



Groundbreaking for Phase III of VA/DoD Partnership



Another ceremony took place at North Chicago on October 5th to announce, upon full integration of North Chicago VAMC (NCVAMC) and Naval Health Clinic Great Lakes (NHCGL) partnership, they will be called *Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center*. This marks the first time VA & DoD have fully integrated two of their facilities into one. Officials from both departments admit it is an unparalleled milestone in resource sharing. Once the project is completed, (2010) it will be the first fully integrated Federal Health Care Center (FHCC) between VA & DoD.

Secretary Gordon Mansfield (right) congratulates Captain (Ret.) James Lovell, Jr. USN (left) and Representative Mark Kirk (R-IL) (center) on the naming of the new Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center

The Partnership was a three phase process. The initial phase relocated inpatient mental health services from the Navy to the NCVAMC in October 2003. Phase II was the renovation and modernization of NCVAMC's Surgery and Emergency Departments. Once completed in June 2006, Navy shifted their inpatient medicine, surgery and emergency services to NCVAMC. VA & Navy personnel are working side-by-side to provide the best quality health care to veterans, active duty, and their family members, and for the first time in a VA, there is pediatric care provided for DoD eligible dependents.

The new facility leadership will include a VA SES Medical Center Director, a Navy Captain (O-6) Deputy Director with an Interagency Advisory Board and a Stakeholder Advisory Board monitoring performance. Goals of this partnership include

improve access, patient satisfaction, and timely delivery of services for VA and DoD beneficiaries, all while improving efficiencies and reducing costs to taxpayers.

James A. Lovell was chosen in September 1962 for the space program following experience as a Naval Aviator and Test Pilot. Lovell executed various commands in the Gemini and Apollo mission programs. Lovell's fourth and final flight was on the perilous Apollo 13 mission in 1970.

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Network News

Hines

Mental Illness Awareness Week



Marianne Blaccionere, Hines' Suicide Prevention Coordinator, talking with patients and staff about various signs and symptoms that may indicate a problem.

Mental Illness Awareness Week was observed at Hines VA Hospital by setting up an information table in the main lobby. Hundreds of patients stopped to peruse a variety of helpful tips and articles on various aspects of mental illness. Mental Health Illness Awareness Week is an important national observance that was established by Presidential proclamation to focus on the high incidence of mental illness in America. This observance encourages people with mental illness to seek treatment for mental health problems with the same urgency as they seek treatment for problems with their physical health.

Mental illness is a challenge that millions of Americans face every day and that staff at the hospital see on a regular basis. Many of these illnesses are disabling. The U.S. Surgeon General's report on mental health finds that about one in five Americans experiences a mental disorder in the course of a year. Mental illness affects almost every American family.

These illnesses can affect a person from any cultural, racial or ethnic background and in turn affect our families and the communities in which we live. Thanks to all staff at Hines VA, for their commitment to serving our veterans suffering mental health problems.

“Lunch with Leadership” A Big Success

Over 30 employees attended Hines' first “Lunch With Leadership” program late this summer. The attendees were invited to a brown bag lunch with **Nathan Geraths**, Hines Director, along with **Jeff Gering**, Associate Director, **Barbara Temeck**, Chief of Staff, **Rita DuVal**, Associate Director for Patient Care Services and **Larry Wilson**, Assistant Director.

The employees, front-line staff from across services and services lines, were given the opportunity to get to know leadership on an informal basis and offer suggestions and ideas for improvement. The program was implemented at Hines as a result of a recommendation from the Employer of Choice Committee, that leadership foster open communication between front-line staff and top management. Attendees were very positive about the event and a number of great ideas were discussed. Hines will be holding “Lunch with Leadership” programs quarterly.

Intake Center Opens for Business



Hines has established an OIF/OEF Intake Center, aimed at making it much easier for veterans returning from service in Iraq and Afghanistan to connect with the facility's transition patient advocates as well as the OEF/OIF Program Manager. The new Intake Center, located on the first floor of the Building 228 Main Hospital Annex, offers these veterans a dedicated location with the key staff available there to assist them. Photo above features Tony Spillie, Hines Social Work Executive and Ruth Baker, Hines Employee Assistance Program Coordinator, at the front entrance in the new center.

Iron Mountain

Third Annual Veterans Tribute Ride



Thunder was heard when 371 motorcycles took to the streets for the third annual Iron Mountain Veterans Tribute Ride, meant to recognize and honor veterans. Motorcyclists were escorted by a Military Humvee.

Three hundred and seventy one motorcycles make a lot of noise, and that was the point – reminding everyone just how important our veterans are. Citizens lined the streets and waved American flags as the Iron Mountain Veterans Tribute Riders made their way through town.

Rich Moore of the VFW, a Vietnam veteran, coordinated the event. On May 26, 2007, the tribute ride began at the Iron Mountain VA Medical Center. “It is their (the veteran’s) hospital,” said Moore. A dedication ceremony with a presentation of a special flag and plaque was held at the hospital as well as at the other destinations along route, which included the Florence VFW, the Iron River/Stambaugh American Legion, the Iron River 82nd Airborne and the Crystal Falls VFW.

Earth Day Fair

The V.A. Medical Center held its first annual Earth Day fair on April 18th. The Green Environmental Management Systems (GEMS) committee hosted the event that included the facility’s battery recycling, paper recycling and prescription drug disposal programs. The Iron Mountain High School Environmental Club also participated with displays that included watershed and global warming. Earth Day is celebrated on April 22nd each year with this marking the 37th anniversary. It was founded by Gaylord Nelson, a then Senator from Wisconsin, in 1970.



From left, Members of the Iron Mountain High School Environmental Club, Danielle Rosen, Sam Langsford and Mimi Singh.

VA Performance Improvement Fair



2nd place Story Board, Xylene Recycling Program.

Iron Mountain VA Medical Center recently held their second annual Performance Improvement Fair. The facility recognizes the importance of continually trying to improve VA services for our patients. Staff have once again shown the strong commitment they have to improving customer service and performance at the facility.

Staff members were asked to identify a problem and to describe the specific actions taken to improve the process or system. They had to support their actions by comparing data from the improved process to the baseline data. All employees were invited to submit a storyboard using the Plan, Do, Check, Act Performance

Improvement Model. Cash prizes were awarded to the top 4 groups.

The 1st place winner went to “Medication Reconciliation Improvements” - this team looked at improving inpatient and outpatient pharmacy orders. The creators of the program include: Dan Aderman, Lisa Basanese and Gina Hakamaki.

The 2nd place winner went to the creators of the “Xylene Recycling Program.” The goal of this program was to determine what practices could be changed to reduce or eliminate the quantity of hazardous waste generated by the VA. The creators of the program included, Greg Haslow, Judy Sielaff, Brad Tomassucci, Dan Recla and Mary Thottakara.

The 3rd place winner went to the “Improving Communication Between Production Coders.” The creators of the program include Mary J. Vitton, Rita Rosen, Sharon Lies and Angela Finley. This team created a “coding blog” through Microsoft Outlook to ensure timely communication between coders. They also created a monthly newsletter called “Iron Mountain Coding Chronicles” which shares information about disease processes, codes clinics related to that disease along with other education information. The People’s Choice Award went to the “Wheel of Rhythm” team. The team consists of Robin Rappely, Amy Hilsabeck, Kathleen Truax, Jan Irish, Susan Gray and Tania Fuller-Hautamaki. The People’s Choice Award was voted on by all Fair attendees.

