forces Day	May 21
Memorial Day	May 30

**June**

PTSD Awareness Month	Month of June
D-Day	June 6
Women Veterans Day	June 12
Army Birthday	June 14
U.S. Flag Day	June 14
Veterans Golden Age Games	June 18-23
Coast Guard Auxiliary Birthday	June 23
PTSD Awareness Day	June 27

**July**

Independence Day	July 4
National Hire a Veteran Day	July 25
Korean War Veterans Armistice Day	July 27
National Buffalo Soldiers Day	July 28
Army Chaplain Corps Anniversary	July 29

**August**

Antiterrorism Awareness Month	Month of August
Air Force Day	August 1
Coast Guard Day	August 4
Purple Heart Day	August 7
U.S. Department of Defense Birthday	August 10
Agent Orange Awareness Day	August 10
Navajo Code Talkers Day	August 14
National Airborne Day	August 16
Marine Corps Reserve Birthday	August 29

**September**

National Suicide Prevention Month	Month of Sept.
National Service Dog Month	Month of Sept.
V-J Day (Victory over Japan)	September 2
Patriot Day	September 11
National POW/MIA Recognition Day	September 16
Air Force (USAF) Birthday	September 18
Air National Guard Birthday	September 18
Gold Star Mother's Day	September 25
VFW Day	September 29





*Dr. Erika Berg, associate professor of Equine Science at North Dakota State, observes therapy sessions at the NDSU Equine Center in Fargo.  
Photo Courtesy: Hayden Austin  
The Spectrum - NDSU*

You may or may not know this, but North Dakota State University's diverse academic program offerings include an undergraduate degree in Equine Science. According to their website, the program "offers students professional training designed to prepare students for careers in animal agriculture, animal agribusiness, animal health and allied industries, equine science, veterinary technology, and related fields." As important as animals are to our economy, our ecology, and the environment, I would argue most people think animals are important to our psyche as well. Doesn't everyone know a "cat lady" or have a neighbor that owns multiple dogs or prefers a certain breed? Let's face it, we love our animals.

So, when I first heard of the Bison Strides program, operated by NDSU's Equine Science department, I thought I probably knew what I was going to see, but was not completely sure. However, when I arrived at the Equine Center just west of campus and met with Dr. Erika Berg, an associate professor of Animal Science at NDSU, I was not prepared for the amazing and emotional experiences I was about to witness.

The Bison Strides program was started by Dr. Berg in May of 2017 and offers equine assisted activities and therapies for individuals with various physical, emotional, or behavioral challenges. The four programs offered are adapted therapeutic horsemanship, equine assisted learning, physical and occupational therapy, and military and veterans horsemanship program.

The program began when another similar program that NDSU Equine Science previously partnered with closed. "I started Bison Strides," said Berg. "We had partnered with a program in Minnesota called 'Riding on Angel's Wings' but they closed in February of 2017. We needed another place for students in the minor program to get their teaching hours and a place to offer the services."

Dr. Berg has been around horses her whole life. "My parents bought my sister and I a horse when we were in high school, but I have been riding since I was seven. My sister and I rode and showed horses and I was on the equestrian team in college," said Berg. "When I was in graduate school, there was a program similar to Bison Strides that was looking for volunteers." It was one of those life "moments" for Dr. Berg. "I go 'oh, I should do that. That seems pretty cool'," remembered Berg. "So, I went, and I completely fell in love...with, just everything about the experience." Then, she had another amazing experience while pursuing her doctoral degree at Texas A&M. "I started my Ph.D. at A&M and part of my assistantship was to coordinate their adapted physical education classes with the Bryan, Texas, school district," said Berg. "So, in 1997, the students in the adapted physical education program of the Bryan, Texas, school district were getting bussed to the Texas A&M Equine Center for their gym class and that's amazing." Berg is still thrilled with the experience today. "When I think back to that and how ever many years ago that was, that was just a completely novel, really cool thing. A school district was paying for the kids' gym class. Their gym teacher was there and that was their P.E. class. (continued on page 10)

That was such a special experience for those kids and for me.” After moving to Missouri to get her teaching certificate, Dr. Berg took her current position at NDSU and started with the ‘Riding on Angel’s Wings’ program.

Of the four programs that Bison Strides offers, most are focused on children. The adapted therapeutic horsemanship is designed to teach horsemanship skills. Some of the benefits seen from this program are improved social skills, balance, and posture, as well as greater self-confidence and self-awareness.

The equine assisted learning program provides equine interaction opportunities that teach honesty, respect, empathy, and communication. This program is for children aged 8 to 17 and focuses on social and emotional growth for those children who are challenged in those areas.

