



## Office of the County Executive

*Josh Schoemann, County Executive*



**For Immediate Release**

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### **Washington County Launches Partnership with Next 18**

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

**WEST BEND, Wis.** — Washington County approved a new partnership for the Washington County Golf Course, which was recently named a Top 50 public golf course in the U.S. The county will use its premier recreational facility to support its objectives on Veterans and Mental Health by partnering with 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.

“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.

Founded by U.S. Army veteran Matt McDonell, Next 18 is a 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.

“I grew up in Germantown, and when I came home after being medically retired from service, I was fortunate to have the support of Washinton 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.”

Washington County Golf Course will host two Next 18 camps in 2025, using its state-of-the-art practice facilities. Next 18 will be the recipient of a pilot round-up program in 2025 at the course. The program will allow golfers to round-up to the nearest \$1 or more with each round of golf or any clubhouse purchase, with proceeds supporting Next 18. In 2024, over 31,000 rounds of golf were played at the course, a strong potential for impactful giving.

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. First responders experience PTSD at a rate comparable to combat veterans, with 30% developing behavioral health conditions such as depression or PTSD.

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In announcing the partnership, Washington County Veterans Service Officer Kurt Rusch noted that marketing campaigns targeting veterans for referral services have shown an uptick in requests for service at the county veteran mental health clinic. Rusch said of Next 18, “They are the real deal, have developed a top-notch board, and successfully developed a program recognized for the excellence of the treatment provisions within their recreational programming.”

Sheriff Martin Schulteis expressed his strong support for the Next 18 organization saying, “I am impressed with their energetic support of our veterans and first responders. Next 18’s mission aligns with the values of our county, and I wholeheartedly endorse their efforts.”

Learn more about Next 18 at [www.next18.org](http://www.next18.org).

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