Jesse Brown

Goodwill/Great Lakes Hires Vets with Severe Disabilities

Veterans with severe disabilities are finding employment at the Great Lakes Naval Base as a result of a partnership among Jesse Brown VAMC, Goodwill/Great Lakes, the Illinois Dept. of Employment Security (IDES) and Innervoice.

More than 400 veterans have been hired as Food Service workers since the program’s inception five years

ago, when John Van Benthuyzen, Assistant Director of Support Services for Goodwill/Great Lakes, teamed up with JBVAMC Addiction Therapist Tommie Price, IDES Veterans Employment Representative Eric Myers, Innervoice Case Manager/Outreach Specialist Horace Jones and David Rogers and Lonnie Fontaine from the Veterans Strike Force service organization.

Although the employment program is open to *any* person with a severe disability, the JBVAMC team has ensured that veterans with severe disabilities receive priority through pre-screenings and routine job fairs held at JBVAMC and Innervoice. The last JBVAMC job fair was on August 9, with the next one scheduled for Thursday, November 8.

“Our goal is to hire 40 people every month,” said Van Benthuyzen. “Thanks to Tommie Price for sponsoring so many job fairs, veterans with severe disabilities have an edge [over non-vets] to employment at Great Lakes Naval Base.” Eligible veterans must have at least one *certified* disability, including PTSD, Depression, Bipolar Disorder or Personality Disorder, with no history of violent crimes or drug sales. “Because people with these diagnoses are typically difficult to employ, this is a very positive program,” said Price. Employment at Great Lakes is a win-win situation for veterans. “The beauty is vets are continuing to serve, primarily to the Navy’s new service members doing basic training at Great Lakes.”



Tommie Price, JBVAMC Addictions Therapist (left) and John Van Benthuyzen, Assistant Director of Support Services for Goodwill/Great Lakes, review a list of job opportunities for veterans.

Navy Pride Day

Over 200 chief petty officers from the Great Lakes Naval Training Center visited Jesse Brown VAMC on September 7 as part of its annual "Navy Pride Day. They



met with Director James S. Jones, visited with patients throughout the facility, participated in a flag-raising ceremony and, as seen in this photo, entertained staff and veterans with a rousing rendition of *Anchors Aweigh*.

Vets Take Top Creative Arts Program Awards

After competing with thousands of veterans nationwide, several JBVAMC veterans have won awards through the National Veterans Creative Arts Program and will attend the 2007 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival in St. Louis, MO, October 22-29.

This year, about 3,000 veterans – representing nearly 100 VA medical centers – entered the competition which recognizes the creative talents of America's vets, and promotes the involvement and support provided to these veterans by VA staff and volunteers.

First Place JBVAMC winners and "Invited Participants" to the festival included:

Jacqueline Bowens

String Art Kit category, Art Division

Francis Mascenic,

Watercolor category, Art Division

The Sensations (members Gina Fraley and Ray Klem) winners of the top awards in two divisions: 1) "Drama" for their *Doctor/Patient Session* skit and 2) "Music" for *Best Vocal Group Broadway*.

Veterans participating in JBVAMC art therapy were assisted by Craft Care Specialist Mia Leber, who represented the Help Hospitalized Veterans national service organization. Veterans participating in music/drama therapy were assisted by Creative Arts Therapist Jessie Herndon. Leber and Herndon accompanied the winning vets to St. Louis, along with Recreation Therapist Ron Fiedor, who will represent JBVAMC as a Team Leader at the festival.

"I love this work," said Herndon, a 30-year employee at JBVAMC, "and am so very proud of all of our veterans." Veterans participating in the festival will showcase their talents during a program that will be televised nationally by PBS. Fraley and Klem will perform with a veterans' chorus comprised of members from all winning VA facilities.

JBVAMC veterans winning awards, but not selected as "Invited Participants," included:

"Art" Division, 3rd Place:

Don Gibson, Figurine Painting Kit category and George Gustafson, Mosaic category.

"Dance" Division, 1st Place Solo Structured Ballroom category: Wilfredo Camacho.

"Music" Division, 3rd Place Vocal Solo Broadway category: Ray Klem; 1st Place Instrumental Group Pop/ Classical/ Broadway/ Patriotic/ Religious category: *Jesse Brown Duo* (members Pianist Anthony Ciampa and Drummer Gary Marshall); and 1st Place Vocal Group Song with Dance category: *Jesse Brown Veterans Chorus* (members Herbert Adams, Debra Atkins, Sidney Brown, Anthony Ciampa, Martell Davis, Lionel Duckworth, Gina Fraley, Roderick Harrison, Thaddies Holloway, Ray Klem, Ernest Maxey, and Walter Richard).

Journey Towards Magnet Status

Just as a magnet attracts iron, Magnet status attracts the most professional and highly qualified employees to a health care organization.

Magnet recognition is awarded by the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) and is the highest level of recognition for nursing excellence that can be granted to an organized nursing service within the health care field. There are only three VA facilities (Tampa, Houston and Portland) that have achieved Magnet status.

Almost one year ago, Jesse Brown VA Nursing Service began its journey towards Magnet recognition by holding a workshop to introduce the elements needed to create a “Magnet” work environment. In order to achieve Magnet status, a healthcare facility must demonstrate excellence in a variety of areas.

Workshop participants identified those elements necessary to create a “Magnet” work environment:

- Clinically competent nursing staff
- Nursing accountability
- Control over nursing practice
- Working together to get the job done
- Collegial relationships
- Supportive management
- Support for education
- Putting Veterans first

The Magnet group is focusing on promoting activities that contribute to a Magnet work environment, including the development of a Shared Governance structure and Professional Practice Model, providing Nursing Grand Rounds and other educational offerings, promoting staff certifications and enhancing relationships with the medical center's affiliate Schools of Nursing.

Typically, the journey towards Magnet status takes several years to achieve, but JBVAMC feels strongly it will be time well spent.



JBVAMC's Magnet Steering Committee holds quarterly workshops with members of nursing management and a Magnet Facilitator group to focus on the medical center's journey to Magnet Status

Employee Picnic



For the second year in a row, Jesse Brown VA Medical Center held its annual All Employee Picnic on the roof of its parking garage, providing great views of Chicago's skyline. Over 1200 staff attended, munched on hamburgers, hot dog and veggie burgers, listened to music and played a variety of games. Poster displays were also set up to recognize employees who had been honored with awards over the previous year.



The medical center also uses the picnic as an opportunity to release the results of its Employee Point Recognition Program, in which staff members receive points for years of service, participation in medical center initiatives and personal accomplishments, including healthy living and volunteering in their communities. Each point is worth 17 minutes of time off (to be taken within seven months) or \$5, depending on which option

each employee requests. Staff members averaged 58 points.

JBVAMC initiated the Point Recognition Program in 2005 after staff members expressed their concerns via the All Employee Survey that the medical center should expand opportunities for staff recognition. A total of 1,289 employees (about 75 percent of staff) participated this year.

Madison

Research Fair Very Successful!



