



Message from our Network Director



Happy New Year to each and every one of you!

During the past several months, I have had the wonderful opportunity of visiting each of our medical centers and meeting many of you in

The Network. I have observed acts of kindness, compassion, and have heard about the excellent care that is being provided to our veterans by employees, volunteers and students.

2006 will prove to be another challenging year in improving our performance measures, providing better access, and an even higher level of quality care.

I am confident that we will continue to excel as we enter this new year because of the extraordinary skills and dedication of our employees and volunteers. Thank you, and please keep up the good work!

Local Landmark Agreement Between Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs

On Monday, October 17, 2005, the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) signed an agreement fully integrating the North Chicago VAMC (NCVAMC) and Naval Hospital Great Lakes (NHGL).

Congressman Mark Kirk, 10th District, IL.; Gordon H. Mansfield, Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and Dr. William Winkenwerder, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs participated in the ceremony.

The initial VA and DoD resource sharing phase relocated inpatient mental health services from the NHGL to the NCVAMC in October 2003. Currently, renovations are underway to expand the NCVAMC's Surgery and Emergency Departments. Upon completion next June, all of NHGL's inpatients including pediatrics, emergency and surgery services will shift to the NCVAMC.



Sitting (left to right) is Deputy Secretary Mansfield and Dr. Winkenwerder as they sign the executive agreement. Standing is Congressman Kirk, Mayor Rockingham of North Chicago and veterans from various service organizations

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 2 Successful Partnerships
- 4 Veterans Day Activities
- 5 OIF/OEF News
- 7 Network News
- 13 CARES Update
- 15 Network Awards and Recognitions

VA and DoD officials note the event is an unparalleled milestone in resource sharing between VA & Navy. VA & Navy personnel will be working side-by-side to provide the best quality health care to veterans, active duty and their family members. Ongoing VA and DoD planning will use the expertise of six national VA/DoD joint work groups. The groups will develop vital contingencies within the unfolding federal health care facility. Their efforts will focus on Human Resources, Information Management and Technology, Leadership, Clinical, Finance and Budget, and Administration functions.

The joint partnership will also include a DoD construction project designing and building a state of the art federal ambulatory care clinic to be located on the NCVAMC campus.



Congressman Kirk held a press conference before the signing ceremony to announce the agreement. Kirk points to an aerial picture of North Chicago VAMC to show where the new ambulatory care center will be built. Deputy Secretary Mansfield (right) and Dr. Winkenwerder (left) look on.

This agreement has been reached after four years of extensive negotiations and will fully integrate leadership and all clinical and administrative functions. Governance will include an interagency Board of Directors, Advisory Board, a VA Medical Center Director and Navy Deputy Director.

The primary goals of this collaboration are to improve access, patient satisfaction, and timely delivery of services for VA and DoD beneficiaries while improving efficiencies and reducing costs.

Developing a federal health care facility between the VA and DoD is a major initiative for both departments.

The overwhelming benefit is the continued provision of accessible, high quality health care for active duty, their family members, and veteran patients. This union also benefits taxpayers through a reduction in costs.

This partnership model that North Chicago VAMC and Naval Hospital Great Lakes are creating will be used for future VA/DoD joint ventures.

The full integration of this new federal health care system is scheduled for 2009-2010.

Successful Partnerships

The grand opening ceremony for Cooke's Manor Hines, a brand new transitional living center on the Hines VA campus, run by Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago, took place last month. Illinois State Treasurer Judy Baar Topinka, along with officials from Catholic Charities and numerous veterans service organizations attended the ceremony, which was held in the Hines Chapel. More than 150 attendees then walked over to Cooke's Manor for an official blessing of the facility by the Bishop of Chicago.

Under an enhanced use lease agreement, Catholic Charities renovated Building 14, which was largely vacant. The newly-renovated space in that building, is now state of the art short-term accommodations that can house up to 40 veterans. Most of these veterans are recent graduates of other Hines programs in the Mental Health Service Line and without this housing would otherwise be homeless. The Catholic Charities transitional housing program will provide much-needed accommodations and services to these veterans as they reenter the community.

"Veterans make up a very high percentage of the homeless population in the Chicago area," said Mary Ann Romeo, VISN 12's Homeless Coordinator. "This program fulfills a critical need for veterans who otherwise might be on the street."

Hines began working on this faith-based initiative with Catholic Charities several years ago. As the successful working relationship developed, the project has expanded and will include enhanced-use agreements for the use of two other vacant buildings

on the Hines campus. These buildings will be used to house an assisted-living program, as well as senior housing.

“We are very enthusiastic about this project,” said Jack Hetrick, Hines Director, who spoke at last month’s ceremony. “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.”

The program at Cooke’s Manor includes structured days, rehabilitative work training, individual counseling, recovery groups, holistic education, pre-employment training and assistance with permanent housing placement. VA estimates that there are more than 300,000 homeless veterans in the U.S. An estimated 18,000 homeless veterans live in Chicago’s six-county metropolitan area.



“I am thrilled to be here to celebrate such a positive project that will benefit our nation’s veterans,” said State Treasurer Topinka. “My father received excellent care at Hines and I always enjoy visiting the facility to see the wonderful things that go on here. This project is an example of a wonderful meeting of the minds between Catholic Charities and the VA, resulting in a much-needed facility for veterans.”

Presently 40 veterans are residing in Cooke’s Manor Hines and there is a waiting list of veterans interested in participating in the program.

Veterans Service Center Opens in Milwaukee

On a cool November 7 day, Wisconsin Secretary of Veterans Affairs John Scocos joined Milwaukee VA Regional Office Director Jon Baker, Milwaukee VA

Medical Center Director Glen Grippen and Milwaukee County Executive Scott Walker in a ribbon-cutting ceremony. The occasion was the opening of the new Milwaukee Veterans Service Center on the Milwaukee VA campus in Building 4.

In his remarks Secretary Scocos said, “This ceremony marks the fulfillment of a successful partnership with the federal VA and Milwaukee County. The move of the Milwaukee Veterans Service Center to its new location in Building 4 will better serve veterans.”

