



## VISN 12 Welcomes New Network Director

Effective October 2, 2005, James W. Roseborough was appointed Network Director for VISN 12.

Previously Roseborough served as Director of the VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System (VAAHS), with the challenge of combining the main Ann Arbor Tertiary Care Referral Center with the new Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) in Jackson and Flint, Michigan and the existing CBOC in Toledo, Ohio. With the integration completed, he set about improving access and services by adding additional outpatient clinics

scores. The VAAHS is comprised of one hospital, one extended care center, and three CBOCs.

He joined the VA in 1970 and prior to being appointed as the Director, was Medical Center Director of the VA Medical Center in Poplar Bluff, Missouri.

Roseborough is a native of Pittsburgh and received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Penn State University, and his Certificate of Public Administration from Eastern Washington State College.

He is a diplomate of the American College of Healthcare Executives and is a member of several other professional organizations.

---

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 2 Hurricane Katrina
- 4 POW/MIA Recognition
- 5 Network Awards
- 8 New Appointments
- 10 Network News
- 21 You Should be Proud- A Letter from The Secretary

## Facilities Celebrate VA's 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

### Tomah

About 300 staff, patients, volunteers and visitors attended the kick-off celebration of the Department of Veterans Affairs' 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary at **Tomah VA**.



*Mayor Chuck Ludeking, left, signed a proclamation citing July 21, 2005 as "Veterans Affairs Day," as Acting Director Jerry Molnar watched.*

**Hines VA** is celebrating the VA's 75th Anniversary with monthly activities throughout the year. All employees were invited to a kick-off ice cream social to mark the occasion. Hines inpatients also shared in the fun as they received complimentary ice cream on their trays as well. Employees are wearing red, white and blue every Friday during the year-long anniversary celebration.

## Hurricane Katrina Brings VA Family Closer Together

It was the most devastating natural disaster in United States history. The need for help was urgent and not left unanswered by VISN 12 facilities.

Staff members from around the VISN volunteered to help in both the Gulf Region and in Chicago where the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) established a call center. 11 staff members from Milwaukee reported to CBOCs in Baton Rouge and Lafayette, LA. 39 staff members from Jesse Brown VA volunteered to be deployed to the hurricane site through the Disaster Emergency Medical Personnel System (DEMPS) while 33 staff offered to provide assistance at a Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) call center located in Chicago. Three staff members from North Chicago have been deployed to Mississippi and Louisiana and another three have volunteered to help staff the FEMA call center. From Hines VA more than 90 employees put their names on the VA's list of people willing to go to the Gulf Coast to provide on-site assistance and an additional 60 employees have volunteered to staff the call center.



*Milwaukee's mobile clinic was deployed to Gulf Region.*

Within 48 hours the mobile clinic from Milwaukee VA was on its way supported by three staff members (an MD, RN, and LPN). It first was assigned to Hattiesburg, MS and then after a few days, went on to Gulfport, LA where the need was greater. The clinic was the first VA mobile clinic operational in the hurricane area.

For use in possible relief efforts, available buildings on the campuses of Milwaukee and Hines were identified to house displaced VA employees and private citizens if needed.

Will Johnson, a veteran service representative from Milwaukee, helped in reuniting a somewhat confused, elderly veteran who was displaced from New Orleans to Houston and finally to Milwaukee. The veteran was put in contact with his son in Atlanta who did not know where his father was and reunited a few days later.

A call of appreciation to Mr. Johnson from the son was an unexpected reward. Mr. Johnson had come in on his day off to take the veteran to the airport.

Robert Barker, from Jesse Brown's Engineering Service, was deployed to the Alexandria VAMC in Louisiana. In an e-mail message back to the medical center, he stated, "I have met both displaced VA employees from New Orleans and volunteers from the VA's all over the country. Every victim I have spoken to has a strong positive outlook for the future and is looking forward to returning home and rebuilding. They have expressed their heartfelt thanks for all the volunteers who have come to help. But I am thankful for being given the opportunity to see first hand what can happen when VA employees pull together and work together to help each other in time of trouble."

In addition to supporting the VA Employee Relief Fund set up after Hurricane Katrina struck, Tomah VA staff collected 930 pounds of goods to be sent to the hurricane ravaged Gulf Coast region.



*Marti Ross, Materiel Handler, boxes donations as the supplies donated by Tomah VA employees pile higher.*

The veterans from the Community Support Program wanted to help the hurricane victims as well. They held a bake sale and raised \$495 in just one day! The proceeds will provide support to fellow Mental Health Intensive Care Management (MHICM) veterans in Gulfport/Biloxi and New Orleans.



*Mike Collies, left, and Ken Yablinsky deliver a cart full of baked goods for sale.*

North Chicago VAMC held a raffle which amounted to \$1,850. A bake sale was also held and raised \$500 to support VA staff affected by the hurricane and sold red, white and blue ribbons that collected \$275.

North Chicago staff also has been busy assisting fellow employees who had family members affected by Hurricane Katrina. At least for now these families have temporarily re-located into the North Chicago area. Clothing, personal items and monetary donations have been made to help these families get back on their feet. North Chicago has also helped two displaced VA employees from the Gulf Coast with temporary jobs at the medical center.



*Tena Shealey, N&F and Donna Williams, Patient Services assist with bakesale.*

The Hines Employees Association and the Hines VA Voluntary Service set up a table in the hospital lobby last week to take donations that will be sent to a general post fund account in VISN 16 and to the account set up to aid VA employees. In this way, 100% of the donations will be used to support patients and staff affected by Hurricane Katrina. In one day, generous employees donated more than \$1800 to the cause and the donations keep coming.

Hines and its community based outpatient clinics have received more than 20 veteran patients who are staying with family in the Chicago area after being displaced by the hurricane and sought treatment locally. The facility's social work service is heavily involved in assisting these patients in obtaining support from various agencies in the community.



*Hines Director Jack Hetrick at Memorial Service for Hurricane Katrina Victims.*

A collection initiated by Canteen Service at the Jesse Brown VAMC raised almost \$2,000 the first week through collection sites placed at all the cash registers in the cafeteria and retail store. Pat Gleason, Chief, Canteen Service, said funds continue to come in each day, with a number of employees donating between \$50 and \$200 in checks.

Veterans Strike Force – 1 (a veterans service organization started at the Jesse Brown VA) partnered with Walls Memorial C.M.E. Church and several other organizations to send two 53-foot semi-trailers, each filled with over 60,000 pounds of food, water and clothing, to assist displaced Americans in the Gulf Coast states.

Overall, hundreds of JBVA employees responded in some way – donating money, food, clothing, personal care items or volunteering at the Red Cross or

Operation PUSH, as well as at the Tinley Park Mental Health facility where hurricane evacuees are being sheltered. Many employees mentioned special assistance programs they were involved in with their churches.