The Research Fair on June 7th for veterans, employees, volunteers and visitors was a huge success. The drawing card was a chance to participate in many interactive exhibits. Visitors could see molecular biology equipment demonstrated, test the strength of their tongue, check eyelid startle response, measure the difference in blood pressure when resting vs. lifting, take simple memory tests, see demonstrations of communication and memory aid devices, tour a website on Alzheimer's disease and the brain, look at living cancer cells through a microscope, and learn home monitoring for anticoagulation. Other exhibits featured brain imaging, eye diseases, longevity, lung infection, muscle pain, and PTSD.

Nearly 400 individuals attended, with a number of visitors returning more than once. Said one staff visitor, "It's

great to find out what's going on in the rest of the hospital. It's too easy to just get caught up in your own work." Voluntary Service/Public Affairs handled all the pre-Fair publicity, distributed news of the Fair to many veterans' organization publications and even targeted patients coming to the hospital for appointments on the day of the Fair. Representatives from the offices of both of Wisconsin's U.S. Senators attended. Investigators and lab technicians were on hand at each exhibit to answer questions, help visitors participate in a research activity, or do demonstrations. Many handouts were made for the Fair. Refreshments and decorations created a party atmosphere in the conference room where the Fair was held. Exhibitors, too, had fun, calling the Fair an "A++ event."

Evaluation forms filled out by Fair visitors helped identify what made the Fair work. Visitors liked having exhibits staffed by someone to explain How, Why, and What.



Aaron Stegner discussed the study of unexplained muscle pain in Gulf War Veterans

Education and fun were combined in such a way that visitors "enjoyed all of the exhibits because of the information I learned." The wide variety of health issues enabled many visitors to find exhibits on problems relevant to themselves or their families. Even exhibits on subjects not personally relevant attracted a crowd of watchers. The INR exhibit, which demonstrated how home monitoring of anticoagulation is taught, was rated highly because it "would be very helpful and economic for patients." Others comments included that the Fair was "colorful, friendly, thorough, practical, and

explanations were nicely simplified." One staffer commented on the lung exhibit in which lung pressure was demonstrated by inflating a balloon inside a clear plastic cylinder. "We should have seen this in Nursing School." A veteran who came just for the Fair said, "My day was not wasted with all this new information. The Fair was wonderful. When are you going to have one again?"



Rob Conhaim demonstrates lung inflation using a balloon in a plastic cylinder.

VAH Madison Named Smoke-free Campus Pilot Site

Healthcare organizations across the country are taking the lead in establishing smoke free environments to promote health and wellness for their patients, staff and visitors. Smoking is the single most alterable risk factor contributing to premature morbidity and mortality in the United States, accounting for approximately 400,000 deaths annually. The prevalence of smokers in the Department of Veterans Affairs is significantly higher than in the general population (33 percent versus 23 percent), suggesting that smoking contributes to a disproportionately high morbidity and mortality rate among veterans receiving VA care.

VAH Madison has been chosen as one of five pilot VA facilities to move toward a smoke-free campus. Smoking at VAH Madison is currently allowed in two enclosed smoking shelters and six "bus shelter type" smoking areas. The plan is to limit smoking to only the two enclosed shelters by November 15, 2007, the day of the nationally recognized Great American Smoke-Out,

resulting in the removal of the bus shelter type smoking areas. Smoking will no longer be allowed in the facility parks or patio areas. The ultimate goal is to eliminate smoking from all VA grounds in the future. They plan to increase their efforts of providing smoking cessation treatment to all VAH Madison patients, and to offer this service to their employees as well. They realize that smoking is an addiction and that it will require a significant team effort to reach their goal. The Joint Commission, which surveys and accredits VA and community medical facilities, is requiring that all medical facilities be smoke-free in 2009.

Celebrating Success

The Veterans Industries / Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) Program and the Addictive Disorders Treatment Program (ADTP) Apartment Program joined together to celebrate the success of veterans in each program. A picnic was held on August 27, 2007 at Hoyt Park in Madison where the veterans enjoyed lawn games, conversation, and an evening of good food, catered by the VA Canteen Service and grilled by CWT staff member George Heideman. John Rohrer, Acting Associate Director, below left, attended the event and presented achievement awards to veterans. A CWT alumnus was also recognized for his continued success since transitioning out of the CWT program.



Veterans in the CWT program were presented achievement awards to recognize their accomplishments in vocational rehabilitation as demonstrated by maintaining transitional work

experience or supported employment positions, and demonstrating excellent attendance and work performance.

Veterans in the ADTP Apartment Program were presented achievement awards to recognize their accomplishments in their recovery programs and for maintaining independent living in the Madison community. In addition to veterans currently in the programs, program alumni and VA employees from the ADTP, CWT, and Mental Health Intensive Case Management programs were present to help congratulate the veterans. The evening was enjoyed by all, and they look forward to doing it again next year!

Women's Health Grant

The Women Veterans Health Program (WVHP) has been awarded a grant in the amount of \$190,000 to develop a national curriculum in women's health. The funding source is the VA Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards, whose Chief Officer is Dr. Lawrence Deyton. The grant originated at the initiative of Dr. Deyton and Dr. Patricia Hayes, Acting Chief Consultant for the Women's Health Strategic Healthcare Group.

Molly Carnes MD, MS, WVHP Director and University of Wisconsin Professor of Medicine, Psychiatry and Industrial & Systems Engineering, and Gail Gunter Hunt, LCSW, Women Veterans Program Manager, will direct this project. The VAH Madison WVHP is closely affiliated with the University of Wisconsin Center for Women's Health Research (CWHR), a Department of Health and Human HS-designated National Center of Excellence in Women's Health. Dr. Carnes is also Director of the UW CWHR and Gloria Sarto, MD, Ph.D, WVHP Gynecologist and UW Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology is the Co-Director. The Women Veterans Program at VAH Madison is a Women's Veterans Health Fellowship site and an integral part of four other federally-funded academic training programs that support research and career development across a spectrum of scientific inquiry related to women's health.

The curriculum will include not only information to improve and update skills of practitioners in diagnosing and managing conditions that are unique to women, but

also in diagnosing and managing conditions that occur in both men and women when there are gender differences in risk factors, presentations, treatments, or prognoses. The curriculum will include attention to the long term mental and physical conditions that are associated with traumatic stress such as what occurs in combat or following military sexual trauma. Attention will be given to safety during pregnancy and lactation, medications used to treat conditions common in returning women veterans, and how to counsel women who may be on medications for service-related psychological conditions who wish to become pregnant.

VAH Madison looks forward to working on this important initiative to provide top notch care to the growing number of women veterans, including those brave women who are returning from the on-going conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Milwaukee

Chapel Restoration

Restoration of the 1889 Home Chapel at Milwaukee's Clement J. Zablocki VA Medical Center continues this fall in the biggest way yet, with restoration of the chapel's tower. The Soldiers Home Foundation, Inc. (www.soldiershome.org) continues the work begun by volunteers in 2002.

The tower is the first step of the foundation's four-phase project to restore the chapel to U.S. Secretary of the Interior standards, and its 1889-1914 period of significance. Plans to reopen its doors by 2009 for veteran funerals and veteran, VA, and community use are currently on target.