The ceremony was also attended by congressional and legislative offices, veterans organizations, civic leaders and area veterans community leaders.



The now accessible building underwent an \$800,000 remodeling and has an impressive history. It was originally built as an 11,525 square foot social hall in 1894 at a cost, some say, of \$4,950. Built from Post Funds, its beginning began with a \$500 donation from a group of alcoholics. The basement was fitted with card tables, checkers, chess, pocket ball boards and other features. The first story was a billiard room, having two billiard and four pool tables. The second story was beautifully furnished and named the Grand Army of the Republic Post Hall. The walls were festooned with pictures of war scenes and portraits of prominent generals, admirals and others who became famous in the military and naval history of the country. All affiliated societies had free access.

Besides the Veterans Service Center, the building houses a patient bowling alley in the basement and the medical center payroll office as well as part of fiscal on the second floor.

The new location of the Milwaukee Veterans Service Center will provide better access for the full array of veterans' benefits and services. The center will be staffed with Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs personnel and includes shared office space for the Milwaukee County Veterans Service Officer and other veterans service providers, including the Milwaukee Veterans Day Parade, Inc.

The address for the center is: Milwaukee Veterans Service Center, VA Building 4, 5000 W. National Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53295-0002. The telephone number is (414) 382-1727.

Veterans Day Activities

At Tomah VA, the annual Veterans Day ceremony was held Friday, November 11 in the Chapel. Guest speaker was Captain Scott Southworth, who is the District Attorney in Juneau County and an Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran, having spent 14 months in Iraq.



Medical Center Stan Johnson presents Capt. Scott Southworth a Tomah VA mug during the Veterans Day program.

About 180 patients, staff, volunteers and members of the community attended the program, which concluded at the eleventh hour with the 21 gun salute and the playing of "Taps."

Instead of holding its annual Veterans Day program, Jesse Brown VA Medical Center (JBVAMC) scheduled a trip for veterans and staff to attend the dedication of the Chicago Vietnam War Memorial. Participating in the ceremony was Joe Bazil, JBVAMC's Assistant Chief for Environmental Management Service, who serves on the Mayor's Advisory Council on Veterans Affairs. Bazil was among the speakers that recited the list of over 2,900 military members from Illinois who were killed or reported missing during the Vietnam War.



Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley (from left), Colonel Constance Edwards, Kathy Byrne (daughter of former Mayor Jane Byrne, along with son, Willie) and Congressional Medal of Honor recipient Allen Lynch pause for a moment of silence.

Afterwards, the medical center's Voluntary Service office provided refreshments for veterans in the auditorium and hosted ROTC units from the University of Illinois at Chicago and Hirsch High School to visit with patients. In addition, members of a local law firm, Corboy & Demetrio, provided a gift distribution to patients for the third year in a row.

Later that evening, several members of the medical center were invited as guests of the Chicago Union League Club, which sponsored a Veterans Day fundraiser and presented Acting Director Michelle Blakely with the keys to a 13-passenger van it donated to JBVAMC. Members of the medical center's Veterans Strike Force – 1 service organization provided an Honor Guard for the Union League Club's Veterans Day program.

Earlier in the week, veterans at JBVAMC packed the auditorium to meet Chicago Bears' defensive tackles Tommie Harris and Tank Johnson. The two players answered questions, signed autographs and held a Bears history trivia contest. Veterans who answered their questions correctly received Chicago Bears caps.

Jesse Brown VAMC also kicked off its "Affirming the Commitment" campaign on November 10 to coincide with Veterans Day. Staff members attended a very moving program, highlighted by audiovisual presentations and several guest speakers who had served in Vietnam and Iraq.



Chicago Bears' defensive tackles Tank Johnson (left) and Tommie Harris visited JBVAMC on November 8 to honor patients during the week of Veterans Day.

Highlighting the theme of “Veterans Serving Veterans,” the medical center posted displays of photos taken of staff during their years of military service, which, in some cases, were over 30 years ago. Over 300 staff members submitted photos of themselves or family members who had served in uniform. The medical center is also running a series of articles in its employee newsletter in which employees reminisce about their military experiences.



Six of the 10 children in the Warren family entered military service during the 1980's and four now work at the Jesse Brown VAMC and Hines VAH. Posing in front of the JBVAMC “Veterans Serving Veterans” display is (from left) Mary Wesley, RN, who works in Support Services at JBVAMC; Shirley Warren-Merritt, RN, Nurse Manager, JBVAMC Specialty Clinics; James Warren, RT, Operations Manager, JBVAMC Radiology Service; and Deborah Dear, RN, Clinical Nurse Manager of the Emergency Department at Hines VAH. All four siblings cited their desire to serve veterans and the special camaraderie among VA patients and staff that influenced their decisions to pursue a career with the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Ombudsmen get OEF/OIF veterans connected

Milwaukee, WI – “Public Law 105-368 authorizes VA to provide combat veterans cost-free care for conditions potentially related to their combat service for up to two years following their discharge or release from active duty.”

With that Public Law, passed by the Congress and signed by the President on Veterans Day of 1998, Andy Hendrickson, RN, and Eric Proescher, PsyD, at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center became vested in their new positions as members of the Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom Veteran and Family Outreach Effort. Their goal is to reach out to the returning military veterans and their families to facilitate the healthy transition from deployment to normal civilian life. The team, one of 30 in VA medical centers nationwide, acts as a proactive resource working with other governmental agencies as an advocate for the returning soldiers.



On the Road – Eric Proescher, PsyD, and Andy Hendrickson, RN, are visiting many places in Wisconsin and Illinois they have only heard of. They represent the Milwaukee VA Medical Centers Veteran and Family Outreach Effort to spread the word as combat soldiers return from Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom.

“There are many resources out there available,” said Dr. Proescher. “People trying to do it differently, but there is still a disconnect between those who need services and then navigating the system to get all the resources that are available.” He said that their goal is to make the changeover from combat as seamless as possible utilizing a wide spectrum of resources.