Several employees spoke of inviting displaced family members to live with them and others indicated their willingness to provide space in their homes for displaced veterans or children. One employee who owns an apartment building on the north side of Chicago pledged to provide an apartment large enough for a family of four, rent-free for the remainder of the year, to a veteran or VA employee displaced by Hurricane Katrina.

## POW/MIA Recognition Day

Facilities around VISN 12 held observances of POW/MIA Recognition Day. At Tomah VA, the annual program to honor and remember our nation's former Prisoners of War (POW) and those still Missing in Action (MIA) was held on Friday, September 16 in the VA Chapel.

Over 150, including eighteen former Prisoners of War, attended the program. Shari Sarazin provided harp music during the MIA Tribute as well as before and after the program. Vietnam veteran Dan Krehbiel sang two songs, including "The Highground" which he wrote for the dedication of the veterans' memorial in 1997.



Former Prisoners of War and other guests took turns lighting candles in remembrance of those still Missing in Action from the Vietnam War. The white candles symbolize those whose remains have been found. There are twenty-nine servicemen still missing from that war; eight have been found, including three just this past year.

In Milwaukee, there wasn't a dry eye in the place as former POWs recounted their imprisonment during WWII.

Karen Berte, PhD, coordinator of the PTSD outpatient services, spoke on the Physical Health and the POW Experience. She likened the tragedy which so many Americans are facing today in the Gulf to the POW experience.



*Fred Broussard, a 82-year old WWII veteran interred for over 10 months in Germany, places a Marine Corps service cap at the Missing Man Table, a symbol to remember those veterans who are no longer with us.*

Dr. Berte encouraged the audience to let their minds go a little bit deeper and think about the contrast of depravation and events that last far longer than the day and weeks that people are currently dealing with in the disaster area. "Our former Prisoners of War are truly a remarkable group of people, and they have endured great hardships physically and psychologically. And many times, their physical hardships became an additional source of psychological pain for them."

One by one the former POWs slowly walked to the podium and told their personal stories. The stories were not pleasant. All were chocked with emotion and each received a warm round of applause.

Joe Campbell, a past recipient of Vietnam Veteran of the Year, gave an emotion filled explanation of the items on the Missing Man Table prominently placed in front of the auditorium: "The table is set for five to honor those of each branch of the armed forces. The table is round to show the everlasting

concern for those still missing. The cloth is white to symbolize the purity of their motives when answering the call of duty. There is a single red rose displayed in a vase reminds of the life of each of the missing and their love ones and friends who keep the faith awaiting answers. The vase is tied with a red ribbon symbolic of our continued determination to account for our missing. There is a slice of lemon on the bread plate and that is to remind us of the bitter fate of those captured and missing in a foreign land. There is a pinch of salt on each plate which symbolizes the tears endured by those missing, their families who seek answers. The Bible represents the strength gained through faith to sustain those lost from our country founded as one nation under God. The glasses are inverted to symbolize their inability to share this POW/MIA Day of Remembrance. And finally, the chairs are empty.” He paused. “They are missing.”

Over 40 former prisoners of war, primarily from World War II and the Korean War, attended the National POW/MIA Recognition Day ceremony at the Jesse Brown VAMC on September 16.



Here, they are seen bowing their heads during a moment of silence out of respect for those service members still listed as Missing in Action.



The North Chicago VA featured four former Prisoners of War (POW's) from World War II at their celebration.

Each of them served in the Air Force, sharing their experiences and stories of heroism and sacrifice. The four speakers included Frank Schwermin, John Lord, Nathan Firestone, and Ernest Shavitz. The audience, which included many former POW's from Northern Illinois, was very moved by these stories. It is very important to pass down these moments in history to the younger generations, so that they may have a better understanding of what actually happened and remember what these men and women sacrificed for our country.

## Network Awards

### Hines Employees Win National Award for Innovation

A group of eleven Hines employees were honored for an innovative project that will expand and improve services to Chicago-area homeless veterans.

The Hines team was named winner of the prestigious U.S. General Services Administration Real Property Award for Innovative Practices. The winning project involved Hines VA initiating a faith-based enhanced use lease agreement with Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago.

Under this agreement, Catholic Charities is renovating several existing vacant buildings on the Hines Hospital campus and converting them to transitional and assisted living centers for homeless veterans. The project will enhance the quality of life and provide some valuable assistance to hundreds of area veterans every year. It will also bring in ongoing revenue for the facility to use to support other veteran health care programs and needs.

This project is already coming to fruition. Catholic Charities recently opened the doors on one of the newly-renovated buildings on the Hines VA campus. This facility, called Cooke's Manor Hines, consists of short-term accommodations that can house up to 40 veterans. The Catholic Charities transitional housing program provides much-needed accommodations, as well as counseling, job placement services and on-site recovery meetings to veterans who are preparing to reenter the community after completing various homeless and substance abuse programs at the Hines VA.

"Cooke's Manor Hines offers each resident a furnished private room, access to three wholesome meals a day in a common dining area, a recreation/exercise room, library and laundry facilities, as well 24-hour security," said Ron Chambers, Hines coordinator of the Catholic Charities project and member of the winning team. "It's inspiring to see a previously vacant building on the Hines campus put to such good use."

Hines Director, Jack G. Hetrick, agrees. "We are very enthusiastic about this project," Hetrick said. "Catholic Charities is able to lease some space in a key Chicago-area location, the VA is able to put some of its vacant buildings to good use, and most importantly, our veterans will be the ultimate winners. It really is a win-win-win situation."



*Group posing in front of the first renovated building, called Cooke's Manor Hines. From left to right Jack Hetrick, Hines Director, Jeanne Obrochta, Rao Vadlamadi, Ray Bogush, Lara Horvith, Tony Travia, Mary Ann Romeo, Deepa Agusala, Ron Chambers. Not pictured are Michael Rogala, Tim Morgan and Michael Lesnet.*

Veterans make up a very high percentage of the 18,000-plus homeless population in the six-county Chicago metropolitan area. This program will fulfill a critical need for veterans who otherwise might be on the street. GSA's Real Property Award is open to all federal employees and promotes innovative practices and policies that enhance management of the federal government's real property assets and workplaces.

## "Affirming the Commitment" Project

Sarah Allman, Administrative Assistant for Support Services at the Tomah VA, began the "Affirming the Commitment" initiative while she was an Administrative Resident at the facility. She received national recognition from the National Leadership Board's Communication Committee for her contributions this summer.