The physical and occupational therapy program uses “evidence-based practices and clinical reasoning to purposely manipulate the movement of the horse to engage the client’s sensory, neuromotor, and cognitive skills to achieve functional outcomes.” Bison Strides works closely with Beyond Boundaries Therapy Services to assist with this program. “Something that is unique about a horse’s walk is that when a human is sitting on their back,” explained Berg, “the horse moves a human’s pelvis as though the human were walking on their own two feet. It [the horse’s movements] has an anterior/posterior rotational quality to its walk that mimics a human’s walk.” An example is a child with a brain injury or afflicted with cerebral palsy can get the muscle patterns of a gait, (or walk) built into its muscle or brain memory which helps significantly in their recovery or simply improves their motor skills.



**NDSU** BISON STRIDES

On one of the days I visited the equine center, I was able to witness a little boy who looked about five years old. He and his mother (both of whom will remain anonymous for privacy purposes) had just resumed their equine therapy sessions recently as the pandemic appeared to be diminishing in its scope. His mother told me he had one of his hips replaced as the hip he was born with was diseased. So, this little guy is dealing with a new artificial hip while still having the underdeveloped motor skills of a five-year old. Watching the excitement in this young man riding this horse and the look of joy on his mother’s face was an emotional experience for me. While a physical therapist walked along on one side and an occupational therapist walked along the other, this little guy rode the horse facing forward, rearward, and facing both to the left and right. Meanwhile, his occupational therapist had him do other simple exercises like holding his arms above his head while the horse was moving. It was an amazing experience to observe.

The last program offered is the military and veterans program. It consists of what is referred to as “ground training”. This training gives the veteran an opportunity to build a relationship with the horse that focuses on mutual respect, clear expectations, and trust. The veteran also has an opportunity for self-reflection, emotional awareness, and stress tolerance. “We’ve probably had about 20 veterans use that program so far,” said Berg. “The pandemic kind of slowed that down a little and we only have one veteran right now. Four to six veterans is about our session limit because we can’t have that many people in the arena with the horses. We had four last semester, but one moved away and the others have had some other health issues,” continued Berg. “We are always looking for more. So, we are working on getting the word out from fellow veterans because we think that holds a lot more weight.” The military and veterans program is also beneficial to the horses. “It is good for the horses to get that contact, too,” said Berg.

The one current veteran in the program is retired U.S. Navy Captain Doug Kliman. I met Captain Kliman one morning at the equine center and spoke with him while he groomed a miniature horse named ‘Tony’. When asked what he liked about the military and veterans program, Kliman said, “the time with the horses spent getting to know them and bonding with them.” Captain Kliman is taking equine classes at NDSU as an undesignated student and likes the fact that the classes and therapy “compliment each other.”

‘Tony’, one of two minis at the center, is new to the grounding sessions and is being groomed, literally and figuratively, for other work as well. ‘Tony’ along with the other miniature horse, ‘Spark’, are both being trained to become ambassadors for the Bison Strides program.

“Pet Partners is a group in the United States that does evaluating and certifying of teams, a human and an animal,” said Berg. “Most of the time, it’s humans and dogs or humans and horses, but it can be a human and a cat, almost anything really. The certification means the animal and the human team need to meet a certain criteria and once you have that partner certification, it’s like having a canine good citizen certificate for your dog. The dog has to sit, it has to

stay, it has to come when called and not bark or climb on somebody,” explained Berg. “In the case of a horse, the horse must show it can be led quietly, it has to accept three strangers petting them and remain still and they have to accept a neutral dog.” A neutral dog is one that simply walks by without actually engaging the horse.

“The horses also have to deal with loud noises,” said Berg. “Humans shouting in the area or children being loud, they really must show that they can keep it together when facing that environment. Another important one, especially for our veteran population, is walkers and wheelchairs. How will the horse react when approached by someone using one of those walking aids?”

Once ‘Tony’ and ‘Spark’ have their certifications, the plan is to have them go to schools, nursing homes and hospitals to advertise the Bison Strides program. “Fingers crossed,” said Berg.

Why horses? What is it about this animal that makes them a great fit for the various types of therapy that Bison Strides offers?

“In order to work with horses, you need to be calm in your body and present in your mind,” said Berg. “Sometimes we don’t see that, particularly in our veteran population. We see those with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and some of our veterans aren’t always in that state and are in their “fight or flight” mode. They’ve got intrusive thoughts coming in. Working with the horses allows a person to be present, in fact, the horse basically demands you be present with them.”

