



The Great Lakes News

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A Message From the Network Director

In 2006, the VHA conducted an All Employee Survey to assess the cultural health and employee satisfaction in all our health care facilities. Over 8,800 or 82% of VISN 12 employees participated in this assessment giving VISN 12 the 2nd highest response rate in the country.

The results show no statistically significant changes in employee satisfaction in the VISN or at any of our facilities, but each facility is now in the process of evaluating the results of this survey and developing initiatives to identify opportunities for improvement.

The VISN continues to address health care issues important to our veterans in the areas of patient access, quality, cost, and satisfaction.

Access: Our facilities eliminated the electronic wait list, but still face the need to further reduce the waiting time for clinic appointments.

Quality: VISN 12 remains a leader in a number of Quality areas. Our performance here is our greatest strength. We are working to become the VHA leader in quality.

Cost: We continue to face challenges in cost, but have made progress in getting the most value for our veteran patients.

Satisfaction: Our patient satisfaction (SHEP) scores remained high despite the issues faced with increasing workload throughout the year.

Measurement is a vital part of delivering quality health care services. Our commitment to ensure safe, effective, efficient and compassionate care to our nation's heroes remains a primary focus for us in the coming year. We acknowledge and appreciate the support our VISN 12 employees contribute to achieving the VA's mission.

James W. Roseborough

Network Director

Flu Season is Upon Us

Here's what 2 facilities are doing to ward off the flu bug! Jesse Brown VA Medical Center has initiated a hand hygiene campaign to enhance hand washing practices in the facility in compliance with current guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and to improve overall performance related to 2006 National Patient Safety Goals.

In September, Environmental Management Service and Patient Safety completed an assessment of facility hand washing equipment, sinks and soap dispensers. Supplies were reordered and broken equipment repaired while new posters emphasizing the importance of hand washing were placed above all dispensers.

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The following month, JBVAMC focused the campaign on patient education. A Patient Awareness Fair was held on October 17. The medical center distributed over 500 educational flyers with information about proper hand washing techniques and 300 personal hand sanitizers which patients were encouraged to use. In addition, an instructional video ran continuously throughout the fair.

To demonstrate the necessity of hand washing or using hand sanitizers, nurses at the patient fair tested the hands of 75 patients and employees. The test revealed how much bacteria was present on their hands, and how the sanitizer effectively eradicated that bacteria. Many patients attended and the fair was a major success. Members of the hand hygiene campaign also visited inpatients on all the floors to distribute sanitizers and educational flyers.



In November, the focus of the campaign shifted to include flu prevention. It promoted the importance of respiratory hygiene (cover your coughs) and the necessity to receive flu vaccinations, as well as the importance of hand washing.

In December, the campaign took additional steps to engage the JBVAMC staff. Every single employee was given a lanyard with an attached hand sanitizer. They were also asked to sign a hand washing contract to demonstrate their commitment to comply with the medical center's Hand Hygiene Policy.

As part of the campaign, Billy Raye Smith, a member of the Performance Improvement staff, photographed 27 groups of employees throughout the medical center raising their hands as a symbol of commitment to the Hand Hygiene Campaign. Posters of those photographs have been posted throughout the medical center as a reminder to staff and to serve as an example to patients.

The medical center has also installed sanitizers (along with campaign posters) throughout the medical center, especially in the cafeteria and by the elevators. It is also ordering respiratory etiquettes booths, which will be located at each of the facility's two entrances and provide complimentary face tissue, mouth masks and cleansing wipes to anyone entering the building.



Staff at the Tomah VA saw these "flu bugs," Cindy Berg and Diane Wilson, traveling throughout the facility to remind staff to get their flu shots.

NETWORK NEWS

HINES

CARF Visit a Resounding Success

The Commission on the Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) recently visited Hines. A number of areas of the hospital were assessed, including SCI – acute rehab on SCI North, Blind Rehab, 15 ER (acute rehab) Health Care for Homeless Veterans, and

Compensated Work Therapy/Veterans Industries. The CARF surveyors were quite impressed with the hospital services and employees and gave a very positive exit report.

Subspecialty Clinics Open in New Location



Hines recently celebrated the relocation of the subspecialty clinics to the newly-remodeled area on the fourth floor of the main hospital. The nursing staff in the clinics held an open house. Visitors were offered tours of the new clinics as well as refreshments and fun. "We are very excited about our new clinics," said Marivic Gregorio, the Clinical Nurse Manager of the Subspecialty Clinics. "We are proud to offer our veterans care in the modern, newly-remodeled area."

Fisher House Coming to Hines

Two new initiatives are underway. A Fisher House on the Hines campus is another step closer to reality. The facility submitted another application for a Fisher House a few months ago and has received word that Hines is among the top five facilities in the country slated to receive a house. A Fisher House is a hotel-like building that will offer patients' families a place to stay while their loved one is in the hospital at Hines. Numerous military installations, as well as VA facilities, have a Fisher House at this time.

A fundraising group, headed by a local pharmaceutical company and including numerous other Chicagoland

fundraising entities, is up and running, hoping to raise the necessary funds in the near future. Hines hopes to have an operational Fisher House up and running on the grounds in a few short years.

In addition, Hines has submitted a proposal to Washington for the State of Illinois to renovate and lease one of their vacant buildings or demolish one of the unused buildings and use the space to create an Illinois State Veterans Home on the campus. Representatives from the State have visited the facility and are interested in the area located next to the Catholic Charities Bishop Goedert Residence. Although this project is still in the discussion phase, it would ultimately bring a State Veterans Home to the Hines campus.

IRON MOUNTAIN

Boy Scouts Learn What It Means To Be a Veteran

The VA was visited by Pack 510 1st Years WEBLOS who are working on their citizenship badge. The scouts were taken on a guided tour by Mark Frazee, Chief Voluntary Service. The scouts heard about the history of the hospital, saw historical displays and visited with the patients.



Shown in photo: Back Row – Sandy Lindholm (Pack Leader), Jack Burgess, Joshua Kramer and Mark Frazee, Chief, Voluntary Service. Front Row – Ethan Metras, Logan Schewe and Brandon Lindholm

POW/MIA Day

The POW/MIA hot air balloon was featured at the POW/MIA Recognition Day Program, held on September 15, 2006 at the VA. A ceremony was conducted to honor former Prisoners of War as well as remembering military members that died in action and those listed as Missing in Action. The ceremony and hot air balloon were enjoyed by many veterans and their families.



JESSE BROWN

Nancy Sinatra Visits Veterans



Over 100 veterans had the opportunity to meet Nancy Sinatra, who visited the medical center on October 12. Ms. Sinatra stayed for over two hours, giving each

veteran a hug and an autographed photo, and then spending several minutes with each vet to chat and pose for photos together.

The famous singer and actress visits veterans at VA medical centers in every city she travels to. She made several trips to Vietnam with the USO in 1966 and 1967 to perform for U.S. troops, including her signature song, "These Boots Are Made for Walking." Today, she still refers to Vietnam veterans as "my guys" and performs for charitable causes supporting U.S. troops who fought in Vietnam, including Rolling Thunder.

MILWAUKEE

Getting Reacquainted



R. James Nicholson (L), Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and Shiloh J. Ramos, MD (R), make time to visit at the John H. Bradley VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic in Appleton, WI. The Secretary toured the clinic in September with co-division manager Debbie Hagen and clinic manager Karen Karch. This wasn't Dr. Ramos' first meeting with the Secretary. As a primary care physician, he volunteered and went to Mississippi to provide medical care from a mobile clinic after Hurricane Katrina. In a meeting with the Secretary at that time, he had the opportunity to explain how the mobile facility and its staff served the storm damaged community. Secretary Nicholson's visit to Appleton was his first to the newly renamed John H. Bradley VA Clinic.

Great Clips

“Don’t smile just yet,” says Esther Green to Bill Grim a patient at the Milwaukee VA. Ms. Green is one of nine cosmetologists from Great Clips in Delavan, Fox Point and West Bend who volunteered to cut the hair (and beards) of veterans so they would look even better for the holidays. The program organized by Ken Lee, MD, division manager of the spinal cord injury unit, and Michelle Johnson of Great Clips, was so successful there is talk of a repeat performance. “Veterans who in the past have hardly smiled, did that day,” said Dr. Lee. “The interaction between the Great Clips team members and the patients was extraordinary.” Over 60 patients participated in the program.