Mr. Hendrickson likes to think of their positions as ombudsmen for the returning soldiers in their change to being home.

Both spend a lot of time on the road and work many evenings and weekends sharing information about benefits and readjustment. They speak to many different audiences and to members of support groups and units going or returning from duty overseas. Their catchment area includes the counties in east central and southeastern Wisconsin, but it is actually broader as local members of the armed forces are assigned to units all over the Midwest.

The program is funded for three years. Education and research are also connected with their efforts and includes a program evaluation. Presently, they are concluding a seven-week program entitled "Understanding Readjustment" for recent military service veterans and their families. "It is a readjustment program," said Dr. Proescher. "The program focuses on service members returning to home life and understanding the changes that occurred while gone." Another session is slated to begin after the first of the year.

Stress management is another aspect that the team deals with in support sessions. "Battle-Body Re-training" is yet another program of eight-week duration that began this month. This program is for all veterans and focuses on relaxation.

It is a new and a busy assignment that gives Mr. Hendrickson and Dr. Proescher an opportunity to call on their recent military service as OIF/OEF veterans. The Milwaukee VA is possibly the only site in VA system to have a registered nurse and a psychologist teamed together. They have the advantage of speaking from their experiences...and from their hearts.

Operation Military Pride

During the month of November, the North Chicago VA Medical Center (NCVAMC) staff and volunteers were invited to contribute items and/or money for care packages to send to U.S. troops serving overseas this holiday season. This is the second year the NCVAMC held this drive and it proved to be a great success due to the generosity of the staff and volunteers who know what it means to be Proud to Care!

The vast amount of items collected was enough to pack 36 boxes full of snacks, books, games, stuffed animals, toys and other wonderful goodies. In addition were hand written letters and cards prepared by students in the 4th grade class at Dr. Bessie Rhodes Magnet School, located in Skokie, IL and two 5th grade classes at Curtis Strange School, located in Kenosha, WI.



North Chicago VA employees Lyle Walter, Colleen Smoger and Deborah Russell pack up items that will be shipped to service personnel for the holidays.

Among the thirty-six recipients were 4 immediate family members of NCVAMC staff. A special package was made up for a military K-9 and his handler which included items for both the dog and the soldier. Troop's names and addresses were received from www.operationmilitarypride.org.

NEWS FROM IRAQ

On December 7, the Tomah VA's Federal Women's Program (FWP) Committee sponsored a program titled "News from Iraq." 1Lt. Josephine Jerome was the speaker. Jerome is a Recruiting and Retention Specialist for the Wisconsin Army Reserves/National Guard in Madison. Jerome served as Platoon Leader, 229 Engineer Company, 555 Engineer Group, 4th Infantry Division, in Tikrit, Iraq from May 2003 through March 2004 in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The program was opened with a moment of silence in remembrance of a Tomah Marine who was killed in Iraq in early December and in honor of all of our fallen soldiers, including those present at Pearl Harbor 61 years ago to the day.

Jerome showed pictures of the living conditions of our soldiers, and described the positive impact the American forces are having on the people of Iraq. She said that the Iraqis frequently greeted their convoys with smiles, waves and blown kisses. She was happy to show pictures of the people of Iraq smiling and welcoming the Americans, and was quick to point out their torn clothes and decayed teeth.

The duties of the 229th Engineer Company were to build bridges, clean schools, improve medical facilities for the Iraqis, secure places for the Iraqi police force to work from, to clean the medians to decrease the risk of insurgents hiding explosive devices, and, in Jerome's words, "to win the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people."



Jerome poses with a group of Iraqi citizens during her tour in Iraq in 2003/2004.

Jerome vividly remembers the day Saddam Hussein was captured. She was approached by three Iraqi men, one of whom carried a boom box kind of radio. The men were smiling and approached her, shouting, "Saddam! Saddam!" They were crossing their wrists to indicate that he had been captured and handcuffed. Jerome believes the men crossed several "social norms" in approaching an American, a woman, and a soldier with a rifle, but she believes that it was more important to them to share the news than to obey social rules.

Jerome spoke about how being in the military gave soldiers the "gift of gratitude." She has a new respect for the comforts of home and "what the body can do." She said there were days when they had to use a meat thermometer to measure the temperature of the air – a regular thermometer would not register the heat.

It was obvious that Jerome was touched by the people she met and encouraged by the progress our US forces have brought to the people of Iraq. "I would go back," she said. "Our lives are not just about us – it's about helping others."

Network News

Hines

Hines Generosity

The Hines Employees Association and Social Work Service sponsored an annual Holiday Sharing program again this year. Social workers at the facility identified veterans and their families who were in need of gifts during the holiday and employees stepped up to provide gifts of coats, toys, etc., for these individuals. 136 veterans and family members received gifts to brighten their holiday season as a result of the generosity of the Hines staff.

Hines employees and volunteers raised \$4,881 in donations to support victims of Hurricane Katrina. In early December a check was sent to the VA Hospital in Shreveport, Louisiana where it will be used for special housing projects for people displaced by the Hurricane. According to sources at the Shreveport VA, with aid getting reduced to the affected areas, this donation will certainly be appreciated. Hines employees were proud to support this worthy cause and show just how much Hines cares about our VA family.

Iron Mountain

Network Director Visits Iron Mountain



James W. Roseborough, Network Director, is shown with Janice M. Boss, Director of the Iron Mountain VA Medical Center, during his recent visit to Iron Mountain. In addition to meeting with employees and

volunteers, he toured the facility and had the opportunity to witness the variety of changes and improvements that have been taking place in Iron Mountain.

Iron Mountain staff enjoyed meeting Mr. Roseborough and having the chance to welcome him to VISN 12 and Iron Mountain. He promised to visit again in the Spring when the snow melts.

Veterans Photo Contest

Sponsored by the VA Medical Center in Iron Mountain, veterans in the Upper Peninsula and northeastern Wisconsin had the opportunity to participate in an annual photography contest. The program was introduced in 2004 when veterans were invited to submit up to three photos of landscapes in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan or northeastern Wisconsin. The response was overwhelming with over 200 entries being received. From that number, 15 winning photographs were selected for matting, framing and display in the recently remodeled ICU/inpatient unit on the fourth floor of the medical center.