*Stan Johnson, Medical Center Director, (left) visited Tomah and presented Sarah's award to her. Mr. Johnson was serving as the Acting Director at the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center in Chicago.*

Because of her work on "Affirming the Commitment" at the Tomah VAMC, Ms. Allman was asked to be part of the National Leadership Board's Communication Committee "Affirming the Commitment" Taskforce. She authored a chapter in the book, "Affirming the Commitment: Opening Hearts to Veterans." The chapter, "Someone's Son or Daughter," includes monthly veteran's stories from Tomah. Ms. Allman is the Tomah VAMC liaison for the national "Affirming the Commitment" campaign.

## Madison Receives Worker Safety Awards

Each year federal agencies are required to pay back costs associated with employee injuries resulting in days away from work and medical expenses. Chargeback is the amount agencies

must pay the U.S. Treasury for these costs. The Madison VA had the lowest Office of Worker Compensation Programs (OWCP) chargeback expenses per full-time employee equivalent (FTEE) for chargeback years 2003 and 2004 in comparison to the other VISN 12 facilities. Madison's expenses over this period averaged \$271 per FTEE, which is 60% lower than the next best facility in VISN 12.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration tracks incidence rates for all industries, including the hospital sector. An incidence rate is the number of recordable injuries and illnesses occurring among a given number of full-time workers over a given period of time. One rate for determining days away from work is the Lost Time Claims Rate (LTCR). The lowest LTRC for VISN 12 for Fiscal Year 2004 was Madison VA's 1.79.

The Madison staff is commended for their excellent efforts of working safely and voicing concerns that are identified during their daily tasks.

### Milwaukee Director Honored by President Bush

Recently Glen W. Grippen, medical center director at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center took a trip to Washington, D.C. He had made the journey before. He was there to be honored as a winner of the Presidential Rank Award for Meritorious Service... for the second time. He had been so recognized in 1998 – this was a unique tribute. The award was presented by Secretary of Veterans Affairs R. James Nicholson.

"I am honored," said Mr. Grippen. "This signifies the passion and dedication my coworkers at Milwaukee bring to veterans' healthcare." He was effusive in his praise of the support he has received that made the award possible.

Each year, the President recognizes and celebrates a small group of career Senior Executives with the President's Rank Award for exceptional long-term accomplishments. Winners of this prestigious award are strong leaders, professionals, and scientists who achieve results and consistently demonstrate strength, integrity, industry, and a relentless commitment to excellence in public service. Winners are chosen through a rigorous selection process and receive a monetary award and a plaque signed by President Bush.

### Honorary Leadership Award Presented to JBVA Pharmacy Chief

Richard Rooney, PharmD, Chief of Pharmacy Service at the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center, has been named the national recipient of the Leadership VA Alumni Association (LVAAA) 2005 "Honorary Leadership Award" in the GS-13 through 15 (or equivalent WG, Title 38) category. Honorary Leadership Awards are given annually to two outstanding VA employees (one in the GS-13 through 15 Category and one in the Senior Executive Service) who are selected by the LVAAA Board of Directors to recognize extraordinary achievement in management and leadership throughout their careers.

Dr. Rooney was named Chief of Pharmacy at the Lakeside VAMC in 1987 and selected as overall Chief of Pharmacy following the Lakeside/West Side consolidation in 1996. Among his accomplishments was the establishment of an American Society of Health Systems Pharmacists residency program in 1995 that has grown from one resident to seven and is now one of the largest in VA. The program is held in such high esteem that it annually attracts over 90 applicants nationwide for its seven positions. It also serves as an excellent recruitment and retention tool, with 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of its graduates remaining in the VA system.



*Richard Rooney, PharmD, named national recipient of Leadership VA Alumni Association 2005 "Honorary Leadership Award."*

The Jesse Brown VA also serves as a training site for over 80 Pharm.D. candidates from the University of

Illinois (UIC) at Chicago College of Pharmacy. This is the largest non-university training site in Chicago for Pharm.D. candidates and is so popular that twice as many students apply as can be accepted and UIC holds an annual lottery to determine who will enroll.

Due to efficiency improvements and a re-engineered work environment initiated by Dr. Rooney, JBVA's outpatient pharmacy reduced prescription waiting times from 92 minutes to 14 minutes and reduced medication errors 52 percent – accomplishing all of this with six fewer FTEE. Dr. Rooney also initiated a program for pharmacists to offer medication counseling and discharge planning on all the inpatient floors, enhancing the team approach to patient care and improving its continuity. The program was expanded this year to include taking medication histories upon admission, so pharmacists are now involved in the total care of all inpatients from admission through discharge.

As a result of these and other accomplishments, Jesse Brown VAMC's Pharmacy Service was named as a Center of Excellence during the medical center's last two JCAHO surveys in 2000 and 2003.

## New Appointments

### Madison's New Chief of Staff

Dr. Alan Bridges was appointed Chief of Staff on September 4, 2005. He is the eighth Chief of Staff at the William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital since it opened in 1951.

Dr. Bridges received an undergraduate degree from Augustana College, Rock Island, IL and his Medical Degree from the University of Illinois, College of Medicine, Peoria, IL. He completed his Residency in Internal Medicine at the University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics, Madison, WI. He was Chief Medical Resident in Internal Medicine and completed a Rheumatology Fellowship, both at the University of Wisconsin Hospital, Madison, WI. Dr. Bridges is board certified in Internal Medicine and Rheumatology.

After completing his fellowship, he was appointed Assistant Professor of Medicine at the University of Missouri-Columbia School of Medicine and, during

this same time period, he was appointed Associate Director, Antinuclear Antibody Laboratory at the University Hospital and Clinics, Columbia, MO.



*Dr. Alan Bridges, New Chief of Staff at Madison VA*

Dr. Bridges' research has focused on antibody testing for rheumatic diseases and new treatments for rheumatoid arthritis and connective tissue disease. He has published more than 50 articles in peer review journals. Dr. Bridges has been honored with teaching awards from the University of Missouri and University of Wisconsin. He received the Professionalism Award from the University of Wisconsin in 2004. Dr. Bridges has served as chairman and a member for numerous committees, boards and task forces within and external to VA, including several for VISN 12.

Dr. Bridges has held numerous academic appointments, advancing from Associate Professor of Medicine to Professor at the University of Wisconsin Medical School. In addition, Dr. Bridges has served as Chief, Rheumatology Section and Associate Chief of Staff for Medicine and Managed Care at the William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital. His administrative appointments at the University of Wisconsin included Associate Chair, Vice-Chair and, most recently, Interim Chair of the Department of Medicine in 2005.

"Dr. Bridges is an extraordinary physician-manager with outstanding vision and character," said Nathan L. Geraths, Madison's Director. "I anticipate his leadership and clinical expertise will prove very valuable to our facility and the veterans we serve."

"I am honored to serve the VA and our veterans as Chief of Staff. It will be my priority to ensure the highest quality of care to our veterans," Dr. Bridges said.