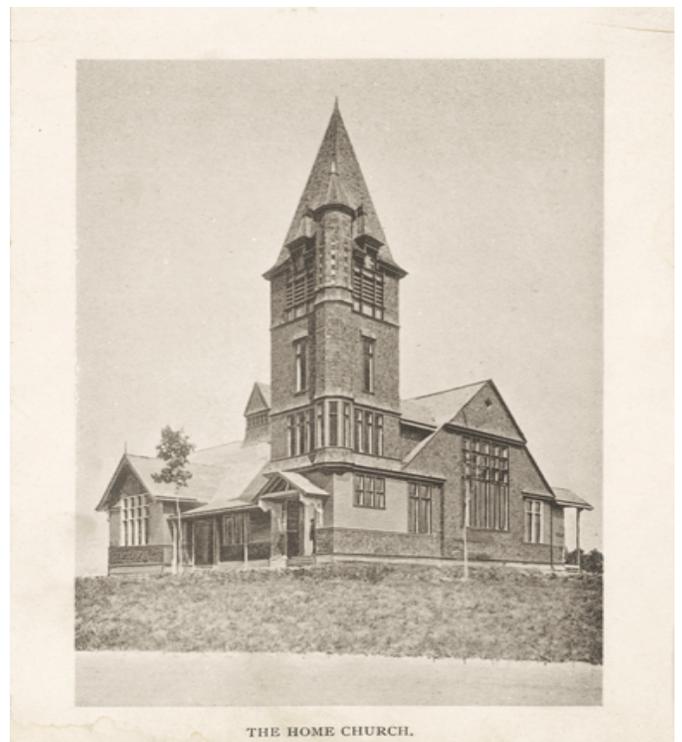
The Restoration Begins

The Soldiers Home Foundation, Inc. recently announced the beginning of phase one restoration of the 1889 chapel on the Milwaukee VA grounds. According to foundation president Kristin Gilpatrick, “We have raised enough money to abate the lead and asbestos inside the chapel which began in December. Work on a new, restored roof starts this spring and is set to be completed in time for Reclaiming Our Heritage.”

The history of the chapel starts in 1889 when funded through post funds and built at a cost of \$9,317.85. It was opened for use on September 22 of that year as a multi-denominational chapel providing seating for approximately 600.



Furnished with all the needs of the Catholic and Protestant worshippers, it is of wood frame with stone foundation and shingle style construction in the shape of a cross with a few appendages. The first organ was purchased in 1896 for \$1,000. The records of Bob Neugent, a local historian, reveal the chapel is a copy in wood of the stone-built post chapels at Fort Jay, NY and Fort Washington, MD.



Mrs. Gilpatrick needs volunteer help. "The restoration project will take work of course, and we especially need volunteers to help us plan parts of the restoration." She encourages those interested to call (414) 383-1867 or email her directed at kristin@heronextdoor.com

The Soldiers Home Foundation, Inc. is a non-governmental 501(c)(3) public charity with partners from community, educational and veteran organizations. It is dedicated to the protection, preservation and renovation of the historic Milwaukee Soldiers Home District and grounds.



Reclaiming Our Heritage is the multi-era encampment paying tribute to the Soldiers Home legacy and the history of our country. Over 15,000 joined in last year on the historic Milwaukee VA campus. This year the free weekend event is June 2-3. It is an opportunity to participate in living history and tour historic buildings. The buildings are only open at this time of the year. For more information, go to www.soldiershome.org

MADISON

Beaver Dam CBOC Relocation Celebration

The Community Based Outpatient Clinic in Beaver Dam, WI, was recently relocated. The clinic, which was

established in March of 2000, has been relocated to provide increased space to meet the demand for services. The clinic provides primary care services closer to home for over 1,500 enrolled veterans. A ribbon cutting and open house were conducted to celebrate the relocation with stakeholders and the community.



Pictured left to right: Mark Grams, Dodge County Veterans Service Officer; Jerry Beuthin, Green Lake County Veterans Service Officer; Katie Crawley, U.S. Senator Russ Feingold's Regional Coordinator; Allen Ackers, Madison VA's Associate Director; Beaver Dam Mayor John (Jack) Hankes; Richard Zeiman, Building Owner; Del Lang, Clinic Patient; and Louis Checkai, Dodge County Veterans Service Commission.

Employee Picnic



Madison VA employees being served during the employee picnic.

Though the weather conditions were less than ideal, employees at the Madison VA greatly enjoyed being treated to a picnic lunch at the beginning of autumn. The traditional picnic fare of brats, hot dogs, baked beans, potato salad, potato chips, sodas, and ice cream bars were served. Hospital management and supervisors handled the serving honors for the day.

Semi-Annual Volunteer Appreciation Week



Volunteers and their utilizing service supervisors enjoy a breakfast buffet being served by Mary Merlin, Voluntary Service Specialist.

National Volunteer Week is the traditional time each spring for formal expressions of appreciation to volunteers for all their dedicated service for our veterans. At Madison VA, the half-way point between National Volunteer Week observances is an additional time for saying thanks. A semi-annual volunteer appreciation week was conducted October 16 - 20 which included breakfast buffets for approximately 400 volunteers and their staff supervisors as well as afternoon ice cream socials. The Voluntary Service staff prepared scrambled eggs, ham, and hash browns along with serving a variety of other items.

Veterans Canteen Service's Toys for Tots Drive

The Veterans Canteen Service held a special one-day sales event on December 5th in support of needy children

in the community. Toys purchased for donation to the U. S. Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots Campaign and left with the Canteen Service that day received a 20 percent discount. The mission of the campaign was to collect new, unwrapped toys for distribution by the U. S. Marine Corps Reserve as Christmas gifts. The primary goal of the Toys for Tots Campaign is to deliver a shiny new toy at Christmas as a message of hope for needy youngsters that will help motivate them to grow into responsible, productive, patriotic citizens. Participation in the project was outstanding with 199 toys being purchased, ranging in price from \$1.00 - \$59.99.



Pictured Left to Right: Nathan L. Geraths, Director; Patty Seiler, Chief, Canteen Service; and Allen Ackers, Associate Director.

Wellness and Vet to Vet Programs Celebrate Mental Illness Awareness Week

Madison VA's Wellness and Vet to Vet Programs celebrated Mental Illness Awareness Week on October 5th with their semi-annual grilled chicken and bratwurst sale and picnic on the front lawn of the hospital. The groups have been conducting this event every spring and fall for the past 10 years to raise awareness regarding mental health issues, to reduce stigma, and to provide wellness education. (Yes, you CAN have good nutrition and get some exercise while indulging in a

bratwurst!) In the past, a Wellness Walk was offered on the day of the sale with education regarding nutrition and exercise. This year, because Wellness Walks were being offered every Tuesday and Thursday at noon throughout the months of September and October, the Wisconsin NAMI (National Alliance for Mentally Ill) Walk was promoted.

The funds raised were used to support veteran travel to recovery conferences. After the spring sale, they were able to send veterans to the United States Psychosocial Rehabilitation Association (USPRA) conference in Philadelphia and the VA Recovery Conference in Memphis. This fall, six veterans of the groups attended the Grassroots Empowerment Mental Health Consumer Conference: Becoming a Strong Advocate.

After the bratwurst sale, the groups got busy planning another recovery promotion event. Veterans created wonderful artistic expressions through drawing, painting, photography, writing, and other media in Vet to Vet groups and Creative Expression groups. The Vet to Vet Program runs both a photography group and a writer's group each week, and one of the Mental Health occupational therapists conducts creative expression groups in collaboration with Vet to Vet on an almost daily basis. Thanks to donations received through Voluntary Service, a means has been provided to frame and mount art for an art gallery in the Mental Health Clinic hallway.

In recognition of both the talent and recovery in their midst, the groups invited veterans, family, staff, and volunteers to an "Open Hearts" Open House on November 2. The groups started that day by baking 400 cookies. The aroma wafted throughout the hospital, inviting everyone to their door including Almeda Williams, Chief of Nutrition and Food Service, who requested a sample to maintain quality control.

"Art, poetry, stories, interaction, and cookies, in celebration of the possibilities of recovery on a beautiful fall day: it doesn't get much better than that. Except for this... the gallery has been such a big success, that the Associate Director invited the groups to expand the project to the first floor of the hospital," according to Kristi Rietz, Mental Health Occupational Therapist.

Vet to Vet is a vibrant, growing program and is open to new members and volunteers. Groups and activities include Volunteer Work, Recovery and Correctness, Pathways to Recovery, Writer's Group, and One Day at a Time.

National Pharmacy Week Observance

In celebration of the important contributions made by health-system pharmacists and pharmacy technicians in providing excellent patient care, the Pharmacy Week Committee organized fun activities and public awareness opportunities for the staff and patients of the Madison VA.

The week of October 23rd, pharmacists and pharmacy technicians shared patient encounter descriptions showcasing exceptional patient care they had provided or witnessed recently. These stories were collected and as a compilation sent on to the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists to help aid the organization with public relations and further promotion of the wonderful work performed by health-system pharmacists and technicians every day.

