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Next 18 Launches Partnership with Washington County

Wisconsin Nonprofit Supports Veterans & First Responders Through the Game of Golf

WEST BEND, Wis. — Next 18, a PGA Tour-supported Birdies for the Brave initiative that uses golf as a catalyst to provide mental wellness education to veterans and first responders, today announced that it will partner with Washington County Golf Course.

There is an urgent need for mental health resources for these communities. An average of 17 veterans die by suicide each day in the United States. Meanwhile, first responders experience PTSD at a rate comparable to combat veterans, with 30% developing behavioral health conditions such as depression or PTSD.

Founded by U.S. Army veteran Matt McDonell, Next 18 is a Milwaukee, WI based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that provides free, 4-day wellness camps designed to support mental wellness and holistic lifestyle practices for veterans and first responders. Program participants come together at premier golf courses nationwide in a safe, supportive environment to share experiences, explore personal growth, and break down stigmas around seeking help. Washington County Golf Course will host two Next 18 camps in 2025, using its state-of-the-art practice facilities.

“I grew up in Germantown, and when I came home after being medically retired from service, I was fortunate to have the support of Washington County Veteran Service Officer Kurt Rusch, who helped me transition back to civilian life. But I know that’s not the case for many veterans across the country,” said McDonell, an Airborne Infantryman with the 173rd Airborne Brigade who was deployed to Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom. “The mental health crisis among veterans and first responders is real, and I’ve seen firsthand how passionate Washington County is about supporting my brothers and sisters in service.”

As part of the partnership, Washington County Golf Course will pilot a ‘Round Up’ donation program during the 2025 season. The program would allow golfers to contribute \$1 or more with each round of golf, with all proceeds supporting Next 18’s mission. In 2024, over 31,000 rounds of golf were played at the course — a strong potential for impactful giving.

“Providing more effective ways for veterans and first responders to respond to the trauma they’ve experienced through a program offering fellowship and instruction not only in golf but in self-care will assist in their healing and mental well-being,” said County Executive Josh Schoemann. “Next 18’s mission closely aligns with the County’s function of aiding those in need of mental health services and its aim to provide mental health care to those in need, including those who bravely served our country and its first responders.”

In 2024, over 31,000 rounds of golf were played at the course, with more than 20,000 transactions—a strong potential for impactful giving. Washington County Golf Course opens for the season on April 1. Learn more about Next 18 at www.next18.org.