North Chicago

4th Annual Car Show



Blue skies, 76 degrees and a light breeze made for a perfect day at the 4th Annual Car Show for Veterans at the North Chicago VA Medical Center veterans, employees, Navy Corps School students and families, were able to see 168 vehicles spanning 9 decades from around the world. The oldest entry was Waukegan Fire Department's 1921 Stutz Fire Engine, all the way through automotive history to a 2007 Lamborghini Murciélago Roadster.

The various clubs in the area that attended were the Ferrari Owners Club, the Chicago Replicar Association, the Chain-O-Lakes Model A Club, the Kenosha Car Club, the Mopar Connection of Chicago, and North Shore Corvettes. Even the United States Marines of Marine Air Control Group 48 also took time out of their busy schedules to participate and displayed a "HUMVEE" and an enormous 7-Ton tactical vehicle and the United States Army brought a 2006 "Hummer" H3.

With polished chrome and glossy paint of every color, the vehicles were stunning, representing the various years, countries, and styles. Marquee names such as Rolls Royce, Bentley, MG, Porsche, Lotus, Ferrari, Lamborghini, Shelby, Model A & T's, and of course a fantastic mix of every American hot rod and muscle car were on hand.

Six North Chicago employees and family members brought in cars for the show. Dave Warstler of the SEDOL program brought his 1987 Formula Firebird. Cathy McBride of Patient Administration and her father Michael McBride brought a 1933 Ford Vickey. John Manczko from the Associate Director's Office and his wife Penny, drove their 2005 Ford Mustang GT

Convertible. Sue Patrone of Surgical Services and her husband Larry brought their 1977 Chevy Corvette. Haley McLaughlin of Patient/Nursing Services, who created and coordinates the car show, brought her 1962 Ferrari 250 GTO-R and Haley's mother and brother Paulette and Mark McLaughlin, who do the cooking each year, brought their 2002 Chevy Monte Carlo SS Dale Earnhardt "Intimidator" Edition and 1971 Ford Maverick Grabber, respectively.

Donations from Jewel Foods, Boy Scout Troop #109 from Wood Ridge, IL., Dominicks Foods, Costco Flags, Jelly Belly Candies, the B.P.O. Elks, the McLaughlin family, Double K Productions, the Ferrari Owners Club, the Chicagoland Replicar Association and the Volo Auto Museum made it possible to have FREE hot dogs, brats, chili, refreshments, goodie bags, "oldies" music and free raffle give-a-ways as their way of saying thank you to all the drivers.

At the end of the day the Director's Choice Award, and the 1st, 2nd and 3rd place Veterans Choice awards were presented as well as a gift basket to the person who drove the furthest distance to attend. Then the drivers turned the keys and the engines roared to life as Patrick Sullivan, the Medical Center Director, hopped into the 1921 Fire Engine and led the Parade for Vets in front of the main buildings for the patients who were too ill to make it out to the car show site.

The smiles and laughter of many generations of folks in attendance, stories and "shop" talk, was priceless. The car owners were touched by what they saw, stating this was unlike any other car show they have ever attended, and truly enjoyed spending the day giving our Nation's Heroes a well deserved "Walk Down Memory Lane."

50th Annual VAVS Patient Carnival

North Chicago held its 59th Annual VAVS Patient Carnival. Over 150 veterans converged on 16 food and game booths to win prizes and eat hot dogs, pie, ice cream, soda, smoothies, popcorn, and chili to their hearts content, while being entertained by a live DJ. Over 30 Navy corpsmen as well as veterans of Buildings 1 and 66 graciously helped escort nursing home patients to the event. This year's carnival was sponsored by over

30 volunteer organizations. Volunteers and volunteer organizations were acknowledged for coordinating such an enjoyable event. Thanks were also extended to the recreation therapy staff, and electrical crews, for all their efforts in planning and preparation. A good time was had by all.



Great Games on a Great Lake



The 27th National Veterans Wheelchair Games, "Great Games on a Great Lake" were hosted by Milwaukee from June 19th – 23rd. Over 600 veterans nationwide attended and there were over 4,000 volunteers assisting!

The North Chicago VA team had a blast participating in bowling and nine ball (pool). This was the first time they had competed and they all wish to do it again next year. Thanks to several of our employees for assisting. Each employee stated that it was a moving experience and would like to have the opportunity to help out again. North Chicago did itself proud.

Emergency Department Now Has X-Ray Equipment to Better Serve Patients

Patients will now be able to get an x-ray without leaving the ED. This will expedite results which will provide even more timely care to the emergency department patients. Thanks for the effort from North Chicago and Navy staff which made this possible. Quality patient care is always our goal.



Mr. Sullivan, Medical Center Director and Captain McGue, Commanding Officer Naval Health Clinic Great Lakes get their hands x-rayed as they shake hands.

Child Care Center Celebrates 30th Anniversary

Recently, the Paul K. Kennedy Child Care Center (PKKCCC) celebrated its 30th Anniversary. The child care center opened its doors on August 15, 1977 and became the first child care center at a VA facility. The celebration included activities for the kids and refreshments for everyone to enjoy.

In 1991, the child care center was accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The teachers work really hard to ensure that the classrooms are organized with developmentally appropriate materials to engage the children in fun and exciting learning activities according to the Illinois Early Learning Standards.

PKKCCC has a long running and successful history thanks to the dedicated teachers who have worked at the center for many years.

The center serves children ages 6 weeks through pre-kindergarten and is open 6 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Monday-Friday.



Children at the PKKCCC listen as teacher Alison Sanborn reads a story to them.

Tomah

VA Logistics Operations Excels

The hospital had a business review of logistics operations by the Management Quality Assurance Service (MQAS) from VA Headquarters in August. The week-long review was conducted by three individuals and was quite thorough.

The review included inventory management operations in Supply, Processing, and Distribution (SPD), Storage and Distribution (Warehouse), Nonexpendable Property Management and Expendable Item Management.

Inventory accuracy of items in the Generic Inventory Package for medical, laboratory, dental, engineering and environmental management supplies was noted as exceptional.

The review team looked especially for “best practices” and some from the warehouse specifically noted were:

- Overall layout of warehouse, which included security features
- Warehouse Air ventilation
- Warehouse MSDS spill clean-up area

With the national focus on equipment inventory management, a highlight was their sampling of Tomah's non-expendable equipment. In this review, the auditors physically observed (hunted down) 95 items in ten different hospital areas (ranging from roads and grounds to hospital wards). The value of the items totaled \$516,895. The review team seemed genuinely amazed to find 100% of the sampled items. By their looks of astonishment, this experience may have been a first for the team.

While some areas for improvement were identified, the compliments outweighed the recommendations, and the recommendations are by and large "easy fixes."



Logistics staff gather in the Tomah VA warehouse. Front Row: Luann Koranda, Annette Phillips, Stacy Kube, Gisela Griffis, Madonna Baker, Marti Ross, Taylor Askew, David Larson. Back Row: Steve Welch, Mark Epps, Denny Linder, Donna Welch, Alonzo Gadson, Mike Halberg, Bob Helmann, Tom Teeples, Charlie Danischefsky. Missing from picture: Barb Courtney, Steve Hoff, Mike Stuhr, Colleen Carl

Summer Activities

Veterans enjoyed a summer full of special events, thanks to the Recreation Therapy staff and the facility's dedicated volunteers and service organizations.