Horses are animals that are keenly aware of their environment and their survival depends on their ability to sense that environment that surrounds them. Berg explains, “Humans are predator, horses are prey. The horse is keenly aware of their environment. In fact, their survival depends on the ability to read the body language of everything in their environment,” said Berg. “If the horse does a poor job of reading its environment, it becomes prey and does not survive. So, from an evolutionary standpoint, horses have an extremely high sense of self-preservation and are really good at adapting to their environment.” Captain Kliman put it this way, “they talk to us through their body language.”

“Many of our veterans can relate to that self-preservation piece,” added Berg.

“It’s important to note that because the horses are not human, they do not judge the veteran,” said Berg. “They do not care if the words coming out of your mouth are hurtful or uncomfortable. You are not going to hurt their feelings. You may make them nervous with the tone you are using, but this allows for some self-reflection.” The horse will then signal the veteran that it is uncomfortable. “In this case, the horse will choose not to stick around and walk away,” said Berg. “Now we have an opportunity for the veteran participant to understand that their body language or tone was uncomfortable, and we can talk about that.”

The horse just walks away. Instead of yelling, judging, or using verbal or physical violence, the horse walks away to tell you that it wasn’t feeling safe. An amazing thing to be sure.

“It’s less confrontational and the participant becomes less defensive about their actions. It’s a self-realization process,” said Berg. “That is much more powerful than another person pointing out to you something you probably already know. The horse has no ulterior motive. They are just ‘being’. The horse is in the moment, and it demands the same of you.”

There are some challenges to the program. “A lot of that population that we get in have bad knees, bad hips, for example. So, sometimes we just do what the participant veteran is comfortable with. If that means staying on the ground and grooming the horse for an hour, so be it.” Sometimes, the participating veteran will relax and begin sharing with the horse, or with the staff. “Not to have it analyzed, not to have it judged,” said Berg. “They get some things off of their chest and maybe start talking some more.”

There is also the challenge of matching up a horse physically with a participant. *(continued on page 12)*



“Our limit right now with the riding or mounted work is our horses are pretty old and pretty small,” explained Berg. “Right now, we have a weight limit of 165 – 170 pounds. So, we are actively looking for other horses that can support adults and it’s not just veterans or military people, it’s all adults.” Berg is currently working with someone who is an alumni of the program to bring in a draft cross horse. A draft horse or a draft crossbreed are horses that are typically large and very powerful. They are popular in farming, logging, and recreational uses. To go along with their size and strength, they are also known for their patience and docile temperament.

Any veteran or current member of the military is eligible. You do not need permission or a doctor’s diagnosis of a condition to participate. “There is some paperwork to fill out,” said Berg. “A doctor’s release form and a registration, emergency contact, that kind of thing.” There is no charge to the veteran for the program. “The military and veteran program is funded 100 percent by grants and donor support,” said Berg.

The program is also dependent on some incredible staff. Besides Dr. Berg, there is a staff of volunteers and of course, NDSU students who are in the equine science program. Jesse Moe, one of those students majoring in equine science, is the Program Assistant for Bison Strides. She sees it every day, the relationship between animal and human. “My favorite thing about Bison Strides,” said Moe, “is seeing how it affects our participants. The horses love it, too.”

“Bison Strides would not run without her [Jesse],” said Berg, “or our volunteers.”

For more information on Bison Strides, visit the following website: <https://www.bisonstrides.org/>. You can also donate to support Bison Strides work here: <https://www.bisonstrides.org/give>.



### Nick, Veterans Horsemanship Program

“My Name is Nick, I recently retired from the Military after 20 years of service and three tours to Iraq and Afghanistan. Transitioning from Military to Civilian life has proved to be extremely difficult for me and my family. I was informed about Bison Strides through my local Vet Center. I am so thankful for the individuals that led me to Bison Strides. The staff there has helped my adjustment exponentially and the horses help me work through problems, understanding how I can relate my thought processes to the horses. The horse doesn’t know you or the things you’ve experienced and there is not one bit of judgement from that horse. There is so much to discover in the process and how a horse can help Veterans that have experienced trauma. I hope to be an advocate for the program and look forward to spreading the word on what Bison Strides has done for me and how great it is to work with a horse.”

*From Bison Strides Stories, see more of these stories [here](#).*



*There is a great deal of research that confirms the value of animal-assisted therapy and interventions for PTSD. If you want to learn more about this topic, visit [Pet Partners](#). This organization partners with the Veterans Administration to bring therapy animals to Veterans Health Administration facilities. This partnership allows for the option of registered therapy animals other than dogs visiting VHA facilities.*