## Hines Welcomes New Assistant Director

Larry D. Wilson was named the Assistant Director of the Hines VA Hospital last month. Wilson is very familiar to many of the facility staff, as he served as Hines' Acting Associate Director last year. He has been a Staff Advisor to the VISN 12 Network Director for the past several years and has been actively involved in the VA/Department of Defense initiative to create a fully integrated Federal Health Care Facility at the North Chicago VA Medical Center.

"I am looking forward to the challenges and opportunities that I will be taking on as Assistant Director at Hines," Wilson said. "I was very impressed with Hines when I served as Acting Associate Director. In particular, the staff is very enthusiastic and passionate about the service they provide to veterans."



*Larry D. Wilson, new Assistant Director at Hines*

Wilson brings extensive experience to his new position at Hines. He has a very distinguished VA career, having served as Special Assistant to the Medical Center Director at the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center, the Regional Facility Project Manager at the VA's Western Region Office in San Francisco, CA and the Special Assistant to the Director for Construction Management for the VA Northern California Health Care System. He is also a Diplomate in the American College of Healthcare Executives and a member of the Healthcare Financial Management Association.

"I hope that I can bring a unique perspective to Hines, after working at both the facility and the network level," Wilson said. "As one of the largest and most complex facilities in the VA, I feel that Hines has a lot to offer, both to our area veterans and to the employees who are fortunate to work there."

## Jesse Brown VA Welcomes New Chief of Staff and Assistant Director

Jesse Brown VA Medical Center is pleased to announce the selection of Warren H. Wallace, M.D. as its new Chief of Staff and Jason Petti as its new Assistant Director. Both began their appointments on August 7<sup>th</sup>.



*Dr. Warren Wallace, Chief of Staff, Jesse Brown VAMC*

Dr. Wallace was named Co-Chief of Medical Service in 2003 and had served as Acting Chief, Medical Service, since September 2004. He has been affiliated with VA since joining Lakeside as a staff physician in 1986.

As Assistant Professor of Internal Medicine for Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine since 1980, Dr. Wallace has received a number of honors for his academic skills. He was the recipient of the university's Patterson Award (Best Teacher Voted by Senior Residents) in 2002 and 2004, the Department of Medicine's Excellence in Teaching Award in 2003 and the Distinguished Service Award in 1989. Dr. Wallace received his

medical degree in 1976 from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

Dr. Wallace was recommended as the top candidate for the Chief of Staff position by the COS Search Committee, the Medical Staff Executive Committee and the Dean's Committee. He was cited for his strong leadership and open communication during the consolidation of clinical services and inpatient transition from Lakeside to the main campus, as well as his academic and administrative experience.



*Jason Petti, Assistant Director, Jesse Brown VAMC*

Jason Petti came to JBVAMC in the newly-established position of Assistant Director. His most recent position was as Health Systems Specialist for the Chief of Staff at the Hines VA Hospital, where he served as Controlled Substance Coordinator, provided direction for administrative support staff within the clinical Service Lines, assisted in preparation for external surveys and reviews and worked on a variety of special projects, including a research cost analysis and physician workload analysis.

He received his Masters of Science in Health Services Administration from the Barry University School of Health and Natural Sciences, where he also performed a postgraduate study on managed care. His areas of responsibility at JBVA will include the Patient Advocates, Canteen, Nutrition & Food, Voluntary, Information Resources Management and Patient Administration Services.

## Tomah VA Has New Chief of Staff

After serving as the Tomah VA Medical Center's Acting Chief of Staff for over a year and a half, Dr. David Houlihan was named Chief of Staff in August.



*Dr. David Houlihan,  
Chief of Staff,  
Tomah VAMC*

Dr. Houlihan, a board certified Psychiatrist, was appointed the Acting Chief of Staff at the Tomah VA Medical Center on February 25, 2004. He received his board certification in the subspecialty of Psychosomatic Medicine in Prior to his Acting Chief of Staff role, he served as the Clinical Director for Mental Health for two years. From July 1994 to January 2002, he practiced Psychiatry at the Medical Associates Clinic, P.C., in Dubuque, Iowa.

Dr. Houlihan received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Luther College, in Decorah, Iowa, in 1986 and his Medical Doctor degree from the University of Iowa, College of Medicine, in Iowa City, Iowa, in 1990. He then spent four years in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where he completed an internship in general psychiatry and medicine and a residency in general psychiatry. Both internship and residency were at the University Health Center of Pittsburgh, Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic. In 1992, he earned the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) Outstanding Resident Award.

## Network News

### Iron Mountain

#### VA Medical Center History

The 1940's saw the end of World War II and with it the return of veterans. Many returned home with war injuries or other medical needs and a government promise to provide necessary care. Congress responded to that

need in 1943 with plans to build nearly 100 hospitals for veterans across the country. Iron Mountain's civic leaders sprang into action and waged a campaign to convince the Veterans Administration that Iron Mountain was a suitable choice for a VA Hospital.

Already concerned about rumors that the huge Ford manufacturing plant might close, the effort to land the VA hospital took on even more importance as local leaders scrambled for ways to soften the blow should Ford pull out.

Personal visits, telegrams and letters flooded the VA as Iron Mountain competed with other Upper Peninsula cities also hopeful to be selected.

The Iron Mountain effort was rewarded with the news that it was chosen. Formal approval for construction was granted on August 24, 1945. The site selected was a 31.5 acre parcel near U.S. 2 which had once been the headquarters for a large sawmill and lumberyard.

The ambitious nationwide hospital building project had a few hitches, however. It took two years after the approval of the Iron Mountain location before ground would be broken. The scale was downsized nationally and only 61 hospitals were to be built. Iron Mountain's project was spared from the cut but downsized somewhat by the elimination of a large auditorium and reduction in the size of the chapel.

A crowd of 5,000 people turned out in Iron Mountain for the groundbreaking ceremony on March 14, 1948. The \$6.5 million construction project was underway. It was the largest building project ever at that time in the Upper Peninsula with 300 construction workers employed at its peak period. The hospital's service area was designed to include the entire Upper Peninsula of Michigan and 11 counties in northeastern Wisconsin.

The six-story hospital was designed for 250-beds and when it opened to receive patients in early 1950, there actually were 265 beds, including eight in the emergency and admitting departments. The hospital's 250 other beds were divided into 16-bed wards, 4-bed wards, 2-bed rooms and 8 single rooms. There were 360 employees. The hospital campus also included a

separate building for a garage and heating plant, a four-apartment complex which provided housing for staff, a home for the hospital administrator, and nurses and attendants quarters.

The hospital was dedicated on March 5, 1950, and the first veteran admitted at 9:55 a.m. on March 20, 1950.