In early June, officials from the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Ladies Auxiliary of the Veterans of Foreign Wars host "VFWA Day." Lady veterans are treated to a tea just for them, which is followed by a picnic-style meal and a bingo extravaganza.

The annual 4th of July Carnival is held on the holiday and over 100 volunteers come to Tomah to provide game and food booths for the veterans' enjoyment. The Carnival is a tradition that started shortly after the Tomah VA opened sixty years ago!

Vets Day is another annual in July that is provided by organizations and volunteers from the southeast corner of Wisconsin. A huge picnic is provided, as well as games and prizes. The sponsoring groups fund-raise throughout the year and have supported the facility's television programming costs over the years.

Veterans enjoyed a new stage presentation titled "**CINEMAGIC**," performed by Re-Creation USA, Inc. in August. Re-Creation provides a national program of live entertainment for America's veterans hospitalized in VA medical centers and State veterans' homes.



Performers from Re-Creation entertained veterans, volunteers, staff and community members with well-loved songs from the movies, including this number from "The Wizard of Oz."

The summer's special events conclude in August with the Platoon Run Car and Motorcycle Show. The show brings car and motorcycle enthusiasts from neighboring communities and states. Veterans select their favorite car, motorcycle and "people's choice," then awards are presented at the end of the show.

Volunteers with the Vets Day event paired up with veterans for a day of conversation and camaraderie.



Jolene Renda, Nurse Practitioner, helps with the butterfly release. Volunteer Gerry Oxedine in background

Memorial Service

A Memorial Service was held on August 18 to remember the veterans who had passed away at the facility. Family members of the deceased veterans, staff and volunteers attended the service, which included music, poetry, scripture readings, candle lightings, liturgical dance and a meditation.

The program concluded with a butterfly release. The butterflies were provided by Gerri Oxedine, a VA volunteer who is known in the community as “The Butterfly Lady.”

Memorial Butterfly Release

As you release this butterfly in honor of me,

Know that I'm with you and will always be.

Hold a hand, say a prayer, close your eyes

And see me there.

Although you may feel a bit torn apart, please

Know that I'll be forever in your heart.

Now fly away butterfly as high as you can go,

I'm right there with you more than you know.

By Jill Haley

VA Volunteers Keep Golf Course Alive

Each month, dozens of veterans at the Tomah VA enjoy playing golf on the facility's 9-hole course.

The Tomah VA is one of the few VA facilities in the nation with a golf course on its grounds. For many years, the golf course was strictly for use by the patients at the facility and operated by VA personnel. In the late 1990's, VA facilities were no longer able to use appropriated funds to operate the courses that remained. Some medical centers closed their courses; but Tomah's Veterans Golf Course was opened to the public and the green fees were generated to pay contracted staff who cared for the greens and who operated the pro shop, known as the “Golf Shack.”

Over the years, the golf course sometimes struggled financially; and in 2006, it was decided to turn to free labor (volunteers) to operate the Golf Shack during the week (contracted staff continued to work on weekends). Utilizing volunteers worked so well, that in 2007, the Golf Shack's day-to-day operation is done completely with volunteers. Green fees are now used to pay contracted greens keepers only. The volunteers enable the golf course to save money for future operational expenses (such as equipment replacements), but more importantly, the golf course is available for the enjoyment of the veterans. Volunteers issue golf clubs, fishing supplies, fish food, and bicycles to the veterans, so they can be physically active, enjoy the outdoors, and continue in their treatment.



Casey Koscal is one of 25 volunteers who have worked every day since April to keep the golf course open. The volunteers take care of the paying customers, but more importantly, provide assistance to the veterans who use the golf course and pond.

NETWORK AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

Socioeconomic Achievement Award



The Great Lakes Acquisition Center was the recipient of the Secretary's FY 2006 Socioeconomic Achievement Award. For having exceeded 5 of the Secretary's 7 socioeconomic goals, VACO's Wayne A. Simpson, Deputy Director Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization, (center) presented to VISN Network Director, James W. Roseborough, (left) and VISN Chief Logistics Officer, Harlan Rochon, (right) an Outstanding Support of Small Business Programs Award.

Improving The Quality of Life for Inpatients

Providing top quality service to America's veterans is something that the staff at the Hines VA has been committed to for many years. Tailoring the facility's services to meet the needs of the specific group of veterans returning from service in Iraq and Afghanistan is something that the facility has been working hard on for the past several years, with excellent results. Recently, Hines was the recipient of a special award that recognized the facility's commitment to meeting the special needs of these veterans.

A Hines project to improve the quality of life for inpatients by offering them internet access, received second place as an innovative healthcare solution at the Region 2 CIO Conference late this summer. At the beginning of 2007, Hines put together a task force to come up with a way to bring internet access and current technological games to our new veterans to assist in their rehabilitation, recreation, and communication. It was identified that younger, more technologically-oriented veterans need access to the internet during inpatient stays at the hospital, especially during long stays in areas like Spinal Cord, Blind Rehabilitation and Extended Care.

Recreational activities that were successful in the past, like bingo, are not appealing to the younger, 21st century returning veterans. They want to use the internet for shopping, entertainment and surfing. The computer use will also improve their motor skills and can do wonders for their spirits and ability to stay connected to the outside world while they are inpatients at Hines.

The Hines task force met often and came up with an innovative approach to provide patients with access to the internet in a way that follows VA guidelines. The network went live in July 2007. The presentation at the Region 2 CIO conference was one of about 40 entered. The patient access network configuration solves many issues other VAs are facing and may become the model used across the country.



Veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom like the patient pictured, appreciate a new Hines initiative to offer them computer access.

Allergist Receives Research Award



At VA Madison's Research Fair, Dr. Robert Bush left, received an Achievement Award honoring his distinguished research career. Dr. Bush is best known for his work on allergy to *Alternaria*, an

airborne outdoor mold common throughout the U.S. Exposure to this mold can occur for months, as opposed to exposure to ragweed pollen, which lasts only a few weeks. Allergy to *Alternaria* is associated with the development and severity of asthma. Dr. Bush's research has identified the important allergens (substances that cause allergy) in the mold that can help clinicians better diagnose and treat the condition. His research has been one of only a very few allergy research projects in the country that has been supported by the Department of Veterans Affairs, which provided nearly continuous support for two decades. His studies have been published in leading allergy journals and have been presented at national and international meetings.

Dr. Bush has also conducted research on allergies to soybeans, peanuts, brazil nuts, and seafood. Other research in his laboratory has focused on substances in the work place, including allergies to latex gloves and to dander from laboratory animals. Most recently, he has conducted studies on allergy to the "Asian lady beetle," a bug that swarms in Wisconsin in summer.

Pharmacist Receives National Honor

Art Schuna, MS, FASHP, VA Madison Pharmacy Service Clinical Coordinator and Clinical Professor, has been named the Residency Preceptor of the Year by the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists, the accrediting body for post graduate pharmacy residency programs.

2006 Hands and Heart Awards-Two Award Winners!

Tab Martin 'that homeless person'

For many years, Tab Martin, RN, has been known by veterans at Jesse Brown VAMC as "that homeless person." Now he can also be called "that Hands & Heart person."

Martin, the case worker who started JBVAMC's homeless outreach program 13 years ago, has been named as Jesse Brown VAMC's recipient of the 2006 VA Secretary's Hands & Heart Award.