Holiday Shopping for Veterans

Veterans had a chance to shop for their family members when they selected gifts provided by the American Legion Auxiliary of Michigan. Shirley Cuyler, American Legion Auxiliary VA Voluntary Service representative, is shown assisting John Farrell, a Nursing Home Care Unit resident, with his holiday shopping. Veterans had the opportunity to select gifts for their family and then the gifts were wrapped and mailed by auxiliary volunteers. Refreshments were provided by the auxiliary members from northeastern Wisconsin.



Jesse Brown

Facilities Leadership Development Program

Graduation ceremonies were held on December 9th for eleven employees who completed the second annual Facility Leadership Development Program (FLDP). FLDP is a training opportunity offered to employees to encourage commitment to VA and personal leadership development, develop skills and techniques used by good leaders, further develop individuals with a recognized potential for higher-level leadership positions and to enhance each participant's ability to contribute to achieving facility goals while performing their current duties.



FDLP graduates included (from left) Jerry Bolden, Environmental Management Service; Gail Dukes, Patient Administration Service; Pamela Brown, Engineering Service; Cheryl Crater, PAS; Qiana Williams, Director's Office; James Warren, Radiology Service; Wardell Campbell, Information Resource Management; Anita Bor-Brown, Nursing Service; Karen Mannos, Mental Health Service Line; Molly Mendoza, Nursing Service; and Tammi Ostrowsky, Nursing Service

Among other assignments, participants of the program were expected to work in teams to complete a facility-based project. The two projects offered were: "Bridging the Gap: Program Recommendations for Native American Veterans" and "Feasibility of Establishing a Discharge Lounge at JBVAMC."

Breast Cancer Walk

Almost 40 employees, veterans and friends of JBVAMC joined together for the "Making Strides Against Breast Cancer" Walk on October 16, raising over \$2,000 for the American Cancer Society's annual event. Staff from the Crown Point CBOC also participated in a similar walk that day in Valparaiso, Indiana, raising \$273, which was \$23 over their goal.



Madison

Annual CVSO Conference

Patient Administration Service recently coordinated another of their very popular county veterans service officer (CVSO) conferences. This annual day-long event encompasses the latest hot topics and changes concerning the VA medical care benefits and the Madison hospital and its clinics. Staff members from a variety of programs served as subject matter experts presenting the following topics this year: My HealthVet; Bed Management; OIF/OEF; Wait List; Insurance Identification/Pre-registration; Care Coordination & Home Telehealth; Research Programs; Alzheimer's; Construction Updates/New Equipment; The Process for Offsets; Changes in Urgent Care; New Mental Health System; and Fee Basis.

The final portion of the agenda was reserved for questions and concerns from the attendees directly to

hospital management. Along with the CVSOs attending from throughout Madison's primary service area, the congressional delegation offices and service organizations were well represented with attendees as well.

19th Annual Operation Care & Share a Major Success

The employees and volunteers at Madison VA have combined their efforts for the 19th year to provide food packages to needy veterans and their families. Non-perishable food items and over \$4,100 in monetary donations were donated over a five-week period. The monetary donations are utilized to purchase items to support a traditional holiday turkey dinner with all the trimmings along with basic items to provide an abundance of family meals. Each food package weighs approximately 40 pounds and is accompanied by a 10–12 pound frozen turkey. The Social Work staff, along with staff from other hospital services, the Madison Vet Center, and county veterans service officers, determine which patients become the recipients of the packages. This year, 50 of the packages have already been provided to veterans, and an additional 75 will be prepared for distribution. Wonderful comments of appreciation are received from recipients each year.

Milwaukee

The National Soldiers Home a 2006 Choice Destination

The National Soldiers Home Historic District on the grounds of the Milwaukee VA Medical Center is a special place where visitors can share the experiences of our nation's veterans. The tranquil environment, in the middle of the Milwaukee metroplex, is a historic respite. That is just one reason why it was recently designated as a 2006 Choice Destination by Discover Wisconsin.

In 1986 the idea was born to showcase Wisconsin's many great vacation treasures on a television show dedicated to Wisconsin tourism - appropriately named Discover Wisconsin. Discover Wisconsin Television became the first public and private sector

partnership under Governor Tommy Thompson.

The television program featured the Soldiers Home as its only destination (Often times several Wisconsin destinations are highlighted.) during the 30-minute program that aired in December on state-wide television stations. The program is also broadcast throughout the Midwest on a combination of network, cable, and satellite stations. It maintains a weekly audience of 750,000 viewers.

The National Soldiers Home Historic District, founded through the efforts of the West Side Soldiers' Aid Society in 1864, fashioned the Soldiers Home to provide post-war care for the returning sick and maimed Civil War soldiers. The campus was made to feel like a community rather than an institution. The buildings included a library, recreation hall, theater and a chapel. Easily seen from the freeway, the tall tower of the signature Old Soldiers Home, occupied in 1869, was built with federal monies and dominates the historic campus.

In recent years, the Soldiers Home Foundation, a group of patriots with partners from community, educational and veteran organizations, rededicated themselves to the protection, preservation and renovation of the historic Milwaukee Soldiers Home District. Their mission is also to honor our nation's veterans and bring history to life.

One way history is revisited is at the Foundation and VA's Reclaiming Our Heritage event held annually in June. This one-of-a-kind patriotic festival that showcases living history exhibits while raising awareness of the historic and cultural value of the Soldiers Home buildings and grounds. This is the only time of the year the historic buildings are open, and the event comes with the Positively Patriotic Parade on Saturday.

The Old Soldiers Home is located next to Wood National Cemetery where visitors can honor and remember our nation's war heroes. The National Soldiers Home Historic District is an amazing space filled with a strong sense of patriotism and rich history certainly making it a choice destination.

