

# Veterans Day Salute

As Veterans Day approaches, we salute a number of veteran-owned businesses in the hospitality industry that serve not only the public but also veteran causes.

story by ELIZABETH GRANGER

An American amber red ale called Thorstad is on tap at the **Chesterton Brewery**. Only at the Chesterton Brewery.

It was created there and is named for U.S. Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Thomas P. Thorstad, a Chesterton native killed in action in 1983 in the Beirut barracks bombings.

The brewery also has the Connor Brown. Bob Mitchell. Pruitt's Porter. Tin Can Sailor.

And the Sapper Six blonde ale, honoring six members of the Indiana National Guard 713th Engineer Company (aka Sappers), based out of Valparaiso, who were killed in 2012 in Afghanistan.

They're brewery owner Vern Brown's way to honor vets who, he says, sacrificed more than he did. "When I got out of the Marine Corps, I had all my limbs. I'm as mentally sound as when I went in. I don't have PTSD. But a lot of others are not so fortunate."

"I needed a way to give back."

So the brewery donates a portion of its earnings to not-for-profit veterans



Chesterton Brewery and Duneland Distillery owner Vern Brown, a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps, donates a portion of his earnings to not-for-profit veterans charities.  
PHOTOS: Chesterton Brewery

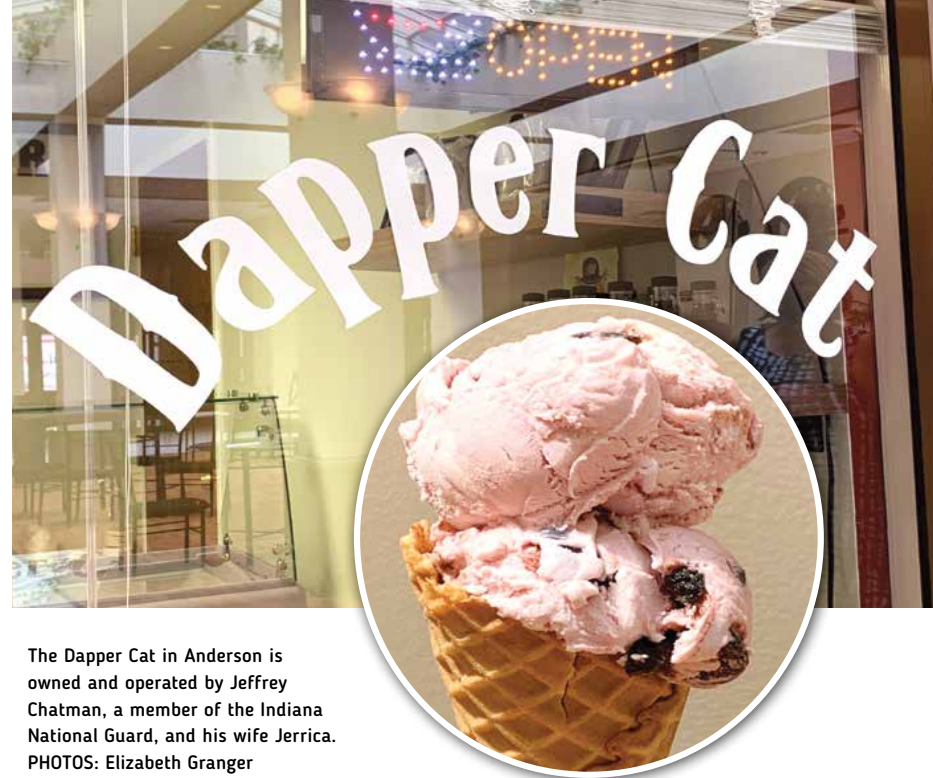


charities. This fall Brown expanded his scope when his **Duneland Distillery** opened to the public.

In South Bend, **Indiana Whiskey Company**. In Indianapolis, **Hotel Tango**. Veteran-owned. Serving the public. And contributing to veterans' causes.

In Anderson it's about ice cream, downtown, at the **Dapper Cat Café**. It's owned and operated by Jeffrey Chatman, a member of the Indiana National Guard, and his wife Jerrica.

"To us a Dapper Cat is a clean, snazzy person," Jerrica says. "I think Jeffrey is the Dapper Cat, although he hasn't admitted to it. Our love for old vinyls, clothing, and pictures ties into the name. It's also family comedy for us because



The Dapper Cat in Anderson is owned and operated by Jeffrey Chatman, a member of the Indiana National Guard, and his wife Jerrica.  
PHOTOS: Elizabeth Granger

we're actually dog lovers."

The café serves sandwiches, wraps, salads and drinks. But its forte is ice cream. "Because it translates to happiness," Jeffrey says. "We're able to deal with great attitudes. No one comes in upset, and no one leaves upset."