Thanks to Martin and others in its homeless outreach program, Jesse Brown VA "finds" hundreds of veterans each year who are brought in to the medical center for medical, dental and mental health care, as well as assistance finding transitional housing and employment. Martin says he spends up to 80 percent of his time outside of the medical center – visiting homeless shelters, soup kitchens, lower Wacker Drive, parks, abandoned buildings and any place else in Chicago where the homeless congregate.

Since October of last year, Martin has served in a new position as the medical center's grant per diem nurse

liaison. He oversees a very successful program in which VA provides subsidies to place homeless veterans in transitional housing with local organizations. Once the veterans have a stable place in which to live, they can devote their energies to solving their other problems and get back on their feet medically and economically.



Tab Martin, RN (left), was presented with the Secretary's Hands & Heart Award by Jesse Brown Medical Center Director James S. Jones during an employee town hall meeting in August.

Michaele Kulick-A Model For Veteran Centered Care

In her letter of nomination for the Secretary Hands and Heart Awards program, Michaele W. Kulick, MSW, was cited as a model for veteran-centered care. Starting at the VA in 2004 as a primary care social worker at the Community Based Outpatient Clinic in Cleveland, WI, she has been actively involved in the care of returning OEF/OIF veterans. She developed an OEF/OIF



resource guide and serves on Milwaukee's Seamless Transition Board.

In June, she became the OEF/OIF clinical case manager for the severely injured. She works out of community based outpatient clinics in Green Bay, Appleton and Cleveland. Her new position involves interaction with veterans who require intensive coordination of care.

"My whole life I have helped people – it's my passion. I am honored by receiving this award," said Mrs. Kulick. "I am touched by the people. I feel they really appreciate what I do for them. It's not just the veterans, it's my colleagues."

Mrs. Kulick comes from a family of those who served in the armed forces. She said that it was an honor to be accepted as an employee, and the VA team has given her the tools to excel in what she loves to do.

She credits her passion for helping to her parents. "My mother was always the one to help the person in need. My father was always the cheerleader and the supporter of what I wanted to do. I grew up going home and finding different people I didn't know sitting at our kitchen table that were strangers having a cup of coffee with her. One lady she found was in a mound of snow and homeless."

After the presentation of the Hands and Heart Award by Larry Berkeley, Milwaukee's acting Medical Center Director, Mrs. Kulick was recognized with a Wood Winner Award for her response to the emergent needs of a veteran. This local award is given for outstanding service in a specific instance. She was surprised. "This is something anybody would have done for anyone."

Mrs. Kulick's outreach extends to volunteerism. Following Hurricane Katrina, she responded by spending two weeks in the Gulf at the Alexandria VA Medical Center. She is grateful for the support she received from her husband and family during this time away. For her actions, she received the Secretary's Valor Award in 2006. At the end of that day – a day she was recognized for what she does everyday – she drove home to Green Bay, shared her story with her family, called her parents and, "Celebrated in my heart – it was such an honor."

Farewell and Welcome

Director Michael J. Murphy

Iron Mountain VA Medical Center staff and veterans are gearing up for the arrival of their new Director, Michael J. Murphy in mid November.

In his most recent assignment before joining the Department of Veterans Affairs, Mr. Murphy served as the Deputy Command Surgeon, Headquarters, Pacific Air Command, Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii. Prior to that he served in a variety of healthcare administration assignments, including USAF medical command assignments (COO/CEO), financial management, personnel and administration, patient administration, and medical contingency planning.

He began his career with the Department of Veterans Affairs as the Associate Medical Center Director at the Battle Creek VAMC effective February 19, 2006. He is an experienced federal senior healthcare executive with 29 years experience in healthcare administration in the United States Air Force (USAF) Medical Service Corps and Veterans Health Administration.

Mr. Murphy was born and raised in California and received his undergraduate degree from Biola University, La Mirada, California. He received his Masters Degree in Public Administration from the University of Colorado. He is a graduate of the United States Air Force Air War

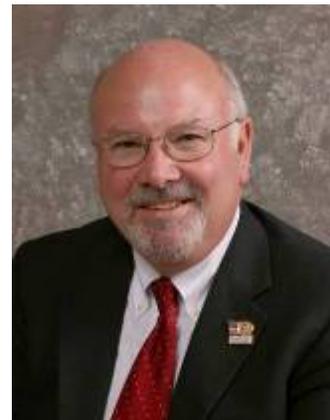


College and a graduate of the Interagency Institute for Federal Healthcare Executives. Mr. Murphy is a Fellow in the American College of Healthcare Executives.

Mr. Murphy and his wife are anxious to begin house hunting so they can settle in before the snow falls and the holidays arrive.

New Director Fan of History

Robert H. Beller will be the 24th director of the Clement J. Zablocki VA Medical Center in Milwaukee. The Medical Center roots date back to Civil War times and Mr. Beller is into history. He will have plenty of it – the house on the VA grounds he and his wife Roberta will move to was completed in 1868. And just glances away, are the signature historic buildings that have given notoriety to the campus.



“I am looking forward to working with the Milwaukee staff and members of the veterans service organizations. I have heard good words about what they do,” said Mr. Beller. “And,” he chuckled, “no director can say they have a major league baseball team as a neighbor,” referring to close proximity of his residence to Miller Park, home of the Milwaukee Brewers.

Come middle of October, Mr. Beller will assume his Milwaukee director duties. Currently he is director of the VA Illiana Health Care System in Danville where he has been for just over two years.

A native of warm California, Mr. Beller received his bachelor of arts degree in 1973 from California State University at Fresno and masters of public administration (emphasis on health care management) in 1979 from Golden Gate University.

He began his career with the Department of Veterans Affairs as a manual arts therapist trainee at the VA Medical Center in Long Beach. His first position was as a therapist at the VA Medical Center in Hampton.

After completing requirements for his master’s, he became staff assistant to the director at the VA Medical Center in Canandaigua. Mr. Beller subsequently served as coordinator for one of three national VA pilot MEDIPRO programs. Later he assumed the position of senior health systems specialist at the Cincinnati VA Medical Center. He completed the associate medical center director training program at Lexington and served

as acting associate director at the Cincinnati VA. Prior to being appointed associate director of Northern Indiana Health Care System in 1999, he served for six years as associate director of the VA Medical Center in Topeka.

Mr. Beller is a fellow in the American College of Healthcare Executives. He is a 1997 graduate of Leadership VA and a past recipient of the Public Administrator of the Year award from the Greater Cincinnati Chapter of the American Society for Public Administration. He received the Undersecretary's Award for Patient Safety, the Federal Technology Leadership Award and the National Performance Review (Hammer Award).

The staff and veterans at Milwaukee anticipate the arrival of Mr. Beller to the historic and caring legacy of the Medical Center. As an aside, they also hope he will add an element of "newcomers luck" for a pennant race for the Brewers. Welcome!

Assistant Director Taylor-Not New to Jesse Brown VA Medical Center



Lynette J Taylor, RN, BSN, MHSA has been promoted to the position of Assistant Director for the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center, Chicago.

Lynette has been a dedicated employee in VHA for 15 years beginning her career as a student nurse before elevating to an ICU nurse, nurse recruiter and most recently the staff assistant to the director. She received her master's degree from St. Francis (IL) University and baccalaureate degree from Olivet Nazarene University. Ms. Taylor graduated from the Healthcare Leadership Institute (HCLI) in June 2007 and also is a member of the ECF (Executive Career Field) class of 2007.