Maybe this is the year you should take that trip to Milwaukee. June 3-4, 2006 is the weekend for

Reclaiming Our Heritage – a multi-era encampment. For more information contact the Soldiers Home Foundation at <http://www.soldiershome.org> or telephone 414-389-4135. The Discover Wisconsin website is <http://www.discoverwisconsin.com>

See you there! By the way, it's free. And don't forget your red, white and blue.



The ladies are having fun welcoming the troops at Reclaiming Our Heritage (ROH). Over 300 reenactors played a part in last year's ROH. The annual event is held on the Milwaukee VA grounds and attracted close to 11,000 visitors in the two-day multi-era encampment. The celebration was recently named a Wisconsin Choice Destination.

North Chicago

Women Veterans Luncheon

November 16th was a windy and dreary day, but that didn't prevent more than 60 women veterans from coming to the North Chicago VA. In what has become a much anticipated tradition, the North Chicago Women Veterans Committee sponsored its annual program and luncheon in recognition of the many contributions of women veterans.

Following welcoming remarks by Associate Director, Marianne Semrad, the Women Veterans Program Manager, Katherine Dong, provided an update to attendees on the status of the Joint VA and Navy Comprehensive Women's Clinic. Next, it was time for the main event. Attendees were provided with an overview of health issues pertaining to women by the

North Chicago gynecologist, Dr. Theresa Kepic, as well as by a North Chicago neurologist/geriatrician, Dr. Rita Shapiro. Both physicians allowed time to address specific issues brought up by women. Hand-outs provided tips for improving and maintaining health.

During and after the luncheon, opportunities for networking and rekindling of friendships abounded. Periods of service represented ranged from World War II to Operation Desert Storm. The North Chicago VA in conjunction with our partners at the Great Lakes Naval Hospital is planning a series of ongoing educational programs for women veterans and Department of Defense beneficiaries. Judging by the success of this program, women are eager to become leaders in adopting more healthy lifestyles.

Fourth Annual Diversity Day Celebration



Display of flags from countries around the world

The Fourth Annual Diversity Day Celebration was held at the North Chicago VA Medical Center on Wednesday, November 30. The theme of the program was, "Holidays Around the World." The event serves two purposes: to increase awareness and to educate the staff on the ethnic cultures and the diversity within our medical center workforce, as well as provide an opportunity to share memorable moments and fun with co-workers.

Groups participating in this year's event included staff from the Philippines, Native American Indian, Korea, India, Poland, Mexico, Caribbean, South America, African-American, and Scotland. The event began with a parade of flags representing countries from around the world. Greetings of Merry Christmas and Happy

New Year were extended to the audience in each of the native languages from representatives of the participating groups. A variety of ethnic entertainment was provided throughout the program. Attendees were treated to a variety of "taste samples" of ethnic food from around the world.



Employees were serenaded by Scottish bagpipes



Employees representing Polish heritage dressed in authentic attire

World AIDS Day

December 1 was World AIDS Day around the nation. North Chicago VAMC recognized World AIDS Day by inviting guest speakers to share their experience from a medical mission to Pretoria, South Africa. Ms. Debbie Gilliam and Ms. Teri Dreher are nurses in the Lake County, Illinois community that assisted in providing health care for adults and children with HIV/AIDS during this medical mission to South Africa.

They shared many experiences and discussed the social, economical, and cultural aspects that affect the HIV/AIDS pandemic in this region. This provided a global view of HIV/AIDS to our veterans, staff, and community members.

In appreciation to veterans who face the challenges of living with HIV/AIDS and honoring those that have passed on from AIDS, a panel of the AIDS Memorial quilt was displayed at North Chicago VAMC. North Chicago also recognizes and supports staff and community agencies that provide care to those veterans with HIV/AIDS. At North Chicago VAMC, we strive for excellence in providing compassionate comprehensive, health care, and are proud to care for our nation's veterans living with HIV/AIDS.



Pictured from left to right: Guest speakers Teri Dreher, and Debbie Gilliam, RNs with Dr. Walid Khayr, Chief of Infectious Disease, and Deborah Russell, RN, HIV Coordinator

Tomah

Visitors to the Hall of Heroes

In May, Kenneth Murphy was inducted into the Tomah VA's Hall of Heroes. On Veterans Day, the AMVETS Post #2180 in Necedah was officially named the "Murphy AMVETS Post 2180." The organization is named after Ken and his seven brothers who are all veterans. The oldest brother, Clifford, now deceased, would have been 81 years old and served in World War II. Six of the brothers, including Ken, served in Vietnam and one in Korea. The youngest brother is 51 – a thirty year span of Murphy boys!



The Murphy brothers and other family members pose by the Tomah VA's Hall of Heroes on Veterans Day.

The brothers (and other family members) traveled to Wisconsin from Illinois, Florida and South Carolina, and made the trip to Tomah to see our Hall of Heroes. Ken Murphy is third from the left in the photograph.

The Murphys received greetings from President Bush who wrote, "Our country is grateful for the extraordinary service of Clifford, Earl, James, John, Joseph, Kenneth, Patrick and Robert Murphy, and their unwavering loyalty serves as an inspiration to our citizens."

Veterans' Assistance Fair

The VA joined forces with a variety of agencies to provide a "Veterans Assistance Fair" in La Crosse on December 6. Also known as a "Stand Down," the event is targeted for all veterans, but hopes to reach veterans who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

Eleven VA employees provided services at the event such as health screens and flu shots. Information on nicotine dependence, the residential programs offered at Tomah, dietetic counseling, veterans' benefits, substance abuse, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and mental health were all available. In addition, a lunch of chili and cheeseburgers was provided by the American Legion Post 52 and the Viet Nam Motorcycle Club, Tomah Chapter. One cosmetologist donated her services and gave 31 hair cuts and 57 pair of free eyeglasses were distributed.



Jill Welch, Medical Administration Assistant, speaks to a veteran about enrolling for VA health care

All in all, a total of 300 veterans and 51 spouses/companions were served. Twenty-three agencies were represented and 67 volunteers were present to provide services. The leading sponsors/organizations were the La Crosse County Veterans Service Office, Veterans Assistance Foundation, Viet Now and the Tomah VA.