**Fifty-five** years later, many changes have taken place. While the staff apartments and administrator's home continue to be used for their original purpose, the attendants quarters are now leased to a local chiropractor and the nurses quarters are used for administrative offices.

Health care across the nation has changed in its methods of delivery and more outpatient services are being provided. The VA followed suit.

The Iron Mountain facility now has 17 inpatient medical and surgical beds, a 40-bed Nursing Home Care Unit, and 12 lodger beds. The outpatient program is very busy and there are approximately 18,000 outpatient visits annually.

In 1993, the first Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) was opened in Marquette, Michigan, followed by five more CBOC locations in Hancock, Sault Ste. Marie, Rhinelander (WI), Menominee, and Ironwood. The CBOCs provide primary care services to veterans in locations closer to their homes.

The 1940s-designed medical center has been updated over the years to add speech pathology, nuclear medicine, ultrasound, respiratory therapy and CT scanning. A new Ambulatory Care addition was completed in August 1997. This project represented the first major construction at the Iron Mountain facility since it opened in 1950. The 16,000 square foot building provides increased primary care space and improved outpatient services. A project to remodel and relocate the Intensive Care Unit adjacent to the medical/surgical unit was completed in 2004. A project proposal to expand and relocate the Nursing Home Care Unit from the 6<sup>th</sup> floor to the 1<sup>st</sup> floor is pending approval.

In spite of its size, VAMC Iron Mountain has proven to be a giant in many areas of advanced technology. In 1996, Iron Mountain activated a Remote Control Dynamic Telepathology System. This was the first of its type in

North America and only one of a few in the world. The system uses robotic technology to give pathologists located hundreds of miles away full control of microscopes, providing immediate clinical information to the primary care physician, which expedites treatment and quality service to the patient. Iron Mountain didn't stop there. Next was a tele-imaging initiative, allowing CT image transfer, nuclear medicine image transfer, film scanning and tele-fluoroscopy. Other telemedicine initiatives are also in place.

One of the largest employers in the area, the medical center currently has 454 employees, and an active volunteer program. Visitors praise the appearance of the medical center which defies its 55 years. It is probably accountable to the pride of its earlier employees, who for the most part, were natives of the community. This tradition continues.



A special weekend of events took place on September 23-24, at the VA Medical Center in Iron Mountain, in celebration of their **55th anniversary**. Above, Laura Frey, a Patient Financial Service employee, is shown making her reservation with Judy Sielaff (right), Education Coordinator, who is a member of the anniversary committee. Following past tradition, current and former employees and volunteers were invited to attend the VA Family Reunion

The Dickinson-Iron Intermediate School District (DIISD) and the Dickinson-Iron-Menominee Mathematics, Science and Technology Center has partnered with the Iron Mountain VAMC to offer computer classes to veterans and senior citizens.

The program, "Serving Those Who Served," is being taught by local high school students. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, through the efforts of Congressman Stupak, the DIISD and the Upper Great Lakes Educational Technologies, Inc., the program is free to the public.

#### MyHealthVet

Area veterans were very excited about learning how to use a computer and having access to the online MyHealthVet (MHV) program. This program is a web-based application designed specifically for veterans and their families. U.S. Representative, Bart Stupak shown below center, helped to launch MyHealthVet at Iron Mountain with the aid of high school students. The My HealthVet web site is located at [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov).



#### Jesse Brown

##### Patient Health Education Day Celebration

To celebrate Patient Health Education Day on June 20, the primary care clinics initiated a campaign to inform veterans how to safely dispose of syringes, razor blades and other "sharps."



*Staff members assisting on Patient Health Education Day included (from left) Kenneth Reed, Mercedes Belbis, Patricia Jackson, Mattie Newsom, Phyllis Miller, Lillie Geater, Ronay Williams, Rosamma Alexander, Mildred Moore-Harmon, Anna Ortiz and Danyeld White.*

Over a period of several weeks, staff members surveyed veterans to see how they disposed of sharp objects. After the survey indicated that many people disposed of the sharps in a hazardous manner, the clinics prepared a flyer of safety tips on how to safely dispose of sharp objects both at the medical center and in their homes. For the patients' homes, they suggested that veterans write "Caution: Contains Sharps" on an empty bleach bottle (which is very durable) and place the bottle in the garbage after it is ¾ filled.

#### Veterans Job Fair



A total of 322 veterans attended the JBVAMC Job Fair on August 18 for the opportunity to meet with employers from over 25 Chicago-based and national corporations and agencies. Many of the veterans attending voiced their satisfaction with the contacts they made and information received, while the employers participating were impressed with the number and quality of veterans they interviewed.

#### Employer of Choice

Jesse Brown VAMC's Employer of Choice Committee has kicked off a series of activities to enhance the medical center's work environment and improve the job satisfaction of its staff.

The medical center's All Employee Picnic was held on Saturday, August 13, and offered food, music, entertainment, games and prizes for all employees and their families. Originally scheduled to be held at a nearby park, the picnic had to be moved inside the medical center when that Saturday turned out to be one of the very few rainy days in Chicago this summer.

The picnic also highlighted staff achievements, recognizing employees who have received GEM

(**Going the Extra Mile**), Starfish (customer service) and long-term service awards. Employees that had submitted appraisal forms for the medical center's first annual Employee Point Program also learned the value of the points they had accrued. Staff will receive either 15 minutes or \$4.15 per point, depending upon whether they selected a time-off or monetary award. Staff members were able to accrue points by engaging in wellness activities, volunteering in the community, completing 40 hours of education training, self-development efforts and participating in medical center programs and activities. A total of 506 staff members will receive awards through the Point Recognition Program.

The next big event will be an employee dinner/dance, which will be held at the downtown Chicago Hilton on Saturday, December 10. The Employer of Choice Committee has kicked off a series of fundraising programs to subsidize the cost of the tickets, which will only be \$30 per ticket for each employee and guest.

The medical center has also initiated a series of health and wellness activities for staff, including the employee MOVE program, kick-boxing and other aerobic workouts and specific hours designated only for staff (during lunchtime and after work hours) in the medical center's Wellness Center. Information on all the activities are compiled in a monthly calendar sent to all staff via email and posted on the medical center's web site.



*How ironic that one of the few rainy days Chicago has seen this summer came on the day that Jesse Brown VAMC's All Employee Picnic was scheduled. Employees and their families come in from the rain at JBVAMC's All Employee Picnic.*

"Many of the initiatives being established now are the direct result of suggestions from employees," said Michelle Blakely, Associate Director. "We hope our staff will continue to provide input to let us know if these activities are helping to meet their needs or if they have any other ideas or programs they would like to see established."