Jason Petti Joins Iron Mountain VAMC

Jason Petti is being added to the management team as Associate Medical Center Director, joining Dr. Pamela



Reeves, Acting Medical Center Director, Dr. Craig Holmes, Chief of Staff and Andrea Collins, Associate Director of Nursing and Patient Care Services.

Previously, Petti served as Assistant Director at the Jesse Brown, VA Medical Center in Chicago, IL. During his tenure with the Department of Veterans

Affairs he has served in various roles, including Health Systems Specialist to the Chief of Staff in Hines VAH and Health Systems Specialist to Medicine in West Palm Beach, FL. He received his health system specialist training at the VAMC in Miami in Geriatrics and Extended Care. A native of Florida, Petti received his Masters of Science in Health Services Administration from Barry University in Miami. Petti began his employment with the VA in 1998 as an Administrative Resident.

Jeff Gering Bound for Chillicothe

This month Hines bid a fond farewell to Jeff Gering, Associate Director. Mr. Gering was selected as the new Director of the Chillicothe VAMC in Ohio.

Mr. Gering was instrumental in spearheading a number of positive programs implemented at Hines during his three year tenure at the facility. He established "Employer of Choice" and "Service Excellence" committees, aimed at making Hines an Employer and Provider of Choice and improving quality of life issues for both employees and patients. He served as acting director of the facility for several months and will be sorely missed by the staff and patients at Hines.

OIF/OEF Update

Special Focus Group

In order to determine how effectively Hines is meeting the needs of veterans returning from service in Iraq, the facility recently held the first of what will be quarterly meetings with a very engaged group of OEF/OIF veterans. Key staff from the facility, including Ivy Bryant the OEF/OIF Program Manager, as well as Nathan Geraths, Hines Director, traveled to the National Guard Armory in nearby North Riverside, Illinois on a Sunday to meet with eleven soldiers who served a tour of duty in Iraq last year and currently receive healthcare services at the Hines VA Hospital.

“We decided to plan our focus group meeting during the lunch hour of a National Guard Drill weekend to make it more convenient for the soldiers,” Bryant said. “They were very happy to take the time to give us their opinions, compliments and suggestions for improvements.”

The soldiers complimented the providers in the Hines Dental Service and Eye Clinic and singled out Dr. Chirag Raval in the Mental Health Service Line as a provider who they especially appreciate. They all agreed that mental health services at the facility are accessible and the staff in this area is very helpful

The participants had some great ideas for improving the process for soldiers transitioning off active duty and becoming veterans who are seeking VA care. They suggested that the facility visit units returning from service at their first drill weekend to reinforce with the soldiers what benefits they are eligible for and how they can obtain services. The soldiers agreed that the transition briefings they receive before getting off active duty are given at a time when their focus is on getting home to be with their families. They felt that additional briefings from Hines personnel soon after the unit returns to the Chicago area would be very beneficial.

Some other suggestions from the service members for improvement included a request for at least some evening hour appointments and additional input into the scheduling process.

“Overall, the meeting was a success,” said Bryant. “We were able to hear directly from our patients what their impression of our facility is and how we can better meet their needs. This is just the kind of information we need to provide the best service possible to this very specialized group of veterans.”

Sensitive to Needs of OIF/OEF Vets and Families

“Every war and every conflict is unique. And while the men and women who fight in these wars share similar experiences, many of the problems they face – both during their deployment and after they have returned home – are also unique,” said Jesse Brown Medical Center Director James S. Jones. “We at VA have a responsibility to do all that we can do to understand the issues and challenges that our veterans face when they come home.”

Mr. Jones was addressing the crowd of employees and veterans attending a presentation of “A Soldier’s Story”, a public interest piece, coordinated by the medical center’s OIF/OEF program and included presentations by three OIF veterans regarding their experiences in Iraq and the difficulties faced when service members transition back to their homes.

The speakers were retired Army Sergeant Daniel Cesara, who sustained serious leg injuries from an IED while driving in a humvee during a mission; Army Reserve Lieutenant Colonel Richard Rooney (JBVAMC’s Chief of Pharmacy Service), who was deployed for 17 months in 2003/04, including service at Abu Ghraib prison; and Air Force Reserve Captain Margaret Myslinsky (JBVAMC’s Clinical Nutrition Manager) who has been deployed twice to Iraq and Kuwait, serving in an Expeditionary (trauma) Medical Unit and as an Infection Control Officer.

JBVAMC has already served almost 3,000 OIF/OEF veterans and continues to provide training programs and workshops to employees to enhance the level of customer service and care provided to the returning veterans.

The medical center has emphasized to its staff that its first priority when serving OIF/OEF veterans is to provide the necessary care and to worry about the paperwork later. The staff's sensitivity to this issue was seen earlier this year when the young widow of a soldier killed in Iraq came to the medical center stating she had an infection and had run out of antibiotics. A resident of Colorado, the woman was in Chicago with her parents to attend funeral services for her husband, who was originally from Chicago. As the widow of a soldier killed in combat, she had Tricare insurance, but had contacted Tricare and was unable to receive assistance. A member of her deceased husband's family – a veteran who receives his care at JBVAMC – had advised her to come to Jesse Brown in her medical crisis.

She was initially seen by PAS clerk Hattie Gresham, who knew the young woman was a non-veteran and not eligible to be treated by VA; however, Hattie was sensitive to the fact that this was a combat soldier's widow who was obviously very upset and overwhelmed by the turn her life had taken. Hattie contacted former OIF/OEF case manager Mike Konkoly, MSW (who now serves as OIF/OEF program manager at the North Chicago VAMC), who met with the young woman and, with assistance from PAS, arranged for Women's Health Care Clinic to triage her. After it was determined she needed antibiotics, Mike spoke with her Medical Treatment Team at Fort Carson Colorado and arranged for their Primary Care Provider to contact a local Walgreen's with the prescription.

Mike was so pleased by the sensitivity and support displayed by PAS and the Women's Health Clinic that he sent a letter of appreciation about the incident to the Medical Center Director, Mr. James S. Jones. Mike wrote, "I want to commend everyone for their sensitivity and professionalism to avert a crisis. Even though this patient did not exactly meet the rules and regulations to the letter, we did the right thing. I believe that this young woman, her family and the Fort Carson Clinic staff have a good feeling about our VA."

Mr. Jones has used the incident as an example to staff of the high level of service he expects all veterans to receive. In a recent town hall meeting, he told

employees, "We should always ask ourselves, 'What is the right thing to do?' and, if it is not within the rules, we need to seek the support of our supervisors to see if it can be accomplished."



Waiting their turns to speak at "A Soldier's Story" are (from left): Retired Army Sergeant Daniel Cesara; Air Force Reserve Captain Margaret Myslinsky; and Army Reserve Lieutenant Colonel Richard Rooney.

Operation Enduring Brats

Wisconsin's VA facilities provide many informal efforts that are routinely made to reach out to returning veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). One such effort was participating with members of the Wisconsin National Guard during their two-week annual training at Ft. McCoy in "Operation Enduring Brats".