VA Sponsors Food Drive

The VA's Federal Women's Program (FWP) Committee sponsored a food drive in late October. In two weeks' time, staff and volunteers had donated 815 pounds of food and donated funds for the Tomah Neighbor-to-Neighbor program.



Bonnie Baldwin (left) and Debby Thorpe pose with the boxes of food and toiletries articles donated for the local food pantry.

Audrey Chambers, FWP Manager, said, "I'd like to thank all employees who brought in food or gave money – without them we couldn't have made this

project successful. Also thank the folks in the Warehouse who weighed and delivered the food to Neighbor to Neighbor."

CARES Update

It's not just the design...

It's a cultural transformation

Milwaukee – The design of the new nursing home on the ninth floor of the Milwaukee VA Medical Center was eye popping to many as they toured during an open house December 5. The fireplace and comfortable seating at the entrance was unexpected and a nice surprise as well as a staffed reception desk.

The new forty-bed 9C Nursing Home Care Unit is for life-stay patients. Every room has its own bathroom and eighty percent of the rooms are private. It also boasts conveniences such as hydraulic tubs and a spacious, no-lift environment.

But design aside; it is a cultural transformation says Victoria Brahm, RN, co-division manager for rehab, extended and community care. "Everything is home-like. You knock on the doors like an apartment and the (resident) council has a lot of say. The council helped with the design. So it is about, 'Everyday is Veterans Day.' We are going to be as much like home as possible."

The new unit was funded by the Department of Veterans Affairs Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) program. This is VA's effort to produce a logical national plan for modernizing health care facilities and was right on target according to Mrs. Brahm. "This is a huge step forward for us to work in an atmosphere more conducive to having the veteran feel independent and maintaining some sense of self confidence and decision making in their aging years. It is going to produce more efficiency and productivity and has been designed specifically for this population."



"This is my new home," announces Art R. Heglund to Michael D. Erdmann, MD, Medical Center chief of staff at the Milwaukee VA. Mr. Heglund and his room were on display at the ribbon cutting and open house of the \$2.8 million 9C-Nursing Home Care Unit. To Mr. Heglund it was about ownership, aesthetics and privacy as he proudly pointed out his private bath with shower and the view from his window overlooking Miller Park and downtown. "It is so much more convenient." Mr. Heglund, who is president of the resident council, is a WWII veteran who has lived in several of the domiciliary buildings on campus. "This is a wonderful facility."

Tomah- After almost a year of working in substitute space, the Laboratory at the Tomah VA moved into its newly remodeled area in early December. According to Sherri Schack, Lab Supervisor, the project will increase the efficiency work, improve patient privacy, and allow the most flexible use of the space.

The patient services areas (there are four) are all separated for privacy for the patient. Each station will have a label printer to improve efficiency as staff will be able to mark samples on the spot, without having to go to a different area of the lab.



Patient services areas offer greater privacy for veterans.

Other nice features of the new lab include a waiting room, an additional bathroom and ergonomic workstations. All of the furnishings are modular and easily moved and reformatted, which will allow the space to adapt to new equipment as needed.



Veterans will enjoy this new gazebo once the temperatures warm up!!

Veterans on Building 406 enjoy a new gazebo which was installed in time for the holidays. The removal of two large trees in front of 406 led the facility to providing a gazebo so veterans could sit outside and have shade.



Jesse Brown- Two elevator shafts and two stairwells rise seven floors above the construction site of the Jesse Brown VAMC's new inpatient bed tower, which is expected to open in late 2007. Funded as part of the CARES consolidation plan, the new inpatient care facility will include 200 patient beds, seven operating rooms and a cystology room.

New VA Leadership

Mr. James S. Jones, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Resolution Management, has been named Medical Center Director for the Jesse Brown VAMC, effective January 8, 2006. The announcement was made by Mr. James Roseborough, Network Director for VISN 12, who stated, "We are happy to welcome Mr. Jones back to the great State of Illinois and the great City of Chicago and look forward to his leadership at Jesse Brown VAMC."



James S. Jones will begin his appointment as Medical Center Director for the Jesse Brown VAMC, effective January 8, 2006.

The new appointment will be a sort of homecoming for Mr. Jones, who began his VA career as a Management Analyst Trainee at the West Side VA Medical Center in 1975. He went on to serve at the Hines VA Hospital as Assistant Director from 1987 to 1991 and as Associate Director from 1991 to 1994. He was subsequently named Medical Center Director for the Danville VA Medical Center in 1994 and served as Deputy Chief Network Officer for the Veterans Health Administration in 1999/2000 before his appointment as Deputy Assistant Secretary for VA's Office of Resolution Management.

Network Awards and Recognitions

Hines Researchers Achieve National Success

Dr. Dale Gerding, Chief of Research Service at Hines, and Dr. Stuart Johnson also in Hines Research Service contributed to a study that was

published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in late November. The article, entitled An Epidemic, Toxin Gene-Variant Strain of *Clostridium difficile*, concerns findings of the emergence of an unknown strain of clostridium difficile. Congratulations to co-authors, Drs. Johnson and Gerding, who were interviewed by numerous news media like the *Washington Post* and the *AMA Journal* about these important findings.

In addition, Hines Researcher Dr. Theresa Pape received a \$10,000.00 award from the Nick Kot charity in support of her research of severe traumatic brain injury (TBI). Dr. Pape will use the funds to support her work on improving prognostication after severe TBI and to conduct pilot studies to develop treatments to facilitate recovery of function after severe TBI. Dr. Pape's research team consists of basic scientists from the Hines VA Research Service, health services researchers from Hines Midwest Center for Health Services and Policy Research and Northwestern University, Statisticians from Hines Cooperative Studies Program and Clinicians from Hines and Northwestern.