Flavors include black cherry, rhubarb crumble, blue moon, exhausted parent (a bourbon-spiced espresso). A flavor called "this sh\*\* just got serious" is the No. 1 seller. And for the ice cream purists, there's always vanilla.

They take an ice cream push cart out into the community to serve at events. "The ice cream is our baby, but we also do catering," Jerrica says.

In Elwood, the POW/MIA missing man table is set 24/7 at **The Tin Plate** restaurant. The candle is lit at 6 o'clock every evening. But the guest never comes.

He's still missing, or he's already gone.

"The table has been there since Day one of operation," says owner Patrick Rice. "We do not want the POWs/MIAs forgotten. It's a nice teaching moment for kids."

While Rice himself is not a veteran, his father and grandfather are. But trumpet

lessons in grade school led to Rice's membership in the world champion Star of Indiana Drum & Bugle Corps during high school. He's now a member of Bugles Across America and continues to play "Taps" at local military funerals. So far, more than 400.

Every Veterans Day, at 11:11 a.m., everything at the restaurant stops while Rice plays "Taps" on the porch outside. Every veteran who goes to the restaurant that day receives a free meal.

For Air Force veteran Patty Frensemeier, hospitality means lodging options. She and her husband own and operate **Hills O' Brown Vacation Homes and Friends O' Mine Campground and Cabins** in Gnow Bone.

Since their work kept them close to home, about ten years ago they started camping less than a mile from their home. "People would laugh at us," she says. "But we were getting to camp."

In May 2020 they bought the campground business.

"I am rooted in this community," says this Brown County native. "We're all about giving back. I do a lot with our local veterans." She's active with groups that

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Marine Corps veteran Ernie Rivas started Reville Transportation to help workers get to their jobs at area manufacturing plants. PHOTOS: Elizabeth Granger



include the American Legion, VFW, Veterans Coalition, Honor Guard. She offers discounts for military personnel both active and veteran.

Marine Corps veteran Ernie Rivas of Elkhart has always encouraged other veterans to learn about their benefits. He started **Stand Down with a Heart** to help them; it's managed by Goodwill now.

And Rivas is in transportation. His

wheels started turning when he saw a man walking down the road; it was 13 degrees below zero.

"I gave him a ride to work," Rivas says. "It was three miles; he had already walked two miles. So I started asking folks how people got to work."

He learned there was no way for many to get to jobs at factories in the region. Especially the homeless.

Rivas bought a couple buses and started **Reville Transportation**. In 2016 he partnered with the Center for the Homeless for a hiring event. "We filled up both buses." Now he has four buses that get people to and from work at area manufacturing plants. The buses are also available for events.

Jason Zaideman of Crown Point uses motorcycles as his vehicle to help. An Army veteran, he says he went back to his normal life when he got out of the Army, including "my hot rod things."

When veteran suicides topped 22 a day, he says it became a calling. His "aha" moment. "I was upset that everybody was raising money to spread awareness about a problem we already know exists. I decided to start an organization based on the hands-on therapy that works for me, for my traumas."

In 2015 he founded **Operation Combat Bikesaver** "to recreate that camaraderie of veterans hanging around other veterans. We fix each other. We crawled through the same mud; we're in good company."

The peer support group combines that camaraderie with hands-on work that started with motorcycles. "We hang out together and build things together," Zaideman says.

"Veterans have told me, 'I probably wouldn't be here today if it weren't for OCB.' I've heard that 50 or 60 times or more. We've had no suicides in six years."



Air Force veteran Patty Frensemeier, along with her husband Dave, owns Hills O'Brown Vacation Homes and Friends O' Mine Campground and Cabins in southern Indiana. PHOTOS: Friends O' Mine Campground and Cabins

He continues: "It yanks me out of bed every morning. It's not what I'm doing for one guy; it's what that one guy is doing for more. I implore the public to look at an organization that is truly making an

impact and do what you can to help them."

*Editor's note: Check local city and/or tourism websites for Veterans' Day events.*



**Veterans Brewing for Veterans is our motto!**

Chesterton Brewery is a veteran-based family restaurant with a brewery. Not only specializing in smoked meats but we have great burgers and pasta specials too. Our mission is to give back to veteran-based charities and our local heroes. Visit us today!

1050 Broadway • STE 36 • Chesterton, IN 46304  
219-728-6558 • www.chestertonbrewery.com

**Veterans Day** originated as "Armistice Day" on Nov. 11, 1919, the first anniversary of the end of World War I. Congress passed a resolution in 1926 for an annual observance, and Nov. 11 became a national holiday beginning in 1938. Unlike Memorial Day, Veterans Day pays tribute to all American veterans—living or dead—but especially gives thanks to living veterans who served their country honorably during war or peacetime.

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Visitor & Tourism Bureau

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