The pharmacy staff participated in a Patient Safety Quiz, which emphasized the patient safety goals set by JCAHO and the facility. The pharmacy staff answered questions regarding ways to prevent communication errors between healthcare providers, ensure administration accuracy, and prevent commutable infections. From the many submissions, the six pharmacists and technicians with the most correct answers received a Pharmacy Week prize.

Tuesday was Pharmacy Technician Appreciation Day! The pharmacists showed their appreciation for the dedication and support of their pharmacy technician coworkers by sponsoring a potluck lunch in their honor.

To promote the role of health-system pharmacists in the healthcare of our veterans, a lecture series was held on Wednesday and Thursday. Patients were invited to attend discussions, addressing how pharmacists help them receive optimal care in the Hepatitis C, Diabetes, and Smoking Cessation Clinics. Another discussion described the benefits and uses of the My Health@Vet

website. One patient, who attended the Smoking Cessation Discussion, agreed to quit smoking and participate in the Smoking Cessation Clinic that month.

At the conclusion of the event filled celebration that week, the pharmacy staff enjoyed an ice cream float social and awards ceremony honoring all those who actively participated in the week's events. The week-long celebration successfully honored the dedication and contributions of the pharmacy staff to the safety and well being of the patients at the Madison VA

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: State of Illinois Veteran Care; My HealthVet; Patient Education Center; Veteran Outreach-Vet Center; OIF/OEF; Construction Updates; Research Programs; Mental Health/Telehealth; Care Coordination – Telehealth; Emergency Department Update; New Patient Orientation; and OIF/OEF Fee Dental. 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.

20th Annual Operation Care & Share a Major Success

Employees and volunteers have combined their efforts for the 20th year to provide food packages to needy veterans and their families. Non-perishable food items and over \$3,816 in monetary donations were donated over a five-week period. The monetary donations were 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 weighed approximately 40 pounds and was accompanied by a 10–12 pound frozen turkey.

PATIENT FINANCIAL SERVICES

Another Successful “Any Soldier” Project for PFS



The Employee Action Committee (EAC) was delighted at the response by the PFS employees with their donations to the “Any Soldier” Project. Their efforts resulted in collecting over 125 lbs. of suggested items to 7 Wisconsin units. The names and addresses were obtained from the “Any Soldier” website. Some of the items included were “lots of candy and gum,” jerky, cookies, powdered drink mixes, pretzels, games, socks, CDs, magazines, paperback books, lots of Beanie Babies (*requested by the soldiers to give to kids in Iraq*) and toiletries of all kinds. Funds earned by PFS employees working at the University of Wisconsin Homecoming football game and additional donations from PFS employees covered the cost of shipping. There were also some personal notes included with words of encouragement and support for our troops. It’s hoped that the packages reached their destinations by the holidays and that those who received them were encouraged by our support, especially coming from their fellow Wisconsinites. Although we hope that the need for packages comes to an end soon, the EAC and the VISN 12 PFS Team will continue to come together to help keep up the spirits of our soldiers. A big “THANKS” is extended to all that participated.

NORTH CHICAGO

Medical Emergency Response System

Implementation of a “Medical Emergency Response System (MERS)” began on November 15, 2006. The MERS was developed by the Critical Care Section/Medicine, under the guidance of Dr. Raúl J. Gazmuri, MD, PhD to prevent life-threatening events and to provide timely and appropriate intervention by the Critical Care service. The MERS Medical Center Memorandum (MCM) served as a guide for its implementation which includes:

1. Establishing Early Warning Signs that would warrant MERS activation.
2. Implementation of a dedicated hotline located in the Intensive Care Unit. Such line is accessed by dialing 81111, which rings a (red) phone located in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU).
3. Providing in-services on all wards involved to educate on how to use the MERS.
4. Documentation of MERS actions by the Critical Care nursing staff by using the SBAR format.
5. Collection of appropriate data related to the MERS utilization for analysis of patient outcomes and oversight by the Critical Care Committee.
6. Operationally, an 81111 call originating anywhere in the medical center is answered by a designated ICU nurse who will obtain initial information and refer the call to an ICU physician (resident, fellow, or attending). The ICU physician will interact with the caller and decide proper action. This may include a decision to (i) deploy a team composed of Critical Care nurses, Critical Care providers and a Respiratory Therapist if clinically indicated; (ii) instruct transfer to the Emergency Department for acute evaluation, or (iii) defer the decision until additional information is obtained.

Deputy Secretary and Veterans Leaders Visit



On September 27th, VA Deputy Secretary Gordon H. Mansfield and national leaders from Veterans Service Organizations (VSO): John F. Sommer, Jr., American Legion; Robert E. Wallace, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW); David W. Gorman, Disabled American Veterans (DAV); and James B. King, American Veterans (AMVETS) visited North Chicago VAMC to see first hand the VA/DoD Partnership that is taking place. The objective of the visit was to educate the national VSO leaders on the VA/DoD Partnership between North Chicago VAMC and Naval Health Clinic Great Lakes. There was a briefing followed by a tour of the new Surgery and Emergency Departments modernization and expansion project. The national VSO's were supportive of this Partnership.

VA Staff Present to the Illinois Counseling Association

Dr. John Schaut, Psy.D., Staff Psychologist on the Stress Disorder Treatment Unit, North Chicago VAMC, and Chaplain Bill Vander Heyden, Chaplain to the unit and Chief of Chaplain Service there, offered a two-hour Trauma Institute Presentation at the Illinois Counseling Association's 58th Annual Conference, October 27, 2006, in Springfield, IL. Approximately twenty-five licensed mental health counselors and graduate students attended their session.

The theme of the entire three-day conference was "Treating Trauma." "We are particularly interested in how the VA treats trauma in our veterans," said Pat McGinn, a Past-president of the Illinois Mental Health Counselors Association. On a scale of 1-5 with 5 being 'Excellent,' you received all 5's," added Pat McGinn who served as Proctor for the session.

PTSD affects the mind, body, spirit, and the relationships of all that it touches. Dr. Schaut described the events that create and the processes that drive Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, making it one of the most complex and formidable challenges for counselors today. Fr. Vander Heyden described his experience and work with veterans of the Stress Disorder Treatment Unit that provides a forum for veterans to address the spiritual wounds they experienced from War and a path back to their faith.

"I cannot tell you how timely your work is and how much we appreciated your sharing with us and . . . for coming all the way to Springfield to present for the Illinois Counseling Association," said Lynn Turovetz, current ICA President.

AMSUS

The Association of Military Surgeons of the United States (AMSUS), the Society of Federal Health Agencies held their 112th Annual Meeting in San Antonio, TX the week of November 5-10, 2006. The association was established and incorporated by Act of Congress in 1903. The Constituent Services of the Association include the U.S. Army, U.S. Navy, U.S. Air Force, U.S. Public Health Service, and the Department of Veterans Affairs. It is the Society of the Federal Health Agencies, and as such contributes to the improvement of all phases of the Federal health services. For more than a century, AMSUS has worked to support and advance our Nation's Federal Health system. Hosted by VHA, this year's theme was Health 2015: Actionable Strategies for Caring for our Warriors, Veterans and Country.



Photo left to right: CAPT Cindy Feller, NC, USN, Senior Nurse Executive (NHCGL), Charles Robinson, Head Nurse, Mental Health Operation (NCVAMC), Mary T. Roseborough, former Nurse Executive (NCVAMC), LCDR Rosemary Perdue, Department Head Family Practice/Internal Medicine (NHCGL) and Christine Mauleon, Head Nurse – Critical Care Unit (NCVAMC).

On Tuesday, November 7th, Captain Cynthia Feller, NC, USN and Mary T. Roseborough, MSN facilitated a panel session titled "The New Federal Center Initiative." The panel included some of the front line nurses responsible for the successful implementation of phase 1 and phase 2 of the integration of the Great Lakes/North Chicago.

SANE Program at North Chicago VAMC

A Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) program has been established due to the integration of the VA/DoD emergency departments. These individuals are specially trained RN's that collect the forensic evidence for adult victims of sexual assault. The Navy has about 50-60 sexual assaults a year. North Chicago worked in collaboration with the Fleet & Family Support Service and the Family Advocacy Program at the Navy to develop the program to serve these patients. By North Chicago having their own SANE program they are able to provide the service in their own Emergency Department and therefore do not have to force the patients into an additional trauma of transferring to another facility for care. The RN's for the SANE program are Judy Vega, Laurie Sheriff and Ruth Ann King.

Fifth Annual Diversity Day



The Fifth Annual Diversity Day Celebration was held on Thursday, November 16. The theme of the program was, "Holidays Around the World". The event served two purposes: to increase awareness and to educate the staff on the ethnic cultures and the diversity within the 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 the Philippines, Native American Indian, Korea, India, Poland, Mexico, Caribbean, South America, African-American, China. The event featured exhibits of artifacts, music and the national flags of various countries. Greetings of Merry Christmas and Happy New

Year were extended to the audience in each of the native languages from representatives of the groups participating. Attendees were treated to a variety of "taste samples" of ethnic food from around the world.