Sgt. Dan "Canada" Killam of the Wisconsin National Guard was helping a recently returning vet who was not doing well seeking resources. The Sergeant was irritated by the perceived lack of collaboration and integration between the Wisconsin National Guard and the VHA system. Cari Myles, OEF/OIF Coordinator, along with other key members of the Madison staff including Milda Bridgewater and Bob Kelter, met with Sgt. Killam who was impressed by the Madison staff and their willingness to help streamline any process and address the concern of returning National Guard troops who desire VA care.

To help further facilitate a positive relationship, staff from the Madison, Milwaukee and Tomah VA's including Jeanne Button of Madison and



Tomah, Cari Myles of Madison, and Andy Hendrickson and David Flynn of Milwaukee were invited to help with "Operation Enduring Brats" at Fort McCoy. This event took place during the National Guard's two weeks of annual training at Ft. McCoy. The National Guard retention leaders, accompanied by the VA staff, loaded portable grills, brats, and all the condiments into Humvee's and set off into the field to greet the Guardsmen as they came in from their morning exercises. Dressed in T-shirts and jeans, the VA crew served up the brats to hungry, hot and tired National Guardsmen while at the same time talking with them about the services available to them through the VA.



The intention of the National Guard Retention NCO Sgt. Killam, was to provide both comfort and a hearty snack to the troops. His invitation to VA staff to join him on a remote post allowed the VA to provide a grateful, if somewhat dusty face to the VA, and to serve the condiments and Gatorade. All involved reported that it was a great experience that helped the Guardsmen learn about the VA and the VA learn about the Guardsmen's needs.

VA'S Health Care System Is a National Model For Health Care, Says Author of New Book 'BEST CARE ANYWHERE'

VA's health care delivery system is a model for the rest of America and offers solutions to the country's health care crisis, according to the author of a recently published book entitled "Best Care Anywhere: Why VA Health Care Is Better Than Yours."

"I believe that within 10 years, the evidence-based, patient-centered, VistA-driven model of care pioneered by the VA will be the delivery device by which most Americans and many foreigners as well receive their care," said Phillip Longman, the book's author and a former economic journalist who is now a resident scholar at the Washington-based think tank, New America Foundation.

In a recent speech, Longman told a meeting of VA Central Office employees that VA faces a number of challenges in the years ahead, most notably the possibility of competition for funding from other programs such as Social Security and Medicaid and from the private sector. "Despite these challenges, I believe that VA's glory days are still ahead," Longman said.

Longman began researching health care as a free-lance writer for *Fortune* magazine which commissioned him to find who was doing the most to modernize health care in the U.S. The assignment was especially important to him because he had lost his wife, Robin, to breast cancer five years earlier, and she had experienced significant difficulties with the care she received.

While doing his research, Longman read a number of articles praising VA for the innovations the Department had made in the last ten years. Pursuing the issue further, he discovered that VA had completely changed its image from what the public saw through vehicles such as the movie, "Born on the Fourth of July." *Fortune* eventually cancelled the assignment, but Longman's research continued and became the basis for an article he wrote for *Washington Monthly* magazine and for his book.

Longman noted that in recent years VA health care has received numerous accolades from well-respected independent expert organizations, including the American Consumer Satisfaction Index and the Innovations in Government Award from Harvard University.

In conducting his research, Longman visited a number of VA facilities and talked with numerous doctors, nurses and other VA employees. Among those he interviewed and featured in the book were the so-called "Hard Hats,"

a loose underground network of pioneering VA doctors, pharmacists and technicians who, beginning in the 1970s, wrote the software that became VistA, the VA's world class system of electronic health records.

"VistA is a process, not a product," Longman said, noting that one of the chief reasons for the system's success is that the ideas for the computer programs were developed by doctors and other medical professionals.

Longman said the "hard hats" represented a revolution from below that set the stage for the decision to implement VistA throughout VHA that was led by Dr. Kenneth Kizer when he became Under Secretary for Health in 1995. Longman said Dr. Kizer's legacy is a model system veterans groups and health care experts now applaud.

He said that in addition to its innovative use of technology for medical purposes, VA is successful because it has a near life-long relationship with its patients, beginning when they leave the service and lasting until the end of life – including long-term nursing home care.

This gives VA incentives for investing in prevention, evidence-based medicine and effective disease management that are weak or lacking in other health care systems.

For example, if VA does not effectively manage its diabetes care, patients may require expensive care such as dialysis or amputations. This provides a financial incentive for preventive care. "These incentives for quality care are lacking elsewhere in the health care system," Longman said.

Outside VA, the benefits of investing in electronic medical records or in preventive medicine wind up going not to the health care system but to other competitors. In short, from the provider's view, there is little or no business case for quality.

Longman said VA has proven it can be successful because its system of care gives the provider a stake in the patient's long-term interest.

Longman's book lays out a plan—his own, not the Department's--to expand the VA model of care, first to cover all veterans and then to cover all their family members. He said there is a good case for merging the military health care system into the VA, which could be expedited because of plans to close some military bases and hospitals.

Longman's long-range plan would be to expand the system to other target publics, such as those on Medicaid or Medicare, and providing coverage for the 47 million people in the United States who do not have health insurance.

"After seeing what the VA can do, I believe the health care crisis is solvable," Longman said.

Gordon H. Mansfield Becomes Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs

Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs Gordon H. Mansfield became Acting VA Secretary on October 1, following the resignation of Secretary Jim Nicholson.

Mansfield assumed the role under the terms of the Federal Vacancies Reform Act, where a Deputy Secretary begins to serve as the acting officer immediately and automatically upon the occurrence of the vacancy. Mansfield will serve as Acting Secretary until the next nominee of the president is confirmed by the United States Senate.



Reminder! Federal Benefits Open Season-November 12th through December 10TH

Open Season is a good time for employees to review and update Federal Flexible Spending Accounts (FSAFEDS) and Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP). Eligible employees will be able to enroll, change, reduce or cancel health insurance or make changes to premium conversion. FEHB plan guides and brochure will be available on OPM's Web site at www.opm.gov/insure/health. Employees are encouraged to use Employee Express at www.employeeexpress.gov when making FEHB Open Season elections.

Employees who want to elect a health care flexible spending account (HCFS), a limited expense health are flexible spending account (LEX HCFSA), or a dependent care flexible spending account (DCFSA) for 2008 must make an election during Open Season. **FSAFEDS enrollments do not roll over from year to year!** Visit FSAFEDS Web site www.FSAFEDS.com.

For employees who may have dental and vision expenses, FEDVIP might be a program worth investigating. FEDVIP is a voluntary supplemental insurance with no federal government contributions and is not dependent upon FEHB enrollment. Enrollments in FEDVIP are available as self-only, self plus one, and self and family. Employees may enroll by visiting the BENEFEDS Portal at www.benefeds.com. Visit the FEDVIP web site at www.opm.gov/insure/dentalvision for more information.

New this Open Season is OPM's inaugural edition of the '**new**' *Guide to Federal Benefits* for calendar year 2008. The Guide provides summary information on the health plans participating in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program. The Guide also provides information on program features and enrollment instructions.

For more information on the 2007 Federal Benefits Open Season, contact your servicing Human resources office or visit the Office of Human Resources management, Work life and Benefits Service's Web site at <http://vaww1.va.gov/ohrm/>.

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