Hand and Hearts Winners - 2 VISN Employees Honored

Louella Manguba, RN, BSN, in the Hines GI Lab was recently pronounced the winner of the prestigious Secretary's Hands and Hearts Award. This Awards Program for Excellence in Nursing annually honors one Registered Nurse (RN) who is actively engaged in the care of patients at a VA facility. The recipients' contributions to the care of patients in any VA health care setting are patient-centered and demonstrate such excellence as to merit recognition from peers.

According to Karen McLean, Clinical Nurse Manager of the GI Lab, Louella's excellence in nursing is ongoing. "Lou recently took a position in the bronchoscopy department, and has resurrected the pulmonary rehab program. She took it upon herself to network with people within Hines to learn about pulmonary rehab, including clinical nurse specialists, PM&R, and a research nurse who conducts studies in pulmonary rehab. She also sought out hospitals

with established pulmonary rehab programs, and arranged to go to Good Samaritan Hospital to observe their pulmonary rehab program so she could learn even more.”



Above- Hines Director Jack Hetrick with Hands and Hearts Winner Louella Manguba, RN.

Louella sought out the Patient Education Resource Center and met with the coordinator to ensure that the patient education materials were within the guidelines for recommended reading level. She submitted a poster at this year's Performance Improvement Fair entitled "I can breathe!", which includes a testimonial letter from one of her patient's wife, who credits her husband's turnaround to the pulmonary rehab program and to Lou's caring manner and commitment to patient education. Her poster also highlights one patient's progress in just eight short weeks. "I continue to expect great things from Lou Manguba," McLean said. "She truly "sets the bar" for nursing at Hines."

Louella was nominated for the award by Jiret Saez, her Clinical Nurse Manager at the time, who was also impressed with her work. "Louella Manguba has consistently demonstrated personalized and compassionate care not only to the veterans but to their families and her colleagues as well. She really is the hands and hearts of veterans."

Velma Barker-Hill, Psychiatric Consultation Liaison Nurse, has been named as the Jesse Brown VAMC's recipient of the Secretary's Hands & Heart Award.

Recognized throughout the medical center as an expert psychiatric nurse, Ms. Barker-Hill has worked diligently to reduce the use of patient restraints with the goal of

achieving a restraint-free environment. She holds restraint classes (sometimes on weekends) and has developed several booklets and handouts to educate staff members about restraints, as well as the effects and impact they can have when used on our patients.

As a result of Ms. Barker-Hill's collaboration with the VISN webmaster, annual restraint training classes are now available on-line, providing clinical staff the opportunity to receive training when it is most convenient for them and with minimal interruptions to patient care.

Restraint usage at JBVAMC continues to spiral downwards, remaining under the 5 percent VISN rate and earning kudos from the JCAHO and SOARS for the medical center's overall efforts in restraint reduction.

Ms. Barker-Hill's experiences as a psychiatric nurse have given her the ability to interact with even the most volatile patients in a calm and soothing manner. When a patient telephoned the medical center last year with suicidal ideations, Ms. Barker-Hill was called upon to talk with him. She was able to convince him that he could be helped through hospitalization and thus prevented the veteran from harming himself. She also provides grief counseling to both patients and staff and makes herself available to assist employees with issues requiring conflict resolution that may impact patient care.



The Hands & Heart Award was presented to Velma Barker-Hill (left) by Paula Steward, Associate Director for Patient Care Services.

National Recipient of the 2005 Shirley Jeffries Award



Mia Leber (center), a Craft Care Specialist employed by Help Hospitalized Veterans who serves in the Jesse Brown VAMC Mental Health Service Line, was named the national recipient of the 2005 Shirley Jeffries Award, which is given each year to an individual who demonstrates true dedication to the goals of the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. Above, she is presented the award by VA Secretary James R. Nicholson and Festival Director Liz Mackey. Mia Leber has served as a member of the festival's national steering committee since 2001.

Tomah's Memories of Hurricane Relief

Late last August and in early September, most of us were glued to our television sets, internet, radios and newspapers, keeping up with the developing disaster in the Gulf States when Hurricane Katrina struck. Most of us wrung our hands and shook our heads and thought it would be nice if we could do something. We donated money to charities and brought supplies in for organized drives to fill semi-truck trailers. But, some did more – they volunteered to go to the disaster sites and offer whatever assistance they could.

Employees in the Department of Veterans Affairs – a total of 1300 of them nationwide – volunteered for deployments lasting two weeks each. At the Tomah VA, numerous employees offered to volunteer, with thirteen actually being deployed.

Three employees were deployed on September 7, about a week after Katrina wreaked her havoc. Hillary Hoban, RN; Colleen Due, RN; and Bob Karpinsky, Social Worker, were all sent to the VA Clinic in Alexandria, Louisiana, which is about 218 miles west of New Orleans. All mental health workers, they worked with veterans evacuated from the New Orleans VA. They completed mental health assessments, passed medications, and provided treatments and general patient care. By the time the volunteers arrived, the local staff were worn out; so they provided welcomed relief. All three said they worked 12 hour days, just pitching in wherever needed: working with family members, finding personal items, doing depression screening, and coordinating National Guard visits to the victims' homes to check on pets and obtain status reports of their homes.

"My most vivid memories were of cases in which we were able to reunite patients with family and friends who had been displaced as a result of the storm," Karpinsky said. "All of these veterans had lived through some difficult days during and after the hurricane, and some were experiencing acute symptoms. Learning that their loved ones were even alive came as the best and most therapeutic news and it was rewarding to be a part of that."

Rebecca Frey, Patient Services Assistant/Certified Nursing Assistant, was deployed on September 11 to Houston and provided psychiatric services to veterans at the Michael DeBakey VA Medical Center. Her most memorable experience was the smell in the Astrodome, which had been used as a shelter for displaced storm victims.

Three Tomah VA staff were deployed as drivers. Mike Ziems, VA driver, transported employees and patients from New Orleans to Jackson, Mississippi; Toby Lane, Administrative Assistant to the Associate Director, drove a mobile VA clinic and was based in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and Chuck Cleveland, Maintenance and Operations Supervisor, drove in the Biloxi, Mississippi area. These drivers did it all – made supply runs, took employees to work, set up folks in housing, made sure people had food and places to sleep, etc.