## Madison

### VA Funds New Research at Madison

Do you know anyone who is diagnosed with Alzheimer disease, epilepsy, skin cancer, or high blood pressure and obesity? If so, you will be interested in five research projects underway at the William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital in Madison, WI. All studies are being funded by Merit Review awards received last year from the Dept. of Veterans Affairs. Such awards are given to investigators who apply in national competitions and must finish in approximately the top 15% in order to get a grant.

#### *Studying Brain Function in Persons at Risk for Alzheimer Disease*

Alzheimer disease (AD) is a progressive condition in which nerve cells in the brain break down or degenerate, causing the brain to shrink. Early symptoms involve loss of memory. The number of US citizens and veterans afflicted with AD will increase as all of us grow older and live longer.

Research by Dr. Sterling Johnson (Geriatrics) will use advanced imaging technology to "watch" the brain while recalling memories. Healthy adults and people at risk for AD are participating. Focus is on a brain region called the posterior cingulate and its connections, since it may be affected even before clinical symptoms of AD appear. Researchers will find out whether decline in this region (measured by memory tasks) can be detected before disease onset. This study will help separate memory problems associated with normal aging from those linked to the beginnings of AD. It will also help in the early detection of AD and the monitoring of its treatment.

#### *Hormone-Lowering Drugs Suppress Alzheimer's Changes*

AD is predicted to affect 13 million Americans by the

middle of this century. Starting at age 65, the prevalence of the disease doubles about every 5 years. By age 85, almost 1 of every 2 individuals has the disease. Therefore, there is an immediate need to determine the cause of this disease, and how to halt or reverse the disease process.

Aging-related changes in sex hormones after menopause and andropause (the male equivalent of menopause) are believed to cause degeneration of nerve cells in the brain that store memories — a process that is thought to lead to dementia. Research by Dr. Craig Atwood (Geriatrics) will examine the molecular ways in which these hormones promote deposits of a special protein in these nerve cells. Researchers can then see which hormones cause changes in the brain, and can select drugs to affect levels of these sex hormones in the bloodstream. Early studies by Dr. Atwood found that these drugs could help prevent or reverse some of the changes associated with aging and AD.

#### *How Brain Chemicals Produce Seizures and Epilepsy*

Research by Dr. Paul Rutecki (Neurology) will try to understand development of epilepsy that occurs after brain injury, repeated seizures, and stroke. He is studying how a brain-signaling molecule (a neurotransmitter) produces seizures. These molecules and their receptors have been implicated in neuronal diseases and psychosis.

Although drugs are available to treat seizures, none are known to prevent epilepsy from developing. Dr. Rutecki plans to identify potential new drugs, then test them in an experimental model that mimics epilepsy. Findings could lead to a significant new type of treatment for epilepsy: true anti-epilepsy drugs. Such drugs could not only prevent seizures but also prevent the effect that seizures have in development of severe epilepsy.

#### *Finding Blood Cells to Fight Melanoma*

Malignant melanoma is an increasingly common skin cancer in US citizens and veterans. Once it spreads or metastasizes, it is almost incurable. Recent treatments are based on activating the body's immune system against the melanoma. If researchers can

identify specific disease-fighting T-cells (one type of white blood cell) that can "see" and recognize melanoma, they could figure out how to monitor and activate a "rejection" response against the melanoma.

Dr. Mark Albertini (Oncology) is leading study of a novel process called "surrogate selection" to identify those T-cells in melanoma patients that "see" melanoma and are trying to fight it. Since such cells likely make up a very tiny portion of the many T-cells in a patient, experiments use selection to find the "needle" against melanoma in the "haystack" of all immune cells. This research is studying these special melanoma-fighting T-cells. What is learned about the immune response against melanoma will guide vaccine and other treatments for veterans with melanoma.

#### *Fatty Acids, High Blood Pressure, and Obesity*

Obesity and the damage it causes are extremely prevalent among veterans. Obesity makes adults prone to high blood pressure, diabetes, and vascular disease. It also leads to heart and kidney damage. How obesity is linked to the other diseases is not understood. Research by Dr. Theodore Goodfriend (Endocrinology) is designed to reveal this link.

He has discovered a new compound, derived from a common fatty acid, that is found in high concentrations in the blood of obese humans. This compound stimulates production of a hormone known to raise blood pressure and damage blood vessels. Those actions make the new compound a likely culprit in the ill effects of excess body fat. If his study establishes this link, it will provide a new way to make obesity less dangerous. It may also lead to drugs to reduce the incidence of high blood pressure and other vascular diseases in both obese and lean adults.

#### Employee/Volunteer Picnic

An employee/volunteer picnic was held at Madison on July 27<sup>th</sup> in recognition of very successful team efforts for recent audits. These audits were all in a short time span, including the following: a System-wide Ongoing Assessment and Review Strategy (SOARS) in April; a mock Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) in May; Office of Inspector General-Combined Assessment Program Review (OIG-

CAP) in June; and a Certification and Accreditation Review of Information Resource Management and the Information Security Officer in July; a mock Environment of Care Survey in August and a cleanup mock JCAHO review with training in September.



Traditional picnic fare was served including brats and hot dogs, potato salad, baked beans, potato chips, soda and ice cream bars.

## Milwaukee

### Wieland Here to Help

Maybe you don't know Bob Wieland. And then maybe, you have never heard of him. But if you're a Vietnam veteran, chances are you know Mr. Wieland lost both of his legs in Vietnam while trying to save a fallen buddy. You may also know that he walked across the country – on his arms.

Since that time, he has become an author, a legendary motivational speaker, an iron man triathlete and a marathon participant. Mr. Wieland is the only double-amputee to compete against able-bodied runners.

Recently he returned home to Milwaukee where his parents live. On a cloudy Monday afternoon, he took some time to endorse the work of the Soldiers Home Foundation. In front of the historic chapel on the VA campus, he and Kristin Kilpatrick, president of the Soldiers Home Foundation, spoke with the

media. She introduced him as the new spokesperson for the Foundation.

Mr. Wieland cited the challenge ahead to preserve the historic buildings and pledged his support to the restoration effort. He spoke of the upcoming first annual historic Soldiers Home Walk. "I'm challenging everybody who lives in Wisconsin. I'm coming back here on October 8... I figure if I can come out and run on my arms through this historic district, there are a whole lot of cheese heads that can come out and join me by walking on their legs."



*Don Hurry is introduced as the "One of the world's greatest physical therapists" by former patient Bob Wieland.*

In the small group of people who gathered to watch the news conference, was Don Hurry. Mr. Hurry was Mr. Wieland's physical therapist when he was a patient at the Milwaukee VA in late 1969.

In the middle of the news conference, Mr. Wieland, looking at Mr. Hurry in the crowd, said with a strong voice full of emotion, "I had the opportunity to get acquainted with one of the greatest physical therapists in America, the chief of physical therapy, Mr. Don Hurry."

