



Dave Osterman

PHOTOS BY REBECCA GILSETH

Stepping in, not stepping back

Isle and Onamia merge VFW posts

BY REBECCA GILSETH

rebecca.gilseth@apgecm.com

The beginning of fall marks a time of year when things begin to change. The air gets colder, the leaves turn color, the threat of winter looms and America's veterans get one day older.

"I'm one of the young ones and I'm 70," Onamia Legion Commander Dave Osterman said.

Faced with dwindling membership, the Isle and Onamia Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) posts decided to merge, a change that became official on Oct. 6 of this year. Onamia's VFW 955 is a senior post in terms of age and will integrate with Isle's VFW 2762 post. Stepping in as new commander will be Jim Dunphy. "We needed this merger to happen," Osterman said, adding, "I'm really, really glad to get together to make this happen for both."

"We're sorry to see the post close, but we'll keep projects going," Jake Shetka, Isle commander, said. After the passing of Isle's quartermaster, the post did not have anyone to fill the role. In addition, honor guard numbers at both posts were on the decline. The loss of membership results from key factors such as veterans passing away or younger veterans refraining from joining.

"There is a shift in attitude," Osterman said. "Many of the younger veterans, I don't think they realize the benefits they can get."

The merge is not unprecedented. Twelve years ago, Isle combined with McGrath's post, which according to Shetka was "basically non-existent."

This unification will ensure that services can continue for veterans in need. "We're still available to help local veterans," Shetka said. "If people need help they can contact the VFW at the Vet's Club."

"We're here to provide assistance and any

help we can to all veterans. Period," Osterman said. Whether it is medical equipment, accessibility services and supplies or a place to talk and reminisce, VFWs help veterans and the community alike. In addition to veteran's services, both groups have helped conduct parades in Isle, McGrath, Onamia and Waukon and Memorial Day services at cemeteries. Supporting education is another big aspect, whether through scholarship programs or services at the school. This includes helping the next generation learn of what veterans experienced.

"Our young people have no idea what a veteran is and who they truly are," Osterman said. "Not only am I a veteran, I'm a grandfather, a father, an uncle. I'm 'Coach,' I'm 'Dad,' I'm 'Papa.'"

Osterman, who served in the army for 25 years of active duty, has deep roots in the area having raised four children in Onamia with his wife. Osterman has been driving school buses and coaching golf for 40 years combined.

He remembers having to face the stark reality of being willing to die for one's country.

"There was going to be no stepping back. I was going to go," Osterman said.

Steve Dallman, on the Isle Vets Club and Legion Board, is another veteran who knows the commitment serving the country holds. Dallman was drafted in April of 1968, one of 11 other men in town. "It was a scary time for a guy," Dallman said, remembering standing in line to get his assignment. Every third man in line was sent to the Marines.

"I remember counting one, two, three, one,

two, three," Dallman said. "OK, I'm Army." A few heads back was Dallman's brother ... Marines.

Dallman ended up in the Army Security Agency (ASA) and then eventually ended up in Texas taking over personnel, sometimes 60 to 120 men. It was not always easy. "When you know you're sending guys over," Dallman said, "It's a lot of sad stuff."

Even when veterans returned, the atmosphere was not always beneficial to their mental health. This is why many veterans advocate for VFW services. "At least you have people around you in the same situation," Dallman said.

The long-term mental health implications of serving in the military often go unheard or ignored, sometimes even driving veterans to take their own lives at a rate higher than the general population. "We are losing veterans at a high rate," Osterman said. "The mental strain is brutal. It's very hard on everyone in the family."

Shetka, a veteran of the 133rd Airlift Wing (AW) of the Minnesota Air National Guard (MNANG), recalled the time he saw a fellow veteran crying over the familiar sounds of the bugle. "That's good, you need to do that," Shetka said. "If you save one person, it's all worth it."

One way Shetka and Dallman hope to save hurting veterans is through the veterans hunting program with Camp Ripley in Little Falls. Veterans can get out and enjoy their time by taking part in the Disabled Veterans Turkey Hunt, coming up in April. The excursion also held a deer hunt from Oct. 7-9 this year.

Camp Ripley has been holding the event for 35 years. Shetka read about it and wanted



Jake Shetka and Steve Dallman

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