If getting around in Katrina's devastation wasn't enough, all three drivers experienced the power of a hurricane first-hand as they were all present when Rita hit.

Cleveland described his Hurricane Rita experience: "I had a van loaded with people. It was early morning and dark as night. Because of Katrina, there were no street signs or signal lights working. Every time I thought I had found a route to take, we ran into downed trees and power lines. At least three times, we were sprayed by sparks from exploding transformers. They would light the area up like daylight. Once we had a power line drop across the vehicle - I just kept going. The devastation was indescribable and everywhere. The people were grateful for us being there and never seemed to miss a chance to express their thanks. On two occasions, I took folks into the only place we could find that was open - the House of Pancakes - to feed them."

Some of the loneliest work was done by our VA police officers. Their main role was to guard the New Orleans VA Medical Center – or what was left of it. Sgt. Joe Segovia arrived in New Orleans on September 17; he said the facility still had merchandise and cash in the Canteen Retail Store and drugs in the pharmacy. The battered Superdome was a mere four blocks away. Segovia was struck with the destruction to the city.

"The only people were police, fire, first responders and volunteers," he recalls. "I remember standing guard at 2 o'clock in the morning through wind and rain while (Hurricane) Rita was hitting the city and not seeing or hearing anyone in a major city. I remember standing in the middle of a major interstate in a major city at 5 pm, which should be rush-hour traffic, and not seeing a single vehicle. I remember the smell."

Segovia also remembers the powerless feeling he had when a haggard looking middle-aged man on a bike approached him. The man explained that he needed his meds – he had been without them for a long time due to the storm. Segovia, armed with a shotgun and his standard 9mm, explained that the hospital was essentially shut down. "I was absolutely powerless," he remembers. "I had no answer for him. I couldn't tell him to go to another building. I couldn't

tell him to call a 1-800 number. I couldn't tell him to go on line. As a veteran, I placed myself in his shoes and just couldn't fathom how powerless and destitute one can be. I realized I cannot take anything for granted."



Hurricane relief workers were recognized by Tomah VA management. Left to right, front row: Colleen Due, Lori Liddell, Hillary Hoban and Toby Lane. Back row: Dr. David Houlihan, Chief of Staff; Mike Zellmer, Tomah Fire Chief; Brian Boldon, Rebecca Frey, Sandy Georgeson, Bob Karpinsky, Mike Ziems, and Stan Johnson, Medical Center Director.

Two other Tomah VA Police were deployed for the same assignment, Detective Brian Boldon (October 22 – 30) and Zach Hibma (October 29 – November 7).

Lori Liddell, Food Service Worker, and Sandy Georgeson, Laundry Driver, had unique roles. Liddell was deployed to Waco, Texas, arriving on October 10. She worked as a food service worker at a shelter set up for non-veterans in a closed down building on the Waco VA campus. Many of the clients had special needs – visually impaired, mentally challenged, or had medical or physical disabilities. "The residents were all so grateful that we were there," she reflected. "They kept saying, 'Thank you for coming' and 'Thank you for caring.' When they said that to me, I told them that my entire crew back home had been talking about the hurricane victims and empathizing with them. I told them I was there at the shelter representing my co-workers, as well as myself."

Georgeson worked as a laborer/driver in Marlin, Texas, in October, where she helped both Katrina and Rita victims. She performed a variety of duties: tearing down cots in the shelter, making runs to Wal-Mart for medications, operating a "free canteen" for clients, dispensing clothing, and even providing recreational

activities, such as bingo and coloring contests. Georgeson said they were closing up the Marlin shelter on the last day of her deployment, and she felt good in that “it felt like we had finished.” The theme for her work unit was, “Adapt and Overcome,” an ideal she and Liddell had to put to use when they were stranded in O’Hare Airport on their way home.

So many of us remember Katrina and Rita, but there was a third big storm of 2005: Wilma, which stuck southwestern Florida in late October. Alice Kirking, RN, arrived in Miami on November 1 and helped staff a mobile clinic operated by VA in Broward County. There were nine mobile clinics in all, two of which were VA. Kirking remembers the difficulty they had navigating a new city when street signs were missing and trees were downed. They served very socially and economically-deprived citizens, many of whom did not speak English. Kirking shared one special memory. The clinic went to an apartment complex where many of the residents were sick with HIV. They had been without food for almost two weeks. The VA volunteers called the Red Cross and soon sandwiches and over eighty bags of groceries were delivered. Kirking remembers their gratitude.

The thirteen VA employees who were deployed performed a variety of duties in a multitude of states and cities along the Gulf Coast. There was one common memory for all: the people they met. Whether they spoke of the victims they served or the volunteers with whom they worked, each individual made new friends and came back home with a new sense of “community.” As Rebecca Frey remembers, “I learned the value of taking kindness from strangers. What I can’t forget is all the fellow VA coworkers who came from every state and put their lives on hold to come and help in a time of need. Like I’ve heard many of my coworkers say, I would do it again – in a heartbeat.”

60 Years of Academic Affiliations – Hines Began Tradition

This past January 4, 2006, marked 60 years of academic affiliations with Northwestern University Medical School and the University of Illinois College of Medicine in Chicago who assigned 56 residents to the Edward Hines, Jr. VA Hospital. This was the first of VA medical school affiliations.

Just 10 years ago, the former Network Director of VISN 12, the former VHA Under Secretary for Health and President of the Association of American Medical Colleges had their pictures taken commemorating 50 years of academic affiliations.



January 31, 1996, standing proudly with plaques commemorating 50 years of academic affiliations are (from left) VISN 12 Network Director Dr. Joan E. Cummings, VHA Under Secretary for Health Dr. Kenneth W. Kizer and Dr. Jordan J. Cohen, President of the Association of American Medical Colleges

Today, these affiliations remain a vital component of clinical training for the country’s physicians, providing not only an invaluable educational resource, but also providing “medical care second to none” for the nation’s veterans.

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. 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, VISN 12 Office