The surprised Mr. Hurry joined Mr. Wieland in front of the cameras as he was praised for his work over thirty years ago. "This man encouraged me daily. Can I say it one more time? This man encouraged me daily – to go for it." Mr. Wieland continued his tribute. "This is where it all started right there in that building with this man. He kicked my butt a few times, but it was okay." He expressed gratitude to Mr. Hurry for being there and for his great support. They shared much with each other in

those early days of therapy. This day they shared the memories.

Mr. Wieland took a short tour of the Soldiers Home District marveling at the history and the legacy. The trip was cut short by a speaking engagement at Greenfield High School where the athlete field is named Bob Wieland Field.

He will be back.

*For information on the First Annual Historic Soldiers Home Walk October 8 on the Milwaukee VA campus, visit [www.soldiershome.org](http://www.soldiershome.org) or call Marlin Brendsel at (414) 649-0093. The Walk is sponsored by the Soldiers Home Foundation.*

#### A Gift of Tranquility

It is a quiet place in a busy setting. Daniel Rudman, MD, Geriatric Park/Memorial Falls is a respite in the middle of the busy Milwaukee VA Medical Center campus. It is located just a few feet from the hospital's back door and is a respite, not only for patients, but for staff alike.

The park was recently dedicated and gifted to the Medical Center from veterans Howard Cole and Robert (Bubba) Norton. Mr. Cole is a deputy representative for the Army/Navy Union and Mr. Norton is a representative for the Amputee Support Group.



*Howard Cole and Robert "Bubba" Norton gave the gift of tranquility. They were the driving and working force behind Memorial Falls at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center. The two-year project was dedicated September 14.*

In accepting the gift, Larry L. Berkeley, associate medical center director, thanked Mr. Norton, Mr. Cole and all the volunteers who worked on the falls. He noted their insight, commitment and efforts that made Memorial Falls a reality. "Bubba and Howard made this happen. It is their project."

Volunteers Mr. Norton and Mr. Cole had completed a pavilion in the park in 2003 offering shade from the summer sun to the nursing home patients. Following the project, they felt there was something missing. Mr. Norton said, "I want to make this the most beautiful place on the grounds." Two years later, with the help of contributions, in-kind services/donations and volunteer help, water today flows over the rocks to a fish laden pool. The peaceful scene is highlighted by flowers, a sundial, foot bridge and lit flag poles surrounded by a lush green hedge.

The greatest satisfaction of this duo – seeing patients and staff members relaxing on the park benches that surround the falls. "It is exactly as we had dreamed it would look," said Mr. Norton. It is their dream come true, and now it's on to the next project.

## North Chicago

Volunteer Appears on TV as "Someone You Should Know"

Dorothy Waters, volunteer at North Chicago VAMC, was featured on ABC Chicago's "Someone You Should Know." Well-known reporter Harry Porterfield came to interview Dorothy and he was very impressed by her. Dorothy is 91 years young and has been a volunteer at North Chicago for 52 years with over 52,500 hours. Dorothy won the George H. Seal Memorial Award presented at the 1996 DAV National Convention by former President Bill Clinton.

Dorothy's accomplishments and contributions to North Chicago testify to a special individual who brings quality and integrity to the meaning of volunteer service. She works three days a week at the Information Desk as a front door greeter and has a welcoming smile for everyone. Arriving each morning, Dorothy prepares the coffee and refreshments for outpatients coming in for clinic or rehab appointments. She is always eager to provide

veteran patients with wheelchairs and motorized carts and answer their questions or give them directions. Her cheerful nature starts everyone's day on a happy note and a wish for a good day. During Dorothy's volunteer career, she has worked in Chaplain Service, Voluntary Service and the Directors Office and she is a member of the American Legion Auxiliary, the Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary and the Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary.



Dorothy is an excellent role model for other volunteers, VAVS Representatives and even staff members. Dorothy is completely dedicated and North Chicago VAMC is grateful for her loyalty and commitment through the years. Everyone at North Chicago is very proud of Dorothy and she is definitely, "Someone You Should Know."

Assistant Secretary of the Navy Visits

B. J. Penn, Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Installations and Environment visited North Chicago VAMC recently. Mr. Penn was there to see the progress of the surgery and emergency department construction that is currently taking place. He was also briefed by North Chicago VAMC and Naval Hospital Great Lakes (NHGL) staff regarding the planning for the ambulatory care facility that the Department of Defense (DoD) will be building at the VA.

North Chicago VAMC and Naval Hospital Great Lakes have been working together towards this partnership for several years. Phase I was the shifting of inpatient mental health services from NHGL to NCVAMC in October 2003. Phase II is presently being worked on which is renovating and expanding NCVAMC's surgery and emergency departments. It is a \$13 million project.

Once that is completed in June 2006 all of NHGL's inpatient medicine including pediatrics, emergency and surgery services will shift to NCVAMC. This will be a milestone since nowhere else in the country is there such a relationship between VA & Navy. This joint partnership will mean VA & Navy personnel will be working together to provide the best quality care to veterans, as well as active duty and their dependents and military retirees. Navy and VA providers will be working along side each other and for the first time in a VA, pediatric care will be provided for Navy dependents. Then Phase III of the joint partnership is the construction of a new ambulatory care center co-located with NCVAMC.



*Picture: left to right – B. J. Penn, Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Installations and Environment, looks on as Bonnie Casis, RN; Tessie Klumak, LPN; and Hm2 (SW) Anthony J. Valentine, Jr., Navy Corpsman, demonstrate how the pulse oxymeter measures oxygen saturation of the blood and also monitors the pulse.*

Mr. Penn is responsible for formulating policy and procedures for the effective management of Navy and Marine Corps real property, housing and other facilities; environmental protection ashore and afloat; occupational health for both military and civilian personnel and timely completion of closures and realignments of installations under base closure laws.

#### Celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month

North Chicago VA kicked off Hispanic Heritage Month 2005 on Thursday, September 15 with a Pinata Breaking at the Paul K. Kennedy Child Care Center. It was a busy month for the Hispanic Heritage

Committee. Besides participating in Waukegan's Mexican Independence Day Parade on Sunday, September 18, they held a Havana Nights event featuring dance demonstrations, an exhibit and snow cones on Thursday, September 22. To close Hispanic Heritage Month, in the Theater on Thursday, October 6, Ballet Folklorico Mi Lindo Mexico performed and Alderman Tony Figueroa of Waukegan was guest speaker.



#### Veterans/DoD Job Fair

The North Chicago VAMC held their seventh annual Veterans/DoD Job Fair, on Wednesday, September 14. The Vocational Rehabilitation Unit at North Chicago VAMC co-sponsored this event with the Naval Training Station, Great Lakes, and Transitional Assistance Management Program.

The goal in sponsoring the Job Fair is to afford employment opportunities to those that are unemployed or under-employed. This event was for veterans, active duty military, military family members, their dependents and retirees.



*Employers in the community talking with veterans and active duty military, military family members and their dependents towards possible job opportunities at North Chicago VAMC job fair.*

Approximately 125 veterans and 75 active duty, military family and dependents and retirees met with 20 local employers to discuss possible job opportunities.

#### Second Annual Car Show for Veterans

The Second Annual Car Show for the Veterans was held at the North Chicago VAMC.

This year 54 vehicles spanning 9 decades, 18 manufacturers and 5 countries around the world were featured. Entries spanned from Waukegan's Fire Department 1921 Stutz Fire Engine all the way through automotive history to the new millennium vehicles like the 2000 Dodge Viper RT-10, a 2002 Ferrari 575M Maranello, a 2003 Harley Davidson "Trike" and a 2004 Chevy Monte Carlo SS "Intimidator."

Veterans were able go around and see each of the vehicles and talk to the owners. Three employees from North Chicago VA Medical Center brought in cars for the show. Clifford Turuc from Facility Support brought his 1969 Dodge Dart, Mary Lange-Alberts from Patient Services brought her 2002 Harley Davidson "Trike" and Haley McLaughlin from Patient Services, who coordinated the car show, brought a 1984 Ferrari 308. Also, David Warstler from Special Education District of Lake County (SEDOL) brought his 1987 Pontiac Formula Firebird.



The wonderful view of the mixed years and styles of the cars was only topped by the smiles and laughter of many generations and backgrounds of the veterans,

patients, staff and owners of the cars. Many veterans helped out by pushing other veterans in wheelchairs, along with the Navy Chief Petty Officer Selects from Great Lakes Naval Training Center. Owners of the cars enjoyed visiting with the veterans and staff.



Refreshments were provided to everyone throughout the day, as well as a DJ playing oldies music. At the end of the day a drawing was held for a free one-year family membership to the Volo Auto Museum. Also, Patrick Sullivan, Medical Center Director presented two trophies. The Veterans Choice Award was presented to Brad Buell from Libertyville, Illinois, who is the owner of a 1954 Buick Skylark! The Directors Choice Award was presented to Lowell Charon from Kenosha, Wisconsin, who is the owner of a gold Plymouth Prowler.



*Waukegan Firefighter/Paramedic Kenny Mayfield gets ready to lead the parade of cars in a 1921 Stutz Fire Engine as Patrick L. Sullivan, Medical Center Director rides along.*

The day officially ended with the parade of vehicles for the veterans. The parade route went by patient buildings so veterans who were unable to make it over could see the cars as they drove by.

## Tomah

### “Old Army Band” Visit

They may be in their 70's, but the former members of the 330<sup>th</sup> Army Band who were stationed at Camp McCoy from 1950 – 1952 could still belt out some toe-tapping music, as was demonstrated at several performances at the Tomah VA on August 19. The band once had over 40 members. At their annual reunion in August, ten members were able to attend.



Most of the members live in the area. While many members stayed involved in their music the last 50-plus years (they don't like to talk about that number), they also pursued careers in law, medicine, teaching (music, of course) and business.

Once a year, the musicians gather for a weekend of music, remembering and fun. This year, they shared their music with our veterans, performing in the dining room during the lunch hour, then providing a great concert on the 402 Patio, followed by Ray Battani's accordion wizardry on three of our hospital units.

### Road Construction Complete

After five months of mess and inconvenience, the road construction at the Tomah VA was completed the end of August.



Some employees celebrated by returning to their routine walking routes which were unavailable during the construction, while the staff and patients on Building 406A observed the removal of road block signs with a “Gravel Daze” party.



Staff donned bright orange safety vests and hard hats and the ward was decorated with various road signs. The party-goers toasted the construction workers with donuts and coffee served right from thermoses.

## Models of Top Notch Care

On the following page, you'll find a letter from the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to the then, Acting Network Director.

We thought we would share the contents with you and extend our “thank you” for the work you do for our nation's veterans.



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
WASHINGTON  
August 9, 2005

Renee Oshinski  
Acting Network Director/Deputy Network Director VISN 12  
The Great Lakes Health Care System  
P.O. Box 5000  
Building 18  
Hines, IL 60141

Dear Ms. Oshinski:

The July 18, 2005, edition of U.S. News and World Report featured an article whose headline referred to VA hospitals as "models of top notch care," and which stated that "the Nation's largest health care system has improved so much that often it is the best around." A copy of this article is enclosed. As a result, millions of readers of this publication now know what I have learned since I became your Secretary: The Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) ability to provide safe, effective, efficient and compassionate care to veterans has no equal in our Nation and the world.

In your job, you have identified and implemented changes critical to our mission and our future success, you have made difficult decisions and taken necessary actions, and you have recognized that providing quality health care requires constant vigilance. You and those with whom you work have made the health care the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides a standard of excellence by which all other health care organizations must now be measured. Today's VA is head and shoulders above private and other government health care providers in its ability to offer world-class health care at a reasonable cost.

I congratulate you on this remarkable accomplishment, and I thank you for creating an atmosphere of passionate dedication and unbreakable commitment among those you lead. This unprecedented level of dedication and commitment among VHA employees and volunteers is what led to this public recognition that VA is satisfying our Nation's debt to its veterans -- the men and women it is our privilege and honor to serve.

I ask that you share my congratulations and thanks with your co-workers and facility volunteers. I am very proud of all of you.

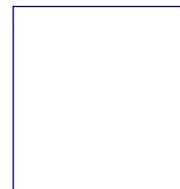
Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. James Nicholson".

R. James Nicholson

Enclosure

Department of Veterans Affairs  
Network Director (10N12)  
PO Box 5000, Building 18  
Hines, IL 60141-5000



ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Mailing Address  
Street Number and Name  
City, State 98765-4321

The Great Lakes News is published for employees and stakeholders in the VA Great Lakes Health Care System. Submissions can be sent to [Linda.deraad@med.va.gov](mailto:Linda.deraad@med.va.gov). Electronic subscriptions are available through our web site at <http://www.visn12.med.va.gov>.

**Contributors for this issue:**

Linda Schmidt, Webmaster; Maureen Dyman, Hines VA Hospital; Rita Bond, Iron Mountain VA Medical Center; Ray Leber, Jesse Brown VA Medical Center; Scott Krueger, Madison VA Hospital; John Zewiske, Milwaukee VA Medical Center; Douglas Shouse, North Chicago VA Medical Center; Laura Bishop, Tomah VA Medical Center; Kevin Rys/Judy Brown VISN 12 Office