Operation Military Pride 2006

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 third year the NCVAMC Patient/Nursing Services Office Staff held this drive and it proved, once again, to be a huge 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 68 care packages full of snacks, books, games, DVDs, toys and other wonderful goodies. This amount has almost doubled the amount of boxes shipped in 2005! Among the sixty-eight recipients were 5 immediate family members of Six NCVAMC employees.

TOMAH

WOMEN'S EQUALITY DAY PROGRAM



Women's Equality Day was celebrated with a presentation by Civil War Re-enactor, Beth Strauss (pictured), Clinical Assistant Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, School of Nursing. Ms. Strauss is nationally certified as a Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) in Medical Surgical Nursing and is also a Clinical Instructor. She worked previously as a nurse at the VA in Madison, WI from 1987 to 1999 and attributes her VA experiences as being one of the main factors for her career success.

Ms. Strauss, dressed in an authentic Civil War costume spoke to a large crowd on "Labors of Love: Women in

Federal Service 1861-1865.” She has done extensive research over the last twelve years on women’s roles during the Civil War. She provided life stories about women who served as spies, government employees, soldiers, and nurses. Those attending were entertained with her knowledge including how women were selected to be nurses and care for the troops.

YOUTH SOCCER ASSOCIATION DONATES TO VA

The Tomah Youth Soccer Association (TYSA) donated \$1,000 in September to the Tomah VA.

In a letter that accompanied the check, TYSA officials said, “We really appreciate the use of your fields for soccer practice, games and especially our annual tournament. Last spring, we wouldn’t have been able to accommodate 500 youth soccer players if it wasn’t for the help and support of the VA Medical Center.”

“Please use this donation towards the VITA program (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) to purchase a new computer for the veterans. We would like to give back to the veterans since the VA has been a big part of our soccer program. Thank you so much!”



Accepting the check was Trish Ten Haaf, RN, MSN, Associate Director for Patient Care Services, far right. Pictured are TYSA board members and a number of the TYSA.

CARNATION APPRECIATION SALE HUGE SUCCESS!

For five years Voluntary Services has conducted a Carnation Appreciation Sale. Employees, volunteers and veterans prepay for carnations for co-workers and friends, sending nice notes to accompany the flower. This year proved to be the biggest and the best with over 2,950 carnations being sold!!



The flowers arrived on Wednesday, September 13 and volunteers went right to work making the bouquets for delivery to staff, volunteers and patients.



In the picture above, Marta Ziems (R), an LPN in Ambulatory Care, helped volunteer Arnie Wiegert figure out where the flowers should go on the first floor of Building 400.

The volunteers enjoyed making bouquets out of the beautifully colored carnations. Over 700 individuals received at least one carnation – some employees received over 20 flowers each! Many workgroups (Lab, Nursing Staff on one unit, etc.) also received flowers. By 12:30 p.m., all of the flowers had been delivered.

This fund-raiser is a win-win program: the volunteer program raises funds and the flowers bring smiles to so many!

CUSTOMER SERVICE CONTEST

The Customer Service Committee sponsored a contest for National Customer Service Week, which was observed October 2-6. There were 13 entries submitted for the contest titled, "How I Would Improve Customer Service at Tomah VAMC and CBOC's." The following criteria were used in selecting the winning entries: (1) relevance to VA customers; (2) feasibility of implementation; (3) creativity; and (4) quality-magnitude of potential impact.

The following employees' entries were selected and their ideas published in the employee newsletter.

William Wallace, ARNP, Wausau CBOC - Using an acronym, he reminded employees who work with veterans that customer service is FIRST: Faith, Integrity, Reliability, Service before self; and Teamwork.

Jacquelyn Morpheu, R.N., B.S.N. - Suggested adding signage at new exit from the Interstate to direct veterans and visitors to Tomah VA.

Lori Hensley, R.N., B.S.N., EPRP Nurse/Patient Care Services - Multiple suggestions, such as employee education on servant and authentic leadership; methods to increase morale; changing reward system to include recognition for more staff throughout the year for all they do, rather than giving larger amounts to fewer staff; plan events for all employees such as holiday socials or spring flings.

Deborah Jilek, Patient Services Assistant, Health Administration Service Line - Offered suggestion to improve telephone customer service by helping the caller yourself rather than passing him/her on to someone else, or take a message; stay on line until call transfer is

completed when caller does need to be transferred; offer name and phone extension of person whom caller is being transferred to, in case call gets cut off.

Verna Ingwell, Facilities Service Line - Improve telephone customer service by keeping telephone directory up-to-date so that when transferring callers, staff have the right extension. Educate telephone operators (at Madison) on correctly directing phone calls. Her other suggestion was implementing the "I" Team incentive program, whereby employees could be recognized based on various criteria.

COMMENDATIONS AWARDED

A dozen employees were deployed to New Orleans or other areas hit by the 2005 hurricanes and provided aid and assistance to those impacted by the storms.



Left to right: Hillary Hoban, Coleen Due, Toby Lane, Joe Segovia, Brian Boldon, Alice Kirking, Bob Karpinsky, Chuck Cleveland, Rebecca Frey, Sandy Georgeson, Mike Ziems, and (kneeling) Steve Amling (accepting for Zach Hibma). Lori Liddell was not available for this photo.

EIGHTH ANNUAL STAND DOWN HELD

The 8th Annual Stand Down was held in La Crosse, Wis. on October 17th.

Some impressive statistics about the Stand Down are:

- 290 veterans attended
- 39 other attendees (spouses, children, parents, friends, etc)
- 54 volunteers representing 21 organizations assisted
- 50 pairs of reading glasses were provided

- 33 free haircuts were provided
- 128 flu shots were given
- 138 health screens were provided
- 45 applications for potential new enrollees were disbursed
- 20 Form X data was collected on homeless or indigent veterans
- 40 veterans received clothing and personal care items

The Planning Committee consisted of the representatives from the Veterans Assistance Foundation, VietNow, the La Crosse County Veterans Service Officer and various VA staff. A delicious and warm lunch was served by the Vietnam Veterans Motorcycle Club (Chapter D) of Tomah. Thirteen local VA employees participated in the Stand Down this year.

GOLD STAR

The Mental Health Intensive Case Management (MHICM) Program has been cited as a “Gold Star” Monitoring Site by VHA’s Northeast Program Evaluation Center (NEPEC).

Tomah received this recognition for completing over 90% of the required forms for NEPEC monitoring of veterans they have treated in FY 2006.

The completed forms are used to collect data on client status, service delivery and utilization, and clinical and cost outcomes. This data is collected from all MHICM programs and compiled in a yearly monitoring report.

The FY 2005 report showed Tomah VA MHICM services have reduced inpatient hospital days of care by 80.1% and are at the lowest cost per visit in the nation. MHICM follows an assertive community treatment model of integrated, intensive, and comprehensive services provided to veterans with severe mental illnesses in the communities in which they live. The program offers a supportive community-based approach that has been experimentally validated. Team consists of Mary Lynn Sinclair, Registered Nurse; Odile Nelson Addition Therapist; Maureen Bernhardt, Recreation Therapist;

Brian Thompson, Master Social Worker; and, Debra Day, Advance Practice Nurse Prescriber.

HOLIDAY PHOTOGRAPHY SHOW

The first Employees Photo Exhibition was held the end of November and attracted over 80 attendees. There were 15 photographs entered in the display/contest.

First and second place winners were selected; each received a gift certificate for the Veterans Canteen Service. The winners were Judith Asen of Nutrition and Food Service and Lisa Felix from Patient Care Services (Nursing). Two staff, Denise Havalik, RN and Jackie Morphey, RN, donated their photographs to one of the nursing units.

Jackie Morphey coordinated this event and as a way to engage employees in a new and fun activity. She said, “I thought this was a fun thing to do to let your mind get-away.”

Staff is now considering other employee exhibitions – possibly a display of Tomah VA employees’ quilts.

NETWORK AWARDS/ RECOGNITION

Hand and Heart Award



Recently three employees from VISN 12 were honored to be recipients of the VA Secretary’s National Hands and Heart Award for 2005. The Hands and Heart Award was established in 1980 and is given to a VA employee

that administers direct patient care and does the most each day to exercise professional expertise as well as emotional support, help and guidance.

Marilyn Lange, an LPN at Hines' Manteno Community Based Outpatient Clinic was honored for consistently providing compassionate and professional care to veterans.

"As a member of a small team in this rural CBOC, Marilyn willingly does whatever is needed for the veteran, from answering their questions on the phone to orienting a new patient to the VA system and clinic, said Stacy Wroblewski, Clinical Nurse Manager of the Hines CBOCs. "She consistently carries out Hines' mission statement by having a positive "can do" attitude. She actively promotes customer service in all aspects of her job whether performing phlebotomy, a dressing change, teaching a glucometer class or providing patient education to the family."

Ms. Lange serves as CPR instructor for 6 Hines Community Based Outpatient Clinics. Several times each year she also travels 75 miles to assist Hines Hospital CPR staff with training programs. She carries her dedication from the VA to the community by speaking to school children in Crescent City Grade School and at Manteno Veterans Home programs. As a 20-year veteran of the U.S. Army with training as a nurse, x-ray technician and combat medic she speaks from the heart in her speeches about what it means to be a woman veteran today. She was the main speaker at the Manteno Veterans Home's 2005 Veterans Day Ceremony and has been featured in an article in the *Iroquois County Times-Republic*.

"Ms. Lange consistently goes above and beyond as she brings her big heart to the Manteno Clinic, Hines VA Hospital and to the community," said Jack Hetrick, Hines' former director who presented Marilyn with this prestigious award at a staff meeting in November. "She is an excellent representative of nursing and the VA and we are very proud of her."

At the VA Medical Center in Iron Mountain, P. Joseph Sobel, CCC-A/SLP, Audiologist and Speech Pathologist received the prestigious award for patient care when he

was presented the Hands and Heart Award by Janice M. Boss, medical center director.



Speech Pathologist and Audiologist, P. Joseph Sobel, left, received the Hands and Heart Award from Janice M. Boss, right, medical center director at the VA Medical Center

"This award recognizes Joe Sobel's compassion towards veterans and their families. Mr. Sobel is known to bring tears of joy to his patients due to his tireless efforts," Boss said.

Mr. Sobel always involves the families, spouses and/or significant others during each educational visit. Mr. Sobel is key to helping our veterans communicate again.

Mr. Sobel joined the VA staff in 1986. He lives in Iron Mountain with his wife, Lupe. They have two children, Joseph Jr. and Holly. Mr. Sobel is a member of the Fellow of the American Academy of Audiology, Certified member of the American Speech and Hearing Association, Member of the Michigan Speech and Hearing Association and is currently completing his clinical doctorate in Audiology through Central Michigan University.

Finally, at the Tomah VA Medical Center, Eugene (Tom) Muench, social worker, Mental Health Service Line, was awarded the VA Secretary's National Hands and Heart Award for 2005.

In his letter of congratulations, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, R. James Nicholson, wrote, "This award

recognizes you as a compassionate individual whose dedication to veterans is marked by the highest standards in patient care. Every day, your work touches and better the lives of ailing veterans. Your skilled hands offer expertise, encouragement, and reassurance. Your caring heart is seen in the gratitude etched on their faces. Your consummate professionalism helps fulfill our Nation's commitment to honor and serve those who served us so well."



Left to right: Dr. Jeffrey Murawsky, VISN 12 Chief Medical Officer, representing VISN 12 Network Director, James Roseborough; Eugene (Tom) Muench; and Stan Johnson, Medical Center Director.

GLAC AWARD RECIPIENTS

SBA Federal Procurement Official of the Year

Ricky Bond is a Contracting Officer at the Great Lakes Acquisition Center. Mr. Bond has over 25 years of contracting officer for Weapon Systems Spare Parts/Defense Industrial Supply Center, to his current position as a senior contracting officer with unlimited warrant authority.

Mr. Bond is often recognized for his hard work and dedication to the small business community, in particular, SBA 8(a) firms. His knowledge of contracting policies and procedures, and his willingness to go above and

beyond the call of duty on behalf of 8(a) firms, is a contributing factor to Veterans Affairs attainment of their contracting goals. In 2003, Mr. Bond was instrumental in awarding 140 sole source and competitive contracts valued well over \$5 million to SBA 8(a) firms. His extraordinary commitment to help develop minority companies is unquestionable, and Mr. Bond is a true champion of the small business community.



Ricky Bond holding his Federal Procurement Officer of the Year award.

JWOD Champion

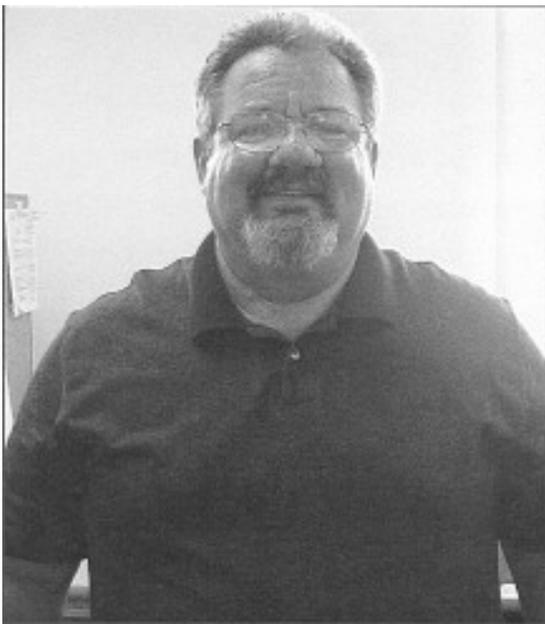
"JWOD helped us turn a daunting task into a seamless operation," stated this month's Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Champion, **Scott Koerner**, contracting specialist, Great Lakes Acquisition Center, Milwaukee, WI.

Koerner has been working in contracting for more than 23 years. In his current role, he awards and administers contracts for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) at the Great Lakes Acquisition Center in Milwaukee, WI. He has been with the VA for nine years.

Koerner first heard of the JWOD Program when he observed JWOD employees on a janitorial contract during his time with the Air National Guard. Since then, he has become even more familiar with the JWOD Program and suggests that we look there first when

making contracting decisions. It is highly encouraged here now,” stated Koerner.

Koerner undertook a laundry contract for the VA hospitals, which was the first time the VA had converted an in-house project into a contract. It was a challenge for him to find a contractor to set up a laundry operation off-site that met the stringent requirements that the VA had in place for hospital laundry operations. There were many factors to consider, including having a barrier wall, an important requirement of the contract which kept the operations of the soiled and clean laundry separate.



Luckily, after being contacted by INSH representative and given a capabilities briefing, Koerner determined that Goodwill Industries of Southeastern Wisconsin fit the bill.

“After going to open market twice, with no success, we were relieved to find that they met all of the requirements that the VA had in place for laundry,” said Koerner. “Before my briefing with NISH I didn’t know that JWOD agencies had laundry operations and frankly I breathed a sigh of relief when I found out they had a barrier wall!”

With the help of Goodwill Industries of Southeastern Wisconsin and NISH, Koerner was able to turn a very complex contract into a successful operation.

“Goodwill was the expert on laundry – not us. They have made so many site visits to the project to make sure

things were running smoothly. They have been great to work with,” said Koerner.

“Scott was very open to discuss NISH, JWOD and Goodwill as the vendor for laundry services at two Chicago area VA hospitals. Without that openness, the likelihood of our partnership would not have materialized,” stated Bob Schneeberg, vice president of work services, Goodwill Industries of Southeastern Wisconsin. “We appreciate his willingness to learn about the JWOD Program, do his required due diligence and to find out that people with disabilities can and do meet all of the aspects of fulfilling a government service contract.”

Koerner took the initiative to increase his understanding of the JWOD Program by hosting JWOD training at the VA and attending NISH training courses himself. He admits that there is a personal reason to why he has such an interest in the program.

“I have a cousin with a disability, which makes granting contracts like this more rewarding than just doing my job,” stated Koerner. “It is a huge bonus for me to know that I am contributing to the workers’ sense of purpose and pride in their jobs.”

“We are very proud of this project and the work that Goodwill of Southeastern Wisconsin had put forth,” stated Nancy Yoder, project manager, NISH North Central. “If not for the staunch support of Scott Koerner and his team, none of this would be possible.”

Hines

A Life Saving Event

A 91 year-old-patient who was at Hines for a routine hearing test fell flat out in front of the volunteer desk in the front lobby of the hospital. The Emergency Department was notified and nurse **Barb Wojnowski** and **Dr. Keith Burgard** immediately ran to give assistance. The patient had no pulse and no respiration. With the assistance of **Dr. Levis**, a G.I fellow who was just walking by, the patient was successfully resuscitated and admitted to the hospital. He was soon up and about and discharged home. Great work by Hines’ caring and professional staff!

Award Winning Doctor

Hines researcher **Dr. Theresa Pape** recently received the prestigious 2006 James Brady Award, sponsored by the Brain Injury Association of Illinois. The James Brady award is given by State Level chapters of the Brain Injury Association, to persons who have contributed significantly to society's awareness of and impact of acquired brain injury.



Dr. Pape is part of the Hines VA Hospital Research Service, Marianjoy Rehabilitation Hospital and Northwestern University. Dr. Pape also is a VA Rehabilitation Research & Development Service (RR&D) Advanced Research Career Development Awardee. Her area of research is traumatic brain injury, including epidemiology, impact, recovery and rehabilitation.

The James Brady award is named in honor of James S. Brady, President Ronald Reagan's press secretary, who sustained a serious brain injury during an assassination attempt on the former President.

More Employee Honors

Hines employees **Mary MacMartin**, APRN, OSC, **Araceli Mendoza**, APRN, Hepatitis C Coordinator and **Karen Clark**, NP, GI/Liver Clinic were recently awarded a \$5000 grant to improve care for veterans with chronic blood borne illnesses. These employees were awarded a \$5,000 grant for their project entitled Collaborative Nursing Chronic Blood-Borne Viral Illnesses (CBI) Project: Education, Screening and Effective Care Management/Follow-up from the VHA Public Health Strategic Health Care Group and Office of Nursing Service.



Congratulations to **Kevin T. Stroupe**, PhD, Research Scientist for the Midwest Center for Health Services & Policy Research Cooperative Studies Program Coordinating Center at Hines, on a recent article he had published in Journal of the American Heart Association. The study examined the cost-effectiveness of angioplasty versus bypass surgery in high-risk patients who had participated in a randomized controlled trial in the VA conducted by the Cooperative Studies Program.

MADISON

Cavanagh Recognition

VISN 12 Safety and Health Manager **Mike Cavanagh** was recognized with a plaque from Governor Jim Doyle for his six years of service as a member of the Wisconsin State Laboratory Hygiene Board.



Left to right: Mike Cavanagh presented plaque by John Rohrer, Acting Associate Director.

TOMAH

Medical Center Director Receives Presidential Rank Meritorious Award

President Bush recognized 297 federal executives as the elite of the elite when he conferred the Presidential Rank Award upon them. The awards are top honor for the Senior Executive Service and equivalent positions and are given in two categories: distinguished and meritorious.



Stan Johnson, Tomah VA Medical Center Director, was recently notified he is the recipient of the prestigious Presidential Rank Meritorious Award.

Nominees must consistently demonstrate strength, integrity, and a relentless commitment to public service. The winners, employed by 33 agencies and departments, were nominated by their agency and then evaluated by a board of private citizens before being approved by the president.

Two Distinguished and seventeen Meritorious awards were awarded to Veterans Health Administration (VHA) employees.

SOMEONE YOU SHOULD KNOW

Jeffrey Murawsky, M.D.



Jeff Murawsky comes to VISN 12 as the Chief Medical Officer after serving since 2002 as the Associate Manager for Medicine and Neurology Services at the Hines VA Hospital and the Associate Program Director for Internal Medicine at the combined program with Loyola University Medical Center. Before joining the Veterans' Administration at Hines in 2001, he was the director of community based teaching for the Loyola University Health System and medical director of the Loyola/ Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago center in suburban Chicago. Dr. Murawsky is currently an Associate Professor of Medicine at Loyola University Stritch School of Medicine. Dr. Murawsky is a native of DeKalb, Illinois and received a bachelor's degree from Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts and received his Doctor of Medicine from Loyola University Stritch School of Medicine in Maywood, Illinois in 1990. He completed a primary care internal medicine residency at Loyola University Medical Center and served as Chief Resident in Internal Medicine and is Board Certified in Internal Medicine. His clinical interests include evidence based medical practice, medical statistics to Advanced Clinical Access. Dr. Murawsky currently serves as the co-chair person of the VHA National Steering Committee on Systems Redesign. Dr. Murawsky is married and a father of two children.

Victoria Brahm, RN, MSN



Vicki Brahm was appointed as VISN 12's Quality Management Officer effective December 10, 2006. She received her MSN from Alverno, Milwaukee, WI in 1981 and her MS from the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, WI in 2001. Vicki was no stranger to the Network as she was the Network's Acting Quality Management Officer from June 2006 until her appointment in December. Prior to that, she was the Division Manager of Rehabilitation, Extended and Community Care at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center. "Her expertise in performance improvement will be a great asset as we strive to meet ever-changing accreditation standards of JCAHO, CARF," said, James Roseborough, Network Director. "Her previous positions, across many specialties, provide the basis for her to benchmark with some of the leaders in nursing practice." Ms. Brahm is also a graduate of the Executive Career Field program. Her familiarity with the Milwaukee VA Medical Center as a major tertiary referral center within VISN 12 will facilitate her transition into being a very active and productive member of the VISN team. Ms. Brahm resides in Sussex, WI with her husband and daughter.

Wendy W. Brown, M.D., M.P.H.



Wendy Brown was appointed as the Chief of Staff at Jesse Brown VAMC. She is a Fellow of the American College of Physicians, a Fellow of the American Heart Association, a past-Chairman of the National Kidney Foundation (NKF), Chair of the NKF's KEEP (Kidney Early Evaluation Program), and a member of the NKF Scientific Advisory Board. She served on the Nominating Committee and the Policy and Public Affairs Committee of the American Society of Nephrology, and was a member of the steering committee of the National Institutes of Health's National Kidney Disease Education Program. She is a member of the Informatics Commission of the International Society of Nephrology. Dr. Brown also served on a number of local and national boards including the United Way of Greater St. Louis, Community Health Charities of Kansas and Missouri, Epworth Children and Family Services (St. Louis), the Board of Directors of the NKF of Middle Tennessee, is 3rd Vice-President of the Society of Executive Leadership in Academic Medicine, and is a past-president of Women in Nephrology.

Dr. Brown has published numerous professional articles and book chapters, serves on the Editorial Boards of

Clinical Nephrology and International Geriatrics and Urology, is Medical Editor of NKF Family Focus, a newspaper for dialysis patients and their families with a circulation of more than 300,000, and reviews manuscripts for a number of professional journals. She is Editor-in-Chief of the journal, Advances in Chronic Kidney Disease.

Nathan L. Geraths



Nat Geraths was recently named the new Director of Hines VA Hospital. Mr. Geraths comes to Hines with a high level of experience as he has served as Director of the William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital in Madison, Wisconsin for the past 23 years. At Madison, he fostered a close relationship with their affiliate hospital and has a reputation as a solid leader with a deep commitment to patients and staff.

Prior to his appointment at Madison, he served as Medical Center Director at Marion, Indiana and his VA career also includes four years in VA Central Office. Mr. Geraths is also a distinguished veteran, serving in the Army and Army Reserve for many years.

"I have been deeply committed to public service all of my life and I look forward to the challenges I will face at Hines," Geraths said. "I have thoroughly enjoyed my

tenure at Madison and am proud of the many accomplishments made there over the years. I will bring many of the lessons I have learned and things I have achieved with me to my new job in Chicago."

SEAMLESS TRANSITION FOR OUR OIF/OEF VETERANS

Hines – WTTW Interview

Ivy Bryant, the Hines Point of Contact and Case Manager for veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan, completed a very successful interview with WTTW, Channel 11 in late October. Ivy was interviewed about Hines' treatment of Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom (OIF/OEF) veterans and did a good job of highlighting the successful programs.

A team of Hines employees attended a Post-deployment Reassessment Health Screening event, which was held at the National Guard Armory in North Riverside. The Hines team assisted soldiers from the 12-24 Transportation Company who recently returned from service in Iraq in learning about VA benefits. A number of soldiers signed up for VA care right on the spot.

An enthusiastic group of Hines employees also attended a welcome home ceremony for another National Guard Medical Unit, based out of North Riverside. The unit, which returned from serving more than a year in Iraq, came home to a large crowd, including news media, local officials and excited family and friends. The Hines group brought a banner saying, "Hines VA Welcomes Home our Veterans from Iraq; Now It's Our Turn to Serve."

Jesse Brown – OIF/OEF Workshop

Jesse Brown VA Medical Center has been hosting workshops for OIF/OEF veterans to help ease them back into civilian life. It recently completed an eight-week workshop on "Transitioning War Zone Skills to Home: Understanding Readjustment" and is initiating a new weekly "Battle-Body Re-training" program on Monday evenings at 6 p.m., beginning on January 15.

Dr. Eric Proescher, a clinical psychologist who is, himself, an OIF veteran, said the eight-week relaxation program will help recent OEF/OIF combat veterans to reduce stress, enhance their immune systems and generate physical and emotional health.

“Military service members training for and participating in combat experience high levels of stress that can cause irregularities in the autonomic nervous system affecting states of sleep, restlessness, exaggerated startle, irritability, pain, and muscle tension,” said Dr. Proescher. “A survey of MIND-BODY interventions including Deep Breathing, Autogenic Relaxation, Progressive Muscle Relaxation, Mindfulness Meditation, Tai Chi, Yoga, Reiki, Guided Imagery and Hypnosis can, through regular practice, help to re-establish the homeostasis of Mind and Body.”

Dr. Proescher uses e-mail technology to maintain a presence and contact with veterans he meets through outreach events. Weekly email messages are sent to a growing list of 30 veterans. These messages include practical tips about education, job opportunities, JBVAMC Wellness Programs and preventive health, along with a personal inquiry about how the veteran is doing.

OIF/OEF veterans interested in attending any of the workshops are encouraged to call Dr. Proescher at (312) 569-7255.

Madison/Tomah – Demobilization Efforts

Several Social Work Service, Health Administration Service (HAS) and Patient Administration Service staff from Tomah and Madison along with representation from the Madison Vet Center and the VA Regional Office participated in a demobilization of more than 800 Wisconsin National Guard soldiers over a several day period during November at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin. The commanding officer required each soldier to stop and register with the VA as part of their demobilization processing. The Tomah VA staff coordinated the effort and distributed the 10-10 applications to VA facilities across the country. Tomah HAS sends letters to all the veterans after the demobilization and the response to

those letters has been good, with calls being made back to the facility and appointments are being made.

Tomah VA has initiated a Saturday clinic for OIF/OEF veterans. Other healthcare professionals along with the OIF/OEF Case Manager see the patients. This schedule doesn't interfere with the new veterans' school and work schedules and helps to ensure that they are seen within the 30-day time frame.

Milwaukee – The Transition to Home

The staff of the Milwaukee VA Medical Center and Clinics has been privileged to serve over 2,123 Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans since the beginning of the Seamless Transition program in September of 2003. Of that number, 12% are female veterans.

But what does this transition program mean to those returning? At Milwaukee it means expanded visiting hours, assured social work case management services available to all returning combat veterans and their families. All OEF/OIF veterans are seen in clinic within 30 days or sooner of initial contact with the medical center.

Many of these services are established within primary care where the social work case managers conduct a full psychosocial assessment to identify each veteran's unique needs and to provide information and coordination of care.

An outreach team of a psychologist and a registered nurse, both of whom are veterans, was established in the fall of 2005 to provide education and support to service members and their families. They also provide presentations to family groups, county veteran service officers, as well as support at post deployment health reassessment events. Programs titled “Understanding Readjustment” and a relaxation program, “Battle-Body Retraining,” are offered on a regular basis.

Post-deployment mental health services are also available and offer comprehensive and specialized approaches and programs.

The Milwaukee VA has established a seamless transition advisory board reporting directly to the medical center

director. This multidisciplinary group continues to improve care for OEF/OIF veterans. A recent development was the identification and implementation of a high risk screening tool for returning veterans. This tool is an example of a national initiative to address suicide prevention and was recently noted during a visit by the Office of the Inspector General.



Milwaukee VA social worker, Kelly K. Underhill, does a chart review at her computer. Ms. Underhill is one of several OEF/OIF case managers for returning combat veterans.

The staff of information management service conducts a weekly computer run of all enrolled OEF/OIF veterans for the following identified risk factors that have occurred in the previous seven days: No shows, pain level six or greater, prescriptions not filled, ER visit(s) and discharge against medical advice. Several of these factors are evidence-based predictors of suicide. The social work case managers then conduct an initial review of those veterans that are identified. They assure that appropriate follow-up and intervention is provided to re-engage the veteran in treatment services.

The goal is to make the transition to home as seamless as possible. If you know of veterans who could benefit

from such services, please contact Jean Bromley, VISN OEF/OIF coordinator, at 888 469-6614, extension 42614.

VETERANS DAY ACTIVITIES

Hines

Hines kicked off Veterans Day celebrations at the facility with a ceremony honoring the Marine Corps Birthday and veterans of all services. The ceremony, which was attended by the Marine Corps League, involved a cake cutting ceremony, several patriotic songs and a short speech by the commander of a local Marine Reserve Unit. Hines employees and patients enthusiastically participated in the ceremony.

Hines volunteers also distributed a hat, scarf and gloves to all inpatients in celebration of Veterans Day. All employees at the facility were encouraged to thank a veteran for their service in honor of Veterans Day.

On Friday, November 10th, Barb Hunt, the facility's Visual Impairment Coordinator and member of the Hines Aces Toastmasters, gave special speech at the Brookfield Zoo's special Veterans Day activity. The Zoo offered free general admission for Veterans Day and Barb's speech was very well received by the large crowd gathered in the Discovery Center for the ceremony.

Jesse Brown



Members of Boy Scout Troop #117 and Cub Scout Troop #3117 provided complimentary shoe shines to veterans at JBVAMC prior to its Veterans Day ceremony on November 11.

Milwaukee

“All these other guys are here with me.”

A few weeks before Veterans Day, Charles Wallace, an EEO program manager, received a message from Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson that read; “...That is why I am calling on America's veterans to wear their military medals this Veterans Day, November 11, 2006. Wearing their medals will demonstrate the deep pride our veterans have in their military service and bring Veterans Day home to all American citizens. Veterans, wear your pride on your left side this Veterans Day! Let America know who you are and what you did for freedom.”

During the time before the day designated to pay tribute to all of America's veterans, Mr. Wallace looked at his medals in his small basement office of Milwaukee's VA Medical Center. He had never worn them. He was quietly proud of his service in Vietnam. The medals came to him through the post office.

He was drafted and went to Army infantry. It was off to advanced infantry school, jump school and then Vietnam. He returned home a sergeant on September 20, 1970. He has a lot of stories. Some are slowly coming out.

Mr. Wallace was hesitant about wearing his medals. He shared the Secretary's idea with his family. His wife Joy and his son Christian encouraged him. He even went so far as granting his son's wish, explaining how each medal was earned. I am sure his conversation ended with what he told this reporter, “Everybody would get those things if they went over there.”

But, he had to make the decision to wear his medals... or not.

On Veterans Day morning, he took his medals and meticulously placed them on his suit to wear at the Veterans Day ceremony. This was a big step.

“The reason why I wore these things is I was thinking about my friend Taylor. He was a real cowboy from Wyoming.” He smiled. “He rode Brahma bulls and he

would tell us these stories when we were out in the boonies. He was a wild guy... a wild man...”

A quiet second or two passed.

“I remember we couldn't get the medivac in there and we had to kind of go up this -- it wasn't a mountain, but it was a pretty tall hill. But because the way we were situated with the fire coming in, we had to hump him up this hill. And he was gunshot around his belly. He humps us this hill with us... with a little help in order to get medivac'd out.”

“He never made it back.”



“I am wearing these medals,” he continued with a surging sense of conviction, “because Taylor and all those bunch of guys that I know are not going to be able to wear them.”

Mr. Wallace shook a lot of hands that Veterans Day. He received many ‘thank yous.’ Probably the most meaningful was the subtle one from Christian who took his picture before the ceremony.

Wearing the medals was the right decision for Mr. Wallace. It brought some closure and honored the memory of his friends. “It was the first time ever that I really had good feelings about that. All these other guys are here with me.”

He had a parting remark. “Thank you Mr. Nicholson.”

Why You Have a Veterans Day Parade.

Signs lined the parade route at the 43rd Annual Milwaukee Veterans Day Parade. All of them contained two words; “thank you.” It wasn’t a quiet parade. Oh yes, there were the bands, but what made it memorable for those veterans walking or riding was the applause, the salutes, the waves and the shouts of support from those watching.

Veterans saw the young mother on the curb with her three small children dressed for the weather all waving flags, the Milwaukee police officer who snapped to attention each time a veteran group would pass or then maybe they saw the woman in the wheelchair with her medal pinned to her thick fur coat. For some veterans, it was a welcome sight for tired eyes.



The 150 unit parade featured veterans of all wars and all organizations. Even the dissenters to the war in Iraq and Afghanistan had a display in a nearby park as the parade marched by. “This is freedom,” explained Mary Ann D’Acquisto who runs the operation. “This is what our veterans fought for.”

Ms. D’Acquisto’s family has a long list of military service. Her dad, a World War II Marine, gave his children the gift of patriotism. His house is easily identified with the American and Marine Corps flags. Her childhood memories recall Sunday drives that would end at the War Memorial.

As parade coordinator, she calls it her second full time job. Her first is a registered nurse in the ICU at Milwaukee’s VA Medical Center.

“I love to do the parade,” said an enthusiastic Ms. D’Acquisto. And she does everything including the fund raising. She pounds on a lot of doors for support. But demonstrates time after time, she is determined. “I don’t give up.” She just goes to the next door.

She has a core group of about ten people – several family members – who help with the event throughout the year. On parade day, the number of volunteers swells to 100. She is always looking for more volunteers, and if you are interested, check out the website; <http://www.veteransdayparade-milw.org/>

The parade tops a year of planning and preparation which is also full of events. On parade day, activities include a breakfast reception, a post parade lunch, essay contest, memorial service and a band concert. This truly makes Veterans Day in Milwaukee a day of honor to celebrate veterans. It is a day to let patriotism thrive.



This year the special guests of honor were the Wisconsin Chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America and the grand marshal was president of the Wisconsin Chapter, Phil Rosenberg. Attending from Washington, DC, was Acting Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs Thomas E. Harvey. And there is always room in the line up for the nurses at the Medical Center.

Ms. D’Acquisto is appreciative for the service of each veteran. The gratitude of a handshake or a smile carries her on. This was her fifth parade, and as she finishes up the thank you notes on her dining room table, she is thinking of November 10, 2007 – next year’s parade

date. The question she asks herself is, "How can I make it better?" And each year she does.

She says, "I want the vets to be happy with it."

They are.

North Chicago



One of the year's highlights for the members of the North Chicago VAMC's Women Veterans Committee is the annual Veterans Day Program that honors the many contributions made by women veterans. Judging from the number of women veterans present at this year's celebration, this sentiment is shared by women veterans of the North Chicago VAMC. On November 14, 2006, approximately fifty women veterans traveled to the VAMC for an educational program on "Hot Topics in Women's Health." Speakers included Wilma Woollard, RN, NP, who spoke about diagnosis, treatment and prevention of osteoporosis; Dr. Theresa Kepic, gynecologist at the NCVAMC, who spoke about the newly released HPV vaccine; and Nancy Decker, RN from the Great Lakes Naval Health Clinic, who discussed recommended preventive health examinations for women throughout the life cycle.

Veterans Day

On November 9th, the Marine Corps League Detachment 801 and the Marine Air Control Group 48 joined with the North Chicago VA to salute veterans with a special Veterans Day program at the VA. This program featured

an impressive cake cutting ceremony conducted by Colonel Curt Ames of MACG 48 (pictured) commemorating the 231st birthday of the Marine Corps. The cake is cut by a ceremonial sword and oldest marine present passes a piece of cake to the youngest marine.



Major Robert Weiler was the guest speaker. Kurt Morris, a Gold Star father who lost his son in Iraq, also shared some inspirational words to our veterans. Commandant Marty Smith of Marine Corps League 801 kept the event running smoothly.

A definite highlight was a performance by "Voice of Veterans" (pictured below) with very moving and meaningful songs that they also wrote themselves. A couple members of the group are veterans from the North Chicago VA. The audience truly enjoyed this entire inspirational and entertaining Veterans Day program.



Tomah

At the Tomah VA's annual Veterans Day Program, a record crowd of over 300 packed the facility's chapel.

Command Sergeant Major M. Kevin Dubois, Installation Command Sergeant Major at Fort McCoy and an Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran, provided the keynote speech. CSM Dubois also assisted with the induction ceremony of two veterans into the facility's Hall of Heroes: Mitchell Red Cloud, Jr. and John A. Steele.

Red Cloud was in the Marine Corps during WWII and served with the United States Army during the Korean War. He received the Congressional Medal of Honor posthumously for his courageous actions in Korea. A Navy ship and military camp in Korea have been named for Red Cloud, as well as the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post in his hometown of Black River Falls, Wisconsin. He was a member of the Ho-Chunk Nation, an American Indian tribe originally from Wisconsin and formerly known as the Wisconsin Winnebago Tribe.

Steele was a Vietnam veteran who received three Silver Stars, a Bronze Star with Valor, and three Purple Hearts; was nominated for the Congressional Medal of Honor and received the American Legion Medal of Valor and the Vietnam Medal of Honor. He lived in Sparta until his death in July 2005.



Members of the Ho-Chunk Nation were active participants in the ceremony as they honored their fallen warrior and gave the program a unique flavor. The "Winnebago Sons" drum group (pictured) sang Mitchell

Red Cloud, Jr.'s Honor Song and comments were provided by the Ho Chunk Nation's traditional chief. Two area veterans' organizations (Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Legion) have been named after Red Cloud and they participated in the flag ceremonies.

Above and Beyond Clock Presentations

At numerous sites across VISN 12 employees who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom were honored for going above and beyond the call of duty and presented with certificates of appreciation as well as clocks as a token of gratitude for the time they spent overseas.

On this page and the next, you'll find photos from the ceremonies held around the VISN.

Janice M. Boss, M.S., CHE, Iron Mountain Medical Center Director presented Dr. Edward Perez – Conde, Primary Care Physician with a OIF-OEF certificate following the Veteran's Day Program. Dr. Perez – Conde is also a Lieutenant Colonel in the Army Reserves with the 452nd Combat Support Hospital and has been called to active duty 4 times in the last 4 years.





Jesse Brown VA Medical Center Director James S. Jones (right) presents Jose Cuadra, Engineering Service, with a clock to recognize his OIF/OEF military service. At left is Dr. Richard Rooney, Chief, Pharmacy Service, who served in Iraq and Kuwait for 18 months.



Pictured Left to Right: Nathan L. Geraths, Director; Donald Van Woert, RN CCU; Jacqueline Wheeler, RN 4A; David Powers, Radiology; and Kelly Gunderson, Patient Financial Services.

NATIONAL WHEELCHAIR GAMES

"I need help... lots of it," said Denise Jashinsky, coordinator of the volunteers for the upcoming National Veterans Wheelchair Games, June 19-23 in Milwaukee, WI. "More than 2,500 volunteers are needed for this year's events." She encourages early registration to get prime assignments.

There are over 40 different areas that need volunteers. Opportunities are available in photography, serving meals, hospitality, site set-up, sporting events, transportation and many others. You can volunteer as an individual or as a group. Shifts will generally be four to six hours and include a meal. Orientation will be provided, as well as, job-specific training.

Volunteers must be at least 14 years or older (younger must be accompanied by an adult). Mrs. Jashinsky explained, "This is an excellent opportunity for high school students wishing to obtain community service experience with a wide variety of different venues to choose from." She added that volunteering at the Games will be a "life altering experience" for many.



Madison VA Hospital Director Nathan L Geraths (center) presents clocks to Michael Bennett, Patient Financial Services (left); and Jennifer Lindemann, Anesthesia Service (right).



Denise L. Jashinsky, voluntary service officer.

Volunteer forms are available on the Games web site at: www.wheelchairgames.org. For more information, contact Denise Jashinsky at (414) 389-3999 or e-mail denise.jashinsky@med.va.gov

ONE OF OUR VERY OWN

In Memoriam – VA Police Officer killed in Action in Iraq

On Friday, November 24, 2006, the VA Medical Center in Iron Mountain received confirmation that one of their employees was killed in action in Iraq on Thanksgiving Day. VA Police Officer James Dennis Priestap, 39, was on a mission with the 46th Military Police Company of the Michigan Army National Guard when he was shot and killed by an insurgent sniper.

Priestap was born in Royal Oak, Michigan and graduated from North Dickinson High School. He had been employed at the VA Medical Center since January 23, 2005, where he served with distinction. Prior to coming to the VA, Priestap served on active duty in the active duty military, including as a rescue swimmer in the U.S. Navy, and in the Sheriff's Department in Sarasota, Florida. He received several military awards, as well as recognition as an outstanding employee at the VA Medical Center. His prior service with the National Guard included a 2005 activation and deployment to provide security support in New Orleans during the recovery operations following Hurricane Katrina.

The VA Medical Center Director, Janice Boss, commented, "Jim Priestap was an exceptional individual, professionally and personally. He was with us for almost 1 ½ years, rarely has anyone had such a positive impact in such a short time. 'Going above and beyond' on behalf of veterans and his coworkers was standard operating procedure for Jim. He was widely liked, respected and admired, especially for his joy in his family and military service to our country, in whose cause he made the ultimate sacrifice. Everyone who knew Jim Priestap is heartbroken at his death. Our thoughts and prayers are with Jim's family and his military unit."



Over 1,000 people attended the Viewing to offer final respects to the fallen soldier and condolences to his family. The Funeral took place December 4, 2006, with 650 people attending. During the funeral, an announcement was made that Sgt. 1st Class Jim Priestap received a Purple Heart and Bronze Star. A committal service with full military honors took place following the funeral. As the funeral procession passed by the VA Medical Center on the way to the cemetery, over 100 VA employees and volunteers stood outside in 15-degree F weather along VA's "Avenue of Flags" to show respect for Sgt. Priestap and sympathy for his family, friends, military unit and VA coworkers.

Priestap leaves his parents, a large extended family including two sisters and three brothers, his wife, and their ten-year-old daughter, nine-year-old son and